



Bible Doctrines I - Survey

The Godhead

I. IDENTIFYING THE TERMINOLOGY

A. Trinity

1. The trinity, being a name we give to our best understanding of the inner being of God, falls far short of the reality.
 - a. For one, this term is a nonbiblical term.
 - b. Additionally, it is not always understood that the idea of the word *trinity* is really a shortened form of *tri + unity* and discusses a *triune* (three-in-one being).
 - c. Lastly, it seems greatly inadequate to use a word to describe the personhood of God that would be adequately used to describe man.
2. The word *trinity* often demands a further explanation. Here are some sample definitions of the trinity:
 - a. “The Trinity of God is His tri-personal existence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the nature of the one God, there are three eternal distinctions which are represented to us under the figure of persons, and these three are equal. This tri-personality of the Godhead is exclusively a truth of revelation.” –Emery H. Bancroft in *Christian Theology* (p.71).
 - b. “There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.” –Benjamin Warfield in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (5:3012).
 - c. The unity of the essence of the Godhead is expressed and has real existence in the plurality of the three persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

B. Godhead

1. Unlike the word *trinity*, the word Godhead is a Bible word (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9).
2. Yet, the word *Godhead* seems to describe something a bit different than the intended connotation of the word *trinity*.
3. The term *Godhead* may be compared to the idea of personality or personhood. It indicates a personal nature (Acts 17:29); one who can think, plan, organize, appreciate beauty, and more.
4. The order, design, and beauty of creation point to an intelligent and personal creator, God. The variety of creation points to variety in the Godhead—a requirement answered by three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) in one God.



II. CORRUPTIONS OF THE TRINITY

A. Tritheism—the belief that the three persons of the Godhead are three gods

B. Unitarianism

1. Generally, this doctrine teaches that the unity of God excludes the idea of three equal persons in the Godhead.
2. Practically, this demotes the Son and the Spirit to lesser beings. The common teaching is that the Son is a created being, subordinate to God, and the Spirit is simply an extension of God.
3. Specifically, Unitarianism by name came out of the eighteenth century.
4. Sadly, Unitarianism was a revival of the Arianism of the fourth century.
 - a. Developed from the teachings of Arius (250-336), a native of Alexandria who was influenced by the Gnostic teachings of the day.
 - b. His view of Christ was as follows:
 - (1) He was created by, and therefore subordinate to, the Father.
 - (2) He was neither fully God nor fully man.
 - (3) He was created before everything else, in turn created all other things, and is therefore the highest created being.
 - c. These teachings are carried on by the Unitarians, the Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses, and others.

C. Modalism

1. Modalism is a general word used to describe various teachings that speak of the one God working in various *modes* but as the same unique God.
2. Monarchianism
 - a. A doctrine that developed in the third century and denies the personal distinctiveness of the Son and the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Adoptionistic monarchianism taught that Jesus was a mere man endowed with the Holy Spirit.
3. Sabellianism
 - a. Named for Sabellius who lived in Rome early in the third century
 - b. He taught that the one God revealed Himself through history, first as the Father, second as the Son, and finally as the Spirit.
 - c. This teaching has been revived by the Apostolic Church and others.

D. The Satanic Trinity

1. The persons of this trinity are the devil, antichrist, and false prophet.
2. The three persons of this trinity are unified by the name of the *beast*. Revelation makes thirty-six references to one or the other of these three as the beast.
 - a. The beast of the bottomless pit is the devil (Revelation 11:7).
 - b. The beast of the sea is the antichrist (Revelation 13:1).
 - c. The beast of the earth is the false prophet (Revelation 13:11).



III. INTRODUCTION TO THE TRINITY

A. The Revelation of God

1. The Bible displays the *works* of God (Psalm 104:24).
2. The Bible sets forth the *person* of God.
 - a. The Bible declares the names of God (Exodus 6:1-3; 33:17-19).
 - b. The Bible defines the attributes of God (Psalm 145:3-9).
 - c. The Bible discloses the essence of God in the trinity (1 John 5:7).

B. The Problems of the Trinity

1. Clearly, the doctrine of the trinity in its fulness is beyond human understanding. Can we believe a doctrine that we cannot understand?
2. How can one God be found in three persons?
3. If there are three distinct persons who each are God, are we still polytheists believing in more than one God?

C. The Importance of the Trinity

1. A true understanding of God and His working cannot be obtained without some understanding of the trinity.
2. It is one of the great mysteries of the New Testament (along with Jesus being both God and man). We need to have a basic knowledge of this critical doctrine.
3. It is a doctrine much taken for granted today.
 - a. This causes many Bible students to accept its validity on the basis of a couple of simple proof texts without any depth of knowledge of the historical and doctrinal issues involved.
 - b. This shallow understanding in turn opens many up to the influence of false teachers who know the subject from their standpoint much better than the orthodox believers.
 - c. Historically within a group, a doctrine is established with much study and depth of understanding. Then, with each proceeding generation the knowledge of that doctrine (though still believed) is more and more shallow. Finally, many are led astray by false teachers who know their doctrine much better than the followers of true doctrine.
4. It is opposed by the major cults (like the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses) and we need to be ready to give an answer to them of what we believe (1 Peter 3:15).
5. Among major world religions (especially Judaism and Islam), it is one of the most maligned doctrines of Christianity. It can also be taken as permission for more than one god by polytheistic religions (like Hinduism and Buddhism). Therefore, in order to witness to people who follow these religions, we must have a thorough understanding of the trinity.



IV. THE BASICS OF THE TRINITY

A. God Is One

1. His numerical oneness; that is, there is only one God.
 - a. He is, by number, one Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29).
 - b. He is only one God (Malachi 2:10; Mark 12:32; Galatians 3:20; James 2:19).
2. His uniqueness; that is, there is none other like Him.
 - a. God is the only God; that is, there is none else beside Him (Exodus 20:1-4; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 1 Kings 8:60; Psalm 86:10).
 - b. God is the only God who is really God; all else are impostors (1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 7:22; Isaiah 44:6-8; Jeremiah 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6).
3. His unity; that is, there is no division within the Godhead
 - a. In His works
 - (1) God is the source of all creation (2 Kings 19:15; Nehemiah 9:6).
 - (2) God is the source of salvation (Isaiah 45:22; Zechariah 14:9; 1 Timothy 2:5).
 - b. In the trinity
 - (1) The oneness of the Son with the Father (John 10:30)
 - (2) The oneness of the Spirit with the Son (John 16:13)

B. God Is Three Persons

1. The plurality of God in the Old Testament
 - a. The plurality of God in pronoun usage
 - (1) In creation—"Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26-27); Note: as God is a three in one being, so is man (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
 - (2) At the time of the fall: "Behold, the man is become as one of us" (Genesis 3:22)
 - (3) At the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:5-8)
 - (4) At the call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8)
 - b. Other instances of the plurality of God
 - (1) "The LORD said unto my Lord" (Psalm 110:1)
 - (2) God to save them by the LORD their God (Hosea 1:6-7)
 - (3) The Lord as messenger and the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:1)
2. The identification of the three distinct persons in the Old Testament
 - a. Father (Isaiah 63:16; Isaiah 64:8)
 - b. Spirit (Job 33:4; Isaiah 48:16; Isaiah 61:1)
 - c. Son
 - (1) As the Son (Psalm 2:7; Proverbs 30:4; Isaiah 9:6)
 - (2) As the Word (Genesis 1:3; Psalm 147:18)
 - (3) As Wisdom (Proverbs 8:22-30)
 - (4) As the Angel of the Lord (Genesis 24:40; 48:16; Exodus 3:1-6; 23:20-23; Isaiah 63:9)



3. The manifestations of trinity in the New Testament
 - a. In the creation of the world
 - (1) The Father, of whom are all things (1 Corinthians 8:4)
 - (2) Jesus Christ, by whom are all things (1 Corinthians 8:4; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2)
 - (3) The Spirit, who moved in creation (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30)
 - b. In the birth of Christ (Luke 1:35)
 - (1) The Holy Ghost
 - (2) The Highest
 - (3) The Son of God
 - c. At the baptism of Christ (Matthew 3:16-17)
 - (1) Jesus baptized
 - (2) Spirit like a dove
 - (3) Voice of the Father from heaven
 - d. In the resurrection of Christ
 - (1) The power of Christ to give His life and to take it again (John 10:17-18)
 - (2) Raised up by God (Acts 2:24, 32; Acts 3:15, 26; Acts 4:10; Acts 5:30)
 - (3) Quickened by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18)
 - e. In the exaltation of Christ (Acts 2:33)
 - f. In the salvation of the lost (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 9:14).
4. The statements of trinity in the New Testament
 - a. In the formula for baptism (Matthew 28:19)
 - b. The Father, the Son, and the Comforter (John 14:16, 26; John 15:26)
 - c. In the work of the ministry (Romans 15:16, 30)
 - d. In the working of the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-6); Note: In Paul's epistles, he normally (as here) uses "God" to refer to the Father, "Lord" to refer to the Son, and "Spirit" to refer to the Holy Ghost.
 - e. In the blessing of Paul (2 Corinthians 13:14)
 - f. In the adoption of the believer (Galatians 4:6)
 - g. In our access to God (Ephesians 2:18)
 - h. In the oneness of the Godhead (Ephesians 4:4-6)
 - i. In our faith in the incarnation (1 John 4:2)
 - j. In the formula of John (1 John 5:7)
 - k. In the life of the believer (Jude 1:20-21)
 - l. In the introduction of Revelation (Revelation 1:4-6)

C. The Three Persons Are Fully God

1. Each of the three persons is fully God.
 - a. The Father (John 8:41; John 20:17; Romans 15:6)
 - b. The Son (Matthew 1:23; John 1:1-3; John 20:28; Acts 20:28; Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8)
 - c. The Holy Ghost (Acts 5:3-4; Hebrews 2:4)





D. The Three Persons Are Distinct

1. Consider the distinctions between the Father and the Son (John 5:23, 30, 36-39; John 17:25).
2. Consider the distinctions between the Father and the Spirit (Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 104:30).
3. Consider the distinctions between the Son and the Spirit (John 14:16-17).
4. Note: one doctrinal error argues that the Spirit is merely an extension of the power of the Father and not a separate person of the Godhead. It is true that the Spirit often works as an extension of the Father, but He is also referred to in ways that require Him to be a separate person.
 - a. He is continually referred to as a separate person alongside the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; see above passages).
 - b. Jesus speaks of the Spirit as a person (John 14:17).
 - c. The Spirit speaks in the first person as "I" (Acts 10:19-20; Acts 13:2).
 - d. The Spirit has a mind (Romans 8:27).
 - e. The Spirit does things that only a person would do: teaching, comforting, revealing, interceding, speaking, etc.
 - f. The Spirit can react to others. For example, He can be vexed (Isaiah 63:10) and grieved (Ephesians 4:30).

V. THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE TRINITY

A. Their Mutual Indwelling

1. The Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father (John 10:38; John 14:10-11, 20; John 17:21).
2. To see the Son is to see the Father (John 1:18; John 14:9) because the Son and the Father are one (John 10:30).
3. Both the Father and the Son are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in them (Romans 8:9).
4. When Jesus went away, He sent the Spirit to take His place (John 16:7). Yet, at the same time, Jesus came to the disciples in the Spirit (John 14:18; Romans 8:9).

B. Their Mutual Glorification

1. The Father glorifies the Son (John 8:54; John 12:23; John 17:1).
2. The Son glorifies the Father (John 13:31-32; John 17:4).
3. The Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14).

C. Their Structural Relationship

1. The procession passages: although there is complete equality of being and attributes among the three persons of the Godhead, there is a



- predetermined order of authority between them. This is clearly seen in two verses in John that speak of one proceeding out of the other.
- a. The Son “proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me” (John 8:42).
 - (1) The divine nature of things is that a son is to submit to his father.
 - (2) The fact that the first two persons of the Godhead are revealed to us as Father and Son anticipates such a relationship.
 - (3) The Son was clearly sent to earth (given to the world) by the Father (John 3:16; John 7:28-29; John 12:49; John 17:8, 25; Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:9-10).
 - (4) While on earth, Jesus fully submitted Himself to the will of the Father (Mark 14:36; John 4:34; John 5:30; John 6:38).
 - (5) At the end of time, the Son who proceeded from the Father will return to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:26-28).
 - b. The Spirit proceeded from the Father and is sent forth by the Son (John 15:26).
 - (1) Careful reading of the scriptures will demonstrate that the Spirit of God does the work of God.
 - (2) The work of the Spirit in relation to the Son is seen in John 16:13-14.
 - a) He will not speak of Himself.
 - b) He will only speak what He hears.
 - c) He will glorify the Son.
 - d) Note: The Spirit fulfills the work of the Father and the Son and glorifies them without glorifying Himself.
 - c. Note: This proceeding forth does not indicate any sort of creation or bringing into being.
 - (1) The three persons of the trinity are co-eternal in their existence and are without beginning.
 - (2) However, this does indicate that the separate works of the three persons in time is different in some ways to their relationship to each other in eternity.
 - (3) They have not changed, being the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). However, the work of redemption gave varying duties to the three persons; duties in which they work always for the same purposes and toward the same goals.
2. The Father, Son, and Spirit cooperate in their work in a way that can be generalized by considering some carefully placed prepositions.
 - a. 1 Corinthians 8:6 states: “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”
 - (1) The Father is the One “of whom are all things.” He is the source and the origin of the works.
 - (2) The Son is the One “by whom are all things.” He is the One who executes the work.



- b. Romans 11:36 states: “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” Note: Although the persons of the Godhead are not directly mentioned, this is an excellent description of their actions.
 - (1) The phrase, “of him,” would match the Father as seen in “of whom” in 1 Corinthians 8:6. All things proceed, or come forth, from Him.
 - (2) The phrase, “through him,” is similar to “by whom” and would look to the work of the Son. Both “through” and “by” indicate process.
 - (3) The phrase, “to him,” indicates purpose or completion. The work of the Spirit tends to enable or to adorn the work of the other persons of the Godhead.
- c. Conclusion of this study
 - (1) The Father originates.
 - (2) The Son executes.
 - (3) The Spirit enables.
- d. The example of creation.
 - (1) The Father was the source of creation. Therefore, Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 20:11 refer to Him.
 - (2) The Son carried out the work of creation as seen in various scriptures (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). Ephesians 3:9 speaks of “God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.”
 - (3) The Spirit enabled and adorned creation.
 - a) The Spirit moved on the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2).
 - b) The Spirit “garnished” the heavens (Job 26:13).
 - c) The Spirit renews the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30).

VI. THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE TRINITY; Note: Scripture, nature, and human knowledge are filled with examples of related threes: triads. They do not prove the trinity, but they do demonstrate the significance of three in God’s idea of being. In fact, three is clearly the number of perfect being in scripture.

A. Scripture

- 1. Prophet, priest, and king (1 Kings 1:32, 45; Jeremiah 13:13)
- 2. Three divisions of the tabernacle: courtyard, holy place, holiest of all

B. Nature

- 1. Three dimensions: height, width, and depth
- 2. In the family: husband, wife, and child (1 Samuel 30:22)

C. Human Thought

- 1. Three tenses: past, present, and future
- 2. In writing: introduction, body, and conclusion