

7. Explain the doctrine of the Trinity and provide its biblical basis.

I. Breakdown the Question

- A. What is the Doctrine of the Trinity?
- B. What are the distinct parts of the Trinity?
 - 1. God is three persons.
 - a. God the Father is fully God.
 - b. God the Son, Jesus Christ, is fully God.
 - c. God the Holy Spirit is fully God.
 - 2. Each Person is God.
 - 3. There is one God.
- C. How do they interact with each other?

II. What is the doctrine of the Trinity?

- A. “We may define the doctrine of the Trinity as follows: *God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.*”¹
- B. “The word *trinity* means ‘tri-unity’ or ‘three-in-oneness.’”²
- C. “In one sense the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we will never be able to understand fully. However, we can understand something of its truth by summarizing the teaching of Scripture in three statements:
 - 1. God is three persons.
 - 2. Each person is fully God.
 - 3. There is one God.”³
- D. “Far from being an abstruse philosophical speculation, the doctrine of the Trinity attempts to describe and account for something biblically obvious and quite fundamental to the gospel. That fact is this: Scripture testifies from beginning to end that God is one; but it also presents three persons who are God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As we will see, there is no legitimate argument over the deity of these three persons. Their deity pervades Scripture and assures us that our salvation is from beginning to end a *divine* salvation, the work of God himself. Nor can it be debated whether the biblical God is one. Indeed, his oneness is also important to our salvation. He is God alone; there is none beside him. So none can prevent him from bringing eternal salvation to his people.

So God is one but somehow also three. This fact is difficult to understand, but it is quite unavoidable in Scripture and central to the biblical gospel.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 226.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 226.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 231.

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The doctrine of the Trinity attempts to account for this fact and to exclude heresies that have arisen on the subject. Its basic assertions are these: (1) God is one. (2) God is three (persons). (3) The three persons are each fully God. (4) Each person is distinct from the others. (5) The three are related to one another eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁴

- E. “When the universe was created God the Father spoke the powerful creative words that brought it into being, God the Son was the divine agent who carried out these words (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and God the Holy Spirit was active ‘moving over the face of the waters’ (Gen. 1:2). So it is as we would expect: if all three members of the Trinity are equally and fully divine, then they have all three existed for all eternity, and God has eternally existed as Trinity (cf. also John 17:5, 24). Moreover, God cannot be other than he is, for he is unchanging...Therefore it seems right to conclude that God necessarily exists as Trinity—he cannot be other than he is.”⁵

III. What are the distinct aspects of the Trinity?

A. God is three persons. (Matt 28:19; 1 John 5:7 *KJV*)

1. “The fact that God is three persons means that the Father is not the Son; they are distinct persons. It also means that the Father is not the Holy Spirit, but that they are distinct persons. And it means that the son is not the Holy Spirit.”⁶
 - a. **Matt 3:16-17** *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; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’*
 - b. **Gen 1:26** *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .”*
2. God the Father is separate from God the Son.
 - a. John 1:1-2, 14
 - b. John 17:24
 - c. Heb 7:25
3. God the Holy Spirit is separate from God the Father and God the Son
 - a. John 14:26
 - b. John 16:7
 - c. Rom 8:27
 - d. 1 Cor 12:4-6
 - e. Eph 4:4-6
 - f. 1 Peter 1:2

⁴ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 423.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 241.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 231.

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B. Each Person is God.

1. God the Father is fully God.
 - a. “First, God the Father is clearly God. This is evident from the first verse of the Bible, where God created the heaven and the earth. It is evident through the Old and New Testaments, where God the Father is clearly viewed as sovereign Lord over all and where Jesus prays to his Father in heaven.”⁷
 - b. Mark 12:32
 - c. James 2:19
 - d. Eph 4:6
 - e. 1 Cor 8:6
2. God the Son, Jesus Christ, is fully God.
 - a. **John 1:1-4** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was nothing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*
 - b. **John 1:14** *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen the glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - c. John 1:18
 - d. Col 2:9
 - e. John 5:16-18
 - f. Isaiah 7:14
 - g. Matthew 14:33
3. God the Holy Spirit is fully God.
 - a. “. . . *the Holy Spirit is also fully God.* Once we understand God the Father and God the Son to be fully God, then the trinitarian expressions in verses like Matt 28:19 assume significance for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, because they show that the Holy Spirit is classified on an equal level with the Father and the Son.”⁸
 - a. “Moreover, the activity of giving new birth to everyone who is born again is the work of the Holy Spirit.”⁹
 - b. Ezek 36:26-27
 - c. Heb 10:15-17
 - d. John 14:26
 - e. Jude 1:20-21

⁷ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 233.

⁸ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 237.

⁹ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 237.

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- f. John 15:26
- g. 1 Cor 6:19-20
- h. 2 Cor 3:17

C. There is one God.

1. “Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God. The three different persons of the Trinity are one not only in purpose and in agreement on what they think, but they are one in essence, one in their essential nature. In other words, God is only one being. There are not three Gods. There is only one God.”¹⁰
2. **Deut 6:4-5**
3. Isa 45:5-6; 21-22
4. Isa 44:6-8
5. 1 Tim 2:5
6. Rom 3:30
7. James 2:19

IV. **Why is the Doctrine of the Trinity Important?**

A. Is the Doctrine of the Trinity a big deal?

1. “Yes it is, for this teaching has implications for the very heart of the Christians faith. First, the atonement is at stake. If Jesus is merely a created being, and not fully God, then it is hard to see how he, a creature, could bear the full wrath of God against all our sins.”¹¹
2. “. . . justification by faith alone is threatened if we deny the full deity of the Son. (This is seen in the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who do not believe in justification by faith alone.) If Jesus is not fully God, we could rightly doubt whether we can really trust him to save us completely.”¹²
3. “. . . if Jesus is not infinite God, should we pray to him or worship him? Who but an infinite, omniscient God could hear and respond to all the prayers of all God’s people? And who but God himself is worthy of worship? Indeed, if Jesus is merely a creature, no matter how great, it would be idolatry to worship him—yet the New Testament commands us to do so (Phil 2:9-11; Rev 5:12-14).”¹³
4. “. . . if someone teaches that Christ was a created being but nonetheless one who saved us, then this teaching wrongly begins to attribute credit for salvation to a creature and not to God himself.”¹⁴
5. “. . . the independence and personal nature of God are at stake: If there is no trinity, then there were no interpersonal relationships within the being of God

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 238.

¹¹ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 247.

¹² Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 247.

¹³ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 247.

¹⁴ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 247.

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before creation, and, without personal relationships, it is difficult to see how God could be genuinely personal or be without the need for a creation to relate to.”¹⁵

6. “. . . the unity of the universe is at stake: If there is not perfect plurality and perfect unity in God himself, then we have no basis for thinking there can be any ultimate unity among the diverse elements of the universe either.”¹⁶

V. Why is important to understand this doctrine for biblical counseling?

- A. “Biblically, it is wrong to teach in the abstract; all teaching is for life. It all involves commitment to God. Therefore, truth incarnated in life is the goal. For reaching this goal, only one method is possible—the biblical one—discipleship. Whole persons must teach whole persons; the Word must be made flesh.”¹⁷

VI. Additional Resources

1. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 226-257.

B. ACBC Approved Reading List

1. John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 421-518.
2. Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption, The Jay Adams Library* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 53-56, 88-93.
3. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 291-313.
4. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 51-60.
5. John MacArthur, ed., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 189-207.
6. Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 198-203.
7. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Complete ed (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2018), 82-99.

¹⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 247.

¹⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 247-248.

¹⁷ Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 91-91.