

The Trinity

Systematic Theology

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Understanding the Mystery of the Trinity: One God in Three Persons

The doctrine of the Trinity stands as one of Christianity's most profound and challenging beliefs. While the word "Trinity" never appears in Scripture, the truth it represents permeates every page of God's Word. It is, quite simply, the belief that makes Christianity distinctively Christian.

The Foundation: One God

Before we can grasp the Trinity, we must anchor ourselves to this fundamental truth: there is only one God. This isn't negotiable or debatable within Christian theology. The God who created heaven and earth, who spoke the universe into existence, who holds all things together—this God is singular, unified, and indivisible.

Romans 1:19-20 reminds us that God has made Himself evident to all people: "For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power, His divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made." We know God exists not just because Scripture tells us, but because creation itself testifies to His reality. Every sunrise, every ocean tide, every intricate detail of the natural world points to an intelligent, powerful Creator.

Yet sin causes people to suppress this knowledge. As Psalm 14:1 declares, "The fool says in his heart, there is no God." This isn't an intellectual problem but a spiritual one—sin leads people to think irrationally and deny what their hearts already know.

Three Distinct Persons

Here's where the mystery deepens: this one God exists eternally as three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are not three gods working together. They are not three parts that combine to make one whole. They are not three different modes or manifestations of the same being.

God the Father is clearly understood as deity throughout Scripture. Few people struggle with this concept.

God the Son—Jesus Christ—explicitly claimed divinity. In John 8:58, Jesus declared, "Before Abraham was born, I am," intentionally using the divine name God revealed to Moses. He stated in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." When Thomas worshiped Him saying, "My Lord and my

God," Jesus accepted this worship—something only God can rightfully receive. He forgave sins, an act the religious leaders correctly understood belonged to God alone. At His trial, when asked if He was the Son of God, Jesus replied, "I am."

God the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, equal in essence to the Father and the Son. The Spirit possesses divine attributes that only God can have—He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. The Spirit was active in creation, as Job 33:4 states: "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." At Jesus's baptism, we see all three persons of the Trinity present simultaneously: the Father speaking from heaven, the Son being baptized, and the Spirit descending like a dove.

Fully God, Fully Distinct

Each person of the Trinity is fully God—not one-third God, but completely and entirely God. They share the same nature, the same will, the same mind. They are all-powerful, all-knowing, and eternal. Yet they have distinct roles in how they relate to us: the Father creates us, Jesus redeems us, and the Holy Spirit changes us.

Before creation existed, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were distinct only in relation to one another. They interact with each other throughout Scripture, which proves they are not merely different forms of the same person. Isaiah 48:16 records the Son saying, "The Lord God has sent me and his spirit." At Jesus's baptism in Matthew 3:16-17, the Father declares Jesus as His beloved Son while sending the Spirit upon Him.

Common Misunderstandings

Many well-intentioned attempts to explain the Trinity fall into ancient heresies:

Modalism suggests that Father, Son, and Spirit are simply different modes or forms God takes at different times—like water existing as liquid, ice, or steam. This denies that all three persons exist simultaneously.

Partialism treats the Trinity as three parts that combine to make God—like saying each person is one-third of God. This contradicts the truth that God cannot be divided and each person is fully God.

Tritheism believes in three separate gods who work together, directly contradicting Scripture's clear teaching that there is only one God.

Subordinationism claims the Son eternally submits to the Father in His divine nature, suggesting He is somehow less than fully God.

The Humanity and Divinity of Christ

A critical point deserves special attention: Jesus is both fully God and fully human. Philippians 2:6-7 explains that Jesus, "existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant."

Jesus never stopped being God, not for a single moment. When He became human, He didn't give up His divinity—He voluntarily set aside some of the privileges of His deity. He experienced hunger, thirst, and weariness because He was fully human. Yet He remained fully God, forgiving sins, performing miracles, and accepting worship.

This truth is essential for our salvation. If Jesus wasn't fully God at every moment, He couldn't be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He had to be both fully God and fully man to bridge the gap between humanity and divinity.

Why It Matters

The Trinity isn't just theological minutiae for scholars to debate. It defines Christianity itself. False religious groups consistently deny or distort the Trinity, teaching heresies that lead people away from biblical truth.

But here's the beautiful part: you don't need to pass a theological exam to be saved. God is infinite; we are finite. We shouldn't expect to fully comprehend the infinite with our limited minds. What matters is faith—childlike trust in what God has revealed.

The Gospel in Trinitarian Terms

The Trinity is woven throughout the salvation story. God the Father loves the world so much that He sent His Son. God the Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. God the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and draws us to faith.

As Romans 10:9 promises, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ—the fully divine, fully human Son of God who experienced everything we experience yet lived without sin.

The Trinity reveals a God who is not distant or detached but intimately involved in our redemption. The Father sends, the Son saves, and the Spirit transforms. One God, three persons, working in perfect unity for our eternal good.

We may never fully understand the Trinity this side of heaven, and that's okay. What we must do is believe—believe that God is who He says He is, believe that Jesus is the Son of God, believe that the Holy Spirit dwells within believers, and believe that anyone who calls on His name will be saved.

The mystery of the Trinity invites us not to complete understanding but to deeper worship of the one true God who exists beyond our comprehension yet reveals Himself clearly enough for us to know Him, love Him, and trust Him with our eternal souls.