

The Trinity

**The Trinity:
One God In
Three Persons**

*Understanding The Nature
Of The God Of Scripture*

By

Don Stewart

The Trinity: One God In Three Persons
Understanding The Nature Of The God Of Scripture

© 2020 By Don Stewart

Published by EOW (Educating Our World)
www.educatingourworld.com
All rights reserved

English Versions Cited

The various English versions which we cite in this course, apart from the King James Version, all have copyrights. They are listed as follows.

Verses marked NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright 1989 by Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved

Verses marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, New International Version, Copyright 1973 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved

Verses marked ESV are from The Holy Bible English Standard Version™ Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked “NKJV” are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from the Contemporary English Version (CEV) copyright American Bible Society 1991, 1995

Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated NET are from the NET Bible Copyright © 2003 By Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. www.netbible.com All rights reserved.

Verses marked HCSB are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

GOD’S WORD is a copyrighted work of God’s Word to the Nations. Quotations are used by permission. Copyright 1995 by God's Word to the Nations. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, (NASB) Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

The Trinity: One God In Three Persons

Understanding The Nature Of The God Of Scripture

Table Of Contents

Question 1	How Can There Be One God In Three Persons? (The Doctrine Of The Trinity)
Question 2	In What Ways Is The Doctrine Of The Trinity Important For Christian Belief?
Question 3	How Can Understanding The Doctrine Of The Trinity Affect The Way We Live The Christian Life?
Question 4	What Are Some Common Misconceptions That People Have About The Doctrine Of The Trinity?
Question 5	Does The Bible Teach That Only One God Exists?
Question 6	In What Sense Is The God Of Scripture A Unity?
Question 7	What Does The Bible Teach About God The Father? (Paterology)
Question 8	Does The Bible Teach That God The Father Is A Distinct Person From God The Son, Jesus Christ?
Question 9	Does Scripture Teach That The Holy Spirit A Distinct Person From God The Father?
Question 10	Is God The Son, Jesus Christ A Distinct Person From The Holy Spirit?
Question 11	Are The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit All Addressed As God?
Question 12	Are Divine Attributes, Or Characteristics Ascribed To Each Member Of The Trinity?
Question 13	Are Divine Works Attributed To Each Member Of The Trinity?
Question 14	Do We Find The Doctrine Of The Trinity In The Old Testament?
Question 15	Does The New Testament Mention The Three Distinct Members Of The Trinity?
Question 16	Does 1 John 5:7 Teach The Doctrine Of The Trinity?
Question 17	How Do The Different Members Of The Trinity Work With Each Other? (Economic Trinity)

The Trinity

- Question 18 Have The Different Members Of The Trinity Had The Same Function For All Eternity? (Was Jesus Always The Son)
- Question 19 How Can We Categorize False Views About The Trinity?
- Question 20 Do Christians Believe In Three Different Gods? (Tritheism)
- Question 21 Does The One God Have Three Different Modes? (Modalism, Sabellianism)
- Question 22 Is Jesus Lesser In Nature Than God The Father (Arianism)
- Question 23 Has The Son Eternally Been Inferior To God The Father? (Subordinationism)
- Question 24 Did Jesus Become Exalted By God At His Baptism? (Adoptionism)
- Question 25 Is The Holy Spirit Merely Another Name For Jesus (Binitarianism)
- Question 26 Is God An Absolute Unity? (Unitarianism)
- Question 27 Do We Have To Describe The Trinity In Masculine Terms? (Father, Son, And Holy Spirit)
- Question 28 Why Do Some People Argue There Are Two Trinities?
- Question 29 Does It Matter Whether The Holy Spirit Proceeded From The Father Rather Than The Son? (Filioque Controversy)
- Question 30 Does It Really Matter If A Person Believes In The Trinity?

About The Author

The Trinity: One God In Three Persons
Understanding The Nature Of The God Of Scripture

The Bible says that only one God exists—there are no others. The one God is infinite, eternal, all-knowing, and all-powerful. He is also a personal living Spirit.

There is something else—this one God consists of three distinct eternal Persons, or centers of consciousness. They are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are a tri-unity, working together to accomplish the divine design and purpose in the universe. The fact that one God exists in three Persons is known as the doctrine of the Trinity.

This difficult doctrine needs to be understood as best as we possibly can. In this book, we will look extensively at what the Bible says regarding God's triune nature. We will find that each distinct Person in the Trinity has attributes, or characteristics, that belong to God alone. In addition, each member of the Trinity does things only God can do.

We will also look at how the different members of the Trinity work together in the various ministries that God performs. Each has a particular function within the Godhead. It is important that we understand the role of each member of the Trinity.

In addition, we will find that the doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to the Christian faith. Without the Trinity, there is no salvation for humanity, no forgiveness of sins, and no guidance for believers today. Consequently, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential to Christianity. It is indeed one of the most important doctrines that a Christian can study.

Question 1

How Can There Be One God In Three Persons? (The Doctrine Of The Trinity)

The subject of the Trinity, the Tri-Unity of God, is holy ground because it discusses the nature of the one, true, God. Consequently, we should approach this special subject with all humility and reverence.

The Word Trinity Is Not In The Bible

The word “Trinity” is a second-century term; it is found nowhere in the Bible. Furthermore, the Scripture does not give us any complete statement about the doctrine of the Trinity. Why, therefore, should anyone believe that the Trinity is a biblical doctrine?

Simply put, while the biblical writers proclaim that only one God exists, they also refer to three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as “God.” Indeed, while insisting there is only one God, the New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the divine Son who is distinct from God the Father. It also presents the Holy Spirit as another divine person who is distinct from both the Father and the Son. With these facts in mind, we are challenged to formulate a doctrine of God that captures all these elements. The result? The doctrine of the Trinity.

All Doctrine Must Be Derived From The Bible

At the outset, we must state that any belief about the Trinity must come from the Bible and the Bible alone. It is the only authoritative source to discover answers about God and His nature. The Bible, by itself, must answer the question as to whether or not there is a Trinity. Tradition, or the pronouncements of some church authority, does not make the Trinity doctrine true. Scripture alone must be our guide.

The Trinity Is Only Known By Revelation

In addition, the doctrine of the Trinity could only be known by divine revelation. Indeed, it cannot be known by human reason. The only way in which the inner workings of God, and His nature, could be known is that God has revealed it to humanity.

Hence, the Trinity is a doctrine that God has revealed to humankind through the Scriptures. It is not the result of human reasoning.

The Definition Of The Trinity

The word Trinity means tri-unity, or three-in-oneness. It is used to explain the God who is revealed in Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity, while admittedly difficult, can be simply stated as follows.

The Bible teaches that there is one eternal God who exists. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. However, within the nature of this

one God are three Persons, or three centers of consciousness. They are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

These three Persons are co-equal, and co-eternal. They are also distinguishable, or distinct from one another. These three distinct Persons are the one God. In other words, everything that is true about God is true about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God is one in essence, but three in Persons.

While the Bible teaches that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, it is wrong to say that God is the Father, God is the Son, or God is the Holy Spirit. God's nature consists of three distinct Persons. Therefore, it is incorrect to limit God to one particular member of the Trinity.

Furthermore, while there are three centers of consciousness, there is only one divine, harmonious will. The three members of the Godhead do not act independently of one another.

Scripture makes the following points about the nature of God.

1. There Is Only One God That Exists

Foundational to the doctrine of the Trinity is the biblical teaching of the existence of only one God. No other so-called god has any genuine existence. Trinitarians, those who believe in the Trinity, are emphatic that only one God exists.

Furthermore, the essence of God cannot be divided. God, by nature, is spirit—He has no physical form. It is not possible to divide up spirit. The God of the Bible is one single eternal, infinite being who is indivisible—that is impossible to divide.

**2. There Are Three Distinct Persons Who Exist
(The Father, Son, And The Holy Spirit)**

Scripture is also clear there are three distinct persons who exist. They are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

For example, Jesus prayed to God the Father, He did not pray to Himself. At His baptism, the voice of the Father spoke in an approving way of Jesus—it was not Jesus who spoke of Himself. Therefore, the three Persons should not be confused with one another. In other words, they are distinguishable.

3. Each Of These Three Distinct Persons Is Called God

The Bible teaches that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Each are called God, each possess attributes that only God can possess, and each perform works that only God can perform. The divine essence is in each Person. The Father is wholly God, the Son is

wholly God, and the Spirit is wholly God. Jesus is distinct from the Father but is truly God—as is the Father. The same holds true for the Holy Spirit.

4. The Three Persons Are The One God (The Trinity)

The conclusion to the above facts is as follows: if only one God exists, and if there are three distinct Persons who are all called God, then the three Persons must be the one God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Some Important Clarifications Of The Doctrine Of The Trinity

There are some much-needed clarifications that should be made about the Trinity. They include the following.

1. The Members Are Distinct In Their Roles

The members of the Trinity have distinct roles. Although they are all equally God, they have different functions within the Godhead. For example, the Father is the one who sends, while the Son, Jesus Christ, is the One who was sent. The Holy Spirit has been sent to testify of Jesus.

Jesus the Son, as well as the Holy Spirit, are equal with God the Father in their nature. However, they are subordinate in their relationships. Subordinate in a relationship does not mean lesser in character. This is crucial to understand.

2. Each Member Is Fully God And Equal In Importance

All three Persons of the Trinity are fully God. Each is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present. In addition, each member of the Trinity is of equal importance. Christians often overlook the importance of the Father, and the Holy Spirit because Jesus, God the Son is where our faith centers. He is the one who became a human being, suffered for the sins of humanity, and rose from the dead. He is the one who will return to the earth and set up His everlasting kingdom. Eternal life will be based upon how we view Him.

Consequently, Jesus Christ is central to the heart of the believer. However, we must realize that each member of the Trinity is of equal importance. They are equal in dignity, majesty, glory, and power, but different in the roles in which they have.

3. There Are No Analogies Of The Trinity In Nature

There is something else which we must appreciate. The idea of three centers of consciousness, or three distinct personages, has no analogy for us as humans. All attempts to equate the Trinity with some analogy will miserably fail. This includes trying to compare the Trinity to a human being who has intellect, feeling, and will. This is not the same as the Triune God who has three distinct centers of consciousness. Therefore, it is best to admit that the Trinity has no analogy with which we can compare it.

4. The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Unique To Christianity

The last point we want to make concerns the uniqueness of the Trinity doctrine to the Christian faith. While other religions such as Judaism and Islam believe in one God, they do not have a doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, no other religion has a doctrine exactly like that of the Trinity.

Though some believe that religions who worship a number of different gods have a similar doctrine as the Trinity, this misunderstands what the Bible teaches about the nature of God.

Indeed, Christianity believes and teaches that only one God exists. There are not three gods. Yet it also teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the one God. The fact that God is both three and one at the same time is not a contradiction in terms—rather it is a divine mystery. For this is what the God of the Bible has revealed to us about His nature.

Summary To Question 1: How Can There Be One God In Three Persons? (The Doctrine Of The Trinity)

Though the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, Scripture certainly teaches this doctrine. Moreover, the Trinity doctrine is not something obscure, or meaningless. Indeed, it is one of the most important teachings in all of Scripture!

The truth of the Trinity must be decided solely on what the Bible has to say about the subject. It is our final authority on all matters of belief and practice. Whatever *it* says on the nature of God is the last word on the issue. This is primary to understand.

Furthermore, the doctrine of the Trinity can only be known by divine revelation. Indeed, human reason cannot discover anything about the personal nature of God. We only know the things about God that He chooses to reveal.

When we look at what the Scripture has to say, we discover that one God exists in three Persons. They are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We realize this by noting the following points.

There is only one God who exists. However, we find that there are three distinct persons in the New Testament—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and each of these three distinct persons is called God. Therefore, the three distinct persons must be the one God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

The members of the Trinity have different roles, though they are equal in their character, or nature. While the Son submits to the Father and the Spirit submits to the Father and the Son, they are all fully God and hence all equal in their nature.

The Trinity

The fact that the Son and the Spirit have subordinate roles says nothing about who they are. Indeed, they are all co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father.

Each member of the Trinity is equally important—although Christians tend to emphasize Jesus, the Second Person of Trinity. This is understandable because Jesus is the one member of the Trinity who became a human being.

He is the One who has died in our place as well as the One whom we trust to forgive our sins. Hence, it is understandable why He would receive more emphasis than the other members. However, they are *not* less important.

While people try to give analogies to the Trinity, there is no real analogy that we can give. In fact, we must understand that the Trinity has no analogy in nature, or with humans. Therefore, we must be careful not to compare the Trinity with things we think are similar in our world. There is no real comparison.

Finally, we need to appreciate that the Trinity doctrine is unique to Christianity. Although other religions may believe in one God, only the Christian faith believes and teaches that God is both three-and-one at the same time. This is not a contradiction in terms but rather it is what the one true God has told us about who He is in His basic nature.

These are a few of the elementary truths about the important doctrine of the Trinity. To this, much more will be added. Admittedly, it is a difficult doctrine to understand.

Question 2

In What Ways Is The Doctrine Of The Trinity Important For Christian Belief?

The Bible teaches that only one God exists. However, this one God is made up of three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all of the same essence—God—but they are distinct persons. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. Simply put, this is the doctrine of the Trinity.

While Bible-believing Christians confess to believing the doctrine of the Trinity, many people do not understand its importance. Indeed, it seems that belief in the Trinity is something which we hold to, but we do not really understand why it is significant, or how it can affect our daily living.

Consequently, the idea of the Trinity is not at the center of our thinking about God. Rather we have placed it as something of secondary importance, or as an afterthought. Therefore, we wonder why we should take the time to study the subject or think about its implications.

Is the doctrine of the Trinity that important for Christian belief? Does it really matter? The answer is a resounding, “Yes.”

The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Vital To Christian Belief

The Trinity doctrine is actually at the heart of Christian belief. In other words, if there is no Trinity, there is no Christianity! This can be seen in a number of ways.

1. The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Crucial If We Are To Trust The Bible

To begin with, if humans are to trust the Bible as the written Word of God, then it is absolutely essential for the doctrine of the Trinity to be true. Why? It is because the Scripture says that the Holy Spirit is the One who reveals the things of God to the human race.

Peter wrote the following words to the believers in his day:

First, you must understand this: No prophecy in Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation. No prophecy ever originated from humans. Instead, it was given by the Holy Spirit as humans spoke under God’s direction (2 Peter 1:20-21 God’s Word).

Peter said that no prophecy ever had its origination with human beings but rather it originated with the Holy Spirit. He is the One who ultimately directed everything contained in Scripture.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, He emphasized that the only one who fully knows the truth of God is God Himself. He put it this way:

God has revealed those things to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, especially the deep things of God. After all, who knows everything about a person except that person's own spirit? In the same way, no one has known everything about God except God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-11 God's Word).

Paul says that the only one who really knows a person is that person himself. In the same manner, the only person who really knows who God is, or what He is thinking, is God Himself. The Bible claims to be a written revelation from God.

This is a revelation whose ultimate source is the Holy Spirit. He is the One who lead the writers of Scripture to record God's truth. Yet if the Holy Spirit is not actually God Himself, then He could not really know the thoughts of God. He may have had mistaken ideas.

If this is the case, then humans could have no confidence whatsoever in the written Word of God. We could not be certain that it contains the actual mind of God.

Therefore, it is crucial that the Holy Spirit has the same nature as God. The Scripture says that He does.

2. The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Essential For Us To Trust Jesus

Not only is the doctrine of the Trinity essential for us to trust the Bible, it is also essential if we are to trust Jesus Christ. If Jesus is not God, then we would have no guarantee that His teachings were error-free—or for that matter, that they were even true. The stakes could not be higher.

For example, the entire thrust of the New Testament message is that Jesus Christ came to reveal God to humanity. John wrote:

No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known (John 1:18 NET).

Here is the claim: Jesus, who is Himself God, came to earth to reveal God to us. If we want to know what God is like, then all we have to do is look to Jesus. However, if Jesus is somehow less in nature than God the Father, then we could never be certain He was speaking accurately for God.

As we saw in our last point with the Holy Spirit, the only one who knows what anyone is thinking is that person himself. If Jesus is not God, then we could not be confident that He was correctly revealing God's thoughts. Indeed, if Jesus was somehow less in character than God, it is possible that He may have misunderstood God's thoughts or intentions. However, since the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is God, we have no such problem.

This is why the doctrine of the Trinity is of such importance. Jesus, God the Son, is of the same essence as God. The same is true for the Holy Spirit. Consequently, when they speak, they speak for God. They accurately know the truth of God and are able to convey it to us.

Therefore, we can have complete confidence in everything Jesus said and taught, as well as what we find in the written Word of God—which is ultimately directed by the Holy Spirit.

3. Without The Doctrine Of The Trinity, There Is No Salvation From Sin

There is a third reason as to why the doctrine of the Trinity is of the utmost importance for Christian belief. This has to do with the salvation of our souls. The Bible teaches that we human beings have sinned against a holy God. Sin demands punishment. Someone must pay with their life the penalty for our wrongdoings.

The good news of Scripture is that Jesus Christ, God the Son, took the penalty of our sins upon Himself on the cross of Calvary. Since He has died as a substitute for us, we do not have to experience the punishment of God concerning sin.

However, this can only be true if Jesus is both fully human and fully God. Why? The penalty and the guilt of sin extends to the entire human race. It is the human race which has sinned against a holy God. Thus, only a human being could die in the place of another human being to atone for our sins. This is not something that animals, angels, or any other created supernatural being could accomplish. To be the perfect sacrifice, and to satisfy God's righteous demands, Jesus must have been fully human.

4. Jesus Must Be Fully God For Our Salvation To Be Accomplished

Yet being fully human would not be enough. Jesus must also be God Himself. Indeed, He must be fully divine. There is no mere human being who could pay the penalty for his or her own sin—not to mention the sin of the entire world. Therefore, whoever saves us from our sins must also be God Himself. Otherwise the giving of one's life as a sacrifice in the place of others would be meaningless.

This is where the doctrine of the Trinity is of vital importance. Unless Jesus is fully God, we cannot have forgiveness from our sins. His nature must be greater than the nature of human beings, and the nature of angels. He must be of equal nature with God the Father—if His sacrifice is to be sufficient.

Therefore, if Jesus Christ is not God the Son, then there could be no assurance that He secured our salvation by His death for us on the cross. This is one reason why the doctrine of the Trinity is of enormous importance to the human race. Jesus Christ must be God Himself for our salvation from sin to be accomplished by His death. The Bible says that Jesus is indeed God.

5. The Holy Spirit Must Be God Himself For Our Salvation To Be Assured

The importance of the Trinity for our salvation from sin also extends to the Person of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is the Person who comes into the life of the believer the moment we trust Jesus Christ as our Savior. He is the One who regenerates us.

Furthermore, He continues to indwell us and lead us during our entire Christian experience. However, if the Holy Spirit is not fully God, then we cannot be certain if our conversion is valid or if our Christian experience is real.

If the Holy Spirit is someone, or something, less than the Father and the Son, then we could have no confidence whatsoever that we are truly saved from our sin, or that we are doing the things which He wants us to do. The Holy Spirit must not only be equal in nature to God the Father and God the Son, He must also be equal in purpose. Otherwise, our salvation from sin has not been secured.

Conclusion: The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Important For Christian Belief

Therefore, unless Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are fully God, our salvation from sin cannot be assured. On the other hand, since the Bible teaches the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we can be confident that our salvation has been accomplished by the work of God the Son on the cross, and that the Holy Spirit does make us a new creation in Jesus Christ.

As can be readily seen, the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed an important belief!

**Summary To Question 2:
In What Ways Is The Doctrine Of The Trinity Important For Christian Belief?**

While many people do not give much thought to the doctrine of the Trinity, because of its seeming unimportance and irrelevance, it actually is absolutely essential for the Christian faith to be true. The biblical teaching of one God in three persons is at the heart of Christian belief. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

To begin with, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of Scripture. The writers were guided by Him to put down exactly what He showed them. However, if the Holy Spirit is not God, then the final result, the Bible, would not be the Word of God. It would be something less. Consequently, there would be no reason to trust what it says.

In the same way, God the Son, Jesus, claimed to speak for God. If He is not God, then we could not trust anything that He said—for only God knows the mind of God. We would be uncertain about everything He said

The Trinity

and did. Consequently, for us to trust what they teach, both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit must be the one God.

In addition, our eternal salvation depends upon the identity of Jesus. To be an acceptable sacrifice for our sins, Jesus must be God Himself. All humans are sinners by nature. None of us could be the perfect sacrifice. However, Jesus, as both God and human at the same time, was able to die as our substitute on the cross of Calvary.

Therefore, rather than being irrelevant, we find that the doctrine of the Trinity is absolutely essential for the Christian faith. Indeed, without the Trinity, there is no Christian faith.

Question 3

How Can Understanding The Doctrine Of The Trinity Affect The Way We Live The Christian Life?

Often, we have the idea that the doctrine of the Trinity is not very practical. Indeed, many of us think that the Trinity is something that is only discussed among boring theologians who use technical theological expressions and obscure Latin and Greek terms. The entire subject seems irrelevant for daily Christian living.

However, nothing could be further from the truth. The doctrine of the Trinity is not only vital for Christian belief—it is also important to our practical Christian living. This is crucial for us to appreciate. Indeed, understanding that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are the same essence has a number of practical benefits.

1. Understanding The Trinity Should Bring Great Security To The Believer

The doctrine of the Trinity should be a source of security for those who believe in Jesus. For one thing, the members of the Trinity are not only one in essence, they are also one in purpose. The tri-personal God of Scripture is interconnected.

Indeed, the three members of the Holy Trinity love one another and work with one another in complete unity and harmony. Thus, we will never have to worry that one member of the Trinity will have motives and plans different from the other members.

Consequently, we will never have to be concerned that the love which God has for us will somehow be unequal. This should bring a sense of great security to the believer. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are working together with each believer to accomplish our salvation and to guide us in our daily living. In point of fact, Jesus promised that He would never lose any of those sheep who are His. He said:

My sheep respond to my voice, and I know who they are. They follow me, and I give them eternal life. They will never be lost, and no one will tear them away from me. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than everyone else, and no one can tear them away from my Father. The Father and I are one (John 10:27-30 God's Word).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are working together so that the believer will never be lost. The Good Shepherd has seen to that!

2. The Trinity Is A Model For Loving Others

The doctrine of the Trinity also provides a model for believers loving one another. From the Bible we find that the three members of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, have loved each other from all eternity. As God, their love is perfect. This mutual love among the members of the

Trinity allows them to work together in complete harmony. Indeed, we are told that the members of the Trinity actually submit themselves to one another.

For example, when He was here upon the earth, Jesus testified that He did not come to do His own will—but rather that of God the Father. John records Him saying:

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38 NIV).

In the same manner, the Holy Spirit was sent to do the work of the Father and the Son. Jesus said the following to His disciples:

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 16:12-15 NIV).

This love should serve as an example to each and everyone us.

Jesus told His disciples to love one another as He had loved them. He said:

I'm giving you a new commandment: Love each other in the same way that I have loved you. Everyone will know that you are my disciples because of your love for each other (John 13:34-35 NIV).

The mark of the Christian should be the love we have one for another. This love is perfectly demonstrated among the members of the Holy Trinity. They are to be our example.

The Apostle Paul echoed the same thought. We should be concerned with the things of others. He wrote:

Don't be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others (Philippians 2:4 God's Word).

Again, we have another example of how understanding the doctrine of the Trinity can lead to practical Christian living. The doctrine of the Trinity is certainly not irrelevant.

**Summary To Question 3:
How Can Understanding The Doctrine Of The Trinity
Affect The Way We Live The Christian Life?**

The Trinity doctrine is not only essential to the truth of the Christian faith—it also is tremendously helpful in a practical sense. This can be seen in a number of ways.

The Trinity

For one thing, there is complete unity and harmony among the members of the Trinity. Since the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three separate gods, we do not have to be concerned that they may have different purposes. They will never disagree with one another or have differing agendas.

Therefore, we can rest assured in the promises of God and in the fact that God's program is going forward as He has planned. Knowing this should instill confidence in us.

Furthermore, the members of the Trinity serve as an example to us in the way in which they love one another. We are to pattern our love for each other after their love. Sometimes their love causes them to submit to another member of the Godhead. In the same manner, we should, at times, submit our will to that of others.

Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity is not something irrelevant as far as our daily lives are concerned. Indeed, it provides for us practical examples on how we are to conduct our lives.

Question 4

What Are Some Common Misconceptions People Have About The Doctrine Of The Trinity?

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most important teachings in all of Scripture. Unfortunately, there are a number of common misconceptions that people have about this doctrine. These misunderstandings need to be addressed. They can be listed as follows.

Misconception 1: The Trinity Is A Pagan Idea Adopted By Christians

It is often charged that the doctrine of the Trinity is a pagan idea that the early church adopted. Supposedly, the church adopted the idea of the Trinity from non-Christian beliefs. The Bible, they say, does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity.

Response

There are a number of points that need to be made to refute this accusation. We can address them as follows.

The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Derived From Scripture

First, the Trinity doctrine is derived from Scripture alone. It does not come from some pagan religion or some devilish doctrine. The source of the teaching is from the Bible itself. The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to explain what God has revealed to us in His Word. It comes solely from the Bible.

There Is No Pagan Source That Influenced The Doctrine

Second, there is the matter of which source supposedly influenced the Trinity. Candidates such as the religions of ancient Babylon, Egypt, and Assyria have been mentioned, as have Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

Yet these religions are radically different from one another in their beliefs. Thus, there is no unanimity of opinion on the subject as to where the Trinity doctrine was derived.

There is something else which needs to be mentioned. These supposed derivations of the Trinity from pagan concepts come either too early, or too late in history, or are too far away geographically.

For example, comparison to the worship of three gods in Egypt and Babylonia will not work. These gods were worshipped two thousand years before Jesus Christ came. India, where Buddhism and Hinduism arose is too far removed geographically to have had any influence. There is no credible human source where the doctrine could have come from. None.

Some Christians Are Misinformed About The Trinity And Wrongly Explain The Doctrine

Third, while some Christians may have made comparisons of the Trinity to pagan beliefs, the Bible does not. The Trinity is strictly a biblical doctrine. Those who attempted to compare the Trinity with teachings in other religions either do not understand the doctrine of the Trinity or what the other religions teach concerning the nature of God.

The Idea Of Three gods Is Not The Trinity

Fourth, the fact that there were a number of ancient religions that worshipped three gods is irrelevant. These gods were separate gods. They are not one God as we find in the Trinity.

Furthermore, the three gods worshipped in these cultures were usually the chief gods. There were many other gods these people worshipped apart from the chief ones. The similarity of the number three proves nothing with respect to derivation or influence.

Finally, there is a logical fallacy involved. The fact that some ancient religions may have had some similar beliefs to the Trinity does not mean they are the same or that they influenced the Trinity. Similarity does not mean the same.

Therefore, the idea that the Trinity was somehow influenced, derived from, or borrowed from pagan concepts does not fit the facts.

Misconception 2: The Trinity Doctrine Is A Mystery That Is Impossible To Understand

One of the misconceptions about the Trinity goes something like this: since we cannot comprehend the Trinity, we should not believe it.

It is true that our natural faculties cannot comprehend how one can be three, and three can be one. The doctrine of the Trinity is difficult to understand. It is tough to find human terms that would express how God is able to be both a unity and three distinct Persons at the same time.

Response: Whether We Understand It Or Not, The Bible Teaches The Doctrine Of The Trinity

However, this is not the issue. There are many facts that we, as humans, are not able to fully understand. The Trinity is one of those things we must accept by faith because the Scripture teaches it. It should not be rejected because some find it difficult to comprehend. A basic understanding of the Trinity is certainly possible.

Therefore, it is imprecise to say that the Trinity is impossible to understand. Humans can understand many things about the Trinity without having a complete understanding.

We can know the truth about God if we so desire. Jesus made this clear. He said:

Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own (John 7:17 NLT).

If we wish to know, we can know.

The Apostle Paul attempted to explain the mystery or God's secret plan to the people. He stated that we can understand it. He wrote the following to the Colossians:

My goal is that they will be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have full confidence because they have complete understanding of God's secret plan, which is Christ himself (Colossians 2:2 NLT).

While he is not directly speaking of the doctrine of the Trinity, the thought is still the same. Since God has revealed these things about His nature, we should be able to have some understanding of His truth.

Therefore, we can know certain things about the Trinity even though our knowledge may not be exhaustive.

Misconception 3: The Trinity Doctrine Is Unreasonable

This objection is similar to the previous one and it is very common. Not only is the doctrine of the Trinity accused of being impossible to understand, it is also accused of being contrary to reason.

We are told by some people that the Trinity doctrine should be rejected because it does not make sense.

Response: Human Reason Should Not Be Our Guide: God's Divine Revelation Should Be

Although the doctrine of the Trinity is difficult to comprehend, it is certainly not unreasonable. While some of the truths with respect to the Trinity are beyond human reason, they are not contrary to reason.

Reason, however, should not be our final test of truth. Human reason is flawed by sin. A person who does not accept the Bible as the true revelation from God has no basis to believe the Trinity, but those who accept the Scripture as God's divinely inspired Word can do no other but accept this truth.

The key issue is, "Is the Trinity taught in Scripture." The answer is yes. However, the Scripture does not attempt to explain the Trinity. Indeed, it simply declares it.

**Misconception 4: The Doctrine Cannot Be True Because
The Word Trinity Is Not Found In The Bible**

It is true the word Trinity is not found in the Bible. It is a theological term, not a biblical term. This has led some to the conclusion that belief in the Trinity is not biblical.

**Response: Many Correct Theological Terms
Are Not Found In Scripture**

It is true, the precise word “Trinity” is not found in Scripture. Yet this does not mean that the doctrine is contrary to Scripture. The idea of the Trinity is represented in many places and the term Trinity, or Tri-Unity, best expresses what the Bible says about God’s nature.

We should not necessarily reject any word or phrase that attempts to explain what the Scripture teaches merely because the Bible does not use the term.

For example, the word “theology” is not found in the Bible either. However, theology means “the study of God.” No one doubts that the Bible teaches theology—even though the precise term is not used.

In the same manner, the Trinity is taught in Scripture without the use of the specific term. Moreover, it is not the specific word Trinity that is the issue. The real question is, “Does the teaching about the Trinity conform to what the Bible says about God’s nature?” That is the real issue.

Furthermore, if we use this type of logic, then we should reject the Book of Esther as being part of Scripture since the name of God is not found in the book. Since it does not use God’s name, should we assume that it does not teach us about Him? Esther certainly shows the providence of God without using His specific name.

Likewise, the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity without using the actual term.

**Misconception 5: The Trinity Doctrine Cannot Be True
Because It Is Not Explicitly Taught In
Scripture**

The doctrine of the Trinity is not found in any explicit statement in Scripture. There are no formal doctrinal statements that define, or teach the Trinity. Terms such as “Trinity,” “three Persons,” and “one substance” are not found in the New Testament.

In addition, nowhere do we find the Bible saying that God is one in essence but three as to persons. Since there is no developed teaching concerning the Trinity, it is argued, that the New Testament does not teach this doctrine.

Response: The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Taught In Scripture

While the exact terms that Christians use to describe the Trinity are not found in the New Testament, the ideas in which these terms express are clearly there. We must appreciate the fact that the Bible can teach doctrines in ways other than in direct statements. The truth of the Trinity is found by comparing what the Bible itself says about the nature of God. The basis of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is certainly found in Scripture.

Moreover, what the Bible teaches about the nature of God assumes that God is a Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity should not be rejected because a formal, or explicit, statement is lacking, or because the belief is not fully developed.

The term Trinity is a limited term because it emphasizes the three distinct Persons but not the oneness, or unity of God, within the Godhead. There is a German term, *Dreieinigkei*t, that says it better. It means “three-oneness.” Unhappily, English does not have such a term.

Misconception 6: The Trinity Denies The Oneness Of God

It is often charged that the Trinity doctrine denies the existence of only one God because the Trinity consists of three Persons.

Response: God Is Still One In His Essence In The Doctrine Of The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity does not mean there are three different gods, or three separate gods. God is one essence, one substance. He is not a being made up of three separate parts. The three Persons are united—they do not have separate existence.

Neither is God three separate individuals. The doctrine of the Trinity does not make Jesus a second god and the Holy Spirit a third god. There is only one God. The three members of the Trinity are equal in substance. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity does not deny the oneness of God.

Misconception 7: God Cannot Be Three Persons And One Person At The Same Time

It is often assumed that it is impossible for God to be three and one at the same time. Consequently, the Trinity doctrine is rejected.

Response: This Is How God Describes Himself

One of the problems in understanding the Trinity has to do with the English word “person.” Since the word person can be used in two different senses, it can cause confusion when explaining the meaning of the three persons of the Trinity.

When Christians speak of God as “three persons” they are not saying that God is three separate entities, or there are three parts of God. God is one substance, or essence. He cannot be divided into parts and the doctrine of the Trinity does not divide God into parts.

The doctrine of the Trinity recognizes one God who exists in three distinct persons, or centers of consciousness. We can also say that there are three personal self-distinctions. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are eternal personal distinctions within the nature of God. In this sense, God is indeed three persons.

However, there is another sense in which the word “person” is used. When the God of the Bible speaks, He usually speaks as “I,” as one person. When humans pray to God, they pray to Him as “you” in the singular, never the plural. God is never referred to as “they” or “them.” He is always “He,” “Him,” or “You” in the singular.

This reflects the fact that He is a single, personal being. If the word person is used in the sense of a unique, individual being, then God is one person in that sense of the term.

The word person can possibly be misleading because to us it implies separate beings. Three persons to us would be three different beings. However, person seems to be as good a word as we have in English that can express what the Scripture teaches.

Consequently, God can be described as “three persons” or as “one person” depending upon how the word “person” is being used. The traditional Christian usage of person focuses on the distinction of the three members of the Trinity.

Misconception 8: The Trinity Doctrine Was Invented By The Church

The charge is often made that the doctrine of the Trinity was formulated one hundred years after the apostles died. Supposedly it is a product of the thinking of early Christians, not the Bible. It is a doctrine of the church, not a doctrine from Scripture. Today, we do not have to believe it merely because the church has held to it in the past. However, the facts say otherwise.

The Term Was Used Early In Church History

The term Trinity comes from the Latin word *trinus*, meaning threefold. The earliest use of the word Trinity is found by the church father Tertullian (A.D. 166). It is not certain when the term was invented.

Christians Believe In The Unity Of God

The early Christians had a basic belief in the unity of God. They believed in only one God. However, they were faced with the clear teaching of Jesus as to His identity. He claimed a position of equal authority to the Father.

The Trinity

The same is true of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God could guide believers, teach them, as well as dwell in them.

The church was then faced with the following facts. The Bible teaches there is only one God. Although God is a unity, He is a compound unity made up of three distinct Persons. They are God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The only reasonable conclusion to make is that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are the one God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine was not invented by the church rather it was the result of understanding what the Bible had to say concerning the nature of God.

The Trinity doctrine was true from the beginning, but its importance was not appreciated at first. This should not be of any concern. Not every important theological issue arose immediately in the church. The apostles may not have used the term Trinity, but the totality of their teaching clearly presents God as a Trinity.

The Great Creeds Acknowledge The Trinity

Church creeds are statements of belief that were formulated to express what Christians believe. They were usually written in response to some false teaching that arose. The creed clarified the truth about the faith. While the creeds are not to be considered as equal to Scripture, they do provide an insight for us about what the Christians believed. There are three great creeds to which Western Christianity confesses. They are the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed, which is the earliest statement of Christian beliefs, does not mention the Trinity. It is a very compact formula. If this was the only creed written, then one might assume that the Father alone is God and that Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are lesser in character—for only the Father is referred to as divine in the Apostles' Creed. However, the creed was not anti-Trinitarian. The issue was simply not covered.

The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed was written in A.D. 325 and added to in A.D. 381. It is clearly Trinitarian in outlook. It states that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all divine, and of one substance, or essence.

The Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed came later. It was named after the fourth century defender of the Trinity—Athanasius. It is even stronger with its statement about the Trinity. The Creed says, “So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three gods, but one God.”

The church came to this conclusion on the Trinity based upon what the Bible teaches about the nature of God.

Conclusion: Misconceptions Are Usually Based Upon Misunderstanding Of The Doctrine

Almost all of the criticisms laid at the doctrine of the Trinity are a result of a misunderstanding of the belief. This is why it is crucial that the doctrine of the Trinity be properly defined and clarified.

One must be precise with their terms and definitions to gain an understanding of this doctrine.

Again, the key issue is this: Does the Bible teach the doctrine of the Trinity? A careful examination of Scripture shows that it does.

**Summary To Question 4:
What Are Some Common Misconceptions That People Have About The Doctrine Of The Trinity?**

The Trinity doctrine is important to properly understand. However, there are a number of common misconceptions that must be cleared up when considering the doctrine of the Trinity.

The following points need to be made.

To begin with, the Trinity is not a pagan idea. It is based upon what the Scripture has to say about the nature of the God of the Bible. There is no credible evidence that the Trinity was borrowed from any pagan belief. None whatsoever.

The Trinity doctrine is difficult for humans to comprehend, but not impossible. In addition, the Trinity doctrine is not contrary to reason. Reason, however, should not be the ultimate test as to what is true and what is false. The Trinity doctrine is believed because the Bible teaches it.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not destroy the oneness of God as some have wrongly claimed. The doctrine of the Trinity plainly says that only one God exists. It does not teach that there are three gods.

Much confusion surrounds the word “person” with reference to the Trinity. The three members of the Trinity are persons in the sense of distinct centers of consciousness—but they are not separate individuals. God is one in His essence but within that one essence there are three distinct persons.

Though this is difficult to comprehend, this is what Scripture teaches about the nature of God.

While the Trinity is not formally or explicitly taught in Scripture, the church did not invent the doctrine of the Trinity. The church only recognized what the Bible taught on the subject.

The Trinity

In fact, the Trinity doctrine resulted from putting in a systematic form what the God of the Bible has said about Himself.

In sum, although the term Trinity is not found in the Bible, the Scripture teaches one God exists in three distinct Persons.

Finally, we must note that criticisms of the Trinity are based mostly upon misconceptions of what the Bible has to say about the subject. Indeed, a proper understanding of the doctrine will clear up these misconceptions.

Question 5

Does The Bible Teach That Only One God Exists?

The doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly taught in the Old Testament. Since God progressively revealed Himself to the human race, it is not until the New Testament that we find the doctrine of the Trinity fully revealed. However, one truth which was revealed from the very beginning is that there is only one God who exists. Indeed, this is the consistent teaching of Scripture from the first page of until the last. The evidence for this is as follows.

The Testimony Of The Old Testament

The Old Testament leaves no doubt that there is only one God who exists in His essential being. This is the consistent teaching in all its parts.

The Law Of Moses

We find a number of references to the existence of one God in the Law of Moses. We read in the Book of Exodus about the unique nature of the God of Israel. It says:

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11 NIV)

There is only one God—no one is like Him. Scripture makes this clear.

In the Ten Commandments, the following is written:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on earth under it, or that is in the water below. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations to those who hate me, but showing faithful love to thousands belonging to those who love me and to those who keep my commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold guiltless whoever takes his name in vain (Exodus 20:3-7 NET).

Unlike the nations around them, the people of Israel were not to have any other gods. Neither were they to make any image of God.

Moses elsewhere emphasized that the Lord is the only God who exists. He wrote:

You have been made to understand that the Lord alone is God—there is no other besides him. May you understand today and take it to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below—there is no other! (Deuteronomy 4:35,39 NET).

The Trinity

The Lord is God. There are no other gods!

One of the clearest verses as to the oneness of God is found in Deuteronomy. This testimony cannot be misunderstood!

Listen, Israel: As for the Lord your God, the Lord is one. You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and your whole strength (Deuteronomy 6:4,5 NET).

The Lord is one. He is a unity. One God, and only one God, exists.

Samuel

The same truth about God is taught after the time of Moses. In the Book of First Samuel, we read about the uniqueness of the Lord. The Bible puts it this way:

There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God (1 Samuel 2:2 NRSV).

He is the only one who is holy. There is none like Him.

In Second Samuel, it also emphasizes that there is no one like God:

Therefore, you are great, O Lord God, for there is none like you. There is no god besides you. What we have heard is true (2 Samuel 7:22 NET).

The books of Samuel teach there is only one God.

Kings

In the Book of First Kings, we find Solomon testifying to God as the only God who exists. It says the following:

May people all over the earth know that the LORD is God and that there is no other god (1 Kings 8:60 NLT).

There is no other God except the God of the Bible.

Psalms

The psalmist rejoiced in the fact that the Lord is the only God. He wrote:

Let them know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth (Psalm 83:18 NRSV).

The psalmist also wrote:

For you are great and do amazing things. You alone are God (Psalm 86:10 NET).

The Trinity

In contrast to the neighbors of Israel, the Bible presents one God that is big enough to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The Bible says:

The Lord God of Jacob blesses everyone who trusts him and depends on him. God made heaven and earth; he created the sea and everything else. God always keeps his word (Psalm 146:5-6 CEV)

Again, it is “God” who made the universe—the God of the Bible.

Isaiah

The writings of the prophet Isaiah emphasized the oneness of God. He quoted the Lord saying the following:

You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me (Isaiah 43:10 ESV).

There was no God which existed before the God of the Bible, neither shall there be any god who exists after Him. This could not be any clearer!

In that same context in Isaiah, the Lord again emphasizes that He is only one God:

This is what the LORD, Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty, says: I am the First and the Last; there is no other God (Isaiah 44:6 NLT).

Again, in this context, we also read another statement of the Lord:

I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:5,6 NRSV).

Once more, God emphasizes that there is no one but Him.

Scripture says:

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is no one besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:21,22 NRSV).

These verses show that there is only one God who exists. While Scripture speaks of false gods that other nations worshipped, they do not actually exist. When God speaks, it is not one God among many—for He alone is God!

The Testimony Of The New Testament

The New Testament echoes the Old Testament. Indeed, there is only one God who exists, and this is the God of the Bible—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Gospels

In the gospels we read about the existence of only one God. Jesus emphasized this truth during His entire ministry.

Mark records the following answer of Jesus to the question of the greatest commandment in the Law:

Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one’” (Mark 12:29 NRSV).

Jesus said we must understand that the Lord is a unity. He is one God. This is the first and greatest commandment of the Law.

An expert of the law appreciated this truth. He said to Jesus:

The teacher of religious law replied, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other” (Mark 12:32 NLT).

There was no question among the Jews of Jesus’ day that only one God existed.

In another place, Jesus emphasized that the Lord alone is God. He said the following to the religious leaders:

How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? (John 5:44 NRSV).

Only one God exists, it is the Lord.

Again, Jesus emphasized this truth when He prayed to God the Father on the night of His betrayal. He said:

And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth (John 17:3 NLT).

The God of Scripture is the only true God.

The four gospels are unanimous in their testimony to the existence of one God. There is no doubt whatsoever about this.

Paul

The writings of Paul echo this same truth. He wrote the following to the Corinthians about the fact that only one God exists:

So now, what about it? Should we eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God and no other. According to some people, there are many so-called gods and many lords, both in heaven and on earth. But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we exist for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life (1 Corinthians 8:4-6 NLT).

According to Paul, there is no other God.

In another place, Paul again said that there is only one Lord, one God. When he wrote to the Ephesians he said:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6 NET).

There is only one Lord, one God and Father. The testimony is clear.

To Timothy, Paul wrote about the only God who exists:

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:17 NRSV).

He is the only God. Consequently, He deserves glory and honor forever.

In the same letter, he emphasized it again. He wrote:

For there is one God (1 Timothy 2:5 KJV).

Paul consistently taught that one God exists—the God of the Bible. There is certainly no doubt about this.

James

James, the brother of Jesus, also emphasized that only one God exists. Indeed, he stated that even the demons realize this truth:

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. (James 2:19 NLT).

James also taught the existence of one God.

It Is The Same God As Found In The Old Testament

Not only does the New Testament recognize the existence of one God, it recognizes Him as the same God who is revealed in the Old Testament. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt in the Exodus. Jesus spoke of this. He said:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11 NRSV).

At no point in the New Testament do we find any hint that there is any God who exists except the one who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, and gave the people the Law at Mt. Sinai. This is the same God who brought Jesus Christ back from the dead. He is Yahweh—the only God who exists.

Conclusion: From Beginning To End, The Bible Teaches That Only One God Exists

The Bible, from beginning to end, makes it clear that only one God exists. Of this, there is no doubt. Indeed, there is a unanimous testimony by the authors of Scripture that the Lord alone, the God of Israel, is God.

Summary To Question 5: Does The Bible Teach That Only One God Exists?

There are a number of statements in Scripture that make it clear that there is only one God who exists. From the first page until the last, the Scripture affirms that only one God has genuine existence. Indeed, beginning with the writings of Moses, to the writings of the last New Testament author, we find that only one God exists.

Scripture does speak about false gods. The false gods that Scripture speaks about have no substance. They do not exist. There is nothing to them.

It is also evident that the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the same God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. He alone is God.

Therefore, we find no hint that the God of the Old Testament is a different personage than the God of the New Testament. He is the same God—the only God.

Hence, the totality of Scripture clearly testifies that only one God has real existence. There are no other gods.

Question 6

In What Sense Is The God Of Scripture A Unity?

The Bible speaks of the unity of God. What does this mean?

There are a number of important points that need to be made about this truth.

God's Nature Cannot Be Divided: He Is One Essence

To begin with, the doctrine of the Trinity does not mean that God is a composite being made up of three gods—rather He is a unity. As a unity, God cannot be divided. The technical term is “indivisible.”

God cannot be divided—neither is He made up of multiple substances. The members of the Trinity are not separate beings within the one divine essence. God is *one* in number. This important truth must be understood.

There Is An Absolute And A Compound Unity

While Scripture teaches that God is a unity, we must realize there is a difference between an absolute unity and a compound unity.

For example, if we say “one man” we are referring to an absolute unity because only one person is in view.

However, when the Scripture says the man and woman will become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) this is a compound unity. This is because the union consists of two distinct persons.

Examples Of A Compound Unity

We find examples of compound unity in the following passages. The Book of Ezra gives an illustration of this.

It says:

When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem (Ezra 3:1 ESV).

The many people were gathered as one.

In the Book of Ezekiel, we read how two sticks become one:

Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:17 NKJV).

Both of these passages used the same Hebrew word (*echad*) for one as Deuteronomy 6:4. It speaks of a compound unity.

Examples Of An Absolute Unity

When the idea of absolute unity, or absolute oneness, is meant, the Hebrew word *yachidh* is used. We find an example of this in the Book of Genesis:

Then God said, “Take your son, your only [*yachidh*] son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about” (Genesis 22:2 NIV).

This is an example of an absolute unity.

In the Book of Amos, it speaks of a person mourning for their only son. We read the following words of the Lord:

I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only [*yachidh*] son and the end of it like a bitter day (Amos 8:10 NIV).

Again, we are dealing with an absolute unity.

Zechariah also wrote about how Israel will mourn for Him who is an only son. The Book of Zechariah states it as follows:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only [*yachidh*] child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10 ESV).

This Hebrew word is used about a dozen times in the Old Testament. It is never used to describe the unity of God.

God Is A Compound Unity

A comparison of the passages, where the different Hebrew words are used, shows that a compound unity is what is in mind in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Furthermore, since the word for God in Hebrew is *Elohim*—a plural noun, we have further inference of Him being a compound unity.

Because God is one substance, He does not have different parts. Therefore, it is not possible to divide up His nature.

The God Of The Bible Is A Compound Unity

In sum, from the teaching of Scripture, and the Hebrew terms used, we find that the God of the Bible is described as a compound unity.

Although He is only one God, a unity, there is also plurality in His unity. This is another indication that God is a Trinity.

**Summary To Question 6:
In What Sense Is God Of Scripture A Unity?**

The God of the Bible is a unity. This is continually stressed. God is a compound unity, not an absolute unity. It is important that we understand the differences between a compound unity and an absolute unity.

When we speak of “one man” we would be speaking of an absolute unity. There is only one person in view.

When referring to man and woman being “one flesh” we would be speaking of a compound unity. More than one person is under consideration.

The Old Testament has two different words which make this distinction. The Hebrew word *yachidh* is used of something that is an absolute unity, while the word *echad* is used of a compound unity.

When speaking of God, the Old Testament always used the word *echad*. The God of the Bible is a compound unity. This is evidenced by the consistent use of the Hebrew term *echad* when speaking of God.

Although there is only one God who exists, within the nature of the one God are three distinct Persons, or centers of consciousness. The fact that the word *echad* is used of the God of Scripture further confirms His Trinitarian nature.

Question 7

What Does The Bible Teach About God The Father? (Paterology)

The Bible speaks of a person called “God the Father.” The study of His person is sometimes called “Paterology. We find God being called a Father in both testaments.

However, most of our information about Him comes from the New Testament. When the name God is used in Scripture it sometimes refers specifically to God the Father. However, more likely, it refers to all three members of the Trinity. The context must tell us.

Who is this person called God the Father? What do we know about Him? From Scripture, we can make the following observations about “the Father.”

God The Father Is The First Person Of The Trinity

God the Father is the first person in rank among the members of the Trinity. Neither the Son, nor the Holy Spirit, is ever mentioned as being first in rank. This does not mean that the Father is greater than the other two members. While He is first in position, or rank, they are all equal in character.

He Is Called The Father In The Old Testament

The specific references in the Old Testament to God the Father are few. There is however, a specific reference to Him in the Book of Isaiah:

For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name (Isaiah 63:16 ESV).

The Lord is the Father to the people.

In the Book of Hosea, we read of God calling Israel His “son:”

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1 NIV)

This statement would give the assumption that God was their Father in some sense.

In the Book of Proverbs, there is another passage that speaks of God’s “son:”

Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, If you know? (Proverbs 30:4 NKJV).

This verse again indicates that God can be called a Father. As to the identity of the “Son” in this passage, there has been much discussion. It seems to be a reference to the coming Messiah—the pre-existent Son of God. Whatever the case may be, this verse speaks of God’s “Son.”

He Is Also Called The Father In The New Testament

Most of the instances of God being called “the Father” are found in the New Testament. For example, Paul wrote:

Paul, an apostle— not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— (Galatians 1:1 ESV).

There is a person called God the Father who is distinct from Jesus Christ, God the Son.

It is from the New Testament that we learn about the identity of the Father. From it, we discover the following truths.

The Father Is A Person

The fact that the Father is a person can be clearly seen by a number of factors. They include the following.

1. He Is Conscious Of His Own Existence

The Father is conscious of Himself. When Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke in an audible voice to the Son:

And behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17 ESV).

The Father is conscious of who He is, as well as who His Son is.

We are also told that the Father is looking for people to worship Him. Jesus said:

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him (John 4:23 NKJV).

The fact that the Father is conscious of His own existence is a clear evidence of His personhood. In other words, He is a personal Being.

2. He Has Self-Determination Or A Will

We also find that God the Father has self-determination, or a will. Jesus spoke of the will of the Father. We read:

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day (John 6:38-39 ESV).

Self-determination is a sign of personality.

3. The Father Shows Emotion

God the Father has the ability to express emotion. For example, He sent His Son into the world because of the great love which He has for humanity.

John wrote:

God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins (1 John 4:9-10 NLT).

Emotion is a sign of personality. This further indicates the personal nature of God the Father.

4. He Can Communicate

The Father is able to communicate to others. We read of Jesus speaking and then God the Father replying:

Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28 ESV).

God the Father is able to communicate to others.

On another occasion, we find that Jesus spoke of the things that He heard from the Father. Our Lord said:

I don't call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. But I've called you friends because I've made known to you everything that I've heard from my Father (John 15:15 God's Word).

The fact that God the Father can communicate shows He is a personal God.

5. He Makes Promises

The Bible says that God the Father can make promises. We read about this in Luke's gospel. Jesus said:

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49 ESV).

The fact that God is able to make promises shows that He is a personal being.

6. The Father Can Bless People

God the Father blesses people. Paul wrote the following to the Ephesians about this desire of God to bless those who are His:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3 ESV).

Only a person has the ability to bless others.

7. He Can Comfort People

The Father is able to comfort people who are hurting. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about this capacity of God the Father:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NKJV).

The ability to comfort people is a sign of personhood.

8. He Can Give To Others

The Father can give to others. Jesus said the Father would give believers another Helper—the Holy Spirit:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever (John 14:16 ESV)

The Father has the ability to give to others.

These are attributes that belong exclusively to personal beings. It is obvious that God the Father is a person.

The Father Is God

There is more. The Father is not only a person—He is also called God. We discover this in four different ways.

They are as follows.

The Father Is Called God In The New Testament

The Father is directly called God. When Paul wrote to the Romans and identified the Father as follows:

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ (Romans 1:7 ESV).

The Father is God.

Paul also called the Father “God” when he wrote to the Ephesians:

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in
you all (Ephesians 4:6 KJV).

There is one God and Father, only one.

To the Philippians, Paul wrote of God the Father:

So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—of those who are
in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue should
confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father
(Philippians 2:10,11 HCSB).

We conclude there is a person revealed in the Bible known as the Father.
This person is also called God.

The Father Has Divine Attributes

We also discover that the Father possesses attributes that belong to God
alone. They include the following.

1. He Is All-Powerful

Omnipotence, or being all-powerful, is an attribute that belongs to God
alone. The Father has all-power. Jesus said the following about the power
of God the Father:

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one
is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand (John 10:29 ESV).

No power in the universe can stop God the Father if He wishes to do
something. Nothing whatsoever!

Jesus also said that God the Father has granted authority to God the Son:

My Father has given me authority over everything. No one really
knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father
except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him
(Matthew 11:27 NLT).

The Father has the power to give this authority. The authority of the Father
extends to everything.

2. He Is Everywhere Present

The Father is omnipresent. In other words, He has the quality of being everywhere at the same time. This is something only that God has in His character.

Indeed, Jesus said that God the Father has the ability to see everything.

We read about this in Matthew's gospel. Jesus explained it in this manner:

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:6 NRSV).

This is an attribute that belongs to God alone. Indeed, no other creature in the universe can be everywhere present.

3. He Has All-Knowledge

The Father has all-knowledge. Another word for this is omniscient. Jesus said that He knows what we need before we ask Him. Again, Matthew records Jesus stating this truth:

Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:8 God's Word).

Only God has all-knowledge.

4. He Can Forgive Sin

The Father can forgive sins. Clearly, this something that only God can do. Jesus made this clear in the Sermon on the Mount. He said the following:

If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14 CEV).

Jesus said that the Father will forgive those who ask Him. This is another declaration that He is God.

The Father Does The Work Of God

God the Father does work that only God can do. The Bible gives a number of examples of this. They are as follows.

1. The Father Is The Creator

The Father was actively involved in creation. We read the Apostle Paul testifying to this as he wrote to the Corinthians:

Yet for us 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 (1 Corinthians 8:6 ESV).

God the Father is the Creator of the universe. Only God creates. And since the Father is the Creator, then He must be God.

2. The Father Is The Source Of Scripture

At the beginning of the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John wrote about how God the Father showed to Jesus what was to come. He put it this way:

This is what God showed to Jesus Christ, so that he could tell his servants what must happen soon. Christ then sent his angel with the message to his servant John (Revelation 1:1 CEV).

Scripture has its ultimate source in God the Father.

God Is The Father To Many Different Groups Of People

He is the Father to a number of different groups. They can be listed as follows.

1. He Is The Father To The Elect

God is the Father to God's elect, or special people. This includes the nation of Israel and the New Testament church.

2. God Is The Father To The Nation Israel

The Bible teaches that God is the Father to the nation Israel. Israel was called God's children, as well as God's son:

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son' (Exodus 4:22 ESV).

Moses was to tell Pharaoh of this unique relationship between the Israel and God. He was a Father to this nation.

3. He Is The Father To The Church

We are also told that God is the Father to the New Testament church. The church consists of those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16 ESV).

God is also the Father to New Testament believers.

The Location Of The Father: Everywhere Present But Has A Special Presence In Heaven

According to Scripture, the Father is everywhere present, or omnipresent. While the Father is an invisible spirit, His presence is spoken of as being seated on a throne in heaven:

And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it! The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow (Revelation 4:2-3 NLT).

This may speak of some visible presence of the Father that is for the sake of angelic beings. However, we certainly cannot be certain of this.

Therefore, from Scripture, we find that the Father is a personal being—the Almighty God who is present everywhere in the universe but, in a special sense, is located in heaven.

The Father Receives Honors That Belong To God Alone

Finally, God the Father receives honors that are due to God alone—this includes worship. Jesus said the Father rightly receives worship. He said:

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. (John 4:23 ESV)

Since the Father is worshipped, He indeed is the true God. We are only to worship God and Him alone.

Summary To Question 7:

What Does The Bible Teach About God The Father? (Paterology)

The Bible speaks of a distinct Person called God the Father. While He is of the same essence, or being, as God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Scripture always makes a distinction between the three of them. Most of our information about Him comes from the New Testament. We discover that the Father is a Person. Indeed, He has the attributes of a Person. Among other things, He thinks, loves, communicates, and has a will. There is no doubt that the Father is a genuine Person. He is also the Father of Jesus. Jesus often referred to God as His “Father.” As Jesus is “God the Son,” the Father is known as “God the Father.”

We also learn that He is the eternal God. He has the attributes or characteristics which belong to God alone. The Father is the eternal God. He is the Father to the elect—to Israel in the Old Testament, and to the church in the New Testament.

Although present everywhere in the universe, in some sense, the Father has a special presence in heaven. These are some of the important things which we learn about God the Father.

Question 8

Does The Bible Teach That God The Father Is A Distinct Person From God The Son, Jesus Christ?

There are those who declare that God the Father and Jesus Christ, are the same Person. They contend that Jesus is merely a manifestation, or development, or role, of the Father. Yet, the first verse of the Gospel of John teaches otherwise. It says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God (John 1:1-2 NRSV).

The Word is distinct from God—yet the Word was God.

The Father Is Distinct From The Son

Indeed, the Bible says that God the Father and Jesus Christ, God the Son, are distinct from each other. They are not the same Person in this sense of the term but rather are distinctive. There are several ways in which the Bible illustrates this truth.

1. The Father Sent The Son

One distinction we have between the Father and the Son is that the Father is the sender while Jesus, the Son, is the one sent.

The Testimony Of Jesus

Jesus said that it was God the Father who sent Him into the world. John records Jesus claiming that He was doing the work of the one who sent Him:

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work” (John 4:34 NET).

In another place in the Gospel of John, Jesus emphasized this again. He was sent by God the Father:

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:30 ESV).

Jesus made it clear the Father had set Him apart and sent Him into the world. We read about this another time in John’s gospel. It says:

Can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? (John 10:36 NRSV).

Jesus claimed that His words came from the Father, the One who sent Him. He said:

I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me gave me his own instructions as to what I should say (John 12:49 NLT)

It was God the Father who sent the Son.

The Testimony Of Paul

The Apostle Paul also testified that the Father sent the Son into the world. He wrote the following to the Galatians:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4 NRSV).

The idea to send the Son to the earth was made before the foundation of the world. Peter wrote of this:

God chose him [Jesus] for this purpose long before the world began, but now in these final days, he was sent to the earth for all to see. And he did this for you (1 Peter 1:20 NLT).

Therefore the Father is distinct from the Son.

2. The Father Testified To The Son

The Father not only sent God the Son; the Bible speaks of the Father testifying of the Son. Jesus said that the Father testified of Him:

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. . . There is another who testifies about me, and I know the testimony he testifies about me is true. And the Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You people have never heard his voice nor seen his form at any time (John 5:31,32,37 NET).

In this passage, Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders. He says that He is not the only one who is testifying concerning Himself. Jesus mentions the testimony of John the Baptist and the testimony of God the Father. Jesus contrasts His testimony from that of the Father showing that they are two distinct persons. The Father provides additional testimony to the character of Jesus.

3. Jesus Prayed To The Father

The two divine Persons, God the Father, and God the Son, exist eternally and distinctly in an interpersonal relationship. For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus did not pray to Himself, but rather to God the Father.

In Jesus' prayer to God the Father, the clear distinction is made between the two of them. The Lord Jesus prayed these words:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you,

Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23 NRSV).

It is clear that two distinct persons are in view here. The Son is not the Father.

4. The Son Is Our Advocate With God The Father

The Bible says that Jesus Christ is the one who is the Advocate for believers. In other words, He is the one who pleads our case before the Father. John wrote:

My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous One (1 John 2:1 HCSB).

Jesus does not plead the case for believers with Himself! He is pleading it to someone who is distinct. This person is God the Father.

The writer to the Hebrews says that the present ministry of Jesus Christ is to make intercession on behalf of believers. He wrote:

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25 ESV).

Someone who intercedes is an intermediary—a go-between. He talks to one person about another person. Thus, Jesus must intercede to someone else on our behalf.

Again, this person is God the Father. This being the case, the Son has to be a distinct person from the Father. He does not intercede to Himself.

5. There Was Mutual Knowledge And Love Between The Father And The Son

Scripture speaks of the mutual knowledge and love that God the Father and God the Son have for one another. Jesus said:

My Father has given me authority over everything. No one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Matthew 11:27 NLT).

The Son knows the Father and the Father knows the Son. These are obviously two distinct persons who are in view.

Jesus testified that the Father has given Him everything. He said:

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand (John 3:35 ESV).

Jesus was “given” all things. He did not give it to Himself.

The Father loved the Son before the world was created. Jesus acknowledged this in His prayer to the Father:

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory that you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world (John 17:24 NET).

Again, this shows a distinction between the two of them. Jesus speaks of my glory and the glory of the Father. This is an obvious distinction between the Father and the Son.

6. Jesus Perfectly Represented The Father

Jesus Christ represented God the Father when He was here upon the earth. In the Gospel of John, we read the following exchange between Jesus and one of His disciples, Philip:

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves” (John 14:8-11 NRSV).

Jesus did not say He was the Father, but rather He was the one who perfectly represented God the Father. However, Jesus testified that God the Father was with Him in a mystical way.

7. Only Jesus Has Seen The Father

No human being has ever seen God. John made this clear when he wrote the following to the believers:

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4:12 ESV).

Only Jesus Christ has seen God the Father. In fact, Jesus Himself made this claim. We read Him saying the following to the religious leaders of His day:

I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father (John 8:38 ESV).

This does not mean that Jesus saw Himself. He saw a distinct Person.

**8. No One Can Get To God The Father
Except Through Jesus The Son**

Jesus told people to believe in Him as they believed in God the Father. In the Gospel of John, it records that He spoke the following words to His disciples:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me (John 14:1 NRSV).

They were to believe in God, as well as believe in Jesus. The Father and the Son are two distinct persons.

The Bible also makes it plain that one cannot know God the Father apart from Jesus the Son.

Jesus claimed to be the only way in which a person can know the living God:

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NLT).

To reach the Father, one must come through the Son. They, therefore, must be distinct from one another.

Paul emphasized this same truth.

He wrote:

For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human (1 Timothy 2:5 NET).

It is only through God the Son that one can get to God the Father.

John also wrote about how one comes to God the Father. It is through God the Son:

No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also (1 John 2:23 NRSV)

This further illustrates the distinction between the Father and the Son.

**Conclusion: God The Father And God The Son Are Distinct
From One Another: Yet They Are Both The One God**

The evidence is clear. God the Father and God the Son are distinct persons. They should never be confused. However, though they are two distinct persons, they are the one God.

This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

**Summary To Question 8:
Does The Bible Teach That God The Father Is A Distinct Person
From God The Son, Jesus Christ?**

It is the teaching of Scripture that God the Father is a distinct person from Jesus Christ, God the Son. This is demonstrated in a number of ways.

The Father sent Jesus the Son to earth. The Father is the sender while Jesus is the one whom He sent.

The Father also gave testimony to the Son. He did not testify to Himself. On a number of occasions, He did this verbally. The Son was not verbally testifying to Himself. Indeed, Jesus was not a ventriloquist!

We find that Jesus, the Son, prayed to the Father. One does not pray to Himself! Indeed, in His prayers He addressed God the Father and spoke to Him like one speaks to a distinct personage. There is no doubt that He was speaking to someone else.

There is also mutual love and knowledge between God the Father, and Jesus the Son. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. This is not talking about people loving themselves, self-love.

Jesus, the Son, always did the Father's will, not His own will. This, of course, means that we have two distinct people in mind. There is a contrast between the Father and the Son.

The Bible also says that only Jesus Christ has seen the Father. Again, it is not speaking of seeing Himself.

Finally, we are told that a person cannot know God the Father without the knowledge of Jesus the Son. This can only mean that two distinct personages are in mind.

This is just a small sample of what Scripture teaches on the subject. However, these illustrations should make it abundantly clear that the God the Father and God the Son are two distinct persons.

Question 9

Does Scripture Teach That The Holy Spirit A Distinct Person From God The Father?

There are some people who do not see any distinction between God the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is assumed to be another description of the Father, or the creative force that comes from the Father. What does the Bible teach on this subject? Does it teach that the Holy Spirit is merely an extension of God the Father?

The Holy Spirit Is Distinct From The Father

God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are distinct. Indeed, the Scripture does make a clear distinction between God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. The evidence is as follows.

1. The Father Sent The Holy Spirit

To begin with, we find that the Bible says that God the Father sent the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Father would send the Spirit when the Son left the world:

But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative—and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you (John 14:26 NLT).

The Father will send the Holy Spirit, not Himself, to help believers. The job of the Holy Spirit is to teach believers about Jesus the Son.

2. The Holy Spirit Does The Father's Will

The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Father—rather He does the will of God the Father. Paul wrote to the Romans:

And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:27 NRSV).

The Holy Spirit intercedes for the believer. He is the one who allows us to talk to God the Father through God the Son. This is another indication of the distinction between the members of the Trinity. The Spirit is not the Father.

3. The Holy Spirit Is Mentioned With The Father And Son

Finally, there are a number of places where the Holy Spirit is mentioned in conjunction with the Father and the Son.

For example, in the Great Commission, we read that Jesus commanded that believers be baptized into the name of each person of the Trinity. He said:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19,20 NIV)

There are a number of similar passages where the Holy Spirit is mentioned together with God the Father and God the Son.

For example, the Holy Spirit is also mentioned as a distinct person from the Father and Son in Paul's benediction:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14 ESV).

This is a further indication that each of them is a distinct personage.

Conclusion: The Father And The Holy Spirit Are Distinct Persons In The Trinity

The Holy Spirit is a distinct Person from God the Father—He is not merely an extension of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity while God the Father is the First Person. They are equal in nature, but have different roles.

Summary To Question 9: Does Scripture Teach That The Holy Spirit A Distinct Person From God The Father?

The Bible makes a distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Father. There are a number of ways which the Scriptures make this evident.

First, the Bible says that the Father sent the Holy Spirit into the world. This is talking about two distinct personages. The Holy Spirit did not send Himself.

In addition, the Holy Spirit does the will of the Father. We are specifically told that He does not do His own will. Clearly, they are not the same person.

Finally, there are a number of places in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit is listed together with the Father and the Son. Since the Son and the Father are distinct personages, it stands to reason that the Holy Spirit, since He is mentioned together with them, is also a distinct personage.

Question 10

Is God The Son, Jesus Christ, A Distinct Person From The Holy Spirit?

While it is clear that God the Father is a distinct person from God the Son, Jesus Christ, we also find that God the Son is a distinct person from God the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Bible makes a distinction between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in a number of different ways. They include the following.

1. Jesus Was Led Of Spirit And Was Full Of The Spirit

After Jesus' baptism, He was said to be full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Holy Spirit. We read the following in Matthew:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1 NRSV).

Something distinct from Jesus led Him. He did *not* lead Himself.

Luke writes about Jesus being full of, or controlled by, the Holy Spirit. He wrote:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness (Luke 4:1 NRSV).

He did not fill or lead Himself.

2. He Was Given The Holy Spirit Without Measure

The Bible says that Jesus was given the Holy Spirit without measure. The Gospel of John records the following description about Jesus:

The one who has accepted his testimony has confirmed clearly that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he does not give the Spirit sparingly (John 3:33,34 NET).

Jesus is not equated with the Holy Spirit in this instance. He certainly was not given Himself without measure!

3. The Spirit Will Testify Of Jesus

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit will testify of Jesus—He will not testify about Himself. On the night of His betrayal Jesus told His disciples the following:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me. All that the Father has is mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you

whatever he receives from me. In just a little while I will be gone, and you won't see me anymore. Then, just a little while after that, you will see me again (John 16:13-16 NLT).

These words of Jesus make a clear distinction between the Himself and the Holy Spirit. They are not the same Person.

4. The Holy Spirit Is Spoken Of As A Distinct Person From The Son

Finally, there are a number of instances where the Holy Spirit is distinguished from the Son. When Jesus gave His disciples the "Great Commission" He told them to baptize believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20 ESV).

The word "name" in the Greek is singular. This shows that each of the three members of the Trinity is distinct from the others.

5. Jesus Is Never Called The Holy Spirit

Last, but certainly not least, Jesus is never called the Holy Spirit. There is not the slightest hint that they are the same personage. This is important to realize. If they were the same person, then we would expect Scripture to either state this truth, or at least give some hints of it. But we find nothing in the Bible that would remotely suggest that Jesus is the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: Jesus Christ And The Holy Spirit Are Distinct Members Of The One God

We conclude that the Bible speaks of two distinct personages—God the Son, Jesus Christ, and the God the Holy Spirit. They are both members of the Holy Trinity. They are the one God but they are distinct, persons, or centers of consciousness.

Summary To Question 10: Is God The Son, Jesus Christ, A Distinct Person From The Holy Spirit?

Scripture makes a distinction between the God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Clearly, they are not the same person.

For example, the Bible says that after His baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He did not lead Himself.

The Trinity

The Bible also says that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit after His baptism. Again, He was not filled with Himself.

In addition, the Scripture says that Jesus was given the Holy Spirit. He certainly was not given Himself.

Moreover, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit will testify of Jesus. Scripture specifically says that He will not of Himself. This is further evidence that the two are distinct.

In the Great Commission, Jesus is spoken of as a distinct person from the Holy Spirit and from God the Father.

Finally, Jesus was never said to be the Holy Spirit. Never! There is not the slightest hint of this in Scripture.

Consequently, we conclude that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person from Jesus.

Question 11

Are The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit All Addressed As God?

Yes. In the Bible, we find that there are three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of these persons is called God. The evidence for this is as follows.

The Father Is Called God

The Bible talks about a person who is designated as the Father. This person is called God. Isaiah the prophet wrote:

And yet, LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We are all formed by your hand (Isaiah 64:8 NLT).

The Lord, the God of Israel, is the Father to His people.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray in the following manner:

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored (Matthew 6:9 NLT).

They were to address the Father in heaven. We only pray to God, never to anyone else for nobody else can answer our prayers.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, he began his letter by saying that he was sent from “God the Father:”

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead (Galatians 1:1 ESV).

God is called the Father in both the Old and New Testaments. Of this, there is no doubt.

The Son Is Also Addressed As God

The Bible records the existence of a Second Person who is distinct from God the Father, and who is also called God. This person is Jesus, God the Son. Jesus has been God for all eternity. Two thousand years ago, He became visible to humanity when He became a human being.

John the evangelist wrote that Jesus existed in the beginning with God the Father:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning. All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. (John 1:1-4 NET).

Jesus Christ is called “the Word.” He existed in the beginning as someone who was distinct from God. Yet, He also is God.

1. Jesus Claimed Equality With God

In another place, John wrote about Jesus being equal with God. The religious leaders were attempting to kill Him because of His claims:

So the Jewish leaders tried all the more to kill him. In addition to disobeying the Sabbath rules, he had spoken of God as his Father, thereby making himself equal with God (John 5:18 NLT).

The Jews understood that Jesus was making Himself equal with God. For this claim, they wanted all the more to kill Him.

2. Jesus Existed Before Abraham

Jesus claimed to have existed before Abraham, a man who lived two thousand years before the New Testament era. John records this episode:

Your father Abraham was overjoyed to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jewish people who had been listening to him replied, “You are not yet fifty years old! Have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the solemn truth, before Abraham came into existence, I am!” Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out from the temple area (John 8:56-59 NET).

The Bible does not teach that humans pre-existed. In other words, until we are conceived, we have no existence. Jesus, however, said He existed before Abraham. This is another claim by Christ of His divine nature. He is God.

3. Jesus Was Worshipped As God

The Son is also to be worshipped as God. After Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, His disciples rightly worshipped Him:

And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33 NRSV).

Only God receives worship—not humans, angels, or any other created supernatural being. When these men worshipped Jesus, they were not rebuked by Him. The fact that He received their worship is another line of evidence that Jesus is God Himself.

God the Father commanded the angels to worship Jesus when He came into the world. The writer to the Hebrews said:

And then, when he presented his honored Son to the world, God said, “Let all the angels of God worship him” (Hebrews 1:6 NLT).

God the Father ordered the worship of God the Son. Again, there is to be no worship of angels, other supernatural beings, or humans. Only God Himself is to be worshipped.

4. Doubting Thomas Acknowledged Jesus' Deity

The disciple Thomas is another example of acknowledging Jesus' deity. When the risen Christ appeared to Thomas, he realized that Jesus was indeed God Himself. John records what happened:

Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and observe My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Don't be an unbeliever, but a believer. Thomas responded to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:27, 28 HCSB).

Thomas confessed that Jesus was both Lord and God. Readers of John's gospel are to make the same conclusion as Thomas. They too are to confess that Jesus is Lord and God.

Indeed, Jesus said that we are blessed if we believe in Him apart from actually seeing Him:

Jesus said, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Those who believe without seeing are blessed." Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name (John 20:29-31 HCSB).

The deeds which Jesus performed demonstrated His divine nature. He is the eternal God who became a human being.

5. Jesus Is God Over All

When Paul wrote to the Romans he called Christ, a man who was fully human, "God over all:"

Their ancestors were great people of God, and Christ himself was a Jew as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen (Romans 9:5 NLT).

Jesus was both human and divine. He is God "over all."

6. Jesus Is The Great God

Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth. Paul wrote to Titus about the blessed hope of the return of Jesus. In doing so, he calls Him the "great God:"

While we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13 NRSV).

Jesus is the “great God and Savior.” Some English versions are somewhat unclear here. They make it appear that two people are in view—the great God and the Savior.

However, the original Greek does not allow for this. In this passage the great God is the Savior—Jesus Christ.

7. The Fullness Of God Dwells In Jesus

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Colosse. In it, he said that the entire fullness of deity dwelt in Christ’s body:

For in Him the entire fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9 HCSB).

Jesus is fully God.

8. Jesus Christ Is The Exact Representation Of God

The writer to the Hebrews stated that Jesus is the exact representation of God’s being, His character.

He wrote:

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 1:3 NIV).

This is about as clear as could be. He is the exact representation of God’s being. This could not be said of humans, angels, or any created supernatural being.

9. Jesus Is Our God And Savior

When Peter wrote his second letter to the believers, he began it by calling Jesus Christ “both God and Savior.” He put it this way:

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1 NRSV).

In the original Greek there is no ambiguity here whatsoever. It is talking about one person, not two. Jesus is both God and Savior.

Consequently, we have a second person mentioned in the New Testament who is also called God.

Jesus And God Are Not Identical

Although Jesus is called God in the New Testament, it is also clear that the New Testament never makes Jesus identical with God. Jesus refers to God

as someone other than Himself. He prays to God, refers to God being in heaven, and commends His Spirit to God when He dies.

Therefore, it is correct to say that Jesus is God but incorrect to say that God is Jesus. We must be careful to state this accurately. God is a Trinity. Jesus is God but so is the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Is Called God

This brings us to the person of the Holy Spirit. There is a Third Person revealed in the Bible who is distinct from both the Father and the Son. He is known as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also referred to as being God.

We read about this in the Book of Acts:

Then Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren’t lying to us but to God” (Acts 5:3,4 NLT).

Ananias did not lie to a human but rather to God—to the Holy Spirit. Lying to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God.

The Holy Spirit Is Linked With The Father And The Son

There is something else. Once it is understood that God the Father and God the Son are fully God, this helps us better understand the identity of the Holy Spirit. On a number of occasions, the Holy Spirit is classified on an equal basis with the Father and Son.

For example, Jesus does this in the Great Commission:

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20 NLT).

The Holy Spirit would never be put in the same classification with God the Father and God the Son if He was not God. The fact that we find Him placed on an equal basis with the Father and the Son is another indication that He too is fully God.

The biblical evidence is that the Holy Spirit is also God.

Therefore, all three members of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are called God.

Conclusion: Each Member Of The Trinity Is Addressed As God

From the biblical evidence we discover that three distinct Persons, the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit are each addressed as God.

This being the case, we have further testimony of the Trinity.

Summary To Question 11:

Are The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit All Addressed As God?

Scripture says that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all distinct persons. The Father is not the Son while the Spirit is not the Father, etc. They are not the same person. The Bible makes this abundantly clear.

Though these three persons are distinct, each of them is specifically addressed as God.

Scripture speaks of God the Father having eternal existence. In addition, He is directly called God. Nobody disputes this.

The Bible also says that Jesus Christ is God the Son. Among other things, He is directly called God, worshipped as God, identified with God the Father on an equal basis, and said to have existed before Abraham. His identity is clear.

Finally, there is a third distinct person, the Holy Spirit, who is also called God. Furthermore, He too is linked on an equal basis with God the Father and God the Son.

Again we emphasize that these three Persons are distinct from one another. When the Bible is specifically speaking about the Father, it is not speaking about the Son. The same holds true when it is speaking of the Son. This is not another reference to the Holy Spirit.

Hence, we come to our conclusion. Since each of these persons is addressed as God, and there is only one God, then the conclusion must be that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the one God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Question 12

Are Divine Attributes, Or Characteristics, Ascribed To Each Member Of The Trinity?

Does the Bible teach that each member of the Trinity possesses divine attributes? Do each of them have characteristics which belong to God alone? The answer is a resounding, “Yes.” Not only are the various members of the Trinity directly called God, each of them has divine attributes ascribed or to them. The evidence is as follows.

1. Each Member Of The Trinity Is Everywhere Present (Omnipresent)

Each member of the Trinity is said to be omni-present, or everywhere present. The evidence is as follows.

God The Father Is Everywhere Present

Jesus stated that God the Father is everywhere present in the universe. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said the following:

When you pray, go to your room and close the door. Pray privately to your Father who is with you. Your Father sees what you do in private. He will reward you (Matthew 6:6 God’s Word).

There is no place where one can hide from God the Father. He is everywhere present. He hears and sees us in our private rooms when we are praying to Him.

God The Son Is Everywhere Present

God the Son is also everywhere present. Jesus said the following to His disciples as He sent them out to preach His message to the world:

Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20 NLT).

He is with every believer, at every place, and at every moment. He will never leave us. He is everywhere present.

God The Holy Spirit Is Also Everywhere Present In The Universe

In the same manner, the Holy Spirit is present everywhere in the universe. The psalmist recognized that there was no place where he could go to flee from Spirit’s presence. He put it this way:

I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! (Psalm 139:7 NLT).

He could never escape from the presence of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is everywhere present.

Again we emphasize that it is God, and God alone, who is everywhere present. If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are everywhere present, then each one of them must be God. This is the logical conclusion we can draw from the facts.

2. Each Member Of The Trinity Is All-Knowing (Omniscient)

Having all knowledge, or being omniscient, is attributed to each of the members of the Trinity. The evidence from the Scripture is as follows.

God The Father Is All-Knowing

God the Father knows all things. He is omniscient. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the following about the Father:

Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:8 God's Word).

The Father knows what we are going to ask Him before we even ask it! This is because the Father knows everything.

God The Son Has All Knowledge

Like God the Father, God the Son has all knowledge. This was acknowledged by Simon Peter. He said the following to Jesus after His resurrection from the dead:

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (John 21:17 ESV).

Peter acknowledged that the risen Christ knows all things. Jesus, who always corrected error in His presence, did not correct Peter here. The Son does indeed have all knowledge.

God The Holy Spirit Knows Everything

As is true with God the Father and God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is all-knowing. Jesus said the following to His disciples on the night that He was betrayed:

But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative—and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you. (John 14:26 NLT).

The Holy Spirit was able to teach all things to Jesus' disciples because He is all-knowing. Indeed, if He did not know "all things," then He would not

be able to remind the disciples of the words of Jesus, or to lead them into “all truth.” The fact that He can do each of these things is another indication that He is all-knowing.

This is another attribute which belongs to God alone. Neither humans, angels, nor any other personage in the universe, is all-knowing. The fact that all knowledge is ascribed to each of the three members of the Trinity is further evidence that each of them is God.

3. They Are All-Powerful (Omni-potent)

The members of the Trinity are all-powerful or omni-potent. Scripture teaches the following.

God The Father Has All Power

The Father is omnipotent or all-powerful. Jesus spoke of His ability to keep believers saved. John records Jesus saying the following:

My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than everyone else, and no one can tear them away from my Father (John 10:29 God’s Word).

No one can tear a believer away from God the Father. He is able to save and keep those who trust in Jesus Christ. He can do this because He is all-powerful.

God The Son Is All-Powerful

The Son is also all-powerful. Jesus spoke of this power that He had. He made the following claim recorded in Matthew’s gospel:

Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18 HCSB).

All authority belongs to Him. Only God could make a statement like this. Angels, other supernatural created beings, and humans may be granted some authority—but not all authority!

God The Holy Spirit Is All-Powerful

The Holy Spirit is all-powerful.

Paul told the church at Rome that he preached and worked miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit:

I have won them over by the miracles done through me as signs from God—all by the power of God’s Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ all the way from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum (Romans 15:19 NLT).

It was through the power of the Spirit of God that Paul was able to work miracles.

The Holy Spirit, like God the Father and God the Son, is all-powerful. As is true of the other attributes we have considered, the idea of being all-powerful is something which belongs to God and to Him alone. Since each of the three persons is all-powerful, each must be God.

4. They Are Unchanging (Immutable)

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit do not change in their basic character. The evidence is as follows.

God The Father Does Not Change In His Character Or Nature

Scripture emphasizes that God the Father does not change. In fact, this is His own testimony:

Because I, Yahweh, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed (Malachi 3:6 HCSB).

The Lord Himself made this claim—He does not change!

In the New Testament, the writer James emphasized this same fact:

Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights; with Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning (James 1:17 HCSB).

Nothing about the character of God the Father can change. He remains the same Person which He always has been.

God The Son Does Not Ever Change

Jesus Christ likewise always remains the same. The writer to the Hebrews made this plain with the following statement:

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8 KJV).

The fact that Jesus Christ does not change is another indication He is the eternal God. God does not ever change in His character.

God The Holy Spirit Is Unchanging

We are told that the Holy Spirit is also unchanging. The Lord said:

My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid (Haggai 2:5 NLT).

The same unchanging Spirit that was with Israel in Egypt was with them centuries later.

The fact that it is said the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not change is another indication of their deity—for God does not change.

Consequently, we again find that the three distinct personages of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, have this attribute which belongs to God alone. They are unchanging in their basic nature, or character.

5. They Are Eternal

All three members of the Trinity are eternal. They have had no beginning and they will have no end.

God The Father Has Existed Forever

God the Father has existed for all eternity. When Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus, he spoke of the Father choosing us in Him before the foundation of the world:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, in Christ; for He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1:3-4 HCSB).

The Father has existed for all eternity. He made certain choices or decisions before the world was formed. This is the world which He created.

God The Son Has Existed Eternally

God the Son did not have a beginning. In the first verse of the Gospel of John, he wrote the following about Jesus:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1 KJV).

God the Son, Jesus, has existed eternally. In other words, there was never a time when He did not exist. At the very beginning of all things pertaining to this universe the Son of God was already in existence.

God The Holy Spirit Has Eternal Existence

The Holy Spirit is also eternal. The writer to the Hebrews declared the following about the nature of the Spirit of God:

Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:14 NLT).

He is called “the eternal Spirit.” Since eternal existence is something limited to God alone, the Holy Spirit must be God.

Therefore, like the Father and the Son, we have direct statements about the nature of the Holy Spirit that leads us to the conclusion that He is God.

Consequently, we find that Scripture attributes a number of divine characteristics to each member of the Trinity. By definition, these characteristics can only belong to God. Therefore, it is clear that each member of the Trinity is God.

**Summary To Question 12:
Are Divine Attributes, Or Characteristics
Ascribed To Each Member Of The Trinity?**

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each specifically called God in Scripture. However, there is more evidence as to who the fact that each of them is the eternal God.

Indeed, divine attributes are attributed to all three of them. The evidence is as follows.

God alone is everywhere present in our universe. Nothing escapes His notice. Yet we are told that each of the members of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are omni-present or everywhere present. Since this is an attribute which only God possesses, each of these three persons must be God.

Only God is all-powerful. The power of humans, angels, and all other created supernatural beings, is limited. Yet the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each said to be all-powerful. This leads us to the conclusion that each of them must be God.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all said to be, “all knowing.” In other words, they have “all knowledge.” Only the Creator Himself could have all knowledge. Hence, the Father, Son, and Spirit must be God.

We also find that each of the members of the Trinity has existed eternally. This cannot be said of humans, angels, or any other supernatural beings. Indeed, they are all created beings. The eternal existence of each of these personages of the Trinity is another indication that each member is God Himself.

The Bible also says that none of the members of the Trinity ever change in their basic nature or character. This is only true of God.

In sum, all three of the members of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, possess attributes that only God can possess. Therefore, the three of them must be the one God. This is the only logical conclusion we can draw from the biblical facts.

Question 13

Are Divine Works Attributed To Each Member Of The Trinity?

Each of the three members of the Holy Trinity is each called God. Furthermore, characteristics are attributed to each of them which God alone possesses. This is additional evidence that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are indeed God.

However, there is still more evidence. When we further examine what the Scripture has to say about the different members of the Holy Trinity, we can see that each of them performs divine works.

The Scriptures list the following works where each member of the Trinity is singled out as doing:

1. Each Member Of The Trinity Was Involved In Creating The Universe

The Bible says that each member of the Trinity was involved in the creation process.

God The Father Was The Creator

Paul said God the Father was the Creator. He wrote the following to the Corinthians:

But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we exist for him (1 Corinthians 8:6 NLT).

Paul says that God the Father created everything.

The Son Was The Creator

John wrote that about God the Son is the Creator:

All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created (John 1:3 HCSB).

Jesus made all things. In fact, we find that apart from Jesus Christ there was nothing which was created. He made everything!

The Apostle Paul also wrote about the involvement of Jesus in creation. He said:

For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him (Colossians 1:16 NRSV).

Jesus made all things “in heaven and on earth.” This is the way the biblical writers describe the entire universe. In other words, Jesus created the universe.

The Holy Spirit Was Involved In Creation

The Holy Spirit was also involved in the creative process. In the Book of Job we are told that He is the one who gives life. Job stated it this way:

The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life (Job 33:4 NRSV).

The Spirit is the one who gives life. Yet, in the Book of Genesis we are told that God is the one who gave life to the first man, Adam:

Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7 HCSB).

The conclusion is that the Spirit must also be the Creator God.

Although each is the Creator, there is only one Creator. The psalmist testified that the Lord has made us:

Acknowledge that the LORD is God. He made us, and we are His—His people, the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3 HCSB).

The Lord is the One who has made us. He is the Creator. This is another indication that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the one God. They are the Lord.

2. Each Member Of The Trinity Is A Lawgiver

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all Lawgivers.

The Father Gave The Law

Paul speaks of the law of God in the following manner:

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin (Romans 7:25 NRSV).

In this case, God would be referring to God the Father.

There Is A Law Given By Christ

Scripture also speaks of the “Law of Christ.” Paul wrote about this to the Galatians:

Share each other’s troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2 NLT).

This is a law which originates with Jesus Christ. This is different from the Law of Moses. Moses was given the law by God to give to the people. He did not originate it. However, the law of Christ is a law which originates with Him. Only God can originate the law.

The Spirit Is Also A Lawgiver

There is also the law of the Spirit. To the church at Rome, Paul wrote:

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2 ESV).

The Spirit is a lawgiver. Again, the ability to provide an absolute standard of law, of right and wrong, is something which belongs to God alone. Nobody else, human, angel, or any other created being, can present an unchanging standard of right and wrong.

3. The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit Each Raise The Dead

Only God can raise the dead back to life. However, we find that each of the members of the Trinity is involved in resurrection of the dead.

The Father And Son Raise The Dead

Jesus said that both He and God the Father will raise the dead. In the Gospel of John, we read His words:

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes (John 5:21 NET).

Notice Jesus places Himself in the same category as God the Father—one who is able to raise the dead.

In the same passage, Jesus emphasized again that He will someday raise the dead.

He put it this way:

I tell you the solemn truth, a time is coming—and is now here—when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live (John 5:26 NET).

This is an astounding claim! The Son, as well as the Father, will raise the dead.

The Holy Spirit Will Raise The Dead

Not only do God the Father and God the Son raise the dead, God the Holy Spirit also raises the dead.

Paul wrote about this to the Romans. He said:

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you (Romans 8:11 NLT).

The Spirit is involved in resurrection of the dead.

Hence, the resurrection of the dead is something in which each member of the Holy Trinity participates.

4. Each Member Of The Trinity Raised Jesus Christ From The Dead

The Trinity was involved in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Father Raised Jesus

Paul wrote about how God raised Jesus:

And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power (1 Corinthians 6:14 NRSV).

In this instance, God would be a reference to the Father.

Jesus Raised Himself

The Bible also teaches that Jesus raised Himself from the dead. He told the religious leaders the following:

Jesus answered, "Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days." Therefore the Jews said, "This sanctuary took 46 years to build, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body (John 2:19-21 HCSB).

Christ predicted that He would raise Himself from the dead. Jesus, as God, has the authority to bring Himself back to life.

The Holy Spirit Raised Jesus

Not only did God the Father and Jesus Himself participate in the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit also raised Christ from the dead. Peter wrote:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18 NKJV).

The Spirit of God was also intimately involved the resurrection of Christ.

Therefore, each of the members of the Trinity was involved in the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

5. Each Member Of The Trinity Commissions The Christian Ministry

The Bible says that each member of the Holy Trinity commissions the Christian ministry.

God The Father Commissions The Ministry

Paul wrote the following to the church at Corinth about the commissioning of the ministry:

It is not that we think we can do anything of lasting value by ourselves. Our only power and success come from God. He is the one who has enabled us to represent his new covenant. This is a covenant, not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old way ends in death; in the new way, the Holy Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:5, 6 NLT).

In this instance, God probably refers to the Father.

Jesus Commissions The Ministry

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he stated that Jesus Christ commissioned him to the ministry. He put it this way:

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service (1 Timothy 1:12 NRSV).

Christ was the commissioner of Paul.

The Spirit Of God Commissions The Ministry

The Book of Acts says that the Holy Spirit also commissions the ministry. Paul said the following to the Ephesian elders:

And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders (Acts 20:28 NLT).

The Holy Spirit personally appointed these men as elders of the church.

This is an indication that the three members of the Trinity work together in the commissioning of the ministry.

6. Each Member Of The Trinity Sets Apart, Or Makes Holy, God's People

Scripture says that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, "sets apart," or "makes holy," God's people.

God The Father Sets Apart His People

The writer to the Hebrews said that God the Father sets apart people:

Jesus and the people he makes holy all belong to the same family. That is why he isn't ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. (Hebrews 2:11 CEV).

The Son And The Holy Spirit Set Apart People For Ministry

Paul wrote about Jesus Christ as well as the Holy Spirit setting apart those who are involved in Christian service:

I am a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News so that I might present you as an acceptable offering to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15,16 NLT).

Here, both the Holy Spirit and Jesus are involved in the work of the Christian ministry. Again, each member of the Trinity is involved.

7. The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit Were Involved In The Composition Of Scripture

All three members of the Godhead were actively involved in the composition of Scripture, the Word of God.

The Father And Son Reveal Truth To Humanity

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of both God, meaning the Father, as well as His Son, as revealing divine truth to humanity:

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he made the universe and everything in it (Hebrews 1:1,2 NLT).

The Holy Spirit Guides Believers Into All Truth

Jesus said the Holy Spirit, who represents Him, would guide the disciples into "all truth." On the night of His betrayal, as He was about to leave this world, He told them the following:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13,14 NRSV)

Guiding the disciples into "all truth" would include the composition of Scripture. Thus, Jesus is referring to the future work of the Holy Spirit since

the Spirit did not perform this ministry until after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Peter wrote of the work of the Holy Spirit in the past through the prophets. The Spirit of Christ was within them. He wrote:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory (1 Peter 1:10,11 NRSV).

Peter also said it was the Holy Spirit who supernaturally guided the prophets to speak for God. He wrote:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves or because they wanted to prophesy. It was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God (2 Peter 1:21 NLT).

The composition of Scripture was a work of the three members of the Trinity.

8. Each Member Of The Trinity Indwells Those Who Believe In Jesus

God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all said to indwell believers. The evidence is as follows.

God The Father Indwells Those Who Believe In Jesus

Paul wrote about how the Father indwells believers:

[There is] one God and Father of all, who is over everything, through everything, and in everything (Ephesians 4:6 God's Word).

He is "in all." This certainly includes the life of the believer.

Jesus Dwells In Believers

Paul said that Jesus Christ also dwells "in" the believer. He wrote the following to the Colossians:

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27 ESV).

The Spirit Of God Lives In Believers

Paul said that the bodies of believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit. When writing to the Corinthians, he put it this way:

Don't you know that your body is a temple that belongs to the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit, whom you received from God, lives in you. You don't belong to yourselves (1 Corinthians 6:19 God's Word).

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit indwell believers. Hence, believers are indwelt by the Holy Trinity.

9. Each Member Of The Holy Trinity Keeps Believers Secure

All three members of the Trinity are involved in keeping the believer secure.

God The Father Saves And Keeps Believers

Jesus spoke of the work of God the Father in saving and keeping the believer:

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand (John 10:27-29 NLT).

The Father keeps the believer secure.

Paul wrote of God keeping the believer secure. He wrote:

God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns (Philippians 1:6 CEV).

God will complete each work which He started. This is certainly a comforting thought!

Jesus Keeps Believers Secure

Jesus Himself kept His disciples secure. He prayed the following to God the Father on the night of His betrayal:

While I was with them, I kept them safe by the power you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost, except the one who had to be lost. This happened so that what the Scriptures say would come true (John 17:12 CEV).

While He was here upon the earth, the Lord Jesus kept His own disciples safe and secure. There is certainly no reason to believe that He would stop doing this once He ascended into heaven.

The Holy Spirit Keeps Christians Secure

The security of the believer is also the work of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul wrote the following to the believers in Ephesus:

And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God (Ephesians 1:13,14 NLT).

The Holy Spirit also keeps believers secure. Indeed, He is God's "guarantee" that every promise made to the believer will be fulfilled.

Therefore, the Scriptures testify that divine works should be attributed to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

This being the case, the conclusion that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. However, since there is only one God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit must be the one God—this is the doctrine of the Trinity.

**Summary To Question 13:
Are Divine Works Attributed To Each Member Of The Trinity?**

Each member of the Trinity is specifically called God. In addition, each has characteristics or attributes which only God can possess. It is, therefore, clear that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the one God.

However, the Scripture has even more to say. Indeed, the Bible says that divine works are attributed to each of the three members of the Trinity.

The Bible says that the creation of the universe was accomplished by the work of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father created, the Son created, and the Spirit created. Since each is the Creator, then each member must be God Himself.

Scripture says that each member of the Trinity is a Lawgiver. God the Father gave the laws in Scripture. Yet the Bible says there is also a law of Christ. In addition, the Holy Spirit is a Lawgiver. Since only God can provide a divine standard, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must be God.

The Bible says that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit raise the dead. The Father will cause the dead to rise. Jesus said the dead will hear His voice and come out of the graves. We are also told that the Spirit raises the dead. Again, only God can raise the dead so each of the Trinity members must be God.

We also find that each Person of the Trinity brought Jesus Christ back from the dead. The Father raised Jesus, Jesus raised Himself and the Holy Spirit raised Jesus. Thus, we have the Trinity involved in the resurrection of the Lord.

The Trinity

Each member of the Trinity specifically commissions the Christian ministry as well as setting believers apart for God's service. This is further evidence that each member is God Himself.

The writing of Scripture involved the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all said to be engaged in the process of the composition of the Bible. Since the Bible is God's Word to humanity, it follows that each of them must be God.

Each member of the Trinity indwells believers when they believe in Christ. This adds to the evidence that each member is indeed the one God.

Finally, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all contribute to the security of the believer. The Father keeps anyone from snatching believers from Jesus. Jesus Himself keeps believers secure as does the Holy Spirit.

These divine works attributed to each member of the Trinity is another line of evidence that these three distinct personages, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are the one God.

Question 14

Do We Find The Doctrine Of The Trinity In The Old Testament?

If the doctrine of the Trinity is true, then God has always been a Triune being. This being the case, we should expect to find some indication of this in the Old Testament. This is exactly what we do find.

We Must Understand The Progress Of Doctrine

However, before we examine what the Old Testament says about the Trinity, we must understand the relationship of the Old Testament with the New Testament. In Scripture, we find what is known as the “progress of doctrine.” This means that God did not say everything He wanted to say about a topic in one passage, or in the entire Old Testament for that matter. This is especially true with respect with the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Trinity doctrine is revealed progressively throughout Scripture. While the truths of the Trinity are found in the Old Testament, it is only in the New Testament that we find the doctrine more fully revealed.

Consequently, while we find indications of the Trinity in the Old Testament, we must resist the temptation to read back into the Old Testament what we know about the Trinity from the teaching found in the New Testament.

The Doctrine Of The Trinity Is Not Plainly Revealed In The Old Testament But Can Be Detected

Therefore, we must emphasize that the doctrine of the Trinity was not clearly formulated until after the New Testament was written. However, there are anticipations of the doctrine in the Old Testament.

As stated, the doctrine of the Trinity is not plainly revealed in the Old Testament. Without the teaching of the New Testament, we would not be aware of this truth. Although not explicitly mentioned, the basis of the doctrine can be detected when exploring the Old Testament. We can make the following observations.

1. A Plural Noun For God Is Used With A Singular Verb

A hint of the doctrine of the Trinity can be found in the very first verse of the Bible. It reads as follows:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1 KJV).

The Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*. Elohim is a plural noun, but it is used here with a singular verb *bara*. In the remainder of the Old Testament, when Elohim speaks of the true God, it is almost always used with a singular verb.

The conclusion to be drawn is that in some sense God is both singular and plural. The doctrine of the Trinity states this: within the nature of the one God there are three eternal Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

There is something else about the word Elohim which we should note. While this plural form is the term which is usually used for God in the Old Testament, we do find that the singular noun *Eloah* is also used.

Since the singular form of the word was available to the writers of Scripture, it may be significant that they used the plural form of Elohim in the great majority of the instances when they wrote about God.

2. God Created By The Word And The Spirit

There is also the fact that God, Elohim, created everything by both His Word and His Spirit. The Bible says:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3 KJV).

God spoke the “Word” and light appeared.

In the New Testament, Jesus is called the “Word” of God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1 KJV).

And, of course, the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of God.” The fact that the Word and Spirit are so closely connected with God’s creative activity in the first few verses of Genesis may be an indication of the work of the Trinity.

3. God Says, “Let Us” In The Creation Account

We find a further hint of the Trinity in Genesis 1. When God created human beings the word “us” is used of God:

Then God said, “Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals” (Genesis 1:26 NLT).

The phrase “let us” again gives the idea of plurality. The word “us” cannot refer to angels, or any other created supernatural being, because they do not create. Indeed, they themselves are created beings. Neither are human beings made in the image of angels or any other created being. Therefore, the verse must refer to someone else.

Some try to argue that what we have here is a “plural of majesty.” The idea behind this is that a king or monarch speaks of himself in the plural—

“we.” However, there are no examples in the Old Testament of a king speaking in this manner or using any plural pronoun to describe himself.

Therefore, in the first chapter of the Bible we seem to have a hint of the Trinity with the plural title Elohim used with a singular verb. In addition, we read of the Spirit of God, as well as the Word of God, specifically mentioned in creation. Finally, the Bible has God speaking and saying, “Let Us.” These are three examples of the foreshadowing of the doctrine of the Trinity.

4. The Word “Us” Is Used Elsewhere In Genesis Of God

We also discover that the word “us” is used elsewhere of God speaking in Genesis. After Adam and Eve sinned, the Bible records the following occurred:

Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (Genesis 3:22 NRSV).

The Lord God said that man is now like one of “us.” The plurality within the nature of God is certainly hinted at here.

At the incident at the Tower of Babel, we again read about God saying, “let us.” Scripture says:

Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech (Genesis 11:7 NRSV).

This is the third instance in Genesis of God speaking in the plural. In each of these instances, more than one person is indicated. Someone is speaking to someone else.

5. It Is Not Limited To The Book Of Genesis

This use of “us”, where God refers to Himself, is not limited to the Book of Genesis. Isaiah the prophet recorded the Lord saying:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8 NIV).

In this verse, the singular and the plural are both used by the Lord to refer to Himself. He says, “I,” then He says, “us.” The use of “us” seems to be an indication of the triune nature of God. Again, while not clearly spelled out, it is consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity.

There is something else. In the New Testament, John the evangelist said this passage of Isaiah was a vision of Jesus:

Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke about Him (John 12:41 HCSB).

The New Testament, therefore, saw a distinction between the members of the Godhead in this verse.

6. There Is Another Plural Name For God: Maker

There is another instance in the Book of Isaiah where a different plural name for God is used. He wrote:

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called (Isaiah 54:5 NRSV).

The word translated “Maker” is plural in Hebrew. Therefore, we have a second Hebrew word that is found in the plural that is used of God. Again, this is another indication that the nature of God is unique.

7. The Clearest Old Testament Statement On The Trinity (Isaiah 48:16,17)

There is one statement in the Old Testament that gives a clear indication of the Trinity. This is found in the Book of Isaiah. The speaker is the servant of the Lord. He says:

Approach me! Listen to this! From the very first I have not spoken in secret; when it happens, I am there.” So now, the sovereign Lord has sent me, accompanied by his spirit. This is what the Lord, your protector, says, the sovereign king of Israel: “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you how to succeed, who leads you in the way you should go (Isaiah 48:16,17 NET).

In verse sixteen, God the Son is speaking. He is called the “servant of the Lord.” He identifies the Father [the Sovereign Lord] and His Spirit as having sent Him. He is also accompanied by His Spirit.

In the next verse, the Son is clearly spoken of as “the Lord.” Consequently, these verses identify three distinct persons who are God without denying the fact there is only one God.

From the New Testament, we learn that Jesus, the promised Messiah, is the servant of the Lord:

But Jesus knew what they were planning. So he left that area, and many people followed him. He healed all the sick among them, but he warned them not to reveal who he was. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning him: “Look at my Servant, whom I have chosen. He is my Beloved, who pleases me. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations” (Matthew 12:15-18 NLT).

Christ is indeed identified as the “servant of the Lord.”

8. There Is A Distinction Between The Lord In Heaven And The One On Earth

The Old Testament also makes a distinction between the Lord who is in heaven and the Lord who is on earth. When the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, the Lord is said to have been both on the earth and in heaven:

Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens (Genesis 19:24 NIV).

The Lord on earth was the angel of the Lord who visited Abraham. He is specifically called, “the Lord.” This seems to indicate that He was God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity.

9. The Angel Of The Lord Is Called God

This brings up the subject of the “angel of the Lord.” In the Old Testament, there are several occasions when a being called the “angel” or “messenger” of the Lord appears. While this messenger is sent from the Lord, this personage is called both “God” and “the Lord.”

The evidence is as follows:

Thereafter, Hagar referred to the LORD, who had spoken to her, as “the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have seen the One who sees me!” (Genesis 16:13 NLT).

Hagar believed the angel of the Lord was the God Himself.

The Bible says that an angel, or messenger, of the Lord, appeared to Moses in the burning bush. We read the following in Exodus:

The Messenger of the LORD appeared to him there as flames of fire coming out of a bush. Moses looked, and although the bush was on fire, it was not burning up. So he thought, “Why isn’t this bush burning up? I must go over there and see this strange sight.” When the LORD saw that Moses had come over to see it, God called to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses!” Moses answered, “Here I am!” God said, “Don’t come any closer! Take off your sandals because this place where you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:2-6 God’s Word).

Here the angel, the messenger, of the Lord identifies Himself as the God of Moses’ ancestors.

Consequently, there are several texts found in the Old Testament where a messenger sent from the Lord is the Lord Himself.

There is more. The angel, or messenger of the Lord, has the power to forgive sins. In the Book of Exodus, we read the following about Him:

I am going to send an angel before you, to protect you in the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Take heed because of him, and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgressions, for my name is in him (Exodus 23:20,21 NET).

Not only does the angel of the Lord have the power to forgive sins, the Lord says, “My name is in him.”

While, at times, the angel of the Lord, is merely a created being, on other occasions a different personage seems to be in view. Many people believe this messenger, or angel, of the Lord is God the Son. If so, it is another indication of the distinction among the members of the Godhead that is found in the Old Testament.

However, the exact identity of the angel of the Lord is debated among Bible believing Christians.

Each Member Of The Trinity Is Specifically Mentioned In The Old Testament

In addition, each member of the Trinity is mentioned by name in the Old Testament. The evidence of this is as follows.

God The Father Is Mentioned In The Old Testament

There are Old Testament passages that refer to God the Father. Isaiah the prophet called God, “Our Father and our Redeemer:”

But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name (Isaiah 63:16 NIV).

Here we find the Lord referred to as “our Father.”

Malachi also wrote of God being a “Father.” He said:

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? (Malachi 2:10 NKJV).

Though infrequent, the idea of God being a Father is found in the Old Testament.

The Son Is Mentioned In The Old Testament

The Son finds mention in the Old Testament. The Psalmist wrote of God the Father speaking to the Son. He said:

Your throne, O God, is permanent. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of justice. You love justice and hate evil. For this reason God,

The Trinity

your God has anointed you with the oil of joy, elevating you above your companions (Psalm 45:6,7 NET).

In this passage, there is a person who is called God, and second person who is called God. They are distinguished from one another. Thus, two distinct persons are called God.

There is something else. This could not be speaking of an earthly king because the king is called “God” and is said that He will rule forever. In addition, it says that God has set this king above His companions. This is a clear indication that the predicted king would be both God and human.

In fact, Hebrews cites this verse as reference to Jesus:

But to the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice. You love justice and hate evil. Therefore, O God, your God has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else” (Hebrews 1:8,9 NET).

In addition, in the second Psalm, we read of God the Father speaking to His Son. The verse reads:

“I have installed my own king on Zion, my holy mountain.” I will announce the LORD’s decree. He said to me: “You are my Son. Today I have become your Father” (Psalm 2:6,7 God’s Word).

Later, in that same Psalm, it speaks of kissing or doing homage, to the Son. The psalmist says:

Kiss the Son, or he will become angry and you will die on your way because his anger will burst into flames. Blessed is everyone who takes refuge in him (Psalm 2:12 God’s Word).

In the Book of Proverbs, it makes a distinction between God and His Son:

Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in His hands? Who has bound up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is the name of His Son—if you know? (Proverbs 30:4 HCSB).

God’s Son, the Messiah is described with divine titles. The prophet Jeremiah records the Lord saying that the coming King will be known as “The LORD Is Our Righteousness.”

The days are coming—[this is] the LORD’s declaration—when I will raise up a righteous Branch of David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land. His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. This is what He will be named: The LORD Is Our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5,6 HCSB).

This title of the coming king is the title of a divine personage, not a mere human.

Isaiah the prophet also ascribed divine titles to God the Son. He said:

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6 NLT).

The Son has several divine titles. Among them, He is called the “Mighty God.”

Interestingly, with these divine titles, He is also called the “Prince of Peace.” The Hebrew word translated as “Prince” is only used in Scripture of humans—it is never of God Himself.

The Child Will Be Both Divine And Human

Therefore, this child who is to be born has both a divine title, “Mighty God,” as well as a human title, “Prince of Peace.” This is a further indication that the child will be both God and human.

In sum, these passages indicate there is a person called the Son who is indeed God.

The Spirit Of God Is Mentioned In The Old Testament

The Holy Spirit, or the “Spirit of the Lord,” is also mentioned in the Old Testament. In the Book of Genesis, we read of the Spirit of God being intimately involved in the creation process:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2 NIV).

The idea of the Spirit “hovering” shows personal intent.

Isaiah spoke of the Spirit of the Lord resting on someone. We read the following:

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears (Isaiah 11:2,3 NIV).

In another place, Isaiah wrote of the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord. He put it this way:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, because the LORD has appointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to announce that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed (Isaiah 61:1 NLT).

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is distinguished from the Lord Himself. They are distinct persons.

Again, Isaiah wrote of the Spirit of the Lord, or the Holy Spirit:

But they rebelled against him and grieved his Holy Spirit. That is why he became their enemy and fought against them (Isaiah 63:10 NLT).

In this instance, the Holy Spirit can be grieved. You can only grieve a person. In addition, that passage treats Him as a different Person from God. God in this passage is most likely a reference to the Father.

In the account in the Book of Genesis, which led up to the Flood, the Spirit of God is distinguished from the Lord. The Bible says:

Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years" (Genesis 6:3 NRSV).

Therefore, the Spirit is also distinctly spoken of in the Old Testament.

Distinctions Are Made Between The Members Of The Trinity

In many places in the Old Testament we find distinctions made between the members of the Trinity.

1. The Lord Speaks To The Lord

In the psalms, we read about the Lord speaking to the Lord. It says the following:

The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit in honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet" (Psalm 110:1 NLT).

Here we have the Lord, saying to another person, to sit at His right hand. No created heavenly being, angel or human being is worthy to sit at the right hand, or place of authority, of the Lord. The only one worthy to sit at the right hand of God, is God Himself. Therefore, we have one member of the Godhead, the Father, speaking to another member, the Son.

2. The Messenger Of The Lord Is The Lord

In Malachi, we read about the messenger of the Lord. The prophet records the Lord saying the following:

Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap (Malachi 3:1-2 ESV).

Here the Lord sends the messenger of the Lord. Yet the messenger is the one who will refine the people. No one will be able to stand in His presence. This could only refer to God and to Him alone.

In addition, a distinction is made between “the Lord of hosts” and “the Lord whom you seek.” They are two different persons.

3. The Lord Will Save His People By The Lord

In the Book of Hosea, the Lord tells us that the Lord will save Judah. The Bible says:

But I will have compassion on the house of Judah, and I will deliver them by the LORD their God. I will not deliver them by bow, sword, or war or by horses and cavalry (Hosea 1:7 HCSB).

This seems to be another example of one Person of the Trinity talking about another one. The Lord is speaking and says to the people that He will deliver them “by the Lord their God.”

Again, this appears to be a reference to two distinct persons.

The Trinity Is Foreshadowed In Benedictions

The Trinity seems to be foreshadowed in Old Testament benedictions. For example, we find a triple benediction in Numbers 6:24-27 where the name Yahweh, or Lord, is used three times. It reads as follows:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:24-27 ESV).

The blessing is in threes.

We find something similar in Isaiah. The doxology of Isaiah 6:3 also gives hint of the Trinity. It reads as follows:

And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth (Isaiah 6:3 HCSB).

There is another example of this. When Jacob blessed his son Joseph, he used the name of God three times. Each time God’s name was identified differently:

Then he blessed Joseph and said: The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm — may He bless these boys. And may they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they grow to be numerous within the land (Genesis 48:15,16 HCSB).

While this is certainly not conclusive, the triple benedictions are consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity.

Why Is More Not Said In The Old Testament?

If the doctrine of the Trinity is true, then why don't we find more explicit references in the Old Testament? While there is no answer to this question given to us in Scripture, there are a couple of points that need to be made.

1. The Polytheistic Background Of The World At That Time May Have Confused The Trinity As Being Three Gods

Part of the answer may lie in the culture in which the Old Testament was written. Israel was surrounded by nations who were all polytheistic—they believed in, as well as worshipped, many gods. It was important for the nation Israel to realize that the God of the Bible is the only God who existed.

Consequently, the oneness of God was stressed. After this truth was firmly understood by Israel, then the Lord revealed further truth about His basic nature—that He is a Trinity.

2. The Full Revelation Of The Trinity Awaited The Coming Of Jesus

There is something else. The full revelation of the Trinity did not occur until God the Son became a human being at a definite time in history. There was an expectation of further revelations of God when Jesus Christ appeared. Indeed, the Old Testament is incomplete. There were predictions waiting to be fulfilled and we discover that Jesus fulfilled many of them at His First Coming.

Thus, the progressive revelation of the Scripture needs to be appreciated. God is certainly not obligated to reveal everything about Himself at once.

Indeed, Jesus did not tell His disciples many things about His death and resurrection until after they occurred. We read the following words of Jesus in John's gospel:

I have a lot more to tell you, but that would be too much for you now (John 16:12 God's Word).

God's revelation to humanity was progressive. The doctrine of the Trinity was revealed over time. That which was latent in the Old Testament is made clearer in the New Testament.

Until Jesus came, God's revelation was only partial. God the Son would be the ultimate revelation. Indeed, Jesus said that He is "the truth:"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6 NKJV)

Consequently, we do not expect any further revelation that may supersede what God has revealed through Jesus Christ.

Indeed, He is God's "last word" to humanity.

**Summary To Question 14:
Do We Find The Doctrine Of The Trinity In The Old Testament?**

Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly taught in the Old Testament, the basis of this doctrine is certainly found there. There are a number of important things that we need to stress.

First there is the use of the plural noun for God Elohim that is used with a singular verb. This gives a hint of the Trinity. God is in one sense singular, but in another sense, He is plural.

In the Genesis creation account, we find that God created with the "Word" and the "Spirit." This may be a reference to God the Son, who is elsewhere called the Word, and the Holy Spirit.

There are also passages where God speaks of Himself with the words, "Let us." These are possible references to the Trinity where the different members are speaking to each other.

The Hebrew word for Maker, which describes God, is also in the plural. This is further indication of some sort of plurality within the nature of the one God.

There are also specific passages where the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are mentioned as distinct from one another. In other words, we have three distinct personages or centers of consciousness. For example, there is a passage in Isaiah 48 where three distinct personages are mentioned, and each is called God. This is without denying that only one God exists.

Add to this passages that foreshadow the Trinity with the triple benediction "holy, holy, holy" is the Lord.

The reason we do not find a developed doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament has to do with the progressive way in which the Lord revealed His truths to humanity. At different times and in different stages, He set forth His truth. He did not reveal everything at once.

We can conclude that the Old Testament does not have a developed doctrine of the Trinity. These passages, while being consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity, do not fully reveal this truth about the nature of God. This was left for the New Testament to accomplish.

However, certain truths about the Trinity are foreshadowed in the Old Testament and they set the stage for what was later revealed when God Himself became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ.

Question 15

Does The New Testament Mention The Three Distinct Members Of The Trinity Together?

Yes. There are several New Testament passages that mention the three persons of the Trinity. They include the following.

1. The Preaching Of John The Baptist Mentions All Three Members

We find the three members of the Trinity all mentioned in the preaching of the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist. He spoke about repentance, or turning toward God, in his message.

We read him saying the following:

Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near . . . But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee God’s coming judgment? Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God” (Matthew 3:2,7-8 NLT).

This would primarily be speaking of God the Father.

John told the people to place their faith in the Messiah, God the Son. In fact, John specifically pointed to Jesus as the Promised One.

We read about this in the Gospel of John:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 HCSB).

Jesus was the one whom John spoke about.

John also predicted the coming “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” We read about this in Matthew in his words to the religious leaders:

I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11 HCSB).

Therefore, John the Baptist talked about each member of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. The Members Of The Trinity Were All At Jesus’ Baptism

We also find all three members of the Trinity were present at the baptism of Jesus. Matthew wrote about what happened:

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16, 17 NRSV).

God the Father verbally acknowledged God the Son when He was being baptized, and God the Holy Spirit physically descended upon Jesus while He was undergoing His baptism.

Thus, we have each member of the Trinity performing a distinctive action.

3. The Promise Of The Father Mentions All Three Members Of The Trinity

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus said that he would pray to the Father who would send the Holy Spirit to be another Comforter. Here we have another episode where all three members of the Trinity are highlighted.

John records Jesus saying the following:

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive Him because it doesn't see Him or know Him. But you do know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you (John 14:16,17 HCSB).

The Holy Spirit will be sent. He is another Helper, or Comforter. He is another of the same kind of person as Jesus, God.

Jesus also said:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26 ESV).

In preparing the disciples for their future ministry, Jesus, God the Son, tells them He will pray to God the Father to send the Helper, or Comforter.

This is a clear distinction between all members of the Trinity.

Jesus referred to the Trinity later that same night. The Son will send the Spirit who will proceed from the Father:

But I will send you the Counselor—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about me (John 15:26 NLT).

The fact that Jesus repeated this truth to His disciples shows the importance of it.

4. Peter's Greeting Mentions The Three Members Of The Trinity

We also find the members of the Trinity in greetings which are given to us in the New Testament letters. For example, in his greeting, Peter makes the distinction between the various members of the Trinity when he wrote to believers:

This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the lands of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia. God the Father chose you long ago, and the Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed Jesus Christ and are cleansed by his blood. May you have more and more of God's special favor and wonderful peace (1 Peter 1:2 NLT).

Here again we have the Trinity mentioned together. God the Father chose these believers, the Spirit made them holy because they have obeyed the Son.

5. Paul's Benediction Links Each Of The Members Of The Trinity

We find the Trinity in the benedictions of the church. In the benediction at the end of 2 Corinthians, we have all three members of the Trinity involved:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14 ESV).

Note that in some Bible translations this is verse 13, not verse 14. This includes translations such as the NET, NRSV, and NLT. They are following the latest verse divisions of the standard Greek text that is used for translating the New Testament.

Therefore, the last few verses in 2 Corinthians 13 will be divided slightly differently.

6. The Members Of The Trinity Are Linked Together In The Sending Of The Holy Spirit

Paul linked all three members of the Trinity when speaking of the sending of the Holy Spirit.

He wrote the following to the Galatians:

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Galatians 4:6 HCSB).

In this one verse, all three members of the Trinity are referred to. God the Father has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.

7. The Members Of The Trinity Are Linked Together In Paul's Prayer

All three members are mentioned together by the Apostle Paul when referring to prayer. He wrote to the church at Ephesus:

For through him [Jesus] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Ephesians 2:18 KJV).

The three again are linked together. Through Jesus we have access to the Father by means of the Holy Spirit.

8. All Three Members Of The Trinity Are Linked To God's Salvation

Paul places the three together in speaking of salvation of sinners. He wrote the following to the church at Ephesus:

And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago (Ephesians 1:13 NLT).

The three are linked together with respect to God's salvation of humanity. God saves us because we have believed in His Son, Jesus Christ. Because of this, He has sent His Holy Spirit to those who trust Him.

9. The Members Of The Trinity Are Linked To The Death Of Christ

The writer to the Hebrews refers to all three members in speaking of Christ's death on the cross. He wrote the following:

The blood of Christ, who had no defect, does even more. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself to God and cleansed our consciences from the useless things we had done. Now we can serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14 God's Word).

The death of Christ links all three members of the Trinity. We serve the living God, the Father, because of the death of the Son. His offering for our sins was done through the Holy Spirit.

Again, we find each of the members of the Trinity mentioned.

10. The Baptismal Formula Links The Three Members Of The Trinity

The early church also practiced Trinitarian baptism. This is based upon Jesus' command that is recorded at the end of the gospel of Matthew. He said:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19 NRSV).

Following Jesus' command, a person was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Trinity was identified in the act of baptism.

Although all three were identified, they were baptized into the name (singular) of each. This emphasized the unity of the Godhead.

Some have seen a contradiction between Peter calling upon people to be baptized in the name of Jesus and Trinitarian baptism:

Repent, Peter said to them, and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38 HCSB).

However, the "name of Jesus" speaks of the authority of Jesus. This distinguishes baptism in the authority of Jesus from the previous baptism done by John the Baptist.

Therefore, the Trinitarian baptismal formula is another instance of the members of the Trinity being linked together.

11. Access To God Is Through All The Members Of The Trinity

Access to God the Father is through the Son by means of the Spirit, the Trinity. Paul stated it as follows:

Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us (Ephesians 2:18-20 NLT).

Therefore, we find another illustration of the members of the Trinity working together.

In sum, we have many New Testament examples of the three members of the Trinity being mentioned together. This gives further evidence of this important doctrine.

Summary To Question 15: Does The New Testament Mention The Three Distinct Members Of The Trinity?

While the doctrine of the Trinity is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, the New Testament develops it more clearly. The three distinct members of the Trinity are mentioned many times together in the New Testament. We can provide the following examples.

They are all mentioned by the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist. He predicted that God the Father would send the coming Messiah. He also

The Trinity

testified that the coming Messiah would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit. Hence, John singled out each member of the Trinity.

We find each member of the Trinity at Jesus' baptism. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus like a dove. God the Father acknowledged Jesus, God the Son, from heaven.

When Jesus was about to leave our world, He spoke of "the promise of the Father" that was to be sent to all believers. This is the Holy Spirit. Again, we find the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together.

When Peter greeted the churches in his letter, he mentioned all three members of the Trinity. Hence, this important disciple taught the truthfulness of the Trinity.

We also find the Trinity in the writings of Paul. In his benediction to the church of Corinth, Paul specifically mentioned each person of the Trinity. Paul also linked the members of the Trinity when he wrote about the sending out of the Holy Spirit. When Paul referred to prayer, he mentioned each of the members of the Trinity. Finally, when it comes to the salvation of believers, Paul said each person of the Trinity is involved.

The members of the Trinity are also linked together in the death of Christ. He was offered up to the Father through the eternal Spirit.

Jesus said believers are to be baptized in water. The water baptism of all believers is to be done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity.

Finally, access to God is through the members of the Trinity. We come to God the Father through God the Son by means of God the Holy Spirit.

In these examples, the members of the Trinity, though distinct from one another, are always assumed to be equals.

Question 16

Does 1 John 5:7 Teach The Doctrine Of The Trinity?

There is a passage in the New Testament that seems to be an extraordinarily clear statement about the doctrine of the Trinity, 1 John 5:7. To many, the question as to the existence of the Trinity is settled by this verse.

What Does 1 John 5:7 Say?

First John 5:7 reads as follows in the King James Version.:

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

The way this verse reads in the King James Version is a clear description of the Trinity. Indeed, it says that there are three that bear witness, or bear record, in heaven. These three are the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit.

In addition, it says that these three are “one.” Why then, is there any controversy about this issue of the doctrine of the Trinity? These words could not be clearer!

The Problem Stated

Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Indeed, there have been numerous questions raised about the authenticity of this passage. We will give a brief history of the problem as well as make some important observations.

The New Testament Documents Were Originally Written In Greek

To begin with, we must note that the books of the New Testament were originally written in Greek. When they were first composed each of them were written upon perishable material.

Immediately, copies were made of these original writings (called the autographs). These hand-written copies of the Greek autographs, called manuscripts, were then copied and recopied.

By the middle of the second century A.D., the books of the New Testament began to be translated and then copied into languages other than Greek. This hand-copying of the text in Greek, as well as in these other languages, continued until the invention of the printing press (about 1450).

Furthermore, even some time after the printing press was invented the text was still copied by hand. In fact, it was not until the sixteenth century (1516) that a Greek New Testament was printed and published. Earlier printed versions of the New Testament were in Latin. Thus, the copying to the text of the New Testament covered some fifteen centuries.

How These Verses Became Part Of The Printed Greek Text And The King James Bible

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, a man named Erasmus was the first to publish a printed Greek text of the New Testament. In putting together the text for this edition, Erasmus consulted all of the Greek manuscripts which he could find.

In the Greek manuscripts of First John which Erasmus examined, these words about the Trinity were not found. Consequently, his first printed edition of his Greek New Testament, issued in 1516, did not contain these words.

This omission caused a real problem among the people of that day since these words were found in the Latin text with which they were familiar. Erasmus defended himself by saying that these words were absent from the Greek texts which he had consulted and thus should not be placed into the text of the New Testament.

When Erasmus issued a second printed edition of his Greek New Testament it too was without these words in First John 5:7. However, before his third edition of the Greek New Testament was issued in 1521, a Greek manuscript was found which did contain this disputed passage. The problem was that this manuscript was likely composed around 1520!

Yet, to quell the uproar caused by the omission of these words, Erasmus placed them in the third edition of his Greek New Testament. This reading remained in all future editions of Erasmus' printed text.

This printed Greek text of Erasmus was basically the same text used by the translators of the King James Bible in 1611. It appears that the Greek text which the translators of the King James Version mostly relied upon was the 5th edition of the printed text of Theodore Beza. This was issued in 1598. This text is similar, but not exactly the same, as that of Erasmus.

Since these disputed words appeared in the later editions of Erasmus' Greek New Testament, as well as other printed Greek texts immediately after his time, including Beza's, they were used as the basis for the English translation in First John.

Therefore, we find these words in 1 John 5:7 which describe the various members of the Trinity as well as testifying that they are "one." In brief, this explains how the words became part of the English Bible.

However, this is not the end of the story. When an authorized revision was made of the King James Version in 1880 these words in First John were omitted. Almost all English translations since that time do not have these words as part of the text.

Why This Passage Is Rejected

There are a number of reasons as to why this passage is rejected as being part of Holy Scripture. We can simply state them as follows.

1. The Passage Is Found In Only A Few Late Greek Manuscripts

Since the New Testament was originally written in Greek, the Greek manuscripts are our primary means of reconstructing the original text. The main reason for doubting these words were originally composed by John is the fact that they are only found in a few Greek manuscripts.

Furthermore, as we examine these few manuscripts which do contain this passage, we find that there are serious questions as to its authenticity.

Indeed, of the over three hundred Greek manuscripts which contain First John we find that only nine of them have this verse listed. Yet, of the nine, four of them have the verse in the margin while only five have it in the actual text.

There is more. These five manuscripts which do have this verse in the text are very late. None of the early manuscripts of First John contain it. Indeed, the first Greek manuscript that contains this verse in the actual text of First John comes from the fourteenth century.

In addition, the way text reads in this particular manuscript is different from the Greek text which was used in translating the King James Version. In fact, the earliest Greek manuscript, which reads exactly as the text which was used to translate this verse in the King James Bible, is from the sixteenth century!

Furthermore, these few Greek manuscripts which contain the reading in the text are not actually copies of the Greek text but rather translations of the Latin text into Greek. Therefore, they are not independent witnesses to the original Greek text.

In other words, the manuscript evidence for the inclusion of this verse is just not there. This is the main reason as to why these words are not placed in the text of First John.

2. This Passage Is Missing From All Ancient Versions

There are more problems with this passage. Indeed, the words in question are missing from all of the ancient translations, or versions, of the New Testament. This includes the following languages: Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Slavonic. The only exception to this is Latin.

While the words in dispute are found in certain Latin manuscripts, they are not found in the oldest ones. This is important to realize. The words did

begin to become part of the Latin text of First John until about the fifth century.

Even so, the wording of the passage was different than what became the basis for the text that is found in the King James Version.

3. The Passage Was Never Cited In The Trinitarian Debates

There is something else which must be appreciated. If this verse was actually part of First John, it is inconceivable that it would not have been used in the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century. However, it is never cited, by either side, as reference to the Trinity.

It is missing from the writings of Christians such as Irenaeus (died about A.D. 200), Clement (died about A.D. 210), Tertullian (who died around A.D. 220) and Athanasius (who died in A.D. 373). If this verse were found in the text of First John, then it would have been the primary verse used in these debates—but it was never cited!

Observations And Conclusions

After looking at the facts surrounding the inclusion of these disputed words in First John we can make the following observations.

1. This Verse Does Not Belong In Scripture

Although this verse clearly does teach the doctrine of the Trinity, as we have seen, there is serious question as to whether it belongs in Holy Scripture.

Indeed, the evidence for its inclusion in the New Testament is almost nil. In fact, almost every modern translation of Scripture, with good reason, rejects its authority. We should make the same conclusion.

2. Rejection Of This Passage Is Not A Rejection Of The Trinity

Contrary to what some have written and said, the rejection of this verse has nothing to do with any conspiracy to keep the deity of Christ, or the Trinity, out of the Bible.

The reason for its rejection is the lack of evidence for its inclusion—it is not some sinister plot to remove parts of God's Word. Indeed, an objective look at the evidence would lead one to conclude that these words were not part of the original text of First John.

3. It Should Not Be Used To Argue For The Trinity

Consequently, this verse should not be used in discussion about the Trinity. As we have repeatedly emphasized, there is sufficient evidence in the Scripture to support the doctrine of the Trinity without appealing to these

words in 1 John 5:7. The Trinity doctrine does not depend upon this verse. It never has. This must be understood.

How Did These Verses Get Into Some Early Manuscripts?

There is one final question. If these words were not original with John, then how did they become included in certain Latin manuscripts of First John? What led to their inclusion? While nobody knows for certain, the best answer seems to be that they were placed as a marginal note in some early Latin manuscripts.

Later, certain Latin copyists then placed them into the text of First John. Eventually, in the sixteenth century, they came to be viewed as part of the original text by some in the church. Yet, as we have seen, there is no real evidence that these were the words John originally composed.

Whatever the case may be, the evidence for their placement as part of First John is sadly lacking. Trinitarians should not cite this verse to support their case. Indeed, the evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity is overwhelming without quoting this passage.

Summary To Question 16:

Does 1 John 5:7 Teach The Doctrine Of The Trinity?

First John 5:7 as it reads in the King James Version says that there are three which bear witness in heaven—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. It also says that these three are one. This is a clear statement of the Trinity. To many people, this verse should end the debate about this doctrine. The Bible has spoken!

However, there is a problem. Although 1 John 5:7, as it reads in the King James Version, is a clear Trinitarian statement, there does not seem to be much chance that it is original with First John. There are a number of reasons for this. Briefly, they are as follows.

For one thing, these words are missing from all of the ancient manuscripts of First John. The manuscripts of First John which have this particular verse are few and they are very late. Indeed, the earliest is from the fourteenth century. Even this manuscript does not read the same as the text that we find in the King James Version. The earliest manuscript that reads exactly the same as we find it in the King James Bible comes from the sixteenth century. In other words, there is no real evidence that these words were part of the text of First John.

In addition, only nine Greek manuscripts of First John contain this verse. Furthermore, only five of them have it in the text while the other four have it written in the margin. Because of the lack of evidence for its inclusion, almost all textual scholars reject it as being original with John. Thus, the external evidence is just not there.

These words are also lacking in all of the ancient translations of the New Testament. The only exception to this is Latin. However, the oldest Latin

manuscripts do not contain this passage. In the few manuscripts, which do have them, we find that the wording is different.

Add to this, there is no evidence of this verse in the writings of early Christians who commented on this book of Scripture. Neither do we find it cited in any of the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century. If it existed at this time, it is inconceivable as to why it was not cited in the debates. Indeed, it would seem to settle the issue.

Therefore, this particular verse should not be used as support for the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. However, we must emphasize that the doctrine of the Trinity does not stand or fall on this verse alone. Indeed, there is sufficient evidence in Scripture for the Trinity doctrine without appealing to 1 John 5:7.

Therefore, it is best to ignore this verse in discussions about this subject.

Question 17

How Do The Different Members Of The Trinity Work With Each Other? (The Economic Trinity)

One of the terms used to describe the Trinity is “economic.” Economic, in this sense, means “the way things are ordered.” Understanding the difference between the nature, or being of God, and His economy, or the way in which He functions, is of vital importance.

They Are Equal In Nature But Have Different Roles

While the three members of the Trinity are fully God, and equal in nature, each member of the Trinity has a specific role to fulfill. In other words, the roles within the Trinity are distinct for each member. The following observations can be made about this topic.

1. Each Member Of The Trinity Is In Full Cooperation

The three members of the Trinity are in full cooperation with each other—they do not have different wills or different agendas. However, the Bible teaches that each of them have certain roles within the Godhead.

Some make the distinction between the members of the Trinity as follows. The Father creates, the Son redeems, and the Holy Spirit sets apart. Yet, they perform these roles in full cooperation with the other members. In each operation, all three members are present.

While this is a popular way of explaining their roles, we must be careful on insisting that this is how they always work. Although the Father is preeminently the Creator, the Son and Spirit were also involved in the creation of the universe. The Bible is clear on this fact.

While the Son is the Redeemer, God the Father and God the Spirit are described as sending the Son to redeem. Again, all three members were actively participating in the redemption of humanity.

The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, the One who sets apart the people of God, yet the Father and Son also cooperate in this work.

Therefore, each member of the Trinity is in full cooperation with the other two, and is personally involved of all aspects of God’s work.

2. They Testify To Each Other

The members of the Trinity testify to each other. The evidence for this is as follows.

The Father Testified To The Son

God the Father testified to God the Son at Jesus’ baptism. Matthew recorded what happened:

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him” (Matthew 3:17 NLT).

In this instance, God the Father testified to God the Son.

The Son Testified To The Father

We also find that the Son testified to the Father. John records Jesus’ words about the Father:

Then Jesus replied, I assure you: The Son is not able to do anything on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son also does these things in the same way (John 5:19 HCSB).

Jesus said that He only does what He sees the Father do. This is a testimony to the existence of the Father.

The Son Testified To The Holy Spirit, The Spirit Will Testify To The Son

God the Son also testified to the Holy Spirit. In turn, the Holy Spirit would testify about Jesus. We read the following words of Jesus:

I have told you this while I’m still with you. However, the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. He will remind you of everything that I have ever told you (John 14:25,26 God’s Word)

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring to the remembrance of the disciples everything which He said to them. Furthermore, the Lord said that the Holy Spirit would lead them into “all truth:”

The helper whom I will send to you from the Father will come. This helper, the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, will declare the truth about me (John 15:26 God’s Word).

The Holy Spirit has the job of declaring the truth about Jesus.

In sum, we find each of the members of the Trinity testifying to the existence of each other.

The Son Submitted Himself To The Father

We also find that Jesus, God the Son, deliberately submitted His will to that of God the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, we read the following:

And going a little farther he [Jesus] fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39 ESV).

Jesus willingly did the Father's bidding. Indeed, He not come to earth to do His own will. This is further testimony that the three members of the Trinity always worked with One another.

3. God's Historical Work Involved The Trinity

There is more. God's plan of redemption began in eternity past. When the work of redemption began in history, the Son entered the world in human form. At this time, He was given a new name, "Jesus." The Holy Spirit entered the world in a new way as the "Spirit of Christ." In all of this, the three members worked together.

Thus, we find from a study of Scripture that the different members of the Trinity are in one accord in their actions.

Summary To Question 17:

How Do The Different Members Of The Trinity With Each Other? (The Economic Trinity)

While the members of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal, they have different roles or functions within the Godhead. This is known as the "economic Trinity." Economic speaks of the way in which things are ordered among the persons of the Trinity.

Some attempt to specify the exact roles of each member of the Godhead. However, we must be careful here. From a reading of Scripture, it seems that their roles overlap somewhat.

It is also important to realize that each member of the Godhead performs their role with complete cooperation of the other members. It is absolutely essential that we understand that each member is fully God and has a unified will, though they have different roles.

Indeed, we find from a study of Scripture that each member testifies to the other. God the Father testified to God the Son at Jesus' baptism. The Holy Spirit has been sent to testify to Jesus. Jesus Himself testified to God the Father as well as to the ministry Holy Spirit. In other words, the three members of the Trinity always act in one accord.

Though the members of the Trinity testify to each other, and are in one accord, they have different roles. For at least the time the Son was on the earth, He was in a submissive relationship to God the Father. While the Son is presently in heaven, the Holy Spirit is testifying to Him to those who are here upon the earth.

To sum up, while the members of the Trinity are indeed unified, there seems to be certain roles which each one has. Beyond saying this, we probably should not try to be too specific.

Question 18

Have The Different Members Of The Trinity Had The Same Function For All Eternity? (Was Jesus Always The Son)

When we speak about the Trinity it is important that we make the distinction as to how the different members exist in their essence or nature and how they operate and function with one another. Technically speaking, this is the difference between the ontological Trinity (who they are in their essence or being) and the economic Trinity (how they function with one another).

Are They Eternally Ordered This Way?

There has been some question as to whether each member of the Trinity has had the same function for all eternity. There are those who believe the Son submitted to the Father only during the time when He was here on the earth.

Before that time, He was not in a subordinate relationship with God the Father. Only when He became human did He submit Himself to God the Father. Now that the Son has completed the redemption for the human race, He has returned to His former exalted position without any further submitting of Himself to God the Father.

Others, however, believe that the submission of the Father to the Son, as well as the Spirit to the Son and the Father is something that has been eternal. While equal in character, each has eternally performed a distinct role.

Christians are divided as to which view properly states the eternal relationship between the three members of the Trinity.

Could They Have Performed Other Duties?

This brings up a related question. There is also the issue as to whether each member of the Trinity performs or could perform other duties. Could the Father have come to earth instead of the Son? Could the Son have been the Comforter instead of the Holy Spirit? Is there any reason to believe that each is limited in the role in which they have?

Each Member Of The Trinity Has A Different Role Within The Godhead

The general teaching on the subject is that the Father is the head of deity—the Son is the one who reveals deity, while the Holy Spirit carries out the work of deity. In some passages, we find that one member of the Trinity seems to carry out the entire process.

What is clear from Scripture is that each member of the Trinity has an assigned role. Beyond this, we should be careful about drawing firm conclusions.

**Summary To Question 18:
Have The Different Members Of The Trinity Had The Same
Function For All Eternity? (Was Jesus Always The Son)**

There are divisions among Bible believers as to whether the submissive role of the Son to the Father, and the Spirit to the Father and the Son, has been eternal.

There have been those who have argued that each member of the Trinity is free to perform any role within the Godhead. In other words, the Holy Spirit or God the Father could have come to earth instead of God the Son. If this was the case, then God the Son could have been sent into the hearts of believers instead of God the Holy Spirit. The roles, therefore, are not fixed.

Others believe that they have been eternally ordered as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and they could not perform different roles. The Son has been eternally submitting to the Father and the Holy Spirit submitting to the Father and the Son.

This seems to be one of these questions which nobody can answer for certain. What we do know is that they have always acted in one accord and that they have loved each other for all eternity.

Question 19

How Can We Categorize False Views About The Trinity?

The Christian church has testified that there is only God who exists. Yet the one God exists in three distinct persons, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are co-equal and co-eternal. Simply stated, this is the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Formulation Of The Doctrine Of The Trinity

The word Trinity is not found in the Bible. Neither is the doctrine explicitly taught. However, the doctrine of the Trinity is the best explanation of all the biblical data on the nature of God. A comprehensive study of the Scripture, with respect to the nature of God, will demonstrate His triune nature—His tri-unity.

Therefore, it is necessary to gather all the information about what Scripture says concerning God's nature to discover what He reveals about Himself. When we do this, we come to the following conclusions.

1. There Is Only One God Who Exists

From a study of the totality of Scripture, there is no doubt whatsoever that one God has genuine existence. No other gods have existed or will exist. There is only one God.

2. There Are Three Distinct Persons: The Father, The Son, And The Holy Spirit

The Bible also teaches that three distinct persons, or centers of consciousness who exist. One is called the Father, a second person is called the Son, and a third person called the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Father, and the Spirit is not the Son. They are distinct from one another.

3. The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit Are Each Called God, Have Attributes That Belong To God Alone, And Do Things Only God Can Do

The Scripture also teaches the following things about these three distinct persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each one of them is directly called God, each distinct person has attributes that belong to God alone. Finally, these three distinct persons perform actions that only God can perform.

Conclusion: The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit Are The One God

To deny the Trinity, at least one of these statements must be proven as untrue. In other words, there must be more than one God who exists, there are not three distinct persons known as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or one or more of these distinct persons cannot be called God.

Classifying The False Doctrines About The Trinity

Throughout the history of the church there have been those who have claimed to be Christians who have denied one of these statements. We can classify the heresies about the Trinity in the following categories.

1. There Are Those Who Deny Of The Unity Of God

The denial of the existence of one God is the heresy of Tritheism. They believe in three gods rather than one God. The Father is a god, the Son is a god, and the Holy Spirit is a god. Therefore, instead of a Trinity, one God in three Persons, there are three different gods. The unity of the God of Scripture is thus denied.

2. There Is The Denial Of The Distinction Between The Three Members Of The Trinity

The denial of the distinction between the three members of the Trinity is called Modalism, or Sabellianism. This is the opposite of Tritheism. They believe that only one God exists who reveals Himself in three different modes or manifestations. In the Old Testament, He was manifested as God the Father, in the gospels as Jesus, and after the Ascension as the Holy Spirit. Hence, they deny the distinctions within the Godhead.

3. There Has Been The Denial Of The Deity Of The Son And/Or The Holy Spirit

The denial that Jesus Christ and/or the Holy Spirit is God has been held by a number of groups. These beliefs are known as such things as Arianism, Adoptionism, Subordinationism, and Binitarianism.

While each of these heresies are different, they all deny that Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit, is co-equal with God the Father. Usually, they are assumed to be created beings.

Subordinationism holds that Jesus is the eternal God, yet He does not have the same attributes as the Father.

These are some of the ways in which the doctrine of the Trinity has been denied. In our next few questions we will examine each of these false beliefs in detail. This will demonstrate that the historic doctrine of the Trinity is what the Scripture teaches on the subject while these other views are nothing but false beliefs.

Summary To Question 19: How Can We Categorize False Views About The Trinity?

The Trinity doctrine came about when Bible believers searched the Scripture to see what it had to say about the nature of God.

First, it was found that only one God exists. There is only one God who exists or who has ever existed. This is the God of the Bible.

The Trinity

Next, it was discovered that there are three distinct persons mentioned in the Bible. These persons are known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are not the same person, or center of consciousness, but rather are distinct from each other.

Finally, it was determined from a search of the Scripture that each of these distinct persons is called God. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.

The conclusion they arrived at is this: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the one God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

There have been those who have denied the doctrine of the Trinity. To deny the truth of the Trinity one must deny at least one of three things.

It is possible to deny that there is only one God. Many do this. They deny the unity of God by saying that more than one God exists. At times, it has been argued that the Trinity is made up of three separate gods. This is one possible way of denying the truth of the Trinity.

Some deny the distinctiveness between the three members of the Godhead. In other words, the Father is not a distinct person from the Son. He is, in reality, the same person. The same hold true for the Holy Spirit. He is assumed to be the same person as the Father. Denying the distinctiveness of the members of the Godhead is also a denial of the Trinity.

Another way the Trinity is attacked is the denial of the deity of God the Son and/or the Holy Spirit. While the deity of God the Father is rarely, if ever, denied, the deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit has often been rejected.

Many groups have arisen in the last two thousand years which have denied one or more of these truths. However, a look at what the Scripture has to say on the subject will demonstrate that they are in error. The doctrine of the Trinity is a biblical doctrine.

Question 20

Do Christians Believe In Three Different gods? (Tritheism)

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that only one God exists. Within the nature of this one God there are three distinct persons or centers of consciousness. They are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are not three different gods.

There is a false view of the Trinity known as “Tritheism.” Tritheism holds that Christians believe in three gods who are independent and self-existing. Tritheism rejects the idea of one God or the unity of God. In Tritheism, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are three separate gods. Tritheism accepts the threeness of God, but ignores the unity. The following observations need to be made about Tritheism.

1 Tritheism Is Not The Trinitarian View

This view is often stated as though it is what Trinitarians believe. But this is not the case. While some Christians may have imprecisely explained the Trinity in a way that sounds like Tritheism, this is not what the Bible teaches about the nature of God. There is only one God, not three gods!

2. It Overstresses The Deity Of The Son And The Holy Spirit

In laying stress upon the deity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, some people fall into the error of Tritheism. They want so much to emphasize the deity of these two persons that they fall into the mistake of making them into separate gods. They are not. They are distinct persons who, along with God the Father, make up the one God.

3. The Bible Says There Is Only One True God: Not Three Gods

Trinitarians emphatically believe that only one God exists. They do not believe in three separate Gods. As we have emphasized, Scripture says there is one God who is made up of three distinct persons or centers of consciousness. These three co-operate with each other in one mind and purpose. Therefore, in the truest sense of the word they are one. The Lord has said of Himself:

So all the world from east to west will know there is no other God. I am the LORD, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:6 NLT).

The Lord, the God of the Bible is the only God who exists. He alone has all-power and all authority.

We also must emphasize that Tritheism is neither taught in Scripture nor has it been the historic belief of the church. It is an incorrect way of explaining the nature of God.

**There Would Be Reason For Loyalty Or Devotion
To Any One Of Them**

There is one other thing which also needs to be mentioned. If Tritheism were true, then there would be no loyalty or devotion to any one of the three gods. A person could never really be certain which one deserved their trust. The worship and devotion would have to be spread out to each of the three gods. This idea is totally contrary to what the Scripture teaches—only one God does indeed exist.

**Conclusion: While Some Christians Mistakenly Explain
The Trinity As Three Gods This Is Not What
The Scripture Teaches**

The Bible does not, in any way, teach Tritheism. Unhappily, many people explain the Trinity in such a way that it implies Tritheism. This is why it is important to have a biblical understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity as well as to be able to explain, as best we can, what the Scripture has to say about the nature of God.

**Summary To Question 20:
Do Christians Believe In Three Gods? (Tritheism)**

The doctrine of the Trinity says that there is only one God which exists. However, the one God consists of three distinct persons or centers of consciousness. The one God is made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are co-equal and co-eternal. They constitute the one God. This is the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

There is a faulty view of the Trinity known as Tritheism. It says the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate gods, rather than one God in three distinct persons. While the Bible does not teach Tritheism, some Christians have explained the Trinity in such a way that it sounds like they believe in three separate Gods.

This sometimes happens when Christians emphasize the deity of Jesus Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit. While attempting to refute people who make the Son and the Holy Spirit something less than God, they emphasize the divine nature of these persons to the point as to make them into separate gods. This is not the teaching of Scripture neither has it been the historic belief of the church. There is only one God which exists, the God the Bible.

Furthermore, those who embrace the idea of Tritheism will have a problem determining which God deserves their devotion. If there are three separate gods, then their love and respect have to be divided among them. One could never know to whom they should put their trust. On the other hand, with the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, there is no such problem. Only one God exists, and He deserves our love and complete devotion. Hence the idea of Tritheism should be soundly rejected.

Question 21

Does The One God Have Three Different Modes? (Modalism, Sabellianism)

The Bible says that there are three distinct persons who make up the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Yet, there have been those in the history of the church who have denied the distinctiveness of the members of the Trinity. One such belief is known as Modalism, or Sabellianism. It constitutes an inadequate view of the nature of the God of the Bible.

The doctrine arose from a bishop in the early church named Sabellius. He had an improper understanding concerning the makeup of the Trinity. From his wrong understanding, this heretical, or non-biblical view, of the nature of God developed. It is important that we understand where he went wrong, and what the Bible teaches about God's nature.

Modalism Defined

Sabellius taught that only one God exists. This is the biblical view. However, he mistakenly taught that the three persons listed in the Bible, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are different modes or manifestations of the one God. Modalists understand the word “person” to mean a representation of God.

As one human being may be a father, son, and husband at the same time, yet the person is only one individual, so it is true with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There are not any distinct persons within the nature of the one God from the modalistic point of view. It is Unitarian in that it accepts only one person in the Godhead.

Therefore, Modalism teaches that sometimes God is Father, at other times He is Son, and at times He is the Spirit. However, He is never all three of them at the same time.

Modalism is sometimes known as “Modalistic Monarchianism.” The reason for this designation is that God revealed Himself as a supreme monarch in His different modes. Since there is only one supreme Monarch in the universe, God must be one in number, never three.

There are a number of points that need to be made about this doctrine of Modalism.

Modalism Attempts To Preserve The Unity Of God

Originally the intent of Modalism was to preserve monotheism (that is the belief in the existence of the unity of the one God) while still holding to the divinity of Jesus Christ. But the Trinity of Modalism is a Trinity of “manifestation.” This means that the three personalities are expressions, or manifestations, of the one person of God.

God Appeared In Different Modes In Scripture

According to Modalism, God appeared as the Father in the Old Testament, He appeared as the Son or Redeemer in the four gospels, and He appeared as the Holy Spirit after the Day of Pentecost. It was the same God who assumed these different modes during these different historical periods. He used these different modes so that He could relate to the people.

Biblical Support For Modalism

Modalism appeals to the Bible to support its doctrine. The following passages are used for support of the modalistic position.

In the Gospel of John, we find that Jesus said that He and the Father were one:

I and My Father are one (John 10:30 NKJV).

This is interpreted to mean that they were the same person. In other words, there is no distinction between them.

Jesus also said that the one who had seen Him had already seen the Father. On the night of His betrayal He revealed this truth. We read:

Jesus replied, "Philip, don't you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see him?" (John 14:9 NLT).

This supposedly means that Jesus is exactly the same person as the Father because whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father.

Response: The Passages Do Not Support Modalism

These passages do not teach Modalism. Jesus was one with the Father in the sense they are one in purpose. Indeed, He made it clear that He was always doing the Father's will. Jesus made this claim:

And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do those things that are pleasing to him (John 8:29 NLT).

Jesus always did the things which please the Father. This is not pleasing Himself! He is one with the Father in the sense they have a unified will, not that they are the same person.

Jesus' statement to Philip, about seeing Him is the same as seeing the Father, emphasizes the fact that Jesus perfectly reflected the Father while He was here upon the earth. He is not saying that He is the same person as God the Father. The writer to the Hebrews said:

He is the radiance of His glory, the exact expression of His nature, and He sustains all things by His powerful word. After making purification

for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3 HCSB)

Jesus is the exact representation of God, but He is not God the Father.

In John 10:30, where Jesus said He and the Father are one, Jesus affirms that He will accomplish all that the Father has given Him to do. They are one in purpose, but they are not the same person.

Consequently, neither of these passages cited by Modalists as support for their view is actually commenting upon the nature of God. Instead, they are speaking of the way in which Jesus acts in His relationship to the Father. He is one in purpose with the Father and always reflects the Father's glory and being, but He is *not* the Father!

In What Sense Is Jesus The Everlasting Father?

There is one more passage which we should consider. In Isaiah, the Son to be born, Christ, is called the "Everlasting Father:"

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6 NIV).

While the title "Everlasting Father" has been used by Modalists to equate Jesus with God the Father, this is not how the word is used in this context.

The idea behind the title is that the future king will be the "Protector of his people." Indeed, we find the same Hebrew word used in a similar way later in Isaiah:

I will put your robe on him, tie your belt around him, and transfer your authority to him. He will become a protector of the residents of Jerusalem and of the people of Judah (Isaiah 22:21 NET).

In this context, the Hebrew word is translated as "protector;" not a literal father.

We read a similar use of this Hebrew term in the Book of Job:

I was a father to the needy, and I investigated the case of the person I did not know (Job 29:16 NET).

Obviously, the word here is used in a metaphorical sense. Job was not a literal father to the needy!

Hence, in Isaiah 9:6, there is no idea of equating the Son with the Father. The Son will be the "Everlasting Protector" of His people!

In sum, the Son, Jesus, is not the same person as "the Father."

The Problems With Modalism

We find no biblical support for Modalism. Add to this, there are a number of other problems with it. They include the following.

1. The Father And Son Are Distinct: They Are Not The Same Person

Modalism denies the personal distinctions within the Trinity. The Bible says that the Father and Son are distinct centers of consciousness, or persons.

The Father Loves The Son

For example, the Bible says the Father loves the Son. John wrote:

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand (John 3:35 ESV).

The Father is not showing love to Himself.

Jesus restated this truth:

The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished (John 5:20 NRSV).

The Father is said to be giving love to a distinct person from Himself, the Son Jesus Christ.

The Father Sent The Son

Scripture says the Father sent the Son. On the Day of His resurrection, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, He promised that He would send them as the Father had sent Him:

He spoke to them again and said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21 NLT).

He did not send Himself.

The Bible also says the Son returned to the Father:

"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God" (John 20:17 NLT).

The Son did not return to Himself. Indeed, He returned to a distinct Person.

The Father Sent The Holy Spirit

The Bible says that the Father sent the Holy Spirit. Jesus, on the night of His betrayal, told His disciples about this promise from God the Father:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26 ESV).

Again, He is not sending Himself.

Jesus Did Not Pray To Himself

If the Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God, under three different names or modes, then the New Testament would be inconsistent, and confusing.

For example, in the prayer of Jesus Christ, recorded in John 17, He is addressing His Father. According to Modalism, He is praying to Himself. Such an idea is absurd.

Jesus Did Not Acknowledge Himself At His Baptism

At Jesus' baptism, the voice of God the Father was heard:

And there came a voice from heaven: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him! (Matthew 3:17 HCSB).

This was not the voice of Jesus saying that He was pleased with Himself. It was the voice of a distinct person, God the Father, who was acknowledging the Son.

2. God Is A Changing God In Modalism

Modalism portrays a God who changes His modes. This undermines the Biblical teaching that God never changes. We read the following in Malachi:

For I am the LORD, I change not (Malachi 3:6 KJV).

While God's actions may differ because of changing circumstances with humanity, He never changes in His nature or being.

3. Modalism Takes Away From The Work Of Christ

Furthermore, Modalism takes away from the work of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus is an intermediary between God and humanity:

For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human (1 Timothy 2:5 NET).

The Modalistic view of God, that the Father and Son are the same person, would have God mediating between Himself. This is not biblical, or logical.

4. Modalism Denies God's Independence

The God of Modalism would have had no one to communicate with until he created humanity. This means that humanity was created to meet some need in this God.

However, the God of the Bible has no such need. There was love and communication within the Godhead by the different persons of the Trinity. Therefore, the creation of the human race met no such need in God. Modalism denies the personal relationships within the Trinity.

Consequently, when Modalism is weighed in the balances it is found wanting.

**Summary To Question 21:
Does The One God Have Three Different
Modes? (Modalism, Sabellianism)**

There have been a number of false views about the nature of God which have arisen in the history of the church. One of them is known as Modalism or Sabellianism. This is a non-biblical way of understanding the nature of the God of the Bible. It is one of the heresies under the heading of Unitarianism.

Modalism says that there is one God who manifests Himself in three different modes. God sometimes manifests Himself as the Father, at other times as the Son, and still on other occasions as the Holy Spirit. The God of Modalism is a changing God. Supposedly, He was the Father in the Old Testament, the Son in the Gospels, and is now the Holy Spirit after the Day of Pentecost.

Biblical support for Modalism is supposedly found in the passage where Jesus says that the Father and Son are one. Elsewhere, Jesus said that those that have seen Him have seen the Father. This supposedly shows that they are the same person.

However, these passages are not speaking of the nature of God the Father. They are not linking the identity of God the Father with the identity of Jesus. Instead, they are referring to how Jesus represents the will and purpose of the Father. They are one in purpose and in essence, but they are not the same person.

This Modalistic concept of God is opposed to what the Bible teaches. First, the Bible says that God exists in three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is not merely one person as the Unitarians believe. Each of the members of the Trinity is distinct from one another.

The Bible says the Father loves the Son. This does not mean that He loves Himself. Scripture gives examples of Jesus praying to God the Father. According to Modalism He would be praying to Himself. This is a ridiculous idea. Consequently, the God of Modalism is not the God of Scripture.

The Trinity

At Jesus' baptism a voice from heaven spoke and said that He was well-pleased with the Son. This voice is identified as that of God the Father. The Father was not saying that He was pleased with Himself. Examples like this could be multiplied. The point is that the Bible teaches the distinctiveness of the members of the Holy Trinity.

There is something else. We are told that the God of the Bible does not change. His nature stays forever the same. This is contrary to the doctrine of Modalism.

Finally, the God of Modalism needed to create humanity to have someone with whom to communicate. The God of Scripture, the Trinity, shared love and communication before the human race was created. The God of the Bible has no such needs.

In sum, Modalism does not properly reflect the nature or character of the God of the Bible.

Question 22

Is Jesus Lesser In Nature Than God The Father? (Arianism)

Jesus Christ is the eternal God who became a human being. He is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and with God the Holy Spirit. Two thousand years ago, God the Son came to the earth to show us what God is like.

Enter Arianism

An ancient heresy regarding the Trinity, known as Arianism, caused much discussion about the nature of God in the early church. This occurred in the fourth century when Arius, a bishop from Alexandria, Egypt, taught that Jesus was the first creation of God and not God Himself.

According to Arius Jesus was the first and highest of all the created beings. Arius famously said, "There was a time when the Son was not."

After being created, Jesus was then given powers to create. He then created the Holy Spirit as His greatest creative act. Because Jesus and the Holy Spirit were created beings, they could not be considered to be divine or to possess the attributes of God.

Therefore, Arianism teaches that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are created beings, and not God. Arianism is another heresy that is Unitarian in its belief about God in that it does not accept the three distinctive persons of the Trinity.

A number of points need to be made about this false belief.

1. The Doctrine Originated In Egypt

The heresy of Arianism originated in Alexandria in Egypt where Arius was an elder of the church. Arius' heretical teaching caused Alexander, the bishop of the church, to exclude him from the fellowship. However the false teachings of Arius spread immediately spread throughout all the churches of the Roman Empire.

2. The Council Of Nicea Met And Discussed Arianism

A council was called at Nicea in A.D. 325 to discuss the relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father. The teachings of Arius were condemned. From this meeting of the church leaders, the Nicene Creed resulted.

The Nicene Creed confessed that Jesus Christ was fully God and not a created being as the Arians taught.

**3. The Biblical Support For Arianism:
Jesus Christ Was Begotten**

Arians attempted to appeal to Scripture to support their belief. They emphasized that the Scripture called Christ “begotten” of the Father. We read the following in the New Testament:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14 NKJV).

To Arians, begotten means created.

John emphasized this again:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him (John 1:18 NASB).

Jesus is the only begotten God, the created God according to Arianism.

Later, we read in the Gospel of John:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NASB).

Jesus is the only begotten Son, the created Son according to the Arians.

In a letter to believers, John again stated that the Son was begotten. He explained it in this manner:

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9 NASB).

This is taken as further evidence that Christ was created.

John also wrote:

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18 NASB).

Since humans use the term “begotten” to refer to the role of a father in the conception of a child, the Arians reasoned that Christ must have been begotten or brought into being by God the Father.

If the Son was begotten by the Father, then He could not have eternally existed.

Response: Begotten Does Not Mean Christ Was Created

The use of “begotten” with reference to Jesus Christ does not mean that He is a created being. There have been two ways in which this charge was answered.

Option 1: Jesus Became The Son At Some Point In The Past

Some believe that Jesus was begotten as a human being at a certain time in the past. While He has been God the Son for all eternity, He became human at a certain point in time.

This is the sense in which He was “begotten.”

Option 2: Begotten Means Unique

Another perspective sees the term “begotten” as referring to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The word has the idea of “one and only.”

What is stressed is that Jesus Christ is the one and only or the unique Son of God. It has nothing to do with Him being created.

Begotten thus means that Jesus Christ is unique or “one of a kind.” It marks out Jesus as being different than all other personages, earthly and heavenly.

Whatever the correct answer is with respect to the meaning of “begotten,” there is nothing in Scripture that even hints that Jesus Christ was somehow a created being. Nothing!

The Problems With Arianism

Add to this, there are a number of biblical problems with Arianism. They include the following.

1. The Father And Son Are Equal In Nature

The Bible teaches that Jesus is equal in nature to God the Father. Jesus is the Creator of everything—not everything but Himself. The Bible says:

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:3 NKJV).

Jesus made “all things.” He did not make all things except Himself.

Paul wrote the following to the Colossians about what Jesus created:

For all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him (Colossians 1:16,17 NET).

Paul emphasized that Jesus is the Creator of all things. He not only existed before all things; He is also preeminent over all things. He was *not* created.

2. The Holy Spirit Is Not A Created Being

The Holy Spirit, like the Son, is not a created being. He is the eternal God the Third Person of the Trinity. He is called the eternal Spirit:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14 NKJV).

There is nothing in Scripture that suggests that Jesus somehow created Him as the Arians mistakenly teach.

3. There Is No Participation Of God With Humanity In Arianism

In Arianism, there is no participation of God with humankind. The Savior of the Arians is not God who became a human being, but rather the first creation of God who became human. Therefore, the entire theme of the New Testament, that God the Son became a human in the person of Jesus Christ, is rejected.

The Arian God Cannot Understand Humans

In addition, the Arian God cannot really understand what human beings experience because He never became human. This is in contrast to the God of Scripture who understands our needs.

The writer to the Hebrews emphasized this when he wrote the following:

Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done. That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it (Hebrews 4:13-16 NLT).

God the Son truly understands what we experience here upon the earth since He Himself went through similar experiences. This is in complete contrast to the false god of Arianism who does not, and cannot, understand our temptations and suffering.

Therefore, the heresy of Arianism, in all its forms, is to be rejected.

The Response From The Council Of Nicea

As we mentioned, the heresy of Arianism was answered with the Nicene Creed. It made it clear that Jesus Christ was not of similar essence to God but the *same* essence as God. There are two terms in Greek: *homoiousios* which means of “similar essence or substance” and *homoousios* which means “of the same nature or substance.”

At Nicea, they chose to use *homoousios* to describe Jesus. He is of the same essence, or substance, as God the Father. While there is only one different letter in the two words, the Greek letter *iota*, this one letter made all the difference in the world. It stated that Jesus is not of a similar nature as God the Father—rather He is of the same nature.

The Statement Of The Nicene Creed

The statement of the Nicene Creed reads as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, and Jesus Christ, the only begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, light of light very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance (*homoousion*) with the Father.

This is the biblical position, as well as the historic position, of the Christian church, as to the exact identity of God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Summary To Question 22: Is Jesus Lesser In Nature Than God The Father (Arianism)

Jesus Christ is God the Son who became a human being some two thousand years ago. This has been the historic view of the Christian church because it is the biblical view.

Unhappily, there have been those in the church who have denied this cardinal truth. Arius of Alexandria, a fourth century church leader, attempted to make Jesus Christ a lesser person than God the Father though greater than humans. According to Arius, Jesus was the highest of all of the created beings. He also taught that the Holy Spirit was part of Jesus’ creation.

One of the lines of evidence used to support this contention comes from the biblical word translated as “begotten.” Arians understand this to mean that God the Son, Jesus, was created at some point in time. Arianism was rightly condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325.

For one thing, the word translated begotten does not necessarily mean created. It can mean that Jesus was begotten as a human being at a certain time in the past.

While He has been God the Son for all eternity, He became human for the purpose of coming to earth. This is the sense in which He was “begotten.”

The Trinity

In addition, another understanding of the term sees it to mean “unique.” Jesus is the unique, one-of-a-kind, Son of God. He was not created. What is stressed in this term is His “uniqueness.”

Whatever answer is correct the biblical evidence is that Jesus is the Creator of all things. Scripture also teaches that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation process of the universe. This is the plain teaching of Scripture.

Finally, the Savior of humanity in Arianism is merely a creation of God while the Savior in the New Testament is God the Son who became a human being.

The Council of Nicea issued a statement which made the identity of Jesus clear. He, along with the Holy Spirit, is of the same essence or nature as God the Father. They are not lesser in character than the Father.

In sum, the Jesus of Arianism is not the Jesus of the Bible. Arianism, in all of its forms, is a false doctrine.

Question 23

Has God The Son Been Eternally Inferior To God The Father? (Subordinationism)

Jesus Christ is the eternal God. Indeed, there was never a time when He was anything less than God. However, there have been those who have denied this important truth.

There was an early heresy in the church that is known as “Subordinationism” which made Jesus a character lesser than God the Father. It can be summarized as follows.

1. Subordinationism: The Son Is A Lesser Being Than The Father

Subordinationism taught that the Son was both eternal and divine. This is different from the heresy of Arianism which said Jesus was a created being. Subordinationism does not do this.

However, Subordinationism makes a huge mistake when explaining Jesus’ nature. Indeed, it teaches that Jesus is not equal to God the Father in His attributes. Consequently, the Son was subordinate, or lesser in His character, His attributes, to God the Father.

One of the early church fathers, Origen, taught a form of this false doctrine. He said that the Son eternally derives His being from God the Father. In other words, His nature or character is somehow dependent upon God the Father.

2. This Is Not The Same As Jesus Being Subordinate In His Role

This heresy is not the same as saying that the Son has been eternally subordinate in His role. It is important that we make the distinction between who the Son is in His essential being, and His role within the Trinity. As God the Son, He has been subordinate to God the Father in His role. One can be equal in character but take on a subordinate role.

Indeed, there seemingly had to be different roles between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for there to be personal distinctions between them. However, the members of the Trinity are equal in character and unified in their plans for time and eternity.

3. Subordination In The Godhead Is Not Arianism

It has been argued that subordination within the Godhead suggests the heresy of Arianism—that the Son is somehow lesser in character to God the Father. But this is not true. Submission, with respect to God the Son, Jesus Christ, has to do with His incarnation—Him becoming a human being. When He came to earth as a human, Jesus voluntarily submitted to

the Father. While He took an inferior position, He was never lesser in character.

Hence, the submission of the Son to the Father has nothing to do with His eternal relationship with the other members of the Trinity. It was necessary because He became a human being. After the redemption of humanity was accomplished, Jesus Christ returned to His role as God the Son. He was not subordinate to the Father. The Bible contains no suggestion of authority and obedience in Godhead. Each member has equal status.

**Summary To Question 23:
Has The Son Eternally Been Inferior
God The Father? (Subordinationism)**

There is an ancient heresy in the church known as “Subordinationism.” It taught that God the Son was the eternal God but that His attributes were in some ways inferior to that of God the Father. This was based upon the fact that the Son was in submission to the Father while He was here upon the earth. Certain people wrongly assumed that this meant that He was inferior in character.

However, the fact that God the Son submitted to God the Father does not imply inferiority. Indeed, the Bible teaches they are the same substance. While each member of the Trinity is fully God, they do have different roles or functions within the Godhead. When Jesus, God the Son, came to earth He voluntarily submitted to the will of God the Father. In doing so, He was lesser in position to God the Father, but He was never lesser in character.

Therefore, when properly understood, the submission of Jesus Christ to God the Father while He was here upon the earth does not imply that He was in any sense lesser in character to the Father. Fortunately, the heresy of Subordinationism has not been very widespread.

Question 24

Did Jesus Become Exalted At His Baptism? (Adoptionism)

During the early years of the church, as the Trinity doctrine was being understood by believers, a number of false ideas arose. One of these is known as “Adoptionism.” The idea behind this view is that Jesus was not God the Son for all eternity but rather a man who became the Son at His baptism. In other words, God “adopted” Jesus as His Son at His baptism. Before this time, Jesus existed as a mere man.

Jesus Was A Mere Man To The Adoptionists

While the Arians believed that Jesus was a supernatural created being, the adoptionists assumed that Jesus was merely a man. Therefore, He did not exist before He was born. After the Father adopted Jesus, He was still not divine in nature but rather an exalted man.

Hence, when the New Testament describes Jesus as the “Son,” it is only in the sense that He is a specially chosen person by God—nothing more.

Adoptionism Has Never Been Popular

The Adoptionist heresy never became widespread. It is contrary to everything that is taught in Scripture. Jesus did not become the Son of God at His baptism. The divine voice of God the Father only confirmed His position as God the Son—it did not make Him the Son. Nowhere do we find that the human Jesus became exalted at some certain point in time.

Furthermore, Adoptionism has the problem of dealing with the many passages which teach that Jesus was more than a mere man, that He is God Himself. The evidence for the deity of Christ is widespread. Indeed, He is called God, has attributes, or characteristics, which only God can have, and has performed acts which only God can perform.

Adoptionism is, therefore, not the proper way to understand the nature of Jesus Christ.

Summary To Question 24:

Did Jesus Become Exalted By God At His Baptism? (Adoptionism)

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ, as God the Son, has been God for all eternity. While believers were attempting to understand the exact relationship between God the Son and God the Father, a number of false theories arose. One of these is known as “Adoptionism.”

Adoptionism is a heresy that arose early in the history of the church. It treated Jesus as a mere man who was selected by God to be exalted. According to this heretical belief, Jesus was no different than any other human being. He was a specially chosen man, nothing more.

The Trinity

The Scripture teaches completely the opposite. Indeed, Jesus is God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Though being God for all eternity, the Son took upon Himself a human nature when He came to earth. At His baptism, God the Father merely confirmed His identity. Indeed, He did not confer something upon Him that He did not previously have.

Fortunately, this false teaching of Adoptionism did not become very widespread.

Question 25

Is The Holy Spirit Merely Another Name For Jesus? (Binitarianism)

There is an ancient heresy that assumed that the Holy Spirit was not a distinct person from Jesus Christ but rather another name for Him. This is known as Binitarianism. This teaching is found in an early work known as “The Shepherd of Hermas” as well as the “Macedonian heresy” of the fourth century.

The Reason For The Belief

The belief is derived from statements that seem to link the two together. For example, Paul wrote to the Romans and stated the following:

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His (Romans 8:9 NKJV).

It is argued that the Spirit of Christ is Christ Himself. Thus, the Holy Spirit is just another name for the Spirit of Christ.

There is a passage in First Peter that states something similar:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory (1 Peter 1:10,11 NRSV).

Since the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of Christ” it is assumed that they must be the same person. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is merely another name for Christ Himself.

The Holy Spirit Is Not Another Designation Of Jesus

From a study of the totality of Scripture we find that the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ are distinct persons. It is not two ways of describing the same person.

How then do we explain the phrase “the Spirit of Christ?” It may just be another designation for Jesus. In other words, it is another way of referring to His person.

It is also possible that it is another way of explaining the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit who is sent from Christ, or who testifies about Christ.

Whatever the case may be, it does not mean they are the same person. Jesus made it clear that they are distinct. He said:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf (John 15:26 NRSV).

The Spirit testifies of Jesus. He does not testify of Himself. Therefore, He is not the same person as Jesus.

This View Has Never Been Popular

The idea that the Holy Spirit is merely another name for Jesus Christ, though taught by some in the early church, did not gain much popularity. Today, the belief is only found in fringe groups.

Summary To Question 25:

Is The Holy Spirit Merely Another Name For Jesus (Binitarianism)

There was an early heresy in the church known as Binitarianism. Binitarianism is a belief in the deity of the Father and Son, but not the Holy Spirit. It taught that the Holy Spirit was actually another name for Jesus.

The evidence for this is supposedly found in the term the “Spirit of Christ.” This particular description is used twice in the New Testament. Some people mistakenly assume that the biblical references to the Holy Spirit, as well as to the Spirit of Christ, refer to the same person, Jesus. They are not two distinct persons.

Yet there is no way that this can be sustained. Indeed, with so much evidence that the two are distinct persons there are much simpler explanations of the meaning of the phrase.

The Spirit of Christ can be another way of expressing the person of Jesus.

Another possibility is that it refers to the Holy Spirit who testifies of Jesus Christ.

Whatever explanation is ultimately accepted it does not mean that the Holy Spirit is the same person as Jesus. He is not.

As would be expected, the Binitarian heresy never gained much acceptance.

Question 26

Is God An Absolute Unity? (Unitarianism)

Throughout the history of the Christian church there have been a number of views brought forward to explain the nature of the God of the Bible that have fallen short of what the Scripture says about Him. One of the most popular is “Unitarianism.”

This Is A General Category

Unitarianism holds to the belief that God cannot be properly spoken of as existing in three distinct persons. God is rather a unity, one in essence and in person. It is a general category that refers to various beliefs that assert the unity of God but deny the Trinity.

Modern Unitarianism: Socinius

Modern Unitarianism dates from the sixteenth century to a man named Socinius. To Socinius, the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of humankind was unnecessary. Rather than believing that Jesus was a divine Savior, Socinius taught that God raised Jesus to divine power as an act of loving-kindness to His people. This was the beginning of modern Unitarianism.

The Claim: Jesus Had A Special Commission From God But Was Not God

Although they rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, the Unitarians of the seventeenth and eighteenth century viewed Jesus as one who had a special commission from God. They taught that Jesus revealed truth from God that human beings, through our own reason, would not otherwise know.

The nineteenth century saw a shift in the Unitarian position. Influenced by the German higher criticism of the Bible, a school of thought developed within Unitarianism that was anti-supernatural. They came to doubt the four gospels as authoritative sources, and thus rejected the uniqueness of Christianity. This rejection of Christianity’s uniqueness was something that earlier Unitarian belief had also held. But with the anti-supernaturalistic attitude, the goodness of human beings was stressed more than the existence and power of God.

This brings us to our evaluation of modern Unitarianism. We can make the following observations.

1. Unitarians Do Not Hold Any One Set Of Beliefs Today

Today Unitarianism does not ascribe to any set of beliefs. What binds Unitarians together is a basic belief in the goodness of humanity and that God is not limited to any one particular revelation, such as the Bible. Instead, it is believed that God can be found in many different religions.

2. Islam Has Unitarian Beliefs

Some non-Christian religions, such as Islam, hold a Unitarian belief about God in that they reject the idea of God being a Trinity. However, they should be considered separately from Unitarianism since Unitarians are a particular movement that has risen within Christianity.

Conclusion: Unitarianism Emphasizes The Unity Of God But Does Not Recognize He Is Three Distinct Persons

While Unitarianism emphasizes the unity of God it does not recognize the distinction between the three members of the Trinity. Consequently, it falls short of what the Bible has to say about the nature of the God of Scripture.

Summary To Question 26: Is God An Absolute Unity? (Unitarianism)

One of the many inadequate views of the nature of God is known as Unitarianism. Modern Unitarianism goes back to the 16th century. It holds to the belief that God cannot be properly spoken of as existing in three persons. To the Unitarians, God is a unity—He is one in essence and one in person. To the Unitarians, there is no Trinity.

Unitarianism, however, is an inadequate view of God's nature. It argues for the unity of God but rejects the idea that God is a Trinity. Consequently, the Unitarian view of God is contrary to what Scripture clearly teaches.

Unitarianism either denies, or misunderstands, what the Bible has to say about the nature of God. Either way it presents a wrong picture of God.

Present-day Unitarians do not subscribe to any one set of beliefs. Seemingly the only thing that binds them together is the belief in the goodness of God and that God cannot be found in any one particular religion.

Islam also has Unitarian beliefs when it comes to the nature of God. They reject the idea that God could be a Trinity. However, it is best not to treat Islam with Unitarianism seeing that they are a world religion while Unitarianism is a distinct group that has arisen within the church.

We conclude that Unitarianism is one of many false portraits of the God of the Bible.

Question 27

Do We Have To Describe The Trinity In Masculine Terms? (Father, Son, And Holy Spirit)

In recent years, there has been the tendency, in some circles, to shy away from using masculine terms to describe the members of the Trinity. Instead of the First Person of the Trinity being called God the Father, He is now called “the Originator.” Jesus, instead of being called “the Son,” is now called “the Child.”

This, it is argued, more correctly explains the nature of the God of Scripture.

Some also argue that it is proper that the members of the Trinity should be called such things as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. They insist that using these biblical terms to describe God does honor Him for who He is.

In addition, these terms avoid wrongfully equating God with maleness. Names for God should be masculine and feminine, or, at the very least, gender neutral. This is the position of those who see the terms as “too masculine.”

Arguments For Feminist Or Gender-Neutral Language

It is argued that masculine terms give the wrong idea of God as well as of the wrong idea about human beings. This description of the Trinity, it is argued, relieves the Trinity of its masculine overtones.

Since no one argues that God is a male as opposed to a female, it should be allowable to refer to God in feminine terms.

Therefore, the language referring to God should be revised as feminine, or it should be made gender neutral. The following points are usually made.

1. God Is Not A Male

God is not literally a male, or a King, or a Father. Everyone agrees that He is a “sexless being.” This being the case, we should not insist on using sexist terms for Him.

2. Using Male Terms Gives The Impression That Males Are Superior To Females

There is something else. Using male terms to name God gives the impression that males are somehow superior to females. This wrong impression has led to countless examples of abuse.

This needs to be stopped.

3. Israel Was Affected By Surrounding Cultures In Using Male Dominated Names For God

There is also the argument that the Bible reflects the patriarchal or male dominated, attitudes of the ancient world. These attitudes were cultural in nature—they are not divinely sanctioned.

Therefore, it is concluded that God the Father could be referred to with such names as “Mother,” and Jesus should be called the “Child,” not the Son.

This sums up some of the more recent objections to the historic descriptions of God, as well as the doctrine of the Trinity.

Response To Feminist Or Gender-Neutral Language For God

Should this be an acceptable practice? Is this an option? The answer is, “No.” There are a number of responses that we can give to those who argue that we should change the terms of the Godhead to either feminist or gender-neutral. They include the following.

This Is A Different God And A Different Faith

The God that is portrayed in the feminist, or gender-neutral language, is not the God of the Bible. Rejection of masculine language presents a different God and a different Christian faith.

This is not because God is masculine, or that males are superior to females. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so. They can be summed up as follows.

1. Father And Son Are The Terms Scripture Uses To Describe God

To begin with, we should use the same terms to describe God that the Scripture itself uses. We should not revise our explanation or description of God to fit the changing mood of the times. Basically, if we change either the function, or content of the Trinity, even in the slightest bit, we are changing the Christian faith.

In Scripture, God has revealed Himself in masculine terms. The First Person of the Trinity refers to Himself as “the Father.” In fact, God is called Father more than 250 times in Scripture.

Indeed, God never uses feminine language to describe Himself—He is never called “Mother.”

Neither do we find any of His specially chosen spokesmen, the prophets, ever using feminine descriptions to name the God of the Bible. He is never referred to in feminine language.

Since the Bible does not do use feminine terms to describe God, believers today do not have the right or the freedom to alter the way in which He has made Himself known to us. Since the living God has chosen to reveal Himself in this particular way to the human race, Christians are in no position to revise, in any way, that which He has divinely revealed.

As a matter of fact, we should not name or characterize God in ways in which He has not named or characterized Himself. In other words, we should not do what the Scripture does not do. Indeed, we do not have that freedom.

The Bible also warns about despising God's name. In the Book of Malachi we read the following statement of the Lord:

“This is what the LORD of Armies says: A son honors his father, and a servant honors his master. So if I am a father, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is my respect? You priests despise my name (Malachi 1:6 God's Word).

We have no right to alter the designations that He has chosen for Himself. God has warned us about this ahead of time.

2. Masculine Terms Do Not Express Greater Value

It is also incorrect to assume that the use of masculine terms for God means that God gives greater value to males than to females. The Bible is very clear on this matter. Paul wrote about how males and females are all “one” in Jesus Christ:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:28-29 ESV)

According to Scripture, males and females are of equal value in the sight of the Lord. Employing masculine terms for God does not alter this fact.

In addition, we find that the Apostle Peter said that the wife is considered to be a fellow heir, or equal partner, with her husband. He wrote the following:

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard (1 Peter 3:7 NLT).

While the husband is the head of the wife, this does not imply that he is somehow superior or that she is inferior. They simply have different roles and functions.

The Bible says that God the Father is not superior to God the Son although the Father is called “the head of Christ.” The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are coequal members of the Holy Trinity—they are equal in person, or nature. The differences between them concern the roles and functions in which they perform.

3. The Father Is The Name Jesus Called The First Person Of The Trinity

There is more. When Jesus Christ, God the Son, came to earth He revealed the First Person of the Trinity as “God the Father.” In fact, Jesus used the word Father more than any other description or name in referring to Him.

Furthermore, Jesus taught believers to address God in the same way. For example, He specifically told believers to address God as follows:

When you pray, don’t talk on and on as people do who don’t know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. Don’t be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask. You should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, help us to honor your name (Matthew 5:7-9 CEV).

Jesus chose to address God as Father. He told us to address Him in the same way.

Hence, we address God as Father because He has revealed Himself to us as Father, and not as Mother. Indeed, the vast majority of metaphors in Scripture speak of how God relates to us as a Father.

Furthermore, the First Person of the Trinity uses the term Father to describe Himself. It is a term that has a specific meaning. It means that He is an actual person, someone who is a distinct personage—not some vague, impersonal force. This person can give and receive communication.

In other words, He can relate to other personal beings. Referring to Him as “Father” reinforces this truth.

4. Titles Like Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer Incorrectly Describe The Trinity

There is something else which needs to be mentioned. These formulas such as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer lose the meaning of the relationship within the Trinity.

God is a Father. If we merely call Him the Creator, then we lose the significance that He has loved the Son for all eternity. Indeed, these substitute names for God such as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer simply do not imply the same things as the personal names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, are we to assume that the Son alone the Redeemer or that the Spirit alone is the Sustainer? The Bible says that each of these actions

is accomplished by all three persons of the Holy Trinity as they work together.

Much more could be added. Suffice to say, we should not substitute the traditional descriptions of the members of the Trinity, the biblical descriptions, for some modern trendy terms. Enormous problems will result if we do this.

**Summary To Question 27:
Do We Have To Describe The Trinity In Masculine
Terms? (Father, Son, And Holy Spirit)**

There is the modern objection that the language about the Trinity is incorrect since it wrongly suggests that God is male. Instead of using the familiar and biblical terms for the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it has been argued that we should either use feminine terms for the Trinity or, at the very least, gender-neutral terms such as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. This, it is argued will provide a more accurate view of the Trinity.

However, this is definitely the wrong way of going about things. To begin with, we have no right to alter, in the slightest way, the terms that God has chosen to explain Himself to us. The Bible is very specific in the language used to describe God—it is always masculine, never feminine.

However, this does not mean that God is a male or that males are superior to females. Scripture teaches neither of these things. This must always be kept in mind when we have this discussion.

Nevertheless, God revealed Himself as “the Father” and Jesus as “the Son.” Indeed, Jesus taught us to address God as the Father in the same way as He did. In obedience to Jesus, this is exactly what we should do.

Furthermore, such substitute titles for the Trinity such as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer remove the personal aspect of God. These are titles which explain what these members do—more than who they are. The biblical terms emphasize that the God of the Bible is a personal loving God.

In addition, the Son and Spirit are likewise Creators, the Father and Spirit are Redeemers, and the Father and the Son are Sustainers. One title for each member of the Trinity is thus a wrong way of describing them.

In sum, these modern attempts to redefine the Trinity should be soundly rejected.

Question 28

Why Do Some People Argue There Are Two Trinities?

There are some people who actually say the Bible teaches “two Trinities.” Why do they say something like this? Are there two distinct Trinities?

The Argument For Two Trinities

The argument for two trinities is as follows. God, on the one hand is said to be equal—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same nature or substance. On the other hand, the Father gives commands to the Son, and the Son obeys these commands.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit submits to the commands of both the Father and the Son. Hence, there are two Trinities. There is one which is equal and another in which the members are unequal.

There is more. Some people use God’s actions as a starting point concerning how we view who He is. Consequently, they assume the Father is greater in nature, or character, than the Son, and the Holy Spirit is lesser in character with the Father and the Son.

In addition, using God’s actions as a starting point for understanding His nature assumes that He has certain needs. He needed to create humanity to meet these things lacking in His character.

Response:

We can respond to the idea that there are two Trinities in the following manner.

1. This Confuses Who He Is With What He Does

There are not two Trinities. The biblical position, as well as the historic position of the Christian faith is that each member of the Trinity is equal in essence but subordinate in function. While the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equally God, the Son submits to the Father while the Spirit submits to both the Father and the Son.

We need to distinguish between God’s very nature and His activities. It is the difference between who God is versus what He does in the world.

2. God Needs Nothing

Scripture is clear that God needs nothing. Indeed, it was not necessary for Him to create the world. The Apostle Paul said to a pagan crowd in Athens that God needs nothing:

The God who made the world and everything in it—He is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in shrines made by hands. Neither

is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things (Acts 17:24-25 HCSB).

He gives life, everything needs Him! God is independent from the world yet works in it.

3. Priority Must Be Give To His Being Not His Actions

Today, people are making the mistake of giving priority to how God works rather than whom He says that He is. Priority is given to His actions, not His person. His actions are used to determine who God is. Accordingly, it is assumed that God's actions are a necessary part of His being.

Consequently, people are teaching that He needs the world. This robs God of His independence from the world.

4. This View Rejects The Truths Of Divine Revelation

Divine revelation tells us who God is. In fact, it is the only way that we can know anything about Him. God tells us truths about Himself that we cannot observe for ourselves. We cannot reject this merely because we cannot personally experience it for ourselves.

Therefore, we must let the Bible tell us exactly who God is. This is something which it clearly does. When we examine the text of Scripture, we discover there are not two contradictory Trinities but rather one consistent portrait of who God is, as well as what He does.

Summary To Question 28: Why Do Some People Argue There Are Two Trinities?

There is the argument that Christians actually believe in two Trinities, not one. In one Trinity, the members are co-equal and co-eternal. In the other Trinity, the Father is greater than the Son, and the Father and Son are greater than the Holy Spirit.

Those who argue for two Trinities make a number of mistakes. Indeed, they confuse what Jesus and the Holy Spirit do with who they are. While the Son is subordinate to the Father, and the Spirit is subordinate to the Son, this is only in their actions or roles within the Godhead. In point of fact, it has nothing to do with their character or nature.

In addition, it assumes that God has certain needs—but the Bible says He has none. Basically, those who hold this view reject the clear teaching of divine revelation.

Question 29

Does It Matter Whether The Holy Spirit Proceeded From The Father Rather Than The Son? (Filioque Controversy)

There is an ancient controversy in the history of the church that is still being felt today. This had to do with how the Holy Spirit is eternally related to God the Father and God the Son.

Does He proceed from the Father only, or does He proceed from both God the Father and God the Son? We must understand the background of this issue as well as the importance of understanding the nature of Trinity. In addition, the salvation of lost sinners also comes into play with this question. We can present the issue as follows.

The Nicene Creed

The background to this controversy can be found in the Nicene Creed. When the Nicene Creed was formulated in A.D. 325, it stated that the Holy Spirit “proceeded from the Father.”

In the second version of the Creed, formulated in A.D. 381, the statement was not changed.

However, in A.D. 589, at a regional church council in Toledo, in what is in present-day Spain, a word was added to the description—“and the Son.” The word in Latin is “Filioque” which means, “and the Son.” Thus, the Creed then read the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

This phrase seems to be in line with what Jesus taught. He said that He Himself would send the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete or Helper, into the world. We read in John’s gospel:

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me (John 15:26 NKJV).

Jesus said that *He* would send the Holy Spirit.

Later, Jesus restated this promise. We also read in the Gospel of John:

However, I am telling you the truth: It’s good for you that I’m going away. If I don’t go away, the helper won’t come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7 God’s Word).

Since, on two occasions, Jesus Himself said that He will send the Spirit, into the world, it seemed there would be no objection in adding this statement to the Creed.

However, the statement of Jesus was referring to a definite point in time, the Day of Pentecost, when He would send the Holy Spirit into the world to take the place of His ministry after He ascended into heaven.

Yet, this was not the issue. The issue was the eternal ordering of the Holy Spirit with respect to God the Father and God the Son. The statement in the Creed was reflecting their eternal relationship.

How did the Holy Spirit eternally relate to God the Father and God the Son? Was He eternally proceeding from the Father alone or from both the Father and the Son? This was the real issue.

The Split Between The East And The West Over The Filioque Clause

In the year A.D 1054, the church split between the East and the West because of this added clause to the Creed. While there were political reasons for the split, the given reason was this difference in the understanding of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.

Eastern Christianity believed that the Holy Spirit was eternally sent by the Father while Western Christianity held that He was sent by both God the Father and God the Son.

To this day, there is disagreement between Eastern and Western Christianity as to whom the Spirit eternally proceeds.

What Does The Bible Say?

While the Bible says that the Holy Spirit does proceed from God the Father, it does not deny that it also proceeds from God the Son.

It has been argued that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son in an eternal relationship. In other words, they are eternally ordered that way. Though the Scripture does not explicitly say this, this is consistent with what the Bible reveals about the eternal relationships between the members.

Why It Matters: Inclusivism And Exclusivism

What may seem like an obscure theological issue has important ramifications. If the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, without proceeding from the Son, then, it is argued, people can have a genuine relationship with God without coming through Jesus Christ.

Those who believe that people can come to the knowledge of the true God, apart from Jesus Christ, are called inclusivists. Those who deny that a person can know the true God apart from Christ are called exclusivists. This is no small issue.

Exclusivists contend that it is only through Jesus Christ that a person can be saved. Inclusivists believe Jesus is the only basis of salvation but it is not

necessary to believe in Jesus to be saved. A person can actually be saved by Jesus Christ without ever hearing His name or knowing anything of the Christian gospel.

How One Is Saved Without Jesus According To Inclusivists

As far as inclusivists are concerned, one may know God and trust Him through general revelation, or through some non-Christian religion. Humble, honest people will find the Lord even though they lack knowledge of Jesus. They need no specific knowledge of Christ to be saved. If the Holy Spirit is not subordinate to Jesus Christ, then the Spirit can testify to God the Father.

This universal presence of the Holy Spirit allows people to become believers in the God of the Bible without ever hearing the name of Jesus Christ. God's truth in non-Christian religions is experienced in the hearts of those without Jesus. Thus, they can receive a certain amount of grace apart from Jesus Christ.

In sum, there is no need for Christ—because the Spirit of the Father reaches these people. They would be in the same situation as those living in the Old Testament period before Christ came.

Response

The idea that the Holy Spirit somehow works apart from Jesus Christ is contrary to everything that is taught about Him in the New Testament. There are a number of important points to make.

The Evidence From The Great Commission

The “Great Commission” is the last commandment which Christ left with His disciples. Luke records the following words from Jesus before He ascended into heaven:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:46-49 ESV).

Note the following truths from this passage.

1. Believers Are To Go To All Nations To Preach Jesus

The disciples were to go to all nations to preach the message of Jesus Christ. This includes everyone on the face of the earth. Indeed, nobody is excluded.

2. People In All Nations Must Repent

The people were to repent of their sinful ways. This means they were not following the truths of God, whether it was knowingly or unknowingly.

3. The Message Preached Is Jesus

The message to be preached is the person of Jesus Christ. It is very specific in its content. Apart from Jesus Christ, they have no other message.

4. They Need Empowering Of The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to preach this message. They cannot do it in their own strength.

According to the Great Commission, believers are required to go the entire world. The message is salvation through Jesus Christ. Nowhere does the Bible remotely suggest that salvation is somehow independent of Christ. People are without hope apart from Christ.

5. The Spirit Honors The Father And The Son

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit honors both the Father and the Son. Jesus said the following to His disciples on the night of His betrayal:

I have a lot more to tell you, but that would be too much for you now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into the full truth. He won't speak on his own. He will speak what he hears and will tell you about things to come. He will give me glory, because he will tell you what I say. Everything the Father says is also what I say. That is why I said, 'He will take what I say and tell it to you' (John 16:12-15 God's Word).

The Holy Spirit does not speak on His own behalf. He only witnesses to Jesus. We do not honor the Holy Spirit when we separate Him from God the Son, Jesus Christ. His job is to lift up the Person of Christ.

To sum up, nowhere is there the slightest suggestion in Scripture that salvation can come apart from Jesus Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit to save people from their sins is always linked to Christ.

**Summary To Question 29:
Does It Matter Whether The Holy Spirit Proceeded From
The Father Rather Than The Son? (Filioque Controversy)**

The Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the God the Father and God the Son in an historical context. This is not debated. However, there is a question as to whether there was an eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father only, or from both the Father and the Son. This point is debated.

The Trinity

In Eastern Christianity, it is believed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. Western Christianity says the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. This is not merely an obscure point of doctrine.

Some of those who hold the Eastern perspective use it to argue Inclusivism. This is the belief that a person can become saved from their sins by Jesus Christ apart from their knowledge of Him. The Spirit from God the Father works with them without the person of Jesus Christ ever being known.

The Bible, however, does not allow any work of the Holy Spirit apart from Christ. He has been given to glorify both the Father and the Son. He presently glorifies the Son by showing them their need for Him in order to be saved from their sins. There is not the slightest hint in the Bible that a person can be saved apart from Jesus Christ. Thus, the view of the inclusivists, while popular has no biblical support.

Question 30

Does It Really Matter Whether Or Not One Believes In The Trinity?

After one looks at the evidence for the Trinity there is one question which remains to be answered. Does it really matter whether or not a person believes in this particular doctrine?

Isn't the doctrine of the Trinity something that should be the merely subject of theological discussions by professional theologians? Indeed, what does it have to do with everyday life?

There are a number of points which need to be made as we answer this question about the relevance and practicality of the doctrine of the Trinity. They can be summarized as follows.

1. What One Believes About The Trinity Is Not Irrelevant

To begin with, the doctrine of the Trinity is not something that is irrelevant to Christianity. While some people may ignore the Trinity doctrine because of its difficulty, it does not mean that it is irrelevant. Their failure to appreciate the truths regarding the Trinity should not stop others from understanding the doctrine the best way in which we can. There are a number of reasons why the Trinity is extremely relevant to the believer.

2. Christian Truth Stands Or Falls On The Doctrine Of The Trinity

For one thing, everything that is central to Christian belief is based upon the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, if Jesus Christ is not God, then He can do nothing about our sin. The Bible says that our sins offend God and Him alone. David said:

You are really the one I have sinned against; I have disobeyed you and have done wrong. So it is right and fair for you to correct and punish me (Psalm 51:4 CEV).

The New Revised Standard Version puts it this way:

Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment (Psalm 51:4 NRSV).

Ultimately our sin is against the Lord and against Him alone.

If Jesus Christ is not God, then we did not sin against Him. Therefore, He can do nothing about our sin problem. Only God can forgive sins that are committed against Him. The Lord has said:

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins (Isaiah 43:25 ESV)

On the other hand, if He is God, then He is able to forgive our sins. This demonstrates how important it is to recognize that Jesus Christ is God. The whole program of salvation, or redemption, is based upon the perfect sacrifice of Jesus for our sins.

The same holds true for the deity of the Holy Spirit. If He is not God, then the presence of God does not reside with us. We only know and experience God on a personal level through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that we recognize that He too, is God.

3. We Need To Realize That God Himself Saved Us

When a person understands the basic truths about the Trinity, they understand that the salvation of sinners was entirely a work of God. God the Father sent God the Son to take upon Himself the punishment for the sins of the world. For those who are saved, God the Father has sent God the Holy Spirit to lead and guide the believer.

Consequently, humankind cannot take any credit for any part of the salvation process. It was, and is, totally a work of God from beginning to end. The only thing that a human being can do is believe it. That's all.

Realizing this should cause the believer to better appreciate and love God for what He has done. He gave Himself for our salvation. Indeed, He did not sacrifice one of His created beings—whether it be a mere human, an angel, or some other type of supernatural being. God Himself became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ, and it was He who was sacrificed for our sins.

There is something else. If Jesus was not God, then we could never be certain that we could trust Him to save us. If He is only a created being, then there would be some doubt whether He could bring our salvation to completion. Fortunately, we do not have that worry.

4. The Fact Of The Trinity Proves That God Is Love

The Bible says that the God of Scripture is love. John wrote the following to believers:

So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (1 John 4:16 NRSV)

This is demonstrated by the Trinity. It is proof that God indeed is love. Instead of being lonely before He created humanity, there was perfect love and communication between the members of the Trinity.

Since God is complete within Himself, He did not need to create us. Neither did He need to save us from our sins once we rebelled against Him. Creation and redemption, the forgiveness of sins, are gracious acts of God

toward humanity. In fact, they were free decisions on His part, nothing made them necessary.

If God is not a Trinity, then one could argue that He needed to create humanity in order to have some type of relationship with a personal being. As a personal God, He would have had no one in which to communicate if He was not a Trinity.

However, because God is a Trinity, with three distinct centers of consciousness, there was no need for anyone else. Denial of the Trinity is a denial of the interpersonal relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

5. Understanding The Trinity Is Important For Worship

There is the practical matter of worship. Christians worship one God in Trinity. It is important to have a correct idea of the God who deserves our worship. Since the doctrine of the Trinity acknowledges the Son and the Holy Spirit as God, they too are included in our worship when we worship God. If any of the three is not fully God, then that person would not be worthy of our worship. Indeed, only God is to be worshipped!

6. We Should Correct Errors Of Belief About God's Nature

Without a correct understanding of what the Bible says about the nature of God, there are other errors that can result. When a person is wrong on their view of the Trinity, then there is a good chance they will be wrong about other important beliefs. An incorrect view of the person of Jesus Christ can lead someone into an improper view of the biblical doctrine of salvation. Therefore, errors of belief should be corrected.

It is important that people have a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity since it is an explanation of the nature of God. The Christian needs to know exactly who God is in order to have a proper understanding of the One whom they serve. A wrong view of the Trinity will give us wrong views about God.

7. We Don't Have To Understand The Trinity To Be Saved

We must emphasize that it is not necessary that an individual understand the Trinity in order to be saved. Salvation consists in believing on the person of Jesus Christ and His work on Calvary's cross. It is not based upon one's view of the Trinity.

However, those who have trusted Christ as Savior should readily accept the doctrine of the Trinity once it is explained to them.

8. The Truth Of God Must Be Precisely Defined

The truths of the Christian faith need to be precisely defined to keep people from error. The historic creeds of the churches were formulated to respond

to false doctrine that came into the church. The biblical truths must be upheld and defended.

Since the doctrine of the Trinity lies at the heart of so many important doctrines of the faith, it is crucial that it be understood by believers, and precisely defined. Indeed, just about everything that is important to the Christian faith depends upon the truth of the Trinity.

Conclusion: The Trinity Is An Essential Doctrine

We conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. It is crucial to understand it, in the best in which we can, as well as to believe it. In fact, it is extremely relevant, and of the utmost importance.

Summary To Question 30:

Does It Really Matter If A Person Believes In The Trinity?

The doctrine of the Trinity is important to the Christian for a number of reasons. Although it is often neglected, a proper understanding of the nature of God can have many practical benefits for the believer.

First, it gives us a proper understanding of the God whom Christians obey and worship. This will keep one from worshipping false gods—something the Bible strongly condemns. A correct understanding of the Trinity is also a safeguard against error. Those who have a wrong conception of the Trinity will likely be wrong in other areas of their belief system.

The doctrine of the Trinity is also central to the beliefs of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ must be God for His sacrifice to mean anything. Because He is God, we can have forgiveness of sins. Otherwise, there is no forgiveness. We have sinned against God and Him alone.

The Holy Spirit must be God if we are to have the personal presence of God dwelling with us.

In addition, when the Trinity is properly understood, then the believer can appreciate the participation of all three persons in the salvation process.

The doctrine of the Trinity is also proof that God is love. In eternity past, there was love and communication among the members of the Trinity.

Therefore, God did not create humanity because of some need that He had. Neither was He forced to save humanity when we sinned. Hence, there is love among the members of the Trinity as well as love that is graciously expressed toward humanity.

While the understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is not necessary for a person to be saved, it should be readily believed once it is explained to a Christian.

The Trinity

Finally, it is important to precisely define the truths of the Christian faith. Once defined, these truths should be upheld and proclaimed by all believers. This is particularly true of the doctrine of the Trinity.

About The Author

Don Stewart is a graduate of Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary (with the highest honors).

Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over seventy books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies. His available books can be found on his website www.educatingourworld.com.

Don is now a full-time missionary with GoinChrist Ministries. His website educatingourworld.com provides free resources for those wanting to know what Christians believe, as well as why we believe. Currently there are 61 books on the site in PDF form, totaling about 13,000 pages of material while answering over 1,900 questions. Eventually we hope to record all the books, as well as translating the material in other languages.