

# THE HOLY SPIRIT

## LESSON 2: THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

**Main Idea:** How may the mystery of the Trinity be best understood? What is the truth concerning the Godhead? Why is the Trinity a doctrine? What is so important about the Trinity? The Trinity is at the *core* of our Christian faith. On it hinges other essential doctrines such as: the Incarnation, the Deity of Christ, the work of the Spirit, etc. This lesson provides a framework for you to begin to grasp this concept that is central to understanding the role and work of the Holy Spirit.

**Scripture:** Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19-20; John 14:26; 16:13-15; Romans 8:15-17; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 John 4:8, 16; 5:7-8



### SIGHTLINE: Acquire Your Target

*What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.*

One question about the Trinity that must be asked is, “Where do we get the notion of God in three Persons?” The word *Trinity* is nowhere used in the text of Scripture. But that doesn’t mean it’s contrary to Scripture. While the idea of the Trinity is not explicitly stated in the Bible, it certainly is implicit. Take time to read the Scriptures listed above.

Certainly, one of the most telling passages to affirm the Trinity is Luke’s account of the Incarnation (see Luke 1:35): God sent the Holy Spirit upon Mary, and, after her acceptance, she conceives the divine Son of God.

Two other biblical passages that shed light on this plurality in unity are 1 John 4:8 and 16. They both declare, “God is love.” Love is not love without an object to love. For love to be God’s nature or essence, presupposes an object of love (even prior to Creation), hence, the love of the Father for the Son, the Son for the Father, the Father for the Spirit, the Spirit for the Father, the Son for the Spirit, and the Spirit for the Son. This is the love between the Members of the Trinity.

Jewish theology did not (and still does not) accept a Trinitarian concept of God (see Deuteronomy 6:4). However, the Christian understanding came from its Jewish roots.

- Genesis 1:26 says, “Let **us** make man in our image.” One explanation for this plural expression implies the Godhead speaking among themselves. How literally or figuratively it is to be taken is up for interpretation.
- Among the several plural names, the most common name in Hebrew for God throughout the Old Testament is “**Elohim.**” It’s a specific, **plural** form of the generic, semitic word for God, “El.”
- The ancient Jews believed that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was One. At the same time, however, many writers refer to some kind of plurality or distinction within the unity of God—a plurality or distinction that does not deny the unity. These distinctions are seen in two ways: (1) a presence of God, visible on earth, that is distinct but not separate from God’s eternal, invisible nature, and (2) a distinction within God’s own nature, labeled as Word or Wisdom, through which God creates the universe. To illustrate this, see Psalm 33:6 that says, “By the **word** of the **LORD** the heavens were made and by the **breath** of his mouth all their host.” The “word,” “LORD,” and “breath” can be seen as an expression of Jesus, Father, and Spirit, respectively. Jewish Scriptures also refer not just to God proper, but also to His Spirit (e.g., Gen. 1:2; Job 32:8; 33:4; Psalm 51:11; 104:30; Neh. 9:20, 30) and the Word or Wisdom (see Wisdom personified in Proverbs; compare with Col. 2:3; 1 Cor. 1:24).



The majority of the Christian faith has always recognized God as “triune” (three in one): The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet, if you ask your friends, you could get a variety of answers to the question, “What is your understanding of the Holy Trinity?” Ultimately, the Trinity may be better expressed as “Tri-Unity.” One God in three Persons, also known as the Godhead.

The Trinity is a mystery beyond human capacity to fully comprehend. By definition, it’s a paradox—something that seems contradictory or impossible, yet is true. God is one, yet somehow He is manifested as three. You may be thinking, *How can something be both one and three?* Many believers have tried to explain this complex idea of the trinitarian Godhead by using analogies or parallels in an attempt to wrap their head around it. But no analogy can provide a perfect understanding. Instead, the Trinity is a mystery that we take on faith because the Bible describes God in this manner, and we trust God’s Word.

C.S. Lewis offers his well-thought-out understanding of the Godhead in his classic book *Mere Christianity*:

You know that in space you can move in three ways—to left or right, backwards or forwards, up or down. Every direction is either one of these three or a compromise between them. They are called the three Dimensions. Now notice this. If you are using only one dimension, you could draw only a straight line. If you are using two, you could draw a figure: say, a square. And a square is made up of four straight lines. Now a step further. If you have three dimensions, you can then build what we call a solid body: say, a cube—a thing like a dice or a lump of sugar. And a cube is made up of six squares.

Do you see the point? A world of one dimension would be a straight line. In a two-dimensional world, you still get straight lines, but many lines make one figure. In a three-dimensional world, you still get figures but many figures make one solid body. In other words, as you advance to more real and more complicated levels, you do not leave behind you the things you found on the simpler levels: you still have them, but combined in new ways—in ways you could not imagine if you knew only the simpler levels.

Now the Christian account of God involves just the same principle. The human level is a simple and rather empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings—just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet



of paper) one square is one figure, and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course, we cannot fully conceive a Being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it. And when we do, we are then, for the first time in our lives, getting some positive idea, however faint, of something super-personal—something more than a person. It is something we could never have guessed, and yet, once we have been told, one almost feels one ought to have been able to guess it because it fits in so well with all the things we know already.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity. Scanned: 2002 <https://www.dacc.edu/assets/pdfs/PCM/merechristianitylewis.pdf> (Accessed March 26, 2019), 78–79.





## CROSSHAIR: Focus on Your Target

*What does this study say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in this study below, you will better understand what God is saying to you today.*

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE TRINITY?

### **The Trinity is One.**

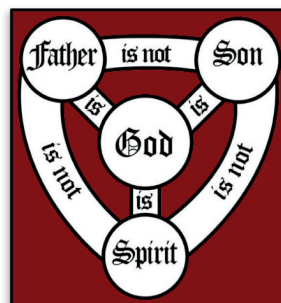
Christianity is unequivocally and undeniably monotheistic: there is only **one** God. He only has **one** nature. He is only **one** substance (albeit supernatural, eternal, transcendent). Yet He is manifest in three Persons. And each of the three Persons are wholly and entirely God.

### **The divine Persons are truly distinct from one another.**

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not simply identical or interchangeable expressions of the one God. They are true distinctions within God's nature. The traditional ancient expressions of these distinctions within God's nature are as follows: "persona" (Latin) and "hypostasis" (Greek, from *hypo*, meaning "under" or "sub-" and *-stasis*, meaning "place," "position," "standing," or "stance"). This does not mean three different substances, but three different positions within that substance.

### **The divine Persons are relative to one another.**

While they are distinct from each other, they are not independent of each other while keeping their own distinctions. They necessarily keep their relationship to one another. As has been expressed for ages: "The Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds." The following image may help you understand.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> New World Encyclopedia contributors, "Trinity," New World Encyclopedia, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Trinity&oldid=992858> (accessed May 14, 2019).

Over the first centuries of the Church, the doctrine of the Trinity had to be clearly defined due to some heretical and spurious teachings against it. By the fourth century, at the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), the doctrine had been fully developed and defined and adopted into the Nicene Creed. Here, the Son is described as having the same nature (Greek, *homoousios* - “one nature/substance”) with the Father and the Spirit. Here is the Nicene Creed :

### **The Nicene Creed**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Nicene Creed.” July 20, 1988, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nicene-Creed> (accessed March 26, 2019).





## **BULLSEYE: Zero in on Your Target**

*How can this study apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.*

Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:

- Who appears in the passages you read?
- Where are these passages taking place?
- When are these passages occurring?
- Why are these passages important?
- What is happening in these passages?
- What verse stood out to you? Why?



- Summarize your thoughts on the analogies presented from the lesson. What is your understanding of the truths concerning the Godhead? What does this mean for you?
  
- How do John 14:26; John 16:13–15 help you identify how the Holy Spirit is distinct from both the Father and the Son?
  
- How do Matthew 28:19–20 and 2 Corinthians 13:14 help you understand that the Holy Spirit is on the same level as the Father and Son?
  
- How do 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 and Ephesians 4:4–6 draw attention to the Trinity being all equal?





# USING MY FIREBIBLE

Read the study notes for the following verses in the *FireBible* and answer the accompanying questions:

- Matthew 3:17. Summarize your thoughts on the three comments regarding the Trinity.
  
- John 14:26. What did Jesus say the most important thing about the Spirit would be? How does this impact your life?
  
- John 16:14. What does a Christian experience as a result of the Holy Spirit? How does that impact your life today?
  
- Romans 8:16. What are the benefits to a believer who follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit?



- 2 Corinthians 13:14. Describe in your own words what Paul prays the Corinthian Church would continue to experience. What do Paul's closing words testify to the New Testament church?
  
- Ephesians 4:5. What does Paul mean by "One Lord?" How does this meaning affect the relationship of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead?
  
- Read the *FireBible* article "The Attributes of God." Re-read point eight under the unique attributes of God. Summarize in your own words the correct teaching of the Godhead.





## TRIGGER PULL: Hit Your Target

*How does this study affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers below or in your journal.*

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about what you just studied. How did this study help deepen your love for God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Write down a thought from this study that you experienced this week.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate the thought you experienced to your family and to others around you?

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