

e ssentials

Faith in One Accord

1) TITLE: We Believe In the Trinity, the Triune God—Part 1

2) INTRODUCTION

A. The natural follow up to *We believe One Living God* is *We Believe In the Trinity, the Triune God*. Our support Scripture texts for this lesson are:

i. Matthew 28:18–20—"*[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] 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, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*"¹

ii. 2nd Corinthians 13:14—"*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*"²

iii. These Scripture texts support and affirm the teachings of the Trinity or the Triune God. The singularity of each name is not in the *plural*, giving way to each distinct Persons of the Trinitarian Godhead—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

B. What we believe...

"We believe there is one living God who eternally exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit" (GRCC Statement of Faith).

¹ All Scripture from the ESV—English Standard Version, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016)) unless noted.

² NIV—The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011)

3) KEY POINT

A. Our key point is this—

- i. When it comes to understanding the Trinity, the Triune God of Scripture, it can be a mysterious reality to grasp that is something beyond human comprehension, yet revealed within the Scripture.
- ii. Remember 2nd Timothy 3:16—*"All Scripture is breathed out by God..."*— (CSB)³ *"All Scripture is inspired by God..."*—(NIV)⁴ *"All Scripture is God-breathed..."* So, what is revealed in Scripture is God's direct revelation about Himself to us which includes the doctrine and reality of the Holy Trinity.
- iii. The doctrine of our Triune God defines the Christian understanding of One God existing eternally in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- iv. These Persons are distinct yet inseparable, sharing the same essence (divine nature). The Trinity reflects a complex unity, emphasizing both the oneness and diversity within the Godhead, a foundational truth in Christian theology.

4) TRANSITION

- A. So, let's look into the importance of why believing in the One God who eternally exists as the Triune God is essential to our faith in Jesus Christ.
 - i. We will break this teaching into parts 1 and 2. We will complete part 2 next week.

TEACHING

I. If God is One, what is the Holy Trinity, the Triune God?

³ CSB—*Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020).

⁴ NIV—*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

- A. For starters, the doctrine of the Trinity or the Triune God, has no human origin, nor was made up by human reasoning.

- B. The Trinity is one of the foundational essentials of the Christian faith that addresses the Triune nature of the One God of the Bible. It is a divine truth God chose to reveal Himself to humanity by way of His Word, the Bible.
 - 1. The word Trinity combines two words—"tri" meaning three and "nity" derives from the word unity meaning a state of being one or oneness.

 - 2. The One true living God eternally exists in *three distinct* Persons or individuals: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
 - a). This description of the Holy Trinity, the Triune God *is not and never was a description of three gods.*

- C. For some, the Trinity may be hard to grasp, but the Bible clearly reveals it.
 - 1. *"The historic formulation of the Trinity is that God is one in essence and three in person. Though the formula is mysterious and even paradoxical, it is in no way contradictory. The unity of the Godhead is affirmed in terms of essence or being, while the diversity of the Godhead is expressed in terms of person."*⁵

 - 2. The idea of the Trinity means unity among the Persons of the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
 - a). One way to understand this oneness with three persons is the oneness in a marriage between the person of the husband and the wife (Genesis 2:24).

⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992).

3. But nevertheless, because we can trust in God who is immutable and inerrant in His divine character, we believe His divine words from the Bible, which include the teachings of the Triune God, which may be difficult to grasp.
 4. And for this reason, for those who cannot grasp certain truths about our God, we are reminded that we accept Him for who He is, for Isaiah 55:8-9 says, *"[8] For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*
- D. Now, though the word Trinity is not found in the Bible, there is unmistakable evidence revealed through Scripture.
1. *"One in essence [divine nature], three in person' is the most concise definition of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Christian faith is not polytheistic, confessing many individual gods, each with its own peculiar divine nature. The Christian faith is not unitarian, confessing that the one divine nature is possessed only by a single person or a single acting subject. Instead, the Christian faith says that three distinct persons are the one divine nature in its entirety. The Father possesses all that makes God who He is; the Son possesses all that makes God who He is; and the Spirit possesses all that makes God who He is. We do not worship three gods, each of whom has his own power, his own intelligence, and so on. Instead, we worship three persons who hold in common the same power, the same intelligence, and so on."*⁶
 2. Matthew 3:16-17—*"[16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and*

⁶ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/one-essence-three-person> Originally published in *Tabletalk* daily Bible study magazine.

behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

3. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus attested to the Triune God saying, *"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."*
4. In 2nd Corinthians 13:14, the apostle Paul concluded his letter attesting to the Holy Trinity, writing these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."*
5. Ephesians 2:18 NLT⁷—*"Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us."*

II. Examples in Understanding the Trinity

- A. What examples can we use to grasp the reality or truth of the Three-In-One, the Trinity?⁸
 1. Consider the egg—it consists of a shell, a yolk and an egg white. Problem with this illustration is that God is never divided into parts because the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are ONE in essence.
 2. Take a fruit—There's the skin, the flesh and the seed. This example fails because the parts of the apple, considered independently, are not the apple. By contrast, each Person of the Trinity, taken independently, is still God.

⁷ NLT—New Living Bible (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015).

⁸ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Holy-Trinity.html>

3. A shamrock has three small leaves on a single stem. The problem with this illustration is that God can possibly be divided and discarded.
4. Then we have the popular illustration of H₂O, or water—it consists of three different states of matter: solid (ice), liquid (water) and gas (water vapor like humidity). The major flaw to this example is that each state switches from one state or *mode* to the other.
 - a). Water switches to solid but ceases to be liquid and gas; water switches to liquid but ceases to be solid and gas; water switches to gas but ceases to be solid and liquid.
 - (i) Now, why is the H₂O illustration an issue? Because God never switches to different states or modes—this is called modalism.
 - (ii) *"Liquid water can become solid or gas, but God the Father never becomes the Son or the Spirit. The idea that God manifests Himself differently at different times and in various contexts (like water manifests itself variously as solid, liquid, or gas) is called modalism, and it is a heresy to be avoided."*⁹
 - (iii) Modalism is a theological error that denies the traditional Christian understanding of the Trinity. It asserts that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct coexisting persons but different modes or manifestations of the same God.
 - (iv) For example, it can be said that God the Father is of the Old Testament, God the Son Jesus is the physical God during His earthly time between His conception and ascension, and God the Holy Spirit

⁹ *Ibid.*

is of the New Testament after Jesus's ascension until today. This is heresy. Modalism is heresy.

(v) Heresy means *"a fundamental error in religion, or an error of opinion respecting some fundamental doctrine of religion. The Scriptures being the standard of faith, any opinion that is repugnant to its doctrines, is heresy."*¹⁰

b). This view of modalism where God is reduced to modes or states has been historically deemed heretical, undermines the orthodox concept of the Trinity's eternal and *distinct* personhood.

(i) Modalism was prominent in early Christian debates, with opponents emphasizing the biblical affirmation of three distinct Persons within the Godhead.

5. But I think the late American Bible scholar and Christian theologian, Charles Ryrie, gave us probably one of the best analogies in understanding the idea of the existence of the Holy Trinity, and it is in our solar system—the Sun.

a). Now, Ryrie clearly understood that *"no analogy can illustrate satisfactorily"* when it comes to the mystery of the Trinity. *"The sun, sunlight, and the power of the sun may come close to a suitable illustration."*¹¹ The reason this one comes close is that the Sun exist *interdependently* as one and not in parts of each other. Therefore, the oneness of the Sun is the Sun itself, the sunlight of the Sun and the power of the Sun.

¹⁰ Noah Webster, *Noah Webster's First Edition of An American Dictionary of the English Language*. (Anaheim, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2006).

¹¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, Expanded ed.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1573.

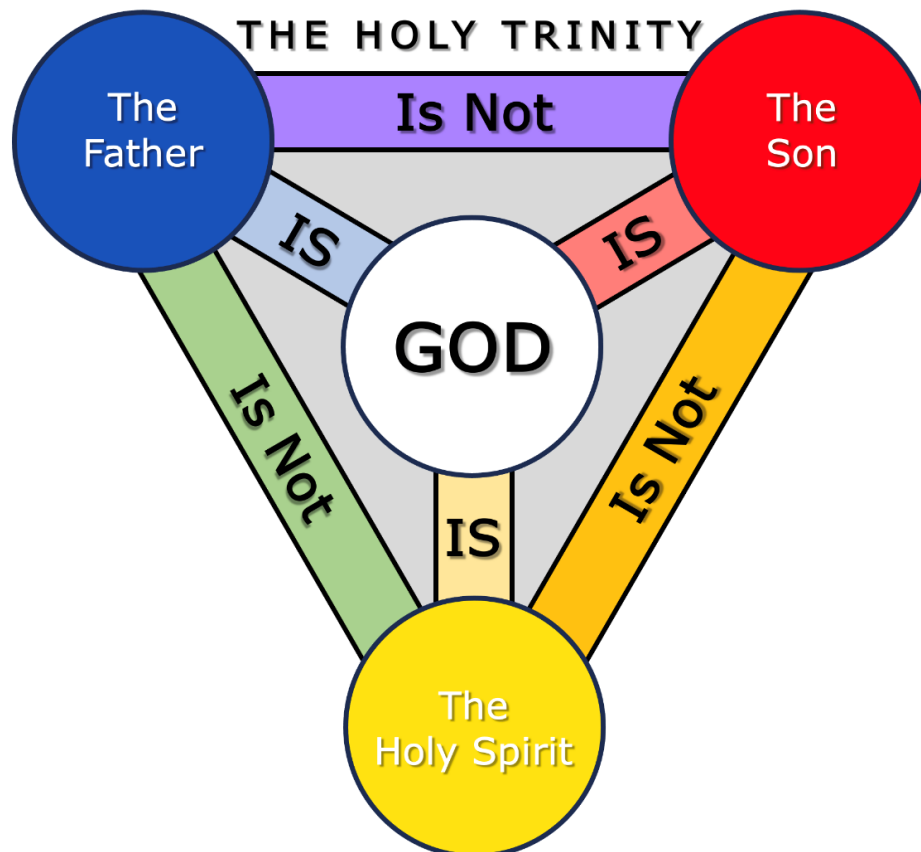
- b). Like the Sun, the Trinity is three distinct Persons coexisting and working together.
6. But here is a good reminder when we are trying to grasp the truth about our Triune God—*"But we accept the Word of God, and by faith we understand that God exists in a realm and in a manner beyond our experience. The egg, the apple, the shamrock, the states of matter, and various geometric shapes are as close as we can come to illustrating the Trinity. We cannot completely understand God's existence. An infinite God cannot be fully delineated in a finite illustration."*¹²
7. So, here's a lesson we can learn—in our attempt to understand the deep mystery yet truth of the Trinity, we must be careful in producing analogies and illustrations in understanding the Trinity that can actually lead to some form of heresy like modalism. However, we accept the authority of God's Word, and we accept ALL His Word by faith. Amen!?
- B. In explaining the Holy Trinity, consider Dr. Bruce Ware, Professor of Christian Theology of Southern University statement¹³: *"To talk about analogies of the Trinity...we really ought to think of the doctrine of the Trinity as being upheld by two pillars. One of those pillars that upholds the doctrine might be called the distinction pillar—where Father, Son and Spirit are distinct from each other. So, it's not the case that Father, Son and Spirit are three names for the same person—like I'm Bruce, I'm Mr. Ware, and I'm Jodie's husband. Those are three names for the same person, but actually Father is a distinct person from Son, and Son a distinct person from Holy Spirit. So, distinction is one of the pillars."*
1. Dr. Ware continues saying, *"The other pillar is the unity or equality pillar in which the Father, Son and Spirit shared together the one identical divine nature.*

¹² <https://www.gotquestions.org/Holy-Trinity.html>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D41u5tk8S5k&t=9s>

They're equally God because each possesses fully the one divine nature. So, bear in mind, this means the Father, Son and Spirit don't possess merely one-third (1/3) of the divine nature but rather the whole divine nature is possessed by the Father, the whole divine nature by the Son, the whole divine nature by the Spirit—one divine nature that is the collection as it were of all of the essential attributes of God possessed fully by the Father and the Son and the Spirit. And yet Father, Son and Spirit are distinct personal expressions of that One God. God is 1 and 3 in the doctrine of the Trinity."

- C. So, by faith, what is clear within the Triune God is that the Bible shows there are three distinct Persons co-existing in one divine nature (essence).
 - 1. Therefore, the Father is God, but He is not the Son. The Son is God, but He is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, but He is not The Father. One in essence, three in person.



III. The Trinity and Our Salvation

- A. When it comes to our salvation it is important to know that our Triune God—the Father, Son and Spirit are united in working together for the souls of sinners.
1. God the Son died for our sins because of God the Father's love for us, that by way of God the Holy Spirit's power of regeneration we are now born again, a people reconciled to our One true God becoming His children.
 2. The One true God sovereignly work in harmony in salvation in the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
 3. The Holy Trinity are united in one intent as One Saviour to rescue sinners according to one saving purpose, plan, and undertaking.
 4. The Triune God and our salvation, Ephesians 1:3-6—*"[3] 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, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."*
- B. Adapted from their book *Our Triune God*, Philip Graham Ryken and Michael LeFebvre shared about the Work of the Trinity in Salvation that *"God plays the symphony of our salvation in three movements. Each movement is associated with a different Person of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. First, there is the work of God the Father in administering our salvation. The Father is the one who organizes and oversees the plan of salvation. Second, there is the work of God the Son in accomplishing our salvation. Jesus is the one who died on the cross for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life. Third, there is the work of God the Holy Spirit in*

applying our salvation. The Spirit is the one who takes what Jesus Christ has done and makes it ours. This is the plan, and the triune God has been working it out since before the beginning of time."¹⁴ They went on to say¹⁵:

1. **The Father: Salvation originated with the Father.**

Ephesians 1:3–6 tells how the Father chose us before the foundation of the world, and predetermined our adoption as this children through Jesus Christ. The Father is the administrator of salvation, and he oversees the process from beginning to end.

a). **What is our application in God the Father's involvement in salvation?** As the originator of salvation the Father invites us to trust in His sovereignty and to rest in His unwavering commitment to our salvation journey. He reassures us that our salvation is not based on our own efforts or merit but on His grace and His sovereign will. This truth can provide immense comfort and security, especially during times of uncertainty or struggle, knowing that God is actively involved in every aspect of our lives (Eph. 1:3-6).

(i) Moreover, recognizing the Father as the administrator of salvation encourages us to surrender control and submit to His divine authority. It prompts us to align our lives with His purposes and to cooperate with His work in us and through us. This may involve seeking His guidance through prayer, studying His Word, and obediently following His leading in our daily decisions and actions.

(ii) Ultimately, the application of Ephesians 1:3–6 calls us to respond with faith, gratitude, and obedience to the Father's loving initiative

¹⁴ Philip Graham Ryken and Michael LeFebvre, *Our Triune God: Living in the Love of the Three-in-One* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 22.

¹⁵ <https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-work-of-the-trinity-in-salvation/>

in choosing and adopting us as His children through Jesus Christ. It invites us to live in the reality of our identity as beloved members of God's family, secure in His unfailing love and confident in His sovereign plan for our lives.

2. *The Son: Salvation is brought to fruition in the Son.*

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.

- a). **What is our application in God the Son's involvement in salvation?** Jesus is the fruition to the Father's plan of salvation. Everything the Father does for our salvation, He does through Jesus.
- (i) We respond to the Son's mediation by seeking favor with God through Him alone. United with believers in local churches, we love as Jesus loved. Our prayers to the Father are in Jesus' name. We follow His teachings in Scripture, acknowledging His role in the Trinity as our guide. (John 13:34-35; 16:23).
 - (ii) Our salvation and full relationship with the triune God which are achieved through God the Son underscores the exclusivity of Jesus as the only way to God. This challenges us to, thus, prioritize our relationship with Jesus and to share the message of salvation with others, inviting them into a life-transforming relationship with Christ.

- (iii) In essence, we are called to center our lives on Christ, embracing the fullness of salvation He offers, fostering unity within the body of believers, and sharing the message of Christ's redeeming love with the world.

3. And finally, *The Spirit: Salvation is communicated by the Holy Spirit.*

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).

a). **What is our application in God the Holy Spirit's involvement in salvation?**

Salvation is communicated through the Holy Spirit by whom our lives are not superficially changed but deeply transformed from within, experiencing salvation as a current and relevant aspect of our daily existence. This transformation is not generic but tailored to our individual contexts, making our faith practical and personal. *"The Spirit changes us from the inside out, performing the gracious act of regeneration."*¹⁶

- (i) Moreover, the Holy Spirit's work serves as an assurance and confirmation of our identity as children of God, providing a sense of security and belonging in our spiritual journey.
- (ii) Therefore, we are encouraged to embrace this ongoing work of the Spirit in our lives, allowing it to shape us into the likeness of Christ

¹⁶ <https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-work-of-the-trinity-in-salvation/>

and empowering us to live out our faith authentically in our unique circumstances.

C. Another way of looking at the Triune God's involvement in salvation is this way:

1. God the Father is the *initiator* in salvation through His agape love:

a). John 3:16-17—"*[16] For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*"

2. God the Son, Jesus Christ, *accomplished* the work of salvation the Father sent Him to do on our behalf.

a). John 19:30 (CSB)—"*When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.*"

(i) "*It is finished proclaims that all the work the Father had sent him to accomplish (cf. John 4:34; 9:4) was now completed, particularly his work of bearing the penalty for sins. This means there was no more penalty left to be paid for sins, for all Jesus' suffering was 'finished.'*"¹⁷

3. God the Holy Spirit is at work in our salvation.

a). Titus 3:5-7 (NLT)—"*[5] He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. [6] He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. [7] Because*

¹⁷ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2068.

of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life."

D. In his work, *The Message of the Trinity*, Dr. Brian Edgar, Professor of Theological Studies and full-time faculty member at Asbury Theological Seminary writes, *"that the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity is fundamentally simple, thoroughly practical, theologically central and totally biblical. It is not, as sometimes suggested, an abstract or philosophical construction with an unusual perspective on mathematics which makes three equal to one! It is not a doctrine which is incomprehensible in presentation, irrelevant in practice, unnecessary theologically or unbiblical in form. It is in fact the distinctive Christian doctrine and essential for Christian life and discipleship...the doctrine of the Trinity means that God can be known intimately and personally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit."*¹⁸

1. Dr. Edgar continued to say that *"The early Christians could not avoid the idea of God as Father, Son and Spirit as they reflected on the events surrounding the person of Jesus Christ and their own experience of him as Lord. Consequently, the doctrine of the Trinity is not found or proved in a single verse of Scripture alone, for it permeates the thinking and the writing of the early church. It is something found in the whole testimony of Scripture concerning the story of salvation and is an unavoidable implication of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."*¹⁹

IV. CONCLUSION

A. In closing, understanding who our God is and His involvement in salvation is essential to our Christian faith because the Scripture reveals that the LORD our God, who is

¹⁸ Brian Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity: Life in God*, ed. Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today: Bible Themes Series* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 20.

One in essence, eternally exists in three distinct Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

- 1. Therefore, there is no gift of salvation without the Triune God, the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.**

B. This is what we believe...

"We believe there is one living God who eternally exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit" (GRCC Statement of Faith).

To God Be The Glory Forever and Ever. Amen!