

## *God is a Trinity*

# Unfolding Revelation

## **The Trinity is Progressively Revealed in Scripture**

The term trinity is never used in either testament. That the concept of the Trinity is Biblical is clear when one examines the relevant texts. The doctrine of the Trinity seeks to fully affirm that there is one God while making sense of and honoring the way in which God is also revealed as three. On the one hand, robust monotheism was central to Israel's understanding of God. On the other, the deity of Jesus Christ, and His distinctiveness from God the Father is essential to Biblical Christianity. How can such central concepts (not to mention the distinctiveness and deity of the Holy Spirit) be held together without creating a nonsensical contradiction? We need to recognize that God's self-revelation in Scripture is progressive. While the NT teaching leads us clearly to the Trinity, the OT teaching reveals aspects of it that are only plain in hindsight. As many have said, the doctrine of the Trinity is *implicit* in the Old, and *explicit* in the New. Even then, Berkhof points out, "The Bible never deals with the doctrine of the Trinity as an abstract truth, but reveals the trinitarian life in its various relations as a living reality, to a certain extent in connection with the works of creation and providence, but particularly in relation to the work of redemption. Its most fundamental revelation is a revelation given in facts rather than in words."

## **It is Implicit in the Old Testament**

As we noted above, the clear emphasis throughout the Old Testament is on the reality that God is one. Still, it seems that the OT does not rule out the concept of God existing as a Trinity of three Persons. Enns writes, "While there is no definitive or explicit statement in the Old Testament affirming the Trinity, it is fair to say that the Old Testament allows for the Trinity and implies that God is a triune being in a number of passages." When we open the Bible we do not have to wait long to see the Trinity at Work. In Genesis 1:1 God creates the heavens and the earth. In Genesis 1:2 we are told, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Furthermore, the pronouns "us" and "our" are used as in 1:26 as God discusses the creation of man in His own image. "Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." Outside of the doctrine of the Trinity, there is no satisfactory explanation for the use of plural pronouns in this context. Grudem gives a strong example of an OT text that seems to distinguish two separate persons within the one God.

In Psalm 45:6–7 (NIV), the psalmist says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.... You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." Here the psalm passes beyond describing anything that could be true of an earthly king and calls the king "God" (v. 6), whose throne will last "forever and

ever.” But then, still speaking to the person called “God,” the author says that “God, your God, has set you above your companions” (v. 7). So two separate persons are called “God” (Heb. אֱלֹהִים, H466). In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews quotes this passage and applies it to Christ: “Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever” (Heb. 1:8).

Another example of this kind of thing is found in Psalm 110:1. “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” The question is what David intended by this. Clearly the LORD (YHWH) is the God of Israel, and David’s Lord is none other than God Himself, and yet Yahweh is described as speaking to David’s Lord. Grudem offers a Trinitarian paraphrase, which seems to capture how we should understand this text in the light of Christ: “God the Father said to God the Son, ‘Sit at my right hand.’” Both Peter and the writer of Hebrews took this to be a reference to Christ (Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13). David’s messianic prophecy contains a glimpse into the extraordinary status that the Messiah would hold at the right hand of the Father.

Isaiah 61:1 says, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.” In this verse the Messiah is described as being anointed by the LORD, and thus having the Spirit of the Lord God upon Him. With the understanding that Christ is also God, we see all three members of the Trinity at work in the ministry of Christ. The Father anoints Him, the Spirit is the element in which He is anointed, and He Himself exercises the power given Him in bringing good news and performing various acts of power and mercy. In Isaiah 63:10 indicates that the Spirit of the Lord is distinguishable from the Father (here referred to as “His Holy Spirit”) and has been grieved, “suggesting emotional capabilities characteristic of a distinct person.”

Finally, Isaiah 48:16 presents all three persons of the trinity as distinct. “Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.” Here Christ is sent by the Lord God, along with His Spirit.

Strong evidence is for a distinction of persons within the God is found in passages related to two themes in particular in the OT. More evidence for an OT witness to the distinction of persons within the Godhead is found in passages where the word or wisdom of God personified (Ps. 33:4, 6; Prov. 8:12-21). Even stronger evidence is seen in the various appearances of the Angel of the LORD (YHWH). He is at once identified with God and distinguished from Him, much the way John speaks of Christ in 1:1-3 (was God, yet with God). Examples are found in Genesis 16:7f; 21:17f, 31:11f, esp. verse 13 (“I am the God of Bethel”), Exodus 3:2 (“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.”) While in some contexts the Angel of the LORD can simply be an angel sent to accomplish something for God, He is yet at times identified as God Himself. A particularly interesting incident is recorded in Judges 6:11f.

**Judges 6:11-24** Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. 12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.” 13 And Gideon said to him, “Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.” 14 And the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” 15 And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” 16 And the LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.” 17 And he said to him, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you.” And he said, “I will stay till you return.”

19 So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. 20 And the angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them.” And he did so. 21 Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. 22 Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” 23 But the LORD said to him, “Peace be to you. Do not fear; **you shall not die.**” 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

Gideon offers worship that is not refused and then fears death upon a realization that it was the angel of the LORD. It is hard to imagine that Gideon did not immediately realize that the angel was sent from the LORD, so his realization must signify that he has come to understand that the angel in fact was the LORD Himself.

The OT data seems to lend itself very well to a distinction of persons within God, setting us up for the NT teaching on Christ and the Holy Spirit, as well as the churches later formulation of God being one in essence while three in persons.

### **It is Explicit in the New Testament**

The New Testament writers strongly affirmed the strict monotheism of the Old Testament. As James says, “You believe that God is one; you do well (2:19).” The New Testament does however take the doctrine of God a significant step further in the revelation of the as a Trinity of Persons. We will see that the churches historic

formulation of this doctrine does well to summarize the data we find in the NT. It affirms over and over again that there is a distinction of persons within God, while maintaining the monotheism that was central to the faith of Israel. The coming of Christ called for the Church to put words to what had clearly occurred. God became a man, took on flesh, and yet distinguished Himself from the Father. He furthermore sent the Holy Spirit as a third person to dwell within and empower His people—all three fully God, yet appearing together, demonstrating an eternal distinction among themselves.

Certain things about Jesus in the New Testament stand out.

1) Jesus is clearly **not** the Father. This is clear as Jesus prays to the Father (e.g. John 17), we hear the Father speak of Him in His presence (Matt. 3:16-17), He regularly speaks of the Father in the third person (e.g. John 6), He rejects His own will for that of the Father (Luke 22:42), and many other examples.

2) Jesus is yet **One** with the Father. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one (John 10:31).” Again, He said, “And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one (John 17:11).” He tells us that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 17:21), leading us to conclude with Paul that in Jesus “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9).”

3) Jesus is unmistakably identified as **God**. He accepts Thomas declaration, “My Lord, and my God!” in John 20:28 without any comment or rebuke. Jesus stirs up violence against Himself when He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58),” a clear reference to the language of God used to describe/name Himself in Exodus 3. John simply refers to Him as God in John 1:1-3, and 18, stating that the creation was “through Him,” and that He, as God, has revealed God (v.18).

4) Jesus both demonstrates and is described as having certain attributes that could only belong to **God**. He demonstrates complete authority over nature revealing omnipotence (calming the storm, Matt. 8:26–27). He claims to be eternal (John 8:58 “Before Abraham was. . .”). Through numerous passages we see that He is immortal, omnipresent (*post-resurrection prediction in Matthew 18:20*), sovereign, and worthy of worship. These are qualities that God shares with no angel, let alone a mere man.

It seems fitting to conclude that while God remains one, there is another aspect to His eternal nature that accommodates two personal distinctions within Him.

Beyond this, we see a similar relationship existing with the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father and Son. While the Father has sent the Son into the world, (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:6; 1 John 4:9), both the Father and the Son have sent the Holy Spirit (compare John 14:26; 15:26 and 16:7).

Several texts demonstrate that the while God is one, the three coexists simultaneously, they are thus coeternal, and eternally distinct. At Jesus Baptism all three Persons are

present at once. “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 my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased(Matthew 3:16-17).” We also see that Father, Son and Spirit are treated with equal dignity as equally God. Jesus commands us to Baptize disciples in the “name (*singular*) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).” We see the whole Trinity spoken of together in several of the Epistles. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 12:4-6, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” Peter writes, “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you (1Peter 1:2).”

# God is One, God is Three

**We worship one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons.**

“Let those, then, who love soberness, and are contented with the measure of faith, briefly receive what is useful to be known. It is as follows: — When we profess to believe in one God, by the name God is understood the one simple essence, comprehending three persons or hypostases.”  
-Calvin

**OUR BIG QUESTION:**

**What Does the Bible Teach About the Trinity?**

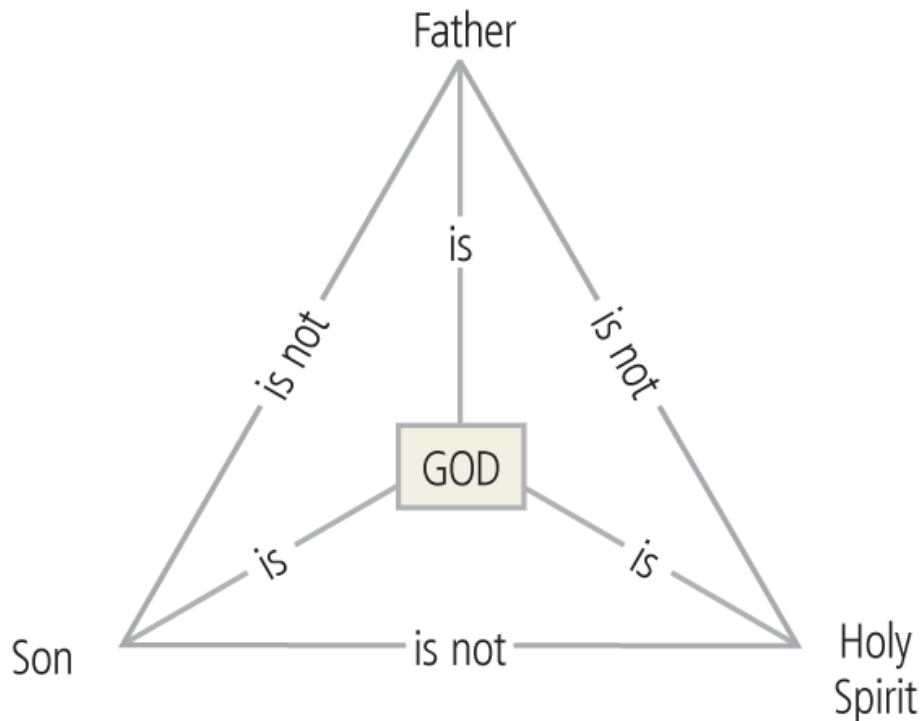
## **The Basic Idea**

The Trinity is among the hardest teachings of the Bible to understand, it is also however, one of the most important. Though the word *Trinity* is not used in the Bible, the concept of the Trinity is clearly described in the Bible. We will start by examining the three basic truths of the Trinity and take it from there.

*To understand the Trinity a person must grasp onto three truths about God:*

- First, there is one God.
- Second, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God.
- Third, God always has and always will exist in three distinct and equal persons.

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### *Distinctions of the Father, the S*

#### **There is one God**

When we say that there is one God we are affirming that, “the Source and End of all things is One.” There is but one all-powerful, Creator and Lord of all. One of the most important theological concepts in the OT is contained in the famous Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which became one of the most important prayers in Judaism. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” This is not some form of henotheism (the idea of a chief god over all other gods), but true monotheism (the idea that there is only one true God). All other gods are demonic impostors at best (Isaiah 44:9-20; and 1 Cor. 10:20).

Isaiah repeatedly presents us with an understanding of One God who stands over all things as the first and the last. “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god (Isaiah 44:6).’” Jonathan Edwards writes,

When God is so often spoken of as the *last* as well as the first, the *end* as well as the *beginning*, it is implied, that as he is the first, efficient cause and fountain, from whence all things originate; so, he is the last, final cause for which they are made; the final term to which they all tend in their ultimate issue. This seems to be the most natural import of these expressions; and is confirmed by other parallel passages.”

The New Testament, while presenting us with the concept of the Trinity nonetheless strongly affirms the bold monotheism of the Old Testament. Paul writes that, “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (1 Timothy 2:5–6).” James affirms also that, “God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder (James 2:19)!”

### **The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God**

When we say that God is One we take nothing away from the revelation that God is three. We are not saying that there are three gods, but that the One God is in a certain way also three. We will examine this further, but for now let's survey some texts that demonstrate that each of the three persons of the Trinity are in fact equally God.

#### *The Father is God*

It is clear that the Bible affirms that the Father is God. In fact most references to God in the Bible are to Him. This created a difficulty for the NT writers who seem to have been reluctant to refer to Christ as God (though see John 20:27f), which would have identified Him as identical to the Father in the minds of many of their readers.

#### *Jesus Christ is God*

- **John 1:1-3** 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
- **John 1:18** No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (NASB)
  - In both this text and the one before it we see John's attempt to make the point that Jesus is God but not the Father. This is extremely Trinitarian!
  - In exactly what sense Christ is begotten is mysterious. We can say with some confidence that it teaches us that Christ, as He exist in eternity, is the appropriate member of the Trinity to become incarnate and accomplished our redemption (see below). In other words, there is something about the Second Person of the Trinity that makes the work of the cross a fitting task for Him instead of the Father or the Spirit.
- **John 20:27-29** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “**My Lord and my God!**” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”
  - As remarkable as the statement of Thomas is, what is more telling is that we see no objection from Christ raised! He accepts it without any hesitation. This is nothing less than worship, something we see other powerful figures in Scripture reject.
    - Paul and Barnabas reject worship in Acts 14:15f.
    - An angel in Revelation 22:9
    - **Revelation 22:8-9** I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the

angel who showed them to me, 9 but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

- **Philippians 2:5-11** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, **being in very nature God**, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NIV)

### *The Holy Spirit is God*

#### **The Holy Spirit is treated as an equal to God in Matthew 28:19:**

- 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. . .

#### **The Same is true in 1 Peter 1:2:**

- “1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, in the sanctification of the **Spirit**, for obedience to **Jesus Christ** and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

#### **It is clear in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 that the Holy Spirit is God. Compare verses 6 and 11.**

- **1Corinthians 12:4** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same **God who empowers them all** in everyone.
- **1Corinthians 12:11** All these are **empowered by one** and **the same Spirit**, who apportions to each one individually **as he wills**.
  - We see here that the Spirit is identified clearly as God. More than that, He is attributed a “will” of His own thus proving Him to be personal and not some mere force or impersonal power.

#### **The various titles give to the Holy Spirit in Scripture shed light on His identity:**

<b>Titles of the Holy Spirit</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Emphasis</b>	<b>Citation</b>
One Spirit	His Unity	Ephesians 4:4
Seven Spirits	His perfection, omnipresence, and completeness	Revelation 1:4; 3:1
The Lord the Spirit	His sovereignty	2 Corinthians 3:18
Eternal Spirit	His eternity	Hebrews 9:14
Spirit of Glory	His glory	1 Peter 4:14
Spirit of Life	His vitality	Romans 8:2

Spirit of Holiness Holy Spirit Holy One	His holiness	Romans 1:4 Matthew 1:20 1 John 2:20
Spirit of Wisdom Spirit of Understanding Spirit of Counsel Spirit of Knowledge	His omniscience, wisdom, and counsel	Exodus 28:3 Isaiah 11:2
Spirit of Might	His omnipotence	Isaiah 11:2
Spirit of Fear of the Lord	His reverence	Isaiah 11:2
Spirit of Truth	His truthfulness	John 14:17
Free Spirit	His sovereign freedom	Psalms 51:12
Spirit of Grace	His grace	Hebrews 10:29
Spirit of Grace and Supplication	His grace and prayerfulness	Zechariah 12:10

### *The Trinity and the Attributes of God*

Aside from explicit statements demonstrating each Person's deity, we see that the Persons of the Trinity each possess God's attributes in such a way that they could not be less than fully God.

<b>Attributes of the Triune God</b>			
<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Son</b>	<b>Holy Spirit</b>
Life	Joshua 3:10	John 1:4	Romans 8:2
Omniscience	Psalms 139:1–6	John 4:17–18	1 Corinthians 2:10–12
Omnipotence	Genesis 1:1	John 1:3	Job 33:4
Omnipresence	Jeremiah 23:23–24	Matthew 28:20	Psalms 139:7–10
Eternity	Psalms 90:2	John 1:1	Hebrews 9:14
Holiness	Leviticus 11:44	Acts 3:14	Matthew 12:32
Love	1 John 4:8	Romans 8:37–39	Galatians 5:22
Truth	John 3:33	John 14:6	John 14:17

### **God always has and always will exist in three distinct and equal persons.**

In other words, the three persons of the trinity are coeternal and eternally distinct. The distinction of persons is an essential aspect of this doctrine. Without it we are left with the heresy of Modalism.

**Matthew 3:16-17 helps us to see that Father, Son, and Spirit are three persons, and not just three different names for the same person.**

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

### **What do we do with all of this?**

We have gathered just some of the Biblical data related to the Trinity, and we have the essential parts of this doctrine in place. There is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each fully, and eternally God. We now need to take a closer look

at the development of this doctrine in Scripture and history, and finally do our very best to try to understand how this could be and what it means for our Faith.

# One *What* & Three *Whos*

## In what sense is God One and yet Three?

We can see that God is one, and yet eternally three. What we need to work out is in what sense God can be One God and yet eternally exists in three persons. Further, we need to determine the exact relationship that exists within the Godhead between the Three Persons of the Trinity. We start by looking at the historical developments of the Doctrine, but before we do we need to get a hold of some of the key terms used in an orthodox formulation of the Trinity. We will get into detail later, but for now . . .

### God is **one** in regard to **essence**, or **substance**.

There is only one divine essence. This speaks of the nature of God. It refers to what God is in His ontological being. In this sense God is one.

### God is **three Persons**, known as **hypostaseis**, or **subsistences**.

*Hypostasis* is the Greek word for person. In this case it refers to “coequal and coeternal centers of self-awareness” within the Godhead. To say that God is three Persons is to affirm that the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is not the Father. They live rather in relationship with one another. The Father, for example, would not refer to the Son as *I* but as *you*, and vice versa. Furthermore, the Father would not say “I” when referring to the Son, but rather as “He”.

<b>Oneness &amp; Threeness Words</b>			
	<b>Greek</b>	<b>Latin</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>One</b>	<i>ousia, physis</i>	<i>substantia, essentia</i>	Being, substance, essence, nature
<b>Three</b>	<i>hypostaseis, prosopa</i>	<i>Personae</i>	Persons, subsistences, modes of subsistence

We should not let the words *hypostasis* or *person* confuse us. What we are saying is that the one God exists in an eternal relationship of three persons. For God this is possible. The confusion comes on account of the fact that this would be impossible for human beings, or any other known life form. We know of no other being for whom this is a possibility. A person in human terms is also one being. God is different. He is one being, but three persons, an impossibility for humans, but not for God. For God, this is central to who He is. The use of term “persons” seems necessary and useful, and yet it is inadequate in describing the nature of God.

J. I. Packer explanation is **extremely helpful!!**

The basic assertion of this doctrine is that the unity of the one God is complex. The three

personal “subsistences” (as they are called) are **coequal** and **coeternal centers of self-awareness**, each being “I” in relation to two who are “you” and **each partaking of the full divine essence** (the “stuff” of deity, if we may dare to call it that) along with the other two. They are not three roles played by one person (that is Modalism), nor are they three gods in a cluster (that is tritheism); the one God (“he”) is also, and equally, “they,” and “they” are always together and always cooperating, with the Father initiating, the Son complying, and the Spirit executing the will of both, which is his will also. This is the truth about God that was revealed through the words and works of Jesus, and that undergirds the reality of salvation as the New Testament sets it forth.

The fact that each Person of the Trinity is fully God was established above. The idea that each member of the Trinity is a Person (*hypostasis, susistence*) is seen in the fact that they are distinct and relate to one another, each possessing their own distinct identity with regard to the others both within the Trinity and without.

*Each of the three Persons (hypostaseis) of the trinity posses the fullness of the divine essence.*

The quote from Packer above has explained this in part already. What is important to understand here is that when we talk about Jesus we are not talking about 1/3 of God, but rather God Himself. Jesus is God in every sense of the term. He exists as God all by Himself. Paul affirmed this writing, “in Him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:19).” Grudem writes, “Within the one being of God the ‘unfolding’ of personality must allow for the existence of three distinct persons, while each person still has the whole of God’s being in himself. The difference in persons must be one of relationship, not one of being, and yet each person must really exist. This tri-personal form of being is far beyond our ability to comprehend. It is a kind of existence far different from anything we have experienced and far different from anything else in the universe.”

# Roles & Distinctions

## Within the Trinity

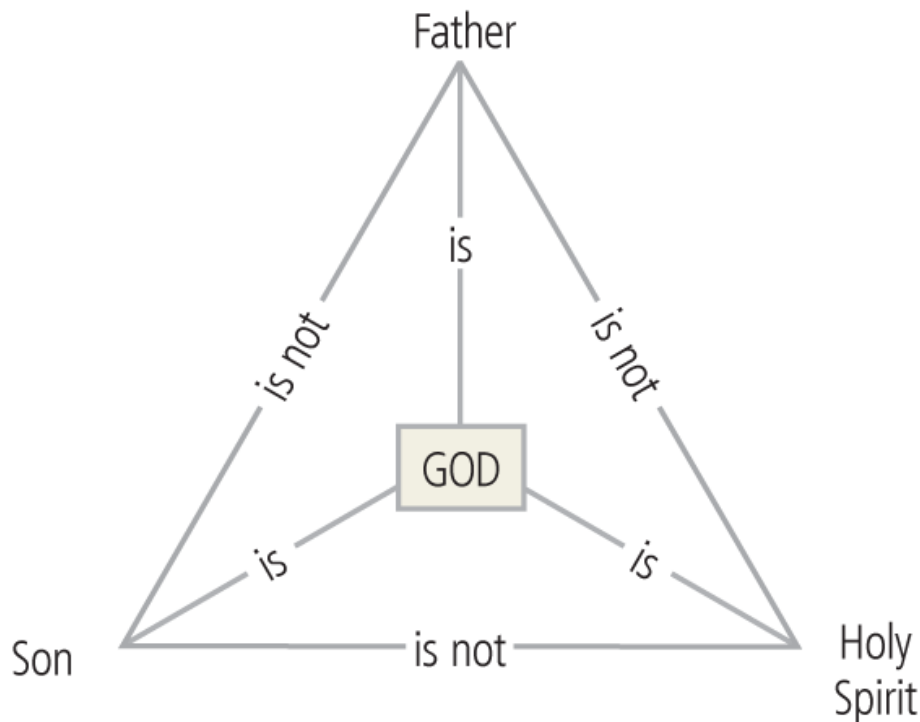
### *Each Person Possesses the Whole of the Divine Essence*

#### *Westminster Confession of Faith on the Trinity*

“In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”

Grudem writes, “. . . we must say that the person of the Father possesses the whole being of God in himself. Similarly, the Son possesses the whole being of God in himself, and the Holy Spirit possesses the whole being of God in himself. When we speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together we are not speaking of any greater being than when we speak of the Father alone, or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone. The Father is all of God’s being. The Son also is all of God’s being. And the Holy Spirit is all of God’s being.”

### *The Shield of Faith or Scutum Fidei*



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### *Distinctions of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

Thus far we have worked at holding together two essential ideas, God is one in essence and three

in persons. We now turn to question of whether there is an order of rank or roles within the Trinity that distinguishes between the function of each Person. “We cannot say, for example, that the Father is more powerful or wiser than the Son, or that the Father and Son are wiser than the Holy Spirit, or that the Father existed before the Son and Holy Spirit existed, for to say anything like that would be to deny the full deity of all three members of the Trinity. But what then are the distinctions between the persons?”

*The Economy of the Trinity*

In this case *economy* is used to speak of the order within the Trinity. While each Person of the Trinity is coequal and coeternal there are nonetheless distinctive roles that each evidently play with regard to God’s work. These distinctions are seen clearly in the works of creation and redemption. Grudmen writes,

*We see these different functions in the work of creation.*

- **God the Father spoke the creative words** to bring the universe into being.
- But it was **God the Son**, the eternal Word of God, who **carried out** these creative decrees. “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). Moreover, “in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (Col. 1:16; see also Ps. 33:6, 9; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2).
- The **Holy Spirit** was active as well in a different way, in “moving” or “hovering” over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2), apparently **sustaining and manifesting God’s immediate presence** in his creation (cf. Ps. 33:6, where “breath” should perhaps be translated “Spirit”; see also Ps. 139:7).

*In the work of redemption there are also distinct functions.*

- **God the Father planned redemption** and **sent his Son** into the world (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:9–10).
- The **Son obeyed** the Father and **accomplished redemption** for us (John 6:38; Heb. 10:5–7; et al.). God the Father did not come and die for our sins, nor did God the Holy Spirit. That was the particular work of the Son.
- Then, after Jesus ascended back into heaven, the **Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to apply redemption to us**. Jesus speaks of “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name” (John 14:26), but also says that he himself will send the Holy Spirit, for he says, “If I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7), and he speaks of a time “when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth” (John 15:26). **It is especially the role of the Holy Spirit to give us regeneration or new spiritual life (John 3:5–8), to sanctify us (Rom. 8:13; 15:16; 1 Peter 1:2), and to empower us for service (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:7–11). In general, the work of the Holy Spirit seems to be to bring to completion the work that has been planned by God the**

## Father and begun by God the Son.

Grudem concludes,

“ . . . we may say that the **role of the Father** in creation and redemption has been to **plan** and **direct** and **send** the Son and Holy Spirit. This is not surprising, for it shows that the Father and the Son relate to one another as a father and son relate to one another in a human family: the father directs and has authority over the **son**, and the son obeys and is responsive to the directions of the father. The Holy Spirit is obedient to the directives of both the Father and the Son.

Thus, while the persons of the Trinity are **equal in all their attributes**, they nonetheless differ **in their relationships to the creation**. The Son and Holy Spirit are **equal in deity** to God the Father, but they are **subordinate in their roles**.

The question remains as to whether the order within the Trinity described here is eternal, or temporal with regard to God’s work in creation and redemption. Again, Grudem gives a clear answer:

Moreover, these differences in role are **not temporary** but **will last forever**: Paul tells us that even after the final judgment, when the “last enemy,” that is, death, is destroyed and when all things are put under Christ’s feet, “then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor. 15:28).

Thus there is a relationship of subordination within the Trinity, but it is only with regard to roles, not to dignity, essence, or nature. Christ is every bit as much the eternal God as the Father, but lives in willing submission to Him. The same can be said of the Holy Spirit. This is not to be confused with the heresy of Subordinationism, in which the Son and the Spirit are understood to be inferior *in essence*! Each Person of the Trinity has the same essence, dignity, and glory, but each Person has a specific role to play in God’s economy.

### *Is there a Difference between Father, Son, and Spirit?*

On the one hand we say that there is **no difference with regard to their nature, or essence**. They are all God in everyway, possessing all of the same attributes in fullness. On the other hand they are three coeternal and eternally distinct Persons. By what are we to differentiate between the Persons? We can start by answering with names or titles. As we said, the Father is not the Son and so forth. We can continue by pointing to their works, which have been revealed in creation and redemption. The Father planned and sent the Son, the Son accomplished, the Spirit applies and so on. Many theologians have drawn a distinction between what is known as the **Ontological Trinity** and the **Economic Trinity**. The Ontological Trinity is the Trinity as it exists eternally, and necessarily. It describes what God is. The Economic Trinity describes what God has done with regard to creation and redemption. In the Economic Trinity there is clearly a designated order. The Father is in fact Fatherly to the Son who willingly obeys Him. The Spirit then serves both Father and Son in applying the work of redemption. The question is whether this economy is at all reflected in the Ontological Trinity. Is the Son eternally Subordinate in role (not in nature of course!) to the Father? And is the Spirit eternally Subordinate to both the Father

and the Son? We have already answered this in citing Grudem above. These distinctions seem to be eternal. As some have said, the Economic Trinity reveals the Ontological Trinity. If we affirm this we affirm that the eternal distinctions within the Ontological Trinity give rise to the temporal distinctions of the Economic Trinity. To put it simply, it seems that the reasons the Son submits to the Father, for example, is found in the fact that this is appropriate to His eternal relationship to the Father. It is fitting for the Son to come and accomplish redemption, and it would not have been fitting for the Father to do it. Likewise it is fitting that the Spirit be sent out to apply the work of redemption and not the Son or the Father. We understand that they are equal in every way displaying perfect unity, “with the Father initiating, the Son complying, and the Spirit executing the will of both, which is his will also.”

The eternal distinctions within the Ontological Trinity that gave rise to the Economic Trinity are described by Berkhof as follows:

There is a certain order in the ontological Trinity. In personal subsistence the Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third. It need hardly be said that this order does not pertain to any priority of time or of essential dignity, but only to the logical order of derivation. The Father is neither begotten by, nor proceeds from any other person; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son from all eternity. Generation and procession take place within the Divine Being, and imply a certain subordination as to the manner of personal subsistence, but no subordination as far as the possession of the divine essence is concerned.

**Here is the big question: what does that mean?** (No one seems to know, but everyone seems really passionate about it.) Frame comments that, “at least some of this discussion amounts to playing with words.” The distinctiveness of the Father is in being unbegotten, the distinctiveness of the Son is in being eternally begotten, and the distinctiveness of the Spirit is in eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. Though this has been debated throughout history, we can affirm it as something that Scripture bears witness to. The Scripture does seem to tell us that this is so, but what this truth in turn teaches us is another matter.

*The Son is Eternally Begotten.* Frame writes, “To say that the Son is eternally generated [or *begotten*] from the Father is to say that something about his eternal nature makes it appropriate for him to be begotten in Time.” He continues,

To summarize: the biblical data authorize us to speak of the eternal generation of the Son, and it is certainly appropriate for the church to confess the statements of the Nicene Creed quoted earlier. But they do not describe this eternal relationship in any detail. We know at least that *Son* is not an arbitrary title; the eternal Son is analogous to human sons in some way. Negatively, we should reject the idea that the Father gives existence to the Son by a creative act and the idea that the Father confers divine essence upon the Son, giving him a derived deity. Whether we confess that the Father confers sonship upon the Son should await further clarification.

He concludes, “A certain amount of reverent agnosticism is appropriate here.”

*The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.* Frame writes,

The Spirit is the member of the Trinity whom the Father and the Son send, over and over again, to do their business on earth. Unlike the Son, he is not generated or born as a

human being. He comes like breath or wind (John3), invisibly, but with an intimate relationship to creatures. He transforms them from within. We should regard this sort of ministry as appropriate to the Spirit, as generation is appropriate to the Son. It is not an accident, not an arbitrary divine choice, that the Spirit is regularly the one who *is sent*, who *descends*, who *comes* in to our world from the Father and the Son. So perhaps there is value in defining eternal procession as that quality of the Spirit which makes it appropriate for Him to receive these missions from the Father and the Son and to proceed he does into the temporal world.

But as with generation, Scripture does not give us any detailed information about the nature of the Spirit's eternal procession. Again, exhortations to theological modesty are in order.

# Good Guys & Bad Guys

## The tumultuous historical development of the doctrine.

### Tertullian, Origen and the fight against Monarchianism

Berkhof notes that the early Church Fathers had no clear conception of the trinity. Their views regarding Christ and the Spirit were varied. Some regarded Christ as coeternal with the Father while others understood Him as “impersonal reason, become personal at the time of creation.” Tertullian was the first to conceive of God in terms of a trinity, and in fact was the one who coined the term *Trinity*. Still, his work fell short of a solid orthodox statement of the Trinity. A group that has come to be called the **Monarchians** (*mono-archeæ* = “one source”) arose out of an attempt to safeguard solid monotheism. The result was an unfortunate heresy. It came in **two brands**. **Dynamic Monarchianism**, in which **the man Jesus** became indwelt by the reason of God until he **became deified**. Berkhof writes,

...the Logos was indeed *homoousios* or consubstantial with the Father, but was not a distinct Person in the Godhead. He could be identified with God, because He existed in Him just as human reason exists in man. He was merely an impersonal power, present in all men, but particularly operative in the *man* Jesus. By penetrating the humanity of Jesus progressively, as it did that of no other man, this divine power gradually deified it. And because the man Jesus was thus deified, He is worthy of divine honor, though He cannot be regarded as God in the strict sense of the word.

The **second form of Monarchianism** is known as **Moralistic Monarchianism**, which is more important for our purposes. The most important figure in this group is a man named Sebellius (c. 198–220), thus the heresy of **Modalism** is often known as **Sabellianism**. According to Sebellius, “the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are simply designations of three different phases under which the one divine essence manifests itself. God reveals himself as Father in creation and in the giving of the law, as Son in the incarnation, and as Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification.” Origen (c. 185–c. 254) combated this with a defense of the deity of Christ alongside the Father, but fell ultimately fell short in affirming that Christ was subordinate to the Father with regard to his essence.

### *The Arian Controversy*

Arius (c. 256–336) believed that God the Father was the only uncreated, eternal being. He believed that the Son had a beginning and was essentially a created being, though worthy of worship by virtue of his adoption by the Father. He was the first created being through whom God created everything as well as revealed Himself. According to Arius, God’s choice of Him was based on foreseeing His good works and moral perfection. His primary opponent was Athanasius.

Athanasius (c. 297–373) had a firm conviction that God was a unified being, not a being in which the Son and Spirit were somehow less than or inferior to the Father. Christ was in every way

eternally God just as the Father was also. He maintained that the Son was of one substance with the Father. “He felt that to regard Christ as a creature was to deny that faith in Him brings man into saving union with God.” He held the following:

- The Father and Son are of the same divine essence, or substance with “no division or separation in the essential Being of God.”
- He stressed God’s unity, but recognized three hypostases (persons) in God.
- He maintained that the Son existed as an eternally distinct Person within the Godhead, avoiding Modalism.
- He maintained that the three persons were not to be understood as three God’s, but One undivided God, avoiding Tritheism.
- He used the phrase “oneness of essence” describes God’s Being.
- God is one, yet the persons of Father and Son may “differ in other respects, as, for instance, in personal subsistence.”
- The “Son is begotten by generation, but . . . he described this generation as an internal and therefore necessary and eternal act of God, and not as an act that was simply dependent on His sovereign will.”

“The controlling factor in his construction of the truth was of a religious nature. His soteriological convictions naturally gave birth to his theological tenets. His fundamental position was that union with God is necessary unto salvation, and that no creature, but only one who is Himself God can unite us with God. Hence, as Seeberg says, ‘Only if Christ is God, in the full sense of the word and without qualification, has God entered humanity, and only then have fellowship with God, the forgiveness of sin, the truth of God, and immortality been certainly brought to man.’”

***The Nicene Creed***

Clearly the Biblical data leads us to the conclusion that God is both One and Three. The difficulty in the first few centuries of the Church was in determining exactly how God is both one and three. At the council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) Athanasius came head to head with Arius and his followers.

<b>Arians</b>	<b>Athanasius</b>
The Son had a beginning, thus was created.	The Son was eternally generated, and uncreated.
Son was created from “non-existence.”	Son eternally generated “from the essence of the Father.”
Son not of same substance with Father.	Son was <i>homoousios</i> , of one essence or substance with the Father.

Arius had the council on his side for the most part. Athanasius came out on top when the emperor threw his support behind him. They came out with this statement:

The issues was not settled for long however. Athanasius himself was unsatisfied with the manner

in which the decision was made, seeing that in the future the whim of the emperor could result in overturning the decision of the council. Debate continued and the church once again fell into a form of semi-arianism. Issues related to the exact relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son also came to the fore, arguing whether He proceeded from the Father only, or from both the Father and the Son. The issue was once further settled when the creed was revised at Constantinople in 381.

### **The Nicene Creed**

*(A. D. 325; revised at Constantinople in A. D. 381)*

We 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,  
Begotten of the Father before all worlds;  
God of God, Light of Light,  
Very God of Very God,  
Begotten, **not made**,  
Being of **one substance** with the Father;  
By whom all things were made;  
Who, for us men and for our salvation,  
Came down from heaven,  
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,  
And was made man;  
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;  
He suffered and was buried;  
And the third day he rose again,  
According to the Scriptures;  
And ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on 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.

And we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life;  
Who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son];  
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;  
Who spake by the prophets.  
And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;  
And we look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

# Heresies & Heretics

## It is wrong to get this wrong.

All heresies involving this doctrine revolve around erring with regard to one of the three truths about God we discussed above.

- Some emphasize the Oneness of God to the exclusion of the threeness of persons, by either taking away the distinction of persons (**Modalism**),
- Others deny the deity of the Son and the Spirit out of a desire to preserve the unity of God, subordinating the essence of Christ and the Spirit to the Fathers in such a way that they are not one God with Him (**Arianism**).
- Others distort and dismiss the doctrine of the Trinity, claiming that it amounts to Tritheism (**Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Muslims**).

### Trinitarian Heresies

- **Arianism:** "Arianism was founded primarily on the teachings of Arius (d. 335/336). The central characteristic of Arian thought was that because God is one, Jesus could not have also been truly God. In order to deal with the scriptural testimony to the exalted status of Christ, Arius and his followers proposed that Jesus was the highest created being of God. So although Christ was fully human, he was not fully God. Arius's teaching was condemned as heretical at the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea) in A.D. 325."
- **Subordinationism:** "A second- and third-century heresy that held that because the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father, they are not equal to the Father and are thus not fully divine." The key idea is that the Son is inferior in being or essence, even though He is eternal and divine.
- **Modalism/Sabellianism:** The "trinitarian heresy that does not view Father, Son and Spirit as three particular 'persons in relation' but merely as three modes or manifestations of the one divine person of God. Thus God comes in salvation history as Father to create and give the law, as Son to redeem and as Spirit to impart grace."

### Modern examples of error and heresy:

- Pentecostal Oneness (Modalism, includes the United Pentecostal Church and others)
- Jehovah's Witnesses (Jesus is not God, Spirit is impersonal)
- Mormons (Seemingly Tritheistic-Three distinct beings that are one in attributes, but not in essential nature)

# Mysterious & Important

**The mystery of this doctrine takes nothing away from the necessity of believing and loving it.**

**The Trinity is a Mystery (thus, all analogies and illustrations Fail).**

This is not to say that it is beyond accurate description, but to say that once we have accurately described it to the best of our human abilities it leaves us with something too great to imagine. The search for analogies and illustrations illustrates this. There are no completely satisfactory ways to think of or illustrate the Trinity. When taken to their logical conclusion, most (if not all) lead to Tritheism or Modalism. The comparison of H<sub>2</sub>O illustrates this. Many point out that water is one substance, but can exist in three forms: ice, steam and water. It seems helpful at first until we realize this is a perfect illustration of Modalism! A woman once told me that she understood the Trinity by comparing it to her husband, who is at the same time Father, Husband, Son, Friend, and several other things. When I told her that this was a dangerous analogy, again leading to a Modalistic conception of the Trinity, she simply said, “well, it helps me.” No it doesn’t! Neither does the egg, a shell, the white part, and the yolk—they add up to an egg. The Father, Son and Spirit are all equally and eternally God. The Son is God all by Himself, and is yet one substance with the Father. An egg yolk is just a part of an egg. You need the other parts to make a whole egg.

Grudem offers a more helpful approach to illustrating the Trinity referencing the inner workings of the human mind:

Our own human personalities provide another faint analogy that can provide some help in thinking about the Trinity. A man can think about different objects outside of himself, and when he does this he is the subject who does the thinking. He can also think about himself, and then he is the object who is being thought about: then he is both subject and object. Moreover, he can reflect on his ideas about himself as a third thing, neither subject nor object, but thoughts that he as a subject has about himself as an object. When this happens, the subject, object, and thoughts are three distinct things. Yet each thing in a way includes his whole being: All of the man is the subject, and all of the man is the object, and the thoughts (though in a lesser sense) are thoughts about all of himself as a person.

But if the unfolding of human personality allows this kind of complexity, then the unfolding of God’s personality must allow for far greater complexity than this. Within the one being of God the “unfolding” of personality must allow for the existence of three distinct persons, while each person still has the whole of God’s being in himself. The difference in persons must be one of relationship, not one of being, and yet each person must really exist. This tri-personal form of being is far beyond our ability to comprehend. It is a kind of existence far different from anything we have experienced and far different

from anything else in the universe.

**Mystery and Complexity do not take away from Necessity!**

People are often quick to excuse those who deny or err on the Trinity. This was my experience when the doctrine of Bishop T. D. Jakes came under question a few years ago. Many of my fellow Pentecostals didn't seem to care whether Jakes believed in the Trinity or not because they liked the other things he was saying and doing. I'm still not clear on what he believes, but we need to be clear on just how important this doctrine is for the Faith! The Trinity makes sense of certain essential Christian doctrines, and is vital for anyone who desires to experience all the fullness of what Christ died to give us. Lets look at a few of the most important examples:

*First, it assures us of the **independence of God (also known as the self-existence of aseity of God)**.* It is a common mistake to assume that God created the world because He in some way needed to. The thought is that God was lacking some sort of companionship and needed the creation in order to relieve a longing within Himself. Jesus indicates that the existence of the Godhead in Trinitarian relationship excludes any *need* for such a thing. He said in John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." It would seem rather that God graciously created us in a desire to share the glory of the intra-Trinitarian relationship that He has been enjoying so much for all of eternity! Amazing. God in His love and creativity created us to glorify Him by enjoying Him forever, but there is no indication in Scripture that He needed to do this in any way. Even when we affirm that the world was created for the glory of God we have to remember that God is eternally glorified in and through His intra-Trinitarian relationship. As Jesus said, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed (John 17:5)." We see here that He was glorified in eternity prior to the creation. Grudem writes, "The fact that God is three persons yet one God means that there was no loneliness or lack of personal fellowship on God's part before creation. In fact, the love and interpersonal fellowship, and the sharing of glory, have always been and will always be far more perfect than any communion we as finite human beings will ever have with God."

**Second, it is important for the doctrine of \_\_\_\_\_.** The person and work of the incarnate Christ make little sense apart from the doctrine of the Trinity. McRoberts writes, Non-Trinitarian views, such as Modalism and Arianism, reduce the doctrine of salvation to a divine charade. All of the basic Christian convictions centering on the work of the Cross presuppose the personal distinction of the three members of the Trinity . . . The doctrine of salvation (including reconciliation, propitiation, ransom, justification and expiation) is contingent upon the cooperation of the distinctive members of the triune God (e.g., Eph. 1:3-14). . . The Modalistic view of the nature of God abolishes Christ's mediatorial work between God and people altogether. Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21) implies the setting aside of enmity or opposition. Whose enmity is set aside? The Scriptures reveal that God is at enmity with sinners (Rom. 5:9), and in their sin, people also are at enmity with God (Rom. 3:10-18); 5:10). The Triune God is explicitly revealed in the Bible in the redemption and reconciliation of sinners to God. . .

In Modalism, the concept of Christ's death as an infinite satisfaction is lost. The blood of Christ is the sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2). The doctrine of propitiation connotes appeasement, the averting of wrath by means of an acceptable sacrifice. Christ is God's sacrificial Lamb (John 1:29). Because of Christ, God's mercy is extended to us in place of the wrath we deserve as Sinners. However, to suggest, as Modalism does, that God is one person and makes himself a sin Offering to himself, being at the same time wrathful and merciful, makes Him seem capricious. In other words, the Cross would be a senseless act as far as the concept of a sin offering is concerned: Whose wrath would Christ be averting?

McRoberts raises an important question:

All of the basic Christian convictions centering on the work of the Cross presuppose the personal distinction of the three members of the Trinity. In reflection, one may ask whether it is necessary to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity to be saved. In response, historically and theologically, the Church has not usually required an explicit declaration of faith in the doctrine of the trinity for salvation. Rather, the Church has excepted an implicit faith in the triune God as essential to one's relating to the distinctive roles of each of the divine Persons in the Godhead in the redemptive work in behalf of humanity.

**Third, the doctrine preserves the Lordship of Christ.** John Frame brings us back to where it all began:

The battle for the Trinity during the fourth century was about the lordship of Jesus. The question was whether Jesus was fully Lord, as much entitled to that designation as God the Father.

The real passion of that battle was not over metaphysics or technical language. It was over the practical religious realities of worship and salvation. Should we worship Jesus? Is he the Lord who comes to save his people? Worship is our chief duty as creatures, and salvation is our chief blessing as sinners saved by grace. In both of these areas, the doctrine of the Trinity plays a major role.

Frame helps us remember that, "the doctrine of the Trinity is not given to relieve our curiosity. It is given to make us better covenant servants and children of God's family."

**Fourth, the doctrine of the Trinity is important to the inner life of every believer.** Our relationship with God is thoroughly trinitarian. We are constantly aware that the Father has planned our redemption and sent His Son to accomplish it. Our peace with God is understood as being before the Father and through the Son. Paul writes, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1-2)." Peter writes, "To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, in the sanctification of the **Spirit**, for obedience to **Jesus Christ** and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you (1 Peter 1:1-2)."

Notice the thoroughly Trinitarian way in which Paul speaks of what has happened to those of us

who have embraced Jesus:

**Ephesians 1:11-14** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of **him** [the Father] who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in **Christ** might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised **Holy Spirit**, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

As we live out the relationship that Christ has secured for us, we do it in a Trinitarian context. We are a people who pray to the Father (generally), through the Son (only), by the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Again, Paul conceives of our ongoing relationship with God as a Trinitarian experience. He writes, "And because you are sons, **God** has sent the **Spirit of his Son** into our hearts, crying, "**Abba! Father** (Galatians 4:6)!" The Spirit of God lives within crying out to the Father catching us up in the very relationship that Christ has had with Him for all of eternity.

**Fifth, the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that submission does not necessarily indicate inferiority!**

This becomes important when considering matters related to the role of men and women in the home and in the church (Ephesians 5:22f; Col 3:15f.).

**Enter in.**

Let's not make the mistake of avoiding thoughts of the Trinity because it is difficult to conceptualize. The best way to get comfortable with the Trinity is to live in relationship with the Triune God. Approach the Father's throne knowing that Christ, His chosen high priest, has made such an approach to possible through His blood. When you come before His throne come in all of your weakness, relying with every breath upon the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower and direct you as you dare to speak to the one who spoke and all things "came to be"; the one Who "commanded, and it stood firm (Psalm 33:9)." Delight in the presence of God who has not only come to you, but has taken up residence within you. Live for the pleasure that flows from being caught up in the extravagant intra-Trinitarian fellowship of God.

# Trinity Summary

## What Did We Learn About the Holy Trinity?

### At least 5 things:

- First, there is one God.
- Second, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God.
- Third, God always has and always will exist in three distinct and equal persons.
- Fourth, a good way to think of the Trinity is that there is one What and three Whos—*One God in Three Persons*.
- Fifth, this doctrine is mysterious, yet definable and essential to a Biblical faith.

### Berkhof gives us a solid summary of everything we've worked through here:

- There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence (ousia, essentia).
- In this one Divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.
- The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order (the Economy of the Trinity).
- There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished.
- The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.