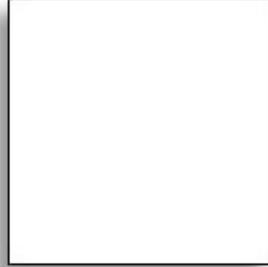


## **Three in One**



The doctrine of the Trinity- that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each equally and eternally the one true God- is admittedly difficult to comprehend, and yet is the very foundation of Christian truth. Would any of us expect understanding the being of God to be a simple thing? Although sceptics may ridicule it as a mathematical impossibility, it is nevertheless a basic doctrine of Scripture as well as profoundly realistic in both universal experience and in the scientific understanding of the cosmos.

Both Old and New Testaments teach the Unity and the Trinity of the Godhead. The idea that there is only one God, who created all things, is repeatedly emphasized in such Scriptures as Isaiah 45:18: "For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; . . . I am the Lord; and there is none else." A New Testament example is James 2:19: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble."

The three persons of the Godhead are, at the same time, noted in such Scriptures as Isaiah 48:16: "I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, there am I; and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me." The speaker in this verse is obviously God, and yet He says He has been "sent both by The Lord God (that is, the Father) and by His Spirit (that is, the Holy Spirit). The New Testament doctrine of the Trinity is evident in such a verse as John 15:26, where the Lord Jesus said: "But when the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, He shall testify of me." Then there is the baptismal formula: "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). One name (God) -- yet three names!

**JESUS** -- That Jesus, as the only-begotten Son of God, actually claimed to be God, equal with the Father, is clear from numerous Scriptures. For example, He said: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8).

**HOLY SPIRIT** -- Some cults falsely teach that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal divine influence of some kind, but the Bible teaches that He is a real person, just as are the Father and the Son. Jesus said: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come" (John 16:13).

**TRI-UNITY** -- The teaching of the Bible concerning the Trinity might be summarized thus. God is a Tri-unity, with each Person of the Godhead equally and fully and eternally God. Each is necessary, and each is distinct, and yet all are one. The three Persons appear in a logical, causal order. The Father is the unseen, omnipresent Source of all being, revealed in and by the Son, experienced in and by the Holy Spirit. The Son proceeds from the Father, and the Spirit from the Son. With

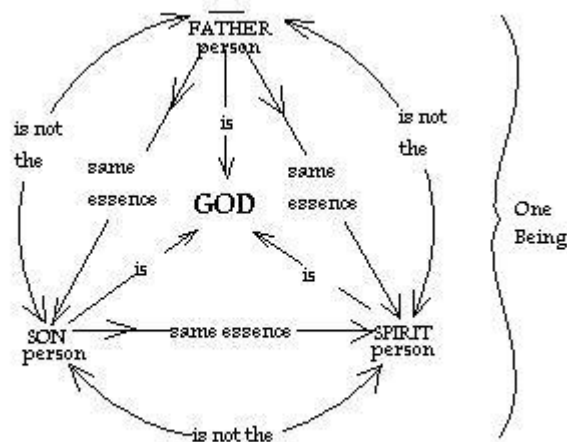
reference to God's creation, the Father is the Thought behind it, the Son is the Word calling it forth, and the Spirit is the Deed making it a reality.

We "see" God and His great salvation in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, then "experience" their reality by faith, through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. Though these relationships seem paradoxical, and to some completely impossible, they are profoundly realistic, and their truth is ingrained deep in man's nature. Thus, men have always sensed first the truth that God must be "out there," everywhere present and the First Cause of all things, but they have corrupted this intuitive knowledge of the Father into pantheism and ultimately into naturalism. Similarly, men have always felt the need to "see" God in terms of their own experience and understanding, but this knowledge that God must reveal Himself has been distorted into polytheism and idolatry. Men have thus continually erected "models" of God, sometimes in the form of graven images, sometimes even in the form of philosophical systems purporting to represent ultimate reality. Finally, men have always known that they should be able to have communion with their Creator and to experience His presence "within." But this deep intuition of the Holy Spirit has been corrupted into various forms of false mysticism and fanaticism, and even into spiritism and demonism. Thus, the truth of God's trinity is ingrained in man's very nature, but he has often distorted it and substituted a false god in its place.

## Jesus Christ our Creator

*A Biblical Defence of the Trinity  
by Jonathan Sarfati*

The doctrine of the Trinity is difficult for some people to understand. But this is what God has revealed in Scripture about His own Being, so we should believe it. The doctrine of the Trinity states that in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and co-equal Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the same in essence but distinct in role - three Persons (or three centres of consciousness) and one Being (see diagram, below) The different senses of one-ness and three-ness mean that the doctrine is not self-contradictory. This is similar in principle to saying that the navy, army, and airforce are three distinct fighting entities, but are also one armed service. NB: this is not to suggest that the three persons are 'parts' of God. Indeed, each Person has the fullness of the Godhead (see Colossians 2:9). A better analogy is that space contains three dimensions, yet the dimensions are not 'parts' - the concept of 'space' is meaningless without all three dimensions.



### **Biblical derivation**

All things necessary for our faith and life are either expressly set down in Scripture or may be deduced by good and necessary consequence from Scripture. Some cults, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and groups known as 'Oneness', or 'Jesus-only' Pentecostals (not to be

confused with mainstream Pentecostals who do believe in the Trinity), are fond of pointing out that the word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible. But the doctrine can be logically proven from the following clear teachings of Scripture as follows:

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*There is only one God* (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 44:8). Note that the Hebrew word for 'one' is echad which means composite unity - it is used in Genesis 2:24 where the husband and wife become 'one flesh'. The word for absolute unity is yachid which is never used of God in the Scripture.

**The Father is called God** (John 6:27, Ephesians 4:6).

**The Son is called God** (Hebrews 1:8. He is also called 'I am' in John 8:58 cf. Ex. 3:14 - see below for more biblical proof). He has always existed (John 1:1-3, 8:56-58), but took on full human nature in addition to His divine nature at the Incarnation (John 1:14, Philippians 2:5-11).

**The Holy Spirit is called God** (Acts 5:3-4), and is personal (Acts 13:2), not some impersonal force as the Jehovah's Witness cult believes.

*They are distinct*, e.g. at the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16-17 all three were present and distinct. The Son is baptized, the Father speaks from Heaven, and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, flies down and lands on the Son. See the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 'baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' Note that the word 'name' is singular, showing that all three Persons are one Being.

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The distinction in persons within the one God means that it is possible for Jesus to be the 'one mediator between God and men' (1 Timothy 2:5), and to be our 'advocate with the Father' (1 John 2:1) when we sin. An advocate is a defence lawyer, who pleads our case before a judge. This demonstrates a distinction between the persons.

The distinction makes the Substitutionary Atonement possible. How else could Jesus be the One on whom the LORD has 'laid ... the iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:6)? The one laying and the one on whom our sins are laid must be distinct.

Jesus said that His Father sent Him (John 14:24) and that the Spirit was sent by both the Father (John 14:26) and the Son (John 15:7). This also points to distinct centres of consciousness within the one God.

The fact that Jesus prayed to God the Father (John 17:1) shows there was a distinction between Father and Son. Since Jesus was fully human (as well as fully divine), and humans should pray, it follows that it was proper for Jesus to pray in His humanity.

Also, the deity of the Son, Jesus Christ, is further proved by the fact that He has attributes belonging uniquely to God, e.g.:

\*He is the Creator (Colossians 1:16-17).

\*He has the ability to forgive sins (Luke 7:47-50) and judge all people (John 5:27).

\*He sends forth the Holy Spirit (John 15:26).

\*He accepts worship (Hebrews 1:6, Matthew 14:33)

\*He is called 'Lord' (Romans 10:9) where 'Lord' (kurios) is a translation of the Old Testament Yahweh (= God) (Romans 10:13 cites Joel 2:32 which makes this clear)

\*And He is identified with the 'Alpha and Omega' and the equivalent 'the first and the last' (Revelation 1:8, 17-18, cf. Isaiah 44:6).

\*In the Old Testament, He is the Child who is called 'Mighty God' and 'Everlasting Father' (Hebrew is literally 'Father of Eternity', meaning 'Author of Eternity') (Isaiah 9:6, cf. 10:21) He would be born in Bethlehem, yet His 'goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.' (Micah 5:2)

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## **Some Objections to the Trinity Answered**

Despite the clear Biblical evidence for the Trinity, some cults have objections based on misunderstandings of Scripture.

\*Jesus said: 'My Father is greater (meizon) than I' (John 14:28). But this refers to the Father's greater position in Heaven, not superior nature. Philippians 2:5-11 states that Jesus had equality by nature with God, but voluntarily took on the lower position of a servant. The same arguments apply to related passages about Jesus submitting to His Father's will.

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The word 'better' (kraitton) would have been used to describe superiority in nature if this is what had been meant. Indeed, kraitton is used to describe Jesus' superiority in His very nature to the angels (Hebrews 1:4). The distinction can be illustrated in the human realm by the role of the Prime Minister - he is greater than us in position, but he is still a human being like us, so is not better in nature.

\*Jesus is called 'the firstborn of every creature' (Colossians 1:15). However, in Jewish imagery, 'firstborn' means 'having the rights and special privileges belonging to the eldest child'. It refers to pre-eminence in rank more than to priority in time. This can be shown in passages where the term 'firstborn' is used of the pre-eminent son who was not the eldest, e.g. Psalm 89:27, where David is called 'firstborn' although he was actually the youngest son.

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'Firstborn' does not mean 'first created'; the Greek for the latter is protoktisis, while firstborn is protokotos. In fact, the verses after Colossians 1:15 show that Christ Himself is the creator of all things.

\*Jesus is Son of God. From this, some cults try to show that Jesus is somehow less than God. But in Jewish imagery, 'the son of' often meant 'of the order of' or 'having the very nature of'. For example, 'sons of the prophets' meant 'of the order of prophets' (1 Kings 20:35); 'sons of the singers' meant 'of the order of singers' (Nehemiah 12:28). Jesus' Jewish contemporaries understood that He was claiming to be God, which is why they wanted to kill him for blasphemy (John 19:7).

\*Jesus is the 'only-begotten Son' (John 3:16). The Greek word translated 'only-begotten' is monogenes, which means 'unique, 'one of a kind'. Jesus is the unique Son of God, because he is God by His very nature (see above). Believers in Him become 'sons of God' by adoption (Galatians 3:26-4:7).

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This is shown in the human realm by Hebrews 11:17, where Isaac is called Abraham's 'only begotten son'. Abraham had other sons, but Isaac was the unique son of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis chapters 15-18, 20), born when his parents were old.

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