

The Trinity

Three Yet Only One



WEST SOUND COMMUNITY CHURCH

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A core belief of biblical, historical, verifiable Christianity is the Trinity. While the word itself does not appear in the Bible, it is the inevitable conclusion that must be drawn from many passages...passages that teach first, there is but one God, second, the Father is God, third, the Son is God, and fourth, the Holy Spirit is God. We'll unpack this shortly, but we must first recognize its reality. Why? Why is it so important. I can think of a few reasons:

- Scripture is without doubt the very word of God. (This is verifiable, but we shall assume it for now).
- Scripture says on more than one occasion there is but One God.
- Scripture refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as God.
- Scripture attributes the realities and characteristics of personhood to all three.
- Scripture attributes the realities and characteristics of divinity to all three.

One might, at first glance, consider this an exercise in contradiction. However, as we shall see it is far from contradiction. Let's begin, then with a definition...

Definition: "There is only one God; and in the unity of the Godhead there are three co-equal, co-eternal, and consubstantial persons; the same in essence, yet distinct in subsistence."

Whoa! What did that theologian say?

Let's see if we can make some sense from the above statement. Co-equal and co-eternal are not much of a problem. They simply mean that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are 100% equal and eternal.

However, consubstantial and subsistence may require some translation. The prefix con in consubstantial means the same as the prefix com which means having in common with. The word substantial is defined by Webster's through the phrases having substance and with regard to essential elements. The word consubstantial, then, means common essential substance or elements. In reference to the Trinity it means that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in common their essential substance.

The word subsistence is defined by Webster's as existence. If something subsists it exists. The phrase "distinct in subsistence," therefore, when applied to the Trinity, means the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be distinguished from one another in their being.

While this may still leave us wondering how such a thing can be, it does tell us what the Trinity looks like. This tension will not be relieved through this study. In fact, it will not be relieved in this lifetime—and only God knows if it will be relieved in heaven. However, this does not mean the doctrine of the Trinity is illogical. Ready? Ok, let's get busy.



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SOUND DOCTRINE: THE TRINITY

Note: When you have the time, you should read every reference in its context.
Note: The references are but partial listings...and hardly to be considered exhaustive.

In weeks to come, we'll look at each member of the Trinity, but, to get started, let's get a handle on just how the Trinity is described and why it is not illogical.

1. The Trinity cannot be defined...
 - a. ...modalistically: one God appearing at different times in various forms.
 - b. ...tritheistically: three Gods.
 - c. ...hierarchically: one almighty God with two created beings who have been granted or have attained divinity.

2. The Trinity, instead, is describable.

- a. The Bible says there is one God.

Deuteronomy 6:4

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Isaiah 44:6

"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God.'"

1 Corinthians 8:6

"there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

James 2:19

"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"

- b. The Bible says the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. They are co-equal and co-eternal.

The Father is God: Ephesians 4:6; John 6:27

"one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."



The Son is God: John 1:1-3; 8:57,58

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

"So the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'"

The Holy Spirit is God: Acts 5:3,4

"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.'"

- c. The three are distinguished from one another. They are distinct in their interrelationship with each other.

The Father gives all judgement to the Son: John 5:22

"For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son"

The Son prays to the Father for another Counselor, the Holy Spirit: John 14:16

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever"

The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son: John 16:13,14

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

3. **The Trinity is faithful to Scripture.**

- a. It is faithful to monotheism.
- b. It is faithful to the biblical declarations concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- c. It does not divide the essence of God.
- d. It does not destroy the personality of the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.



4. The Trinity stands above the complaint, "But God does not leave us without total understanding!"
- a. The Trinity sticks to the facts:
- it leaves nothing out
 - it adds nothing to
- b. The Trinity is reasonable:
- Who says we must fully understand the mind of God? Not the Bible (see Deuteronomy 29:29). In fact, logic dictates that we cannot know all that God knows. We can only know what God reveals about himself. The notion that God must fit into a box that we completely understand is the unreasonable position. In fact, there is nothing more illogical than the idea that the creation should fully understand all that the Creator knows and understands.
 - It meets every philosophical demand. It accounts for the order of the universe, because in the beginning there was a thinking, personal, communicating, creative God.
 - It accounts for the personality of humans, because intrinsic to man's Creator is not only intellect, emotion, and will, but also communication. The eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always, still do, and ever shall think, emote, determine, and communicate with one another. Created in God's image, so do we.
 - It stands among other doctrines which can be described, but not exhaustively explained. For example:
 - The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man
 - The incarnation of Jesus Christ: fully God, fully man
 - The inspiration of the Bible: the authorship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the distinctive responsibilities of several men

For Your Personal Application: Read the Gospel of John

1. From John 1:1-18: Who is Jesus?
2. From John 1:13,14; and John 3:1-21: How does one become a child of God?
3. From John 14: After Jesus departs (death and resurrection), who comes to live with the born again child of God?
4. From John 15:1-11: What leads a child of God's into complete joy?
5. From John 16:7-11: Who will cause lost souls to recognize their need for God and his righteousness?

