

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian faith. It is essential to our faith.
- 1.2. Augustine, a 4th century theologian, once commented about the Trinity that “in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.”
- 1.3. Yet, when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, most Christians are poor in their understanding, poorer in their articulation, and poorest of all in seeing any way in which the doctrine matters in real life.

2. What does the doctrine mean?

- 2.1. The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, but the word captures several biblical truths very well. The word Trinity means “tri-unity”.
- 2.2. The biblical teaching on the Trinity embodies four essential affirmations:
 - 2.2.1. There is one and only one true and living God.
 - 2.2.2. This one God eternally exists in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
 - 2.2.3. These three persons are completely equal in attributes, each with the same divine nature.
 - 2.2.4. While each person is fully and completely God, the persons are not identical. The differences among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are found in the way they relate to one another and the role each plays in accomplishing their unified purpose.
- 2.3. That language of “persons” is especially important.
 - 2.3.1. The early church wrestled with the appropriate language, and “persons” aptly speaks to the personality of the three members of the Trinity and their relationship with each other; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully God, and yet there are distinctions.
 - 2.3.2. Persons is a theological work that answers the question “three what?”
 - 2.3.3. We must not confuse it with person in the modern sense of the word.
 - 2.3.4. Person in the modern sense means a separate centre of consciousness and more usually and individual human being. It does not mean that in the definition of the Trinity.
- 2.4. We can also summarise it in seven statements.
 - 2.4.1. There is only one God.
 - 2.4.2. The Father is God.
 - 2.4.3. The Son is God.
 - 2.4.4. The Holy Spirit is God.
 - 2.4.5. The Father is not the Son.
 - 2.4.6. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
 - 2.4.7. The Holy Spirit is not the Father.
- 2.5. The doctrine of Trinity helps us find a way to express the relationship of three persons that are equally and uniquely God, but not three Gods.
- 2.6. We want to be true to the biblical witness that there is an indivisibility and unity of God, even though Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can all be called God.
- 2.7. The Persons are not three gods; rather, they dwell in communion with each other as they subsist in the divine nature without being compounded or confused.
- 2.8. It is not:
 - 2.8.1. Three individuals who together make one God.
 - 2.8.2. Three Gods joined together.
 - 2.8.3. Three properties of God

3. Where is this doctrine found in the bible?

- 3.1. The word Trinity is not found in scripture, but we see a progressive revelation in scripture showing that the one true God exist eternally in three persons. These three persons share the same divine nature yet are different in role and relationship. The basic principle at the heart of God’s triune being is unity and distinction, both coexisting without either being compromised. Anything that is necessarily true of God is true of Father, Son, and Spirit. They are equal in essence yet distinct in function.
- 3.2. There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6; 45:5; Mark 12:29; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5)
- 3.3. The Father is God: John 6:27; Titus 1:4)
- 3.4. The Son (Jesus) is God (John 1:1; 1:18; John 8:58; John 20:28; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3; Titus 2:13; Romans 9:5; 2 Peter 1:1)

- 3.5. The Holy Spirit is God (Hebrews 9:14; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Acts 5:3-4)
- 3.6. The plurality of persons in the Godhead (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 2:7; Psalm 45:6; Psalm 110: 1; Hebrews 1:8, 13; Matthew 22:41-46)
- 3.7. The distinction of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:13-17; Matthew 28:19; John 14:16, 26; 16:13–15; 20:21–22; Rom. 8:9; 15:16, 30; Galatians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:11-14; 2:18, 20-22; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; 6:10-18; 1 John 4:13-14; Jude 20-21)
- 3.8. Differences in roles also appear consistently in biblical testimonies concerning the relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - 3.8.1. The uniform pattern of Scripture is that the Father plans, directs, and sends; the Son is sent by the Father and is subject to the Father's authority and obedient to the Father's will; and both Father and Son direct and send the Spirit, who carries out the will of both. Yet this is somehow consistent with equality in being and in attributes.
 - 3.8.2. The Father created through the Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2)
 - 3.8.3. The Father planned redemption and sent the Son into the world (John 3:16; Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:3–5).
 - 3.8.4. The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us (John 4:34; 5:19; 6:38; Heb. 10:5–7; cf. Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 15:28; Heb. 1:3). The Father did not come to die for our sins, nor did the Holy Spirit, but that was the role of the Son.
 - 3.8.5. The Father and Son both send the Holy Spirit in a new way after Pentecost (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).
4. Why does this matter?
 - 4.1. It matters for our salvation:
 - 4.1.1. Ephesians 1:3–6 tells how the Father chose us before the foundation of the world and predetermined our adoption as children through Jesus Christ. The Father is the administrator of salvation, and he oversees the process from beginning to end.
 - 4.1.2. Everything the Father does for our salvation, he does through Christ. The work of the Son means redemption, adoption to the Father, reconciliation, sanctification, and glorification (Ephesians 1:7-12). It operates horizontally as well as vertically, and it is for Jew and Gentile alike. It is through the Son that we achieve salvation and come into full relationship with the triune God.
 - 4.1.3. The Spirit changes us from the inside out, performing the gracious act of regeneration. With this comes the gift of faith and the spiritual ability to believe in the Resurrection. Through the Holy Spirit, our salvation becomes a present reality, applicable to our lives in our own specific context. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that serves as a seal, establishing us as children of God (Ephesians 1:13–14).
 - 4.1.4. "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14).
 - 4.2. It matters for knowing God: The doctrine of the Trinity makes definitive revelation of God possible as he is known in Christ: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made himself known" (John 1:18). No man can see God and live (Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16), but God the Son provided an actual manifestation of God in the flesh.
 - 4.3. It matters for relationships: We worship a God who is in constant and eternal relationship with himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is only with a Trinitarian God that love can be an eternal attribute of God. Without a plurality of persons in the Godhead, we would be forced to think that God created humans so that he might show love and know love, thereby making love a created thing (and God a needy deity). But with a biblical understanding of the Trinity, we can say that God did not create to be loved, but rather, created out of the overflow of the perfect love that had always existed among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who ever live in perfect and mutual relationship and delight. Within God there is both unity and diversity: unity without uniformity, and diversity without division.
 - 4.4. The Trinity provides the ultimate model for relationships within the body of Christ and marriage (1 Cor. 11:3; 12:4–6; Eph. 4:4–7).
5. What we do not believe
 - 5.1. Monarchianism which believes in only one person (mono) and maintains that the Son and the Spirit subsist in the divine essence as impersonal attributes not distinct and divine Persons.

- 5.2. Modalism which believes that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different names for the same God acting in different roles or manifestations (like the well-intentioned but misguided “water, vapor, ice” analogy). This view does not address Scripture that points to the distinction of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- 5.3. Arianism which denies the full deity of Christ. This view does not address Scripture that declares Christ to be fully God.
- 5.4. Tri-theism, which teach that the three members of the Godhead are three distinct Beings, three separate Gods. This view does not address Scriptures that point to the fact that there is only one God.
6. Conclusion
 - 6.1. God is one, yet He is three. I haven’t got the faintest idea how to explain that divine mystery to everyone’s complete satisfaction, but my own inability to articulate it in a way that answers everyone’s questions doesn’t diminish my faith in God or my conviction that He exists as One in three persons.
 - 6.2. The doctrine of the Trinity is well beyond human ability to ever comprehend fully.
 - 6.3. God is not like us and we get in a mess when we try to describe God using the same sort of language and understanding that we use to describe each other.
 - 6.4. But we do not have any other language available, so we must do the best that we can with it. That is fine, if we remember that the whole truth of the nature of God is simply beyond us.
 - 6.5. So, the doctrine of the Trinity only attempts to provide a rudimentary sketch of the mystery of God's nature, rather than a full description of what God is like. God is a mystery, before which we should stand in awe.
 - 6.6. However, it is central to understanding the nature of God and the central events in the history of salvation. Biblical Christianity stands or falls with the doctrine of the Trinity.