



# **Peninsula City Church**

**We Believe...**

**The Trinity**

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# We Believe... The Trinity

**Q.** How biblically literate and assured are you in understanding the truth about the Trinity?

## An Introduction

This will not be an exhaustive study on the subject, but merely a glimpse at the evidence to find out what the Bible teaches and if our belief is in alignment with it. Part one of this message aims to discuss what the Bible has to say about God briefly. This will look at the truth that there is only one eternal God. However, the Bible also mentions three divine persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are found to be distinguishable but indivisible. Part two of the message will review what we believe about the Trinity.

### 1. What do you believe about God?

**Q.** Do you know what you believe about the Trinity?

To begin with, it needs to be said that, Peninsula City Church in the constitution states that we believe the following regarding God,

“4.2. We believe in the eternal Godhead who has revealed Himself as one God existing in three persons; Father, Son & Holy Spirit, distinguishable but indivisible.”<sup>1</sup>

Two Texts that have been used with this constitution are,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19 ESV).

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

So, in light of what has been stated here in light of our statement of belief found in our constitution, is this idea maintained by the Bible? Or is this statement a false conclusion of what the Bible says on the matter of God. Here we will briefly review the following topics, to attempt to discover what the Bible has to say on the matter.

#### a. One God

The Bible teaches that there is only one God. That makes us what is known as monotheists. This comes from the Greek words *monos*, which means ‘one,’ and *theos*, meaning ‘God,’ specifically the belief in one God.<sup>2</sup> So, monotheists hold to the belief that God is one in unity.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One.” (Deut 6:4 ESV). See also Is 43:10; 44:6,8; 45:5,14,18, 21-22; 46:9; 47:8; Jn 17:3; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:5-6; Eph 4:6 etc.

#### b. The Father

It is important to have a proper understanding of God the Father. The reason being that without proper instruction about the Father one could end up with a wrong understanding of God. If one has a wrong understanding of the Father, then it could affect one’s knowledge of the Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

“If faith in one God is part of the Christian church’s Jewish inheritance, then confessing Him as Father probably ought to be regarded as a specifically Christian contribution to that belief.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Statements of Faith.” In *The Constitution of Peninsula City Church Inc.* (Frankston, Vic: Peninsula City Church, March 2016), 4.

<sup>2</sup> McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms.* (Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 177.

The title of 'Father' was used widely in the New Testament to describe God. However, this was not a new idea, as the Father had supernaturally revealed Himself and was recorded as doing so in the Old Testament. He made Himself known to Israel, and even to some people as their Father. It has been said that,

“Often when God is spoken of as Father in the Old Testament, the emphasis is not on relationship but on origin. Israel traced its beginnings as a nation back to being chosen and redeemed by God.”<sup>4</sup>

Understanding this background can help the reader of the New Testament to know how the Father is to be understood. The following two references mention God as Father in the Old Testament. Note that I have listed more for you to read in your study time.

Moses reminded Israel that God was their Father:

“Is this the way you repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Isn't He your Father who created you? Has He not made you and established you?” (Deut 32:6 NLT).

God was also called the Father of some people in the Old Testament, for example, King David,

“I will be his (David's) Father, and he will be My son. If he sins, I will correct and discipline him with the rod, as any father would do” (2 Sam 7:14 NLT).

Some other passages on the issue of God being Father in the Old Testament

- Likewise, Isaiah mentioned the Father as part of his prayer of repentance: Is 63:16; 64:8
- The Psalmist declared to Israel that God was their Father: Ps 2:7
- Jeremiah spoke of the Father concerning His connection to the nation of Israel: Jer 3:4,19; 31:9
- The prophet Malachi also spoke of God being Israel's Father: Mal 1:6; 2:10

God was also called the Father of some people in the Old Testament

- King David: 1 Chron 17:13; 29:10; Ps 89:26, see verse 20
- King Solomon: 1 Chron 22:10; 28:6
- To the fatherless: Ps 68:5

Therefore, it soon becomes clear in the Old Testament that God was declared as a Father to Israel. He is not like an earthly father, with weakness, fault and affected by sin. Instead, He is the creator and the One who keeps and looks after His children of Israel. In the passages mentioned above regarding God the Father, they also speak about His son Israel. This was not just any son, but Israel the chosen child of God the Father. This would have been a comforting truth for Israel to hear amongst the surrounding nations.

As we read the gospels, we see that it recorded how Jesus personally spoke about the Father as being 'My Father'. This was an amazing thing to say and would have gotten the attention of all who were listening to Jesus.

“Practically everyone now agrees that calling God 'Father' was a particular hallmark of the ministry of Jesus, underlined in the New Testament by the preservation of the original word Abba (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bray, Gerald L. (ed.). *Ancient Christian Doctrine: We Believe in One God*. Vol. 1. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 60.

<sup>4</sup> Richards, Lawrence O. (ed.). *The Applied Bible Dictionary*. (East Sussex, UK: Kingsway, 1984), 374.

Jesus used this idea within the context of Him doing the Father's will. This idea was recorded over 20 times in the gospel of John, in addition to the various times that He spoke of His Father in other ways. However, I will state one and give the references to one each from the other gospels.

"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" (Jn 10:29 NLT). See also, Matt 5:16; Mk 11:25; Lk 3:36.

Do you realise that God the Father has adopted you into His family? Paul taught the church on this subject of adoption when he said,

"So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call Him, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom 8:15 NLT). See also, Jn 1:12; Gal 3:26; 4:4-7; Eph 1:4-5; Heb 2:11; 1 Jn 3:1 .

### c. The Son

As with the Father, a major reason is that without proper instruction regarding the supernatural Son of God one could end up with a wrong understanding of God. If one has a wrong understanding of the Son, then it could affect one's knowledge of the Father and the Holy Spirit. This has been a major area of wrong teaching throughout the history of the Church of Jesus Christ.

It is important to understand that Jesus Christ is the eternal God. He existed as God the Son before He was born, taking on His human body when born in Bethlehem. Jesus Christ who is God the Son was not created. He is eternal and in every way equal with the Father, except that He is not the person of the Father. Jesus Christ is the person of the Son.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the 'Word of God,' existed eternally before anything was created and was in a relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> He was not just part of the 'eternal plan,' or even 'as an idea in the mind or thoughts,' of God the Father. He has always been the eternal God the Son. Consider the following definition:

"The taking on of a human body was the act whereby the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be who He is, God the Son, took into union with Himself what He did not possess before, human nature, and so He was and continues to be God and human in two distinct natures and one person forever."<sup>8</sup>

John in his gospel has some important things to say on these matters. For example, John stressed the truth that Jesus Christ was God, and was with God the Father before the beginning of time.

"In the beginning (existing for eternity) was the Word (Jesus Christ), and the Word (existing for eternity) was with God, and the Word (existing for eternity) was God" (John 1:1).

John went on to point out that it was Jesus Christ and not the Father who became human when He came to earth.

"And the Word (Jesus Christ) became human, and made His home among us (for a limited time), and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

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<sup>5</sup> Bray, *Ancient Christian Doctrine*, 60.

<sup>6</sup> Chant, Barry. *Heart of Fire: The Story of Australian Pentecostalism*. (Unley Park, South Australia: The House of Tabor, 1984), 360.

<sup>7</sup> Beisner, Calvin E. "Jesus Only" Churches. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 20-24.

<sup>8</sup> "The Westminster Shorter Catechism." [http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC\\_frames.html](http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC_frames.html) (15<sup>th</sup> November 2017).

So, Jesus Christ as the eternal second Person of the Trinity became fully human at His conception and birth in all regards, but He had no sin. But, He did not come into existence as the Son at His conception and birth when He took on a body because He had always existed.

Jesus was recorded as highlighted His existence before coming to earth:

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth before Abraham was even born, I Am!’” (Jn 8:58 NLT).

Jesus knew that He had come from heaven:

“No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven” (Jn 3:13 NLT). See also, Jn 3:31; 6:62; 8:23; 13:3; 17:5,24.

Paul states the truth that Jesus is God to the local church in Rome,

“Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ Himself was an Israelite as far as His human nature is concerned. And He is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen” (Rom 9:5 NLT). See also, Ps 45:6-7; Heb 1:8-9; Phil 2:5-8

So, Jesus Christ is no less eternal than God the Father. He was never created and is one with the Father. He is the eternal Son of God. It needs to be remembered that Jesus Christ has always been the eternal Son of God, the second divine Person within the Trinity. God the Son is not only a ‘manifestation’ of the Father or even the Holy Spirit. He is actuality a distinct person of the Trinity. He is not the Father, nor is He the Holy Spirit. The Son of God did not come into existence at Bethlehem and will not cease to exist once His work has been completed. He is the eternal Son of God. Jesus Christ is not simply the redemptive name and manifestation of God the Father for any practical work of redemption.

#### d. The Holy Spirit

As with the Father and the Son, a major reason for discussing this question is that without proper instruction regarding the supernatural God the Holy Spirit, one could end up with a wrong understanding. If one has a wrong understanding of the Holy Spirit, then it could affect one’s knowledge of the Father and the Son. This has been a major area of wrong teaching throughout the history of the Church of Jesus Christ and the Trinity, and it continues today.

The Holy Spirit is understood to be completely co-equal, co-eternal, separate, and the third divine Person of the Trinity. He is more than just a manifestation or mode of the Father. He is not just the Spirit of the Father or Jesus Christ. He is in fact, God the Holy Spirit. Following are some biblical passages that reveal this truth. The Bible plainly upholds the teaching regarding the Holy Spirit as a person of the Trinity.<sup>9</sup> The biblical truth is that there is a separate third person in the Trinity known as God the Holy Spirit. He is not just a manifestation of the Father as the spirit. The use of the term ‘person’ when dealing with the Holy Spirit is acceptable, right and biblical.

The Holy Spirit is called God in the Bible,

<sup>3</sup> “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’ <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it” (Acts 5:3-5 NLT). See also, Rom 8:26-27; Acts 15:28.

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<sup>9</sup> Greene, Frankie. *The Godhead: Oneness or Trinity?* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, a Division of WinePress Publishing, 2002), 93 cf. 85.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force, substance or power; rather He is as much a Person within the Trinity as the Father and the Son. He is God and is a separate Person within the Trinity. He works with great force and power, but He is not just a force or power. It has been said that,

“The Spirit is not a vapour or an influence, as many suppose, but a real Person going out from the Father and the Son, and serving on their behalf.”<sup>10</sup>

## 2. What do you believe about the Trinity?

**Q.** How would you explain the features of Trinity?

This has been a major area of wrong teaching throughout the history of the Church of Jesus Christ, and it continues today. So, having introduced the matter of the one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we will briefly review some of the possible outcomes.

### a. There is no such thing as the Trinity

Some teachers have stressed the point that the word ‘Trinity’ is not found in the Bible.<sup>11</sup> Supporters of this idea who say there is no Trinity and are of the opinion that, the teaching is not from the Bible, but is an interpretation that is “slow, stupid, and unscriptural.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, they understand the Trinity as being opposite to the biblical record, and an embarrassment, error, poor and misleading. So, they incorrectly teach that there is only one God and not three persons in the Trinity. This teaching states that,

“There is only one God... He has revealed Himself to humanity as the Father (Creator), in the Son (Saviour), and as the Holy Spirit (indwelling Spirit).”<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, this incorrect teaching believes that God is One and not a Trinity. It is believed that He is undivided and does not exist as three persons, but as one. He simply revealed Himself in two more manifestations; one known as Jesus Christ and the other as the Holy Spirit. That is, He might be God the Father, and then become the Son for a time, and then he might be the Holy Spirit for a period. So, how would you respond to the following statement?

“Since there is no use of the word Trinity within the Bible; it is not biblical”?

However, the plain answer this theory is that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; yet, there are not three gods, but One. The orthodox Trinitarians throughout church history have endeavoured to be intentional in their expression of the doctrine of God. That is, the unity of God as undivided and indivisible in one essence that is revealed in three eternally distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is, there are three separate persons within the Trinity. There is a unity in God’s relationship that is undivided. The term Trinity (from the Latin Trinitas, meaning “the number three, a triad”<sup>14</sup>) was created to try to communicate the teaching of three eternally separate and divine Persons. God is One and is perfect and holy in every way. He has

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor, George Floyd. “The Sprit and the Bride: A Scriptural Presentation of the Operations, Manifestations, Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit in His Relation to the Bride with Special Reference to the ‘Latter Rain’ Revival (1907).” In *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology: Voices from the First Generation*. Douglas Jacobsen. (ed.). (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 59.

<sup>11</sup> French, Talmadge L. *Our God is One: The Story of the Oneness Pentecostals*. (Indianapolis, IN: Voice & Vision, 1999), 191, cf. also 196, 202, 205. Yong, Amos. *The Spirit Poured Out on all Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 210-211.

<sup>12</sup> Golder, Morris E. *History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*. (Indianapolis, IN: Morris E. Golder, 1973), 40.

<sup>13</sup> *The Apostles Doctrine* (A Tract). (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Believing that there is only One eternal, personal and beyond fully understanding by the human mind and experience God.

existed eternally in three persons; these three separate persons are equal in their being, eternally perfect and nature.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that the word Trinity is not mentioned in the Bible does not mean that it is not true. For example, Christ-followers use other words that are not found in the Bible, such as the rapture, fall of humanity, altar call, and pulpit etc., and these do not cause the same concern. So, to say that it is not true because it is not mentioned in the Bible is nonsense. Some passages where it supports this teaching are found below.

<sup>16</sup> “Jesus came up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit) coming down like a dove and landing upon Him (Jesus). <sup>17</sup> When suddenly a voice came from heaven (the voice of the Father), saying, ‘This is My beloved Son (Jesus)’” (Matt 3:16-17 NLT).

Jesus said to the disciples,

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Jesus said,

“And I (Jesus Christ) will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper (the Holy Spirit)...” (John 14:16). See also, Rom 15:30; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 4:4-6; 1 Pet 1:2.

What do you know about the accepted position of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout church history regarding the doctrine of the Trinity? The accepted position of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout church history on the teaching of the Trinity is as follows. The teaching that, God is One being and exists in three Persons (or the Trinity) was one of the first teachings confirmed in the Church.<sup>16</sup> As monotheists,<sup>17</sup> Trinitarians do not accept the idea of that; God is manifested in different modes one after the other or at the same time as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> As a result, although those who believe in the Trinity hold to the belief that God is one in unity, they are biblical monotheists and not Modalists (that is, God is a single being who has revealed Himself in three modes or forms as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). So, in the end, the early Church Fathers put into words the teaching of the Trinity, because they carefully and faithfully read and studied the Bible on the matter.<sup>19</sup>

Christ-followers, who believe in the Trinity, should be able to stand in agreement with the historically accepted Christian beliefs that support and explain the teaching of the Trinity of the supernatural God. Such beliefs like the Athanasian Beliefs, the Chalcedonian Beliefs, and the Nicene Beliefs built on Scripture that highlight that there is one God in Trinity in full unity. This teaching regarding the Trinity was also seen in the Eleventh Council of Toledo (675AD),

“Although we profess three persons, we do not profess three substances...rather every single person is wholly God in Himself, and all three persons together are one God.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Yong, Amos. *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 207 cf. n. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Hoeksema, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1985), 131.

<sup>17</sup> “From Greek monos, ‘one,’ and theos, ‘God,’ i.e. belief in one God.” McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 177.

<sup>18</sup> Beisner, Calvin E. *“Jesus Only” Churches*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 36.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, C.A. *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 55.

<sup>20</sup> Pinnock, Clark H. “God’s Fair Beauty: The Social Trinity.” *The Spirit & Church* 4, no. 1 (May 2002): 76.



## b. Tritheism

This is a teaching that the Trinity communicates the idea of three individual gods. Those who hold to this teaching understand the Trinity as teaching that God's being is divided into three equal gods. So, the idea of the Trinity rests upon emphasising the divisions of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and it ignores the unity of God as one. This is an endeavour to discredit the teaching of the Trinity, as there are three separate and individual gods.

However, the correct teaching regarding the Trinity would agree with the following statement that,

“The doctrine that there are three gods is neither taught in the Old nor the New Testament.”<sup>21</sup>

The accepted position of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout church history on the teaching of the Trinity is as follows. Those who believe in the Trinity believe that each person in the Godhead is in unity, undivided and undividable as one God. That is, even though God is revealed in three eternal separate persons He is not three individual gods. These three eternal separate persons are God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; however they are not three gods, but one God.

On this matter, the Bible declares that:

- The Father is called God: Phil 1:2; 1 Cor 8:6; Jn 6:27; Rom 1:7; 1 Pet 1:2.
- The Son is called God: Jn 1:1,14; Rom 9:5; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8-10; Jn 1:18; 20:28; Titus 2:13.
- The Holy Spirit is called God: Acts 5:3-5; 2 Cor 3:17-18.; Heb 3:7-9; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:22.
- But note: there is only one God: Deut 6:4; Is 43:10; 44:6,8; 45:5,14,18, 21-22; 46:9; 47:8; Jn 17:3; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:5-6; Eph 4:6 etc.
- So, all three persons of the Godhead act in unity as well; there is no acting in independence from one another: See Jn 5:19; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10.

Therefore, the incorrect thinking that, the Trinity teaches that there are three separate gods, fails to appreciate the unity that has always existed within the Trinity. As a result, this incorrect teaching refers to the Trinity as three gods. However, the Trinity does not teach that there are three persons in the one God, but rather that there are personal distinctions in the Trinity that are part of God's eternal being. As Trinitarians, we uphold the belief in the eternal God, who exists in one divine essence. We maintain that God is three distinct, divine and eternal Persons. To be precise, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are co-equal, co-eternal, perfect and holy in every respect.

## c. Arianism

There is an idea that holds that Jesus Christ is not equal with God the Father, but only a created being. As a result, He is understood to be a lesser god than the Father. This teaching holds that although Christ may be called God, He is not truly God and is in no way equal to God the Father in nature or eternally. This teaching holds that before the creation of anything else, Christ was created. He is in fact just the Logos of God who was the firstborn of all creation and the creator of the rest of creation. However, Jesus Christ is still understood to be the highest of all God's created beings. The Father is claimed to be God and the only uncreated one in all of the creation, and He cannot be known. Therefore, Jesus Christ is not like God the Father who is God and the source of all, but merely the firstborn of all creation.

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<sup>21</sup> Dionysius of Rome. “Dionysius of Rome: Against the Sabellians.” In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. (ed.). (Vol. IV). (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.), 1:365.

It is claimed that Jesus Christ is the Word; similar in nature to the Father, but not the same in nature or eternal like the Father. He is not genuinely God as the Father is, but is a different created substance. Although others may teach this unbiblical idea, it is mainly believed today by the movement known as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

However, Jesus Christ IS fully God, in nature and eternity, as is the Father. He is not of a different substance or even of a nearly similar substance; He is of the very same substance as the Father. Jesus Christ is totally equal with the Father as part of the Godhead. The only difference is that the person of Jesus Christ is not the person of the Father or vice versa,

“For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup>

It has been said that,

“I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, unique of the Father before all worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, unique, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us people and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and became human by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made human; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scripture; and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.”<sup>23</sup>

Following are some verses that teach Jesus as God:

“Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ Himself was an Israelite as far as His human nature is concerned. And He is God, the One who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen” (Rom 9:5).

In Psalm 45:6-7 the psalmist records an interesting phrase when he writes,

<sup>6</sup> “Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a sceptre of justice. <sup>7</sup> You love justice and hate evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed You, pouring out the oil of joy on You more than on anyone else” (Psalm 45:6-7).

Who is being spoken of here in this section of the Psalm? The writer to the Hebrews answers this question through the following description of Jesus Christ:

<sup>8</sup> “But about the Son, He (God the Father) says, ‘Your throne O God (Jesus Christ), will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of Your kingdom.’ <sup>9</sup> 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” (Heb 1:8-9).

The writer to the Hebrews has also said,

“Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, He abides a priest, eternally” (Heb 7:3).

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<sup>22</sup> “Athanasian Creed.” <https://carm.org/christianity/creeds-and-confessions/athanasian-creed-500-ad> (21<sup>st</sup> November 2017).

<sup>23</sup> “The Nicene Creed.” <http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm> (21<sup>st</sup> November 2017).

Paul in writing to the local church in Philippi said,

<sup>5</sup> “You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. <sup>6</sup> Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. <sup>7</sup> Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, <sup>8</sup> He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8).

Jesus Christ was never created and is one with the Father. He is the eternal Son of God.

#### d. Modalism

This idea rejects the idea of the Trinitarian understanding of God. It is a teaching that states, God is one and not three separate persons. There is such a strong rejection of the notion of the Trinity, in place of a theological foundation on which to base the modalism teaching of God. God is seen as one with His essence and merely having various modes or manifestations.

However, Trinitarians throughout church history have expressed the doctrine of God. That is, the unity of God as undivided and indivisible in one essence that is revealed in three eternally distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The teaching of modalism lay outside the limits of orthodox theology and was never accepted as true. Unorthodox teaching regarding of God such as Modalism (others like Sabellianism and Monarchianism) all differ from the Trinitarian view of God. Modalism argues that one manifestation of God can never be present at the same time as another of His manifestations. So, He can only reveal Himself in any one of His manifestations, roles, titles or attributes as either the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit at any one time. This is not an orthodox and historically accepted monotheistic view of God; rather it is an attempt to establish and prove this tradition and theology. Therefore, when it comes down to it, Modalism is unorthodox, nonconformist, and intentionally so.

Does Scripture have an illustration of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit present at the same time? Yes, it does, in the incident of Jesus’ baptism, we see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all present at the same time and in separate times or modes.

<sup>16</sup> “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; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Mat 3:16-17 ESV).

Therefore, how can God exist in different modes when we see the Father speaking to the Son and the Holy Spirit coming on to Jesus? Therefore, the Bible gives us at least one instance where we see the Trinity being evident all at the same time. As Ps Barry Chat has said,

“There is One God, perfect and holy, existing eternally in the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit... These three distinct persons are co-equal and co-eternal in every respect... God the Father is the first Person of the triune Godhead... Jesus Christ the Son is the second Person of the triune Godhead... He is the eternal Son of God... He was pre-existent before He came to earth and is pre-eminent above all things... The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the triune Godhead. He is a divine Person, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Chant, Barry. *Heart of Fire: The Story of Australian Pentecostalism*. (Unley Park SA: The House of Tabor, 1984), 359-360.

### 3. God is a mystery

Trinitarian theology admits that the infinite and eternal God the Trinity is a wondrous mystery. However He has revealed something regarding Himself in the person Jesus Christ (1 Tim 3:16) but, the Triune God remains a mystery.<sup>25</sup> In fact, according to William Menzies, the Trinity is

“...admittedly a mystery, a mystery too great for human comprehension. But as with so many truths hard for the human mind to understand, the Spirit of truth helps our weakness and human inability.”<sup>26</sup>

It could be said that the Trinity is not illogical, but merely is outside of human understanding without God’s self-revelation.

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable” (Ps 145:3 ESV).

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!” (Rom 11:33 ESV).

“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7 ESV).

God is a wondrous splendour in all that He is and does. Therefore, in all the fullness of whom God is as the infinite, eternal and incomprehensible (wonderfully unexplainable) triune One. He is a wonderful mystery beyond human understanding. Even taking into account the greatest revelation He is revealed in the Scriptures the person of Jesus Christ, outside of this He remains a mystery.

“The Trinity is a kind of mystery in that it goes beyond the boundaries of human comprehension.”<sup>27</sup>

It has also been said on this matter that,

“God is beyond humanities capacity to understand or explain exhaustively. In this sense, God is beyond human reason and logic because He is infinite and we are finite... He will always be beyond our grasp. He is too high for us to scale and too deep for us to fathom. We cannot get God in a box. The finite span of the human mind will never encompass the infinite God of Scripture.”<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, we can know something regarding the mystery of God through Jesus Christ. It has been said in Colossians 2,

<sup>2</sup> “That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ... <sup>9</sup> For in Him (Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority” (Col 2:2,9-10 ESV).

God is a wonder and has splendidly revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. Jesus is more than merely a full stop at the end of our prayer, as God, He is a wonder. We do what we do because of God; we can be human because of God, we are who we are because of God, we can pray only because of God. It has been said that,

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<sup>25</sup> Duffield, Guy P. & Van Cleave, Nathaniel M. *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*. (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1987), 86, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Menzies, *Bible Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective*. S.M. Horton (ed.). (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1993), 57.

<sup>27</sup> “The Trinity (Triunity) of God.” <https://bible.org/article/trinity-triunity-god> (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017).

<sup>28</sup> “The Incomprehensibility of God.” <http://www.faithdefenders.com/Articles/Christian-Theology/The-Incomprehensibility-of-God.aspx> (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017).

“To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all attainments.”<sup>29</sup>

So it has been said the Bible teaches that,

- “The Son is God.
- The Father is God.
- The Holy Spirit is God.
- The Father is not the Son.
- The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is not the Father.
- There is only one God.”<sup>30</sup>

### Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

**Q.** How biblically literate and assured are you in understanding the truth about the Trinity?

Honestly, how are you travelling with this teaching as it is a core Christian teaching that has been part of the church for centuries? Could you help someone understand what the Bible has to say about God and especially the Trinity? This truth is that there is only one eternal God. However, the Bible also mentions three divine persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are found to be distinguishable but indivisible. Could you say what you believe about the Trinity?

Trinitarianism, being monotheistic, embraces the theology, that there is only one eternal God. Moreover, as Trinitarians, they embrace the reality that God exists in one divine essence with no division, who at the same time is three distinct Persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are co-equal, co-eternal, perfect and holy in every respect.

So, by reviewing these ideas, it can be concluded as part of the teaching of the Trinity that:

- There is only one God
- God is in complete unity as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and has always existed in this way.
- All three persons of the Trinity have the same essence as each other, so they are not divided as God, and each possesses the perfection as God.
- There is an eternal relationship between all three Persons of the Trinity; as a result, they are called by the relational titles Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Each of the Persons of the Trinity is completely God in every way, and there are not three gods.
- All in the Trinity are equal in authority, even if they have different roles to fulfil.

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<sup>29</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Man's Quest For God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*. (Santa Fe, NM: Aurora, 1998), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *St. Augustine on St. John: Commentary on St John's Gospel, Ten Homilies on St. John First Epistle, Select Sermon's on St. John's Gospel*. Matt McCune (ed.). (No Publisher, 2008), 268.

There is a creed call the Athanasian Creed (a creed is stating a structure of religious belief or faith, and is from the Latin word credo, which means 'I believe'),<sup>31</sup> which says that,

“Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the common faith.

Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will no doubt perish eternally. Now, this is the common faith: That we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither mixing their persons nor dividing their nature.)<sup>32</sup> (I would encourage you to read the rest of this creed as it outlines the Trinity quite clearly).

It has rightly been said that,

“We worry a great deal about the problem of church & state. Now, what about the church & God? Sometimes there seems to be greater separation between the church & God than between the church & state.”<sup>33</sup>

As His church have we lost our wonder of God? Have we lost our God desire, overwhelmed with self-attachment and blind desires? Do our hearts tremble and stir with the eternal flutter as we behold our God in staff meetings? Are we intoxicated with the rush of awe for our supreme God on a Monday at work, study or at home? Are we heavy with wonder, pregnant with reverence feeling grandeur for God when playing with our children or grandchildren? Do we blush in reverence in the presence of a holy God when on our computers, phones and tablets? How will you relate to the triune God each day of this week?

If we have the Trinity living in us and we are part of the church, then we need to continually relate to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand that we worship the three persons of the Trinity are all one God. It has been said that,

“Man becomes what he worships.”<sup>34</sup>

So if we are to become more Christ-like, we need to make sure that we are worshipping God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At times as Jesus pointed out (Matt 6:9 we need to talk to our heavenly Father. At other times, we may need to talk with our Saviour (Eph 5:23); and then as our joint heir Rom 8:17). Then there are times that we will not know the Father's will or how to pray (Rom 8:26-27), or are not sure how to act in a situation (Gal 5:22-23) or feel weak in doing His will (1 Cor 12:1-11) this may be the time to talk with the Holy Spirit.

The Triune God is to be our main focus in a life of worship. We need to know what and why we believe regarding God and how this affects our lives on Monday. God is One eternal being existing in three Persons is a mystery, but this should draw us to Him and not push us away from Him. Kerry McRoberts ends his chapter on the Trinity with the following hymn by Reginald Heber (the Bishop of Calcutta in the 18th century). It is an appropriate way to conclude and summarise this section on the doctrine of God.

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name  
In earth, and sky and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in three Persons blessed Trinity!”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> “Athanasian Creed.” <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/athanasian-creed> (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017).

<sup>32</sup> “Athanasian Creed.” <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/athanasian-creed> (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *I Asked For Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology*. (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2017), 34

<sup>34</sup> Heschel, *Man's Quest For God*, 127.

<sup>35</sup> McRoberts, Kerry. D. “The Holy Trinity.” In *Systematic Theology*. Stanley M. Horton (ed.). (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1998), 167-168.