

# Biblical Evidence for The Trinity

By Rick Booye, Sr. Pastor, Trail Christian Fellowship

The term “Trinity” comes from a Latin word for “three-ness,” *trinitas*. There is perhaps no area of Christian theology which has generated so much controversy as has the doctrine of the tri-unity of God—this mysterious three-ness. Since the second century people have stood up to challenge this teaching, each in turn being ultimately repudiated by the mainstream of biblical thinking. To this day, quasi-Christian cults continue to reject the scriptural evidence on this issue. Yet, the evidence stands and is affirmed by all the main branches of genuine Christianity dating back to the earliest centuries.

## I. Biblical Evidence for The Trinity: *That God is One in Essence and Three in Person. Three co-eternal and distinct Persons who share one Essence.*

### A. There is only one God.

1. Deuteronomy 6:4-5
  - a) The Shema. Central Theological Statement of the Judeo-Christian Tradition
  - b) 1 Tim. 2:5; Jas. 2:19
2. Deuteronomy 4:35.
  - a) YHWH is Elohim and there is no other besides Him.

### B. Yet complexity/plurality in His essence is indicated in both testaments.

#### 1. Old Testament Hints

- a) The term “one” in Deut. 6:4 is “echad” which can mean a complex or composite unity. It is used of man and woman becoming “one” in Genesis 2:24.
- b) His Title is plural. Elohim.
- c) Scripture uses the *first person plural pronoun* of Him.
  - (1) Gen. 1:26; 11:7. “Let Us make man in Our image.”
  - (2) Isa 6:8. Who will go for Us ...?
- d) Passages where more than one person in the context is called God:
  - (1) Gen. 18:26 with 19:24. His Angel is referred to as YHWH or as divine in a way that other angels are not. See also, Gen. 16:13; Ex 3:2-6; 23:20-22
  - (2) Psalm 45:6-7. ... therefore God, your God has anointed you with the oil of joy above your fellows ... Quoted in Heb 1:8 for this purpose.
  - (3) Psalm 110:1. The LORD said to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Cf. Matt 22:41-46 where Jesus rightly sees these as referring to two separate people. Who is David’s Lord, but the LORD Himself?
  - (4) Isa. 63:10. The Holy Spirit is seen separately from God Himself.
  - (5) Hosea 1:7. God says, I will deliver them by YHWH their God ...” What can this mean?

We should not try to derive any precise doctrinal content from these grammatical peculiarities. In every language, plural forms sometimes denote singular realities (like pants in English). I do think it significant, however, that the writers and characters of the Old Testament, emphatic monotheists that they were, do not object to these plural forms or try to avoid them, even though the language offered them alternatives. In the text, there is no evident embarrassment. That suggests that they regarded God, not as a bare unity, but as a unity of many things. John Frame, *Doctrine of God*, p. 632

## 2. New Testament Statements (just a brief sampling from among many more)

a) Three persons are called God in the NT

(1) The Father. 1 Peter 1:2

(2) Jesus, the Son. Titus 2:13; Jn. 20:28; Col. 2:8-9

(3) The Holy Spirit. Acts 5:4; 2 Cor. 3:17

b) They are seen as distinct from each other, yet referred to in unity across the spectrum of NT literature.

(1) Matt. 28:19. Singular “name” with three definite articles, The Father, The Son, The Spirit

(2) Matt. 3:16-17. God is speaking from heaven, the Son is being baptized, the Spirit is descending.

(3) 1 Cor. 12:4-6. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same **Spirit**; and there are varieties of service, but the same **Lord**; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same **God** who inspires them all in every one.”

(4) 2 Cor. 13:14. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

(5) 1 Peter 1:2. ...according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, by the sanctifying work of the **Spirit**, that you may obey **Jesus Christ** and be sprinkled with His blood ...

## II. Being and Working: How God is and what God does:

A. The Ontological Trinity. God as He is.

1. In an ontological sense, (at the level of being) the persons of the Trinity are equal and coeternal.

2. There are three distinct persons and the being of each person is equal to the whole being of God. (Jn. 14:9; 2 Cor 3:17-18)

3. Each is not 1/3 of God, these are not simply three ways of viewing God, these characteristics are not simply added to the essence of God.

B. The Economic Trinity: God in Action.

1. In an active sense, (with regard to how God relates to the creation) the persons of the Trinity relate from Father, to Son, to Spirit.

2. There is no sense of “inequality” found in the separate functions of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

3. We pray to the Father, by virtue of our relationship with the Son, and through the agency of the Spirit. Matt. 6:9; Jn. 14:12-14; Rom. 8:26.

## III. Three Closing Thoughts

A. The term “trinity” does not appear in Scripture, but the concept certainly does.

1. It is “inescapably implicit”.

B. The concept of the Trinity is a paradox, but not a contradiction.

1. A paradox is an apparent contradiction, that, upon closer scrutiny, can be resolved. The orthodox formulation of the trinity (three persons in one essence) is not a logical contradiction.

2. It is not 1+1+1= three gods.

3. It is 1x1x1; infinity times infinity times infinity = one God in three persons

C. The concept of the Trinity is to be believed, not because we can comprehend it, but because Scripture teaches it. 2 Jn. 9

1. Human Reason is not God; *God is God*. Isa. 55:8-9

**D. Note:** A person need not comprehend the Trinity in order to be saved, but we may apprehend it and we cannot deny it without doing violence to the doctrine of Christ Himself.

While theologians of the church were willing to make the attempt to define the Trinity, they are unanimous in acknowledging the Trinity as a mystery that eludes rational comprehension. The Trinity can be stated in paradoxical and symbolic language, but it cannot be resolved into a rational system. It reminds us that the mysteries of faith stand above reason though not necessarily against reason. Once accepted they make sense of the experience of faith. Faith can reflect upon these mysteries, but it cannot furnish a rational framework that circumscribes them. Reason cannot penetrate these mysteries, but it can respect them and try to make them intelligible.

Denial of the Trinity finally leads to deism, pantheism, polytheism or agnosticism. In deism God is remote and detached, a solitary being who remains aloof from the suffering and travail of the world. In pantheism God is identical with the world, or in the form of panentheism God is inseparable from the world. The world is an emanation of the being of God or an expression or manifestation of all-encompassing unity. In polytheism God is no longer one, nor is He supreme. Father, Son, and Spirit become separate gods rather than expressions of the one God. In a mystically tinged agnosticism God becomes an ineffable unity behind the world of phenomena, behind the symbols of human imagination, He is the infinite abyss, the God above God, who remains essentially unknowable. He is not simply mysterious but sheer mystery impenetrable to the human mind, even from the eyes of faith. One can also show that where the Trinity is denied, related doctrines such as the deity of Christ and his preexistence fall by the wayside. (Donald Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, IVP, p. 167)