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# THE TRINITY

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# INTRODUCTION

When we read through the Scriptures we see many times where the Father, the Son and the Spirit are all referred to as God. We can safely conclude that God is three distinct people. Yet, when we study Scripture we see many times where God is referred to as one. This idea that God is three distinct people who live in perfect oneness is called the trinity.

The Bible teaches us that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are all equally God and that they exist in perfect oneness. It teaches us that they are all three individual people who are capable of distinct thought, feeling and action. It also teaches us that these three divine beings all exist and act together in perfect oneness.

This study is a brief look into the nature of God and the whole idea of the trinity. It walks us through the Bible to show us that each member of the trinity is equally God and to show us how God can be both three and one so that we can have confidence in our worship.

# THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the trinity is the idea that **God is three in one.**

It is worth noting at the start that the Scriptures do not use the word trinity. The word trinity is made up of the two words tri meaning three and unity referring to perfect oneness. This word was coined by Tertullian in about 200 AD to describe how God is three and one. Even though Scripture does not use the word trinity it does describe God as three and one.

**1 John 5:7 (NKJV) For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.**

# God is three

Scripture reveals that God is three.

We see the plurality of God right from the beginning in the Genesis account. Genesis 1:1-2 says “In the beginning God...”. The Hebrew word for God used here is “elohim” which is the plural form. A literal translation of this could be “In the beginning Gods...”. Genesis 1:26 goes on to say “God [elohim, plural] said let us make man in our image” and Genesis 3:22 says “The LORD God [elohim, plural] said, behold the man is become as one of us”. Notice God doesn’t say “let me make man in my image” but “let us”. Right in the beginning we see that God is more than one.

We also see many references to the Father, the Son and the Spirit as God throughout the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

# The Father is God

**Romans 1:7 (NIV) To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Romans 15:6 (NIV) ...so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 1:3 (NIV) Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Galatians 1:3 (NIV) Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

**Ephesians 1:3 (NIV) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.**

**Philippians 4:20 (NIV) To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

# The Son is God

**Isaiah 9:6 (NIV) For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

**Matthew 14:33 (NIV) Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."**

**Matthew 28:17-19 (NIV) When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**John 10:30-33 (NIV) I and the Father are one." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do**

you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

John 1:1-3,14 (NIV) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:18 (NIV) No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Philippians 2:5-6 (NIV) Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...

Revelation 1:17-18 (NIV) When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First



**and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**

## **The Spirit is God**

**Matthew 3:16 (NIV) As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.**

**John 4:24 (NIV) "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."**

**Romans 8:9 (NIV) You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.**

**Romans 8:14 (NIV) ...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**

**1 Corinthians 2:10 (NIV) ...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.**

**1 Corinthians 3:16 (NIV) Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?**

## **God is one**

**Deuteronomy 6:4 (NIV) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**

**Mark 12:29 (NIV) "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"**

**Romans 3:29-30 (NIV) Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised**

**through that same faith.**

**Galatians 3:20 (NIV) A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.**

The Old and New Testament Scriptures reveal that God is one.

When Scripture talks about God being one it is speaking in the sense of oneness rather than numerical unity. Deuteronomy 6:4, for example, refers to God as one. This word one used here is the Hebrew word ehead. Echad can mean one in the sense of collective unity and is different from the Hebrew word yachad, which refers to numerical unity. We see this in Ezra 3:1, where it says that “the people gathered as one [echad] man”. We see this same concept of oneness in the New Testament Scriptures.

**John 17:20-23 (NKJV) “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You**

**sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”**

While Jesus’ prayer in John 17 gives us insight into God’s heart for unity within the church, it also gives us insight into the way that Jesus is one with the Father. Jesus prayed that the church may be one in the same way that He is one with the Father. Jesus is obviously not asking the Father for the church to be numerical one. He is not asking that we all become the same person. Jesus is asking for oneness. When Jesus prays for the church to be one in the same way that He is one with the Father this tells us that Jesus and the Father are a collective unity rather than a numerical unity.

When Scripture talks about how God is three it is referring to how God is three distinct persons. This is a real distinction. All three divine beings are equally God and all three beings have a unique mind, emotions and will.

When Scripture talks about God's oneness it is referring to how God is one in nature (one nature in three persons), one in character (one in perfect love), one in cooperation (God works together as one in creation, redemption, etc) and one in mutual love (each member of the trinity prefers one another in love).

## The trinity

The Father, Son and Spirit are all equal<sup>1</sup>. The Son is not lesser or inferior to the Father and the Spirit but

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus says "the Father is greater than I" in John 14:28 (NKJV). Some people mistakenly believe that this means that Jesus is a lesser God or that He is not God at all, but this goes against the many Scriptures that show that Jesus is God and equally worthy of our worship. When Jesus said that the Father is greater He wasn't referring to the Father's essence or divinity but the Father's function or position within the Godhead. In Revelation 20:12 John says "I saw the dead, great and small, stand before God". When John said this he wasn't saying that some people were more human than others or any better than others. He was referring to people's earthly position and power. He was referring to how kings, prime ministers and the richest people in the world will stand next to the poor and seemingly insignificant.

co-equal with the Father and the Spirit (e.g., see Philippians 2:6 & John 5:18). The Spirit is not lesser or inferior to the Son and the Father but co-equal with the Son and the Father (e.g., see 2 Colossians 3:17).

The Father, Son and Spirit are all distinct Persons with unique characteristics. The Father is uniquely the source and the architect who is invisible and dwells in immense light so that no man can approach Him or see Him. The Son is uniquely the visible revelation of God's fullness in human form, the word, the saviour, the priest, the mediator and the sacrificial lamb. The Spirit is uniquely the inspirer, revelator, illuminator of the word and the anointing and is symbolised as rivers, rain, fruit, oil, fire, wind and a seal.

Each member of the Godhead is unique and has a different role. The Father is the first person in operation (the first cause, the beginning, the source), the Son is the second person in operation (the submitted son, obedient to the Father's will), and the Spirit is the third person in operation (the servant, pointing to the Father and the Son). Although there is an order in the Godhead, the Scriptures reveal and emphasise oneness in the Godhead. The Scriptures show us that the Father, Son and Spirit are one in all

that they do and that they honour, serve and glorify each other Member as more important than themselves. The way that the Father, Son and Spirit interact with each other is the model for our relationship with God and with each other

The Father and Son and Spirit all work together in everything that they do. We see cooperation within the trinity in creation (i.e., the Father spoke, the Son was the word and the Spirit was the activating power) and in redemption (i.e., the Father planned redemption, the Son accomplished redemption and the Spirit applies redemption).

Each member of the trinity is fully God and equally worthy of our worship. When we study scripture we see that the general Scriptural pattern is in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. We live in the Spirit, we come to the Father through the Son, and we worship the Father. I say that this is a general pattern because when you study the functions of the Father, Son and Spirit in the Bible you will see that the Father, Son and Spirit are one in all they do and this oneness invades our life.

# Conclusion

We need an understanding of God that emphasises His threeness and His oneness. If we just emphasise God's oneness then we can develop an idea of God as a numerical one which is false. Conversely, if we just emphasise God's threeness then we can develop an idea of God as three separate Gods which is also false.

The truth is that God is three distinct people who live in perfect oneness. Each member of the trinity is unique in their characteristics, function and operation and each member is one in nature or essence, character, cooperation and one in mutual love.