

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
Robert McLaughlin Bible Ministries

DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Point 1. Definition.

The word “trinity” is not found in the Bible. It is a technical theological word coined in the fourth century A.D. to describe a theological concept. The doctrine of the trinity recognizes God as being one in essence but three persons who possess equal, perfect, eternal and infinite identical essence. Therefore, trinity is used to describe three persons in one Godhead.

There is only one divine nature or being. This divine being is tri-personal, involving distinctions between the Father, Son, and Spirit. These three persons are joint partakers of exactly the same nature and majesty of God.

So, there is one true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coequal, coeternal persons. They are the same in substance or essence, but distinct in subsistence or continuing in existence.

The trinity is a revealed doctrine; it is undiscoverable by the natural reason of man. Since each person of the Trinity has the same essence, God is described as one; but they are different as persons.

Distinctions are made between the members of the Trinity, as described in 2Co 13:14.

2Co 13:14 *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God [the Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”*

The word “trinity” was first used by Tertullian in the second century to designate a Biblical doctrine. The doctrine of the trinity was confirmed by the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. After much controversy, they finally came to a correct understanding of the doctrine. Therefore, the doctrine of the trinity is defined as: **God is one in essence but three coequal, coeternal, and coinfinite persons.**

When divine essence is the subject, God is said to be one. When divine persons are the subject, distinction is made between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

For this reason we have different Hebrew names for God. The plural noun Elohim implies more than one person in the Godhead. The singular noun **JHWH** (**Adonai, Jahweh, or Jehovah**) is used to distinguish between the persons. **Elohim** emphasizes the **one essence** of God. **Jehovah** emphasizes **one person in the Trinity, usually God the Son.**

Point 2. Scripture Verification.

The plural pronoun for God, **Elohim**, is used in such passages as Gen 1:26, 3:22.

Gen 1:24 *“Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind’; and it was so.”*

Gen 1:25 *“And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.”*

Gen 1:26 *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”*

In Gen 3:22 *“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.’”*

Isa 6:8 *“Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”*

Gen 11:1 *“Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.”*

Gen 11:2 *“And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.”*

Gen 11:3 *“And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.’ And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.”*

Gen 11:4 *“And they said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’”*

Gen 11:5 *“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.”*

Gen 11:6 *“And the Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.’”*

Gen 11:7 *“Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”*

Joh 17:21 *“that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, [art] in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.”*

We also have passages like Psa 110:1 *“The Lord [God the Father] said to my [David’s] Lord [God the Son].”*

This distinction is also delineated in Psa 2:7 *“I will announce the decree of the Lord [God the Father]. He said to Me [God the Son], ‘You are My Son [deity of Jesus Christ]. This day [day of incarnation] I have begotten You.’”* This is quoted three times in the New Testament, in Acts 13:33, Heb 1:5, and Heb 5:5.

Isa 48:16 ***“Come near to Me; listen to this. From the first, I have not spoken in secret. From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God [God the Father] has sent Me [God the Son], and His Spirit [God the Holy Spirit].”***

Mat 28:19 ***“Go therefore and make disciples [Bible students] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”*** This is a reference to the pre-Canon period of the Church-age in which water baptism was practiced to illustrate the baptism of the Holy Spirit by the use of ritual.

In Joh 10:30, Jesus said to the crowd, ***“I and the Father are one.”*** He was referring to divine essence.

The Father and the Son are two distinct persons in the Godhead, but they have identical essence.

Joh 14:16 ***“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.”***

The next verse explains that the Counselor is said to be ***“the Spirit of truth; He abides with you and He will be in you.”***

Thomas called Jesus both Lord and God when he saw Him in His resurrection body. Joh 20:28 ***“Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord, My God.’”***

Another passage which proves the Trinity is 1Co 12:4-6, ***“There are a variety of spiritual gifts, but the same Holy Spirit. And there are a variety of ministries [opportunities for Christian service], but the same Lord [God the Son]. And there are many different kinds of activities, but the same God [God the Father], who works all of them in all persons.”***

1Pe 1:2 ***“According to the foreknowledge of God [the Father] by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ.”***

Rev 1:4-6 ***“John, to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and prosperity from Him who is [present state of the glorified Christ at the right hand of the Father], who has always existed [Jesus Christ as eternal God prior to the Hypostatic Union], who is to come [Second Advent], and from the seven spirits before the throne [God the Holy Spirit as the power system in both Christocentric dispensations], and from Jesus Christ, the dependable witness, the first formed from the dead, also the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and has liberated us from our sins by means of His blood, and He has provided for us a royal power as priests to God, even the Father.”***

Point 3. Though one in essence, God is three in persons.

In the doctrine of the unity of God, there is only one essence or substance. In the doctrine of the persons of the Godhead, the individuality of the Father, Son, and Spirit is preserved against the notion that there are only modes of God. The idea of modes of God is a false doctrine dating back to the fourth century. It implies that one God has various modes for various purposes in dealing with man, whether in creation or at salvation.

God is one, yet in Himself, He is three separate and distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. From all eternity past, God has always been one in essence, but three individual persons.

Argumentation for the trinity begins in Genesis with the use of plural pronouns for God.

Gen 1:26 ***“Let us make man in Our image.”***

Gen 3:22 ***“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.’”***

Isa 6:8 ***“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I [God the Father] send, and who will go for Us?’”***

When a distinction is made between the persons of the Trinity, it refers to a specific activity of specific persons in the Godhead. 1Th 1:2-3 ***“We give thanks to God [God the Father] always for you, making mention of you in our prayers, constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God our Father.”***

So distinction is made between the Father and Son. They have identical essence, but they are two separate and distinct persons.

1Pe 1:2 ***“According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ.”***

Tit 3:5 ***“He [Jesus Christ] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.”***

Distinction is made between our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Holy Spirit.

Tit 3:6 ***“Whom He [God the Father] poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”***

2Ti 1:13-14 ***“Retain the standard of sound doctrine which you have heard from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasures which have been entrusted to you [the deposit of Bible teaching].”***

Jesus Christ is the only visible member of the Trinity, Joh 1:18, 6:46; 1Ti 3:16; 1Jo 4:12.

Point 4. The Distinctive Function of the Trinity.

While the Bible distinguishes between the members of the Trinity, it refers to the activity of specific persons in the Godhead.

All three members of the Trinity provided salvation. God the Father planned salvation according to Isa 14:27; Joh 4:34, 5:17, 12:44; 1Co 8:6; Eph 3:11. God the Son executed salvation on the cross, Joh 4:34, 5:17; 1Pe 2:24, 3:18; Rom 5:8; Heb 10:7. God the Holy Spirit reveals the message of salvation. Under the doctrine of common grace, He makes the Gospel perspicuous, Joh 16:8-11.

Each person of the Trinity indwells the body of every Church-age believer, and distinction is made between them. The indwelling of God the Father is found in Joh 14:23; Eph 4:6; 2Jo 9. God the Son indwells us according to Joh 14:20, 17:22-23; Rom 8:10; 2Co 13:5; Gal 2:20; Col 1:27; 1Jo 2:24. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is found in Rom 8:11; 1Co 3:16, 6:19-20; 2Co 6:16. Only in this unique Church-age does God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit indwell us.

Each person of the Godhead provides divine power for the function of the PPOG. The omnipotence of God the Father is related to our **portfolio of invisible assets**. He is also the designer of the **predesigned plan of God** (PPOG). The omnipotence of God the Son is related to the **preservation of the universe** as well as the **perpetuation of human history**. The omnipotence of God the Holy Spirit is related to **residence, function, and momentum** inside the PPOG.

Point 5. Though three in persons, God is one in essence.

There is one God, yet three persons who possess every attribute of deity equally, perfectly, and eternally. This means that there is a **unity of essence** and a **plurality of persons** belonging to the same divine being. The persons of the Godhead are not separate and independent beings, such as Peter, James, and John; but three persons with **identical essence** eternally and inseparably united as one in essence. They are three individuals, Father, Son and Spirit, yet one God. None of these is God without the other, and each with the other is God.

God is one in essence yet three distinct persons, and these persons have identical substance.

Point 6. Illustrations of the Trinity.

The illustration given in the Bible is that God is light.

1Jo 1:5 *“And this is the message which we have heard from Him and we communicate to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness.”*

In Joh 1:5 *“The light shined in darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it.”*

1Ti 6:13 *“I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,”*

1Ti 6:14 *“that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,”*

1Ti 6:15 *“which He will bring about at the proper time - He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords;”*

1Ti 6:16 *“who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.”*

Now, light can be regarded from two different viewpoints. Light can be regarded from the standpoint of the colors in the spectrum which illustrate the essence of God. For

example, every ray of light from the sun is pure white, and yet it contains all the colors of the spectrum in light waves or particles of light. Particles of light operate on different waves, which is how we see color. All color in the world depends on light. When all light is reflected from an object, the object is white. When light is absorbed in an object, the object is black.

Every ray of light has three primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. When a ray of light strikes an object so that the red and yellow are absorbed, the color reflected is blue. If the yellow and blue are absorbed, its color is red. So when a ray of light strikes any object, certain parts are absorbed and certain parts are reflected. The secondary colors are orange, green, and purple, and when certain colors are combined they produce other colors. For example, red plus yellow equals orange, and blue plus yellow equals green.

The point is that every color is in every ray of light. What colors are absorbed determine the color of an object as it reflects that light. So light from the standpoint of color illustrates the essence of God. For just as God is one, light is one. However, light has many colors, just as God has many different attributes in His essence. And under certain conditions, you see certain attributes of God.

Light can also be regarded from the standpoint of its composition. Light is one substance, but it is composed of three different properties: **actinic**, **luminiferous**, and **calorific**.

1) Actinic light is a ray of light of short wavelengths that produces photochemical effects. Photochemical effects are related to the effects of light on chemical systems. Actinic light is neither seen nor felt, a perfect illustration of God the Father.

2) Luminiferous light is light produced as a result of heat. Luminiferous light is both seen and felt, a perfect illustration of God the Son.

3) Calorific light is light converted into heat. Calorific light is not seen but felt, a perfect illustration of God the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the composition of light is analogous to the three persons in the Godhead who are one. Light is one with three properties. God is one in essence but three persons.

Another illustration of the Trinity, though not as good, is an egg. The yoke, white, shell are three parts, but there is only one egg.

Point 7. The Concept of the Trinity.

God is one in essence or substance. God is three **coequal**, **coeternal**, and **coinfinite** persons in that one essence. When divine essence is the subject, God is revealed as one. When divine persons are the subject, God is revealed as three separate and distinct persons. In the unity of God, there is only one essence or one substance. In the persons of the Godhead, there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Eph 4:4-6 *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called with reference to one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, even the Father of all.”*

The subject of this paragraph in Eph 4 is unity among the royal family of God. Verses 4-6 teach that just as there is unity in the Trinity, so in principle there is unity in the body of Christ.

Verse 4 teaches there is ***“one Spirit.”***

Verse 5 teaches there is ***“one Lord.”***

Verse 6 teaches there is ***“one God, the Father of all.”***

Point 8. Summary of the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Trinity is not a Biblical word, but a technical, theological term to designate the three-fold manifestation of one God as Father, Son, and Spirit. God is one in essence who exists eternally in three distinct, coequal, coeternal persons.

God is one, Gal 3:20; Jam 2:19. The Son (Joh 1:1, 14:9; Col 2:9) and the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 1Co 3:16) are also fully God, yet they are distinct from the Father and from each other. The unified equality and yet distinction is seen in the triactic references to three persons, as noted in 2Co 13:14; Eph 4:4-6; 1Pe 1:2.

The Old Testament reveals a plurality of persons in the divine name of **Elohim**, as well as in the plural pronouns of Gen 1:26 and 11:7, the plural verbs of Gen 11:7 and 35:7, the identity of the angel of the Lord as God in Exo 3:2-6 and Jud 13:21-22, and the references to the Spirit in Gen 1:2 and Isa 63:10.

These all add up to the fact that God is one in essence but three separate and distinct personalities.

Num 6:22 ***“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,”***

Num 6:23 ***“Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:’”***

Num 6:24 ***“The Lord bless you, and keep you;”***

Num 6:25 ***“The Lord make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you;”***

Num 6:26 ***“The Lord lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.”***

Num 6:27 ***“So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them.”***

Isa 6:3 ***“And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.’”***

Let’s take the body of Christ as an illustration.

1Co 12:12 ***“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.”***

1Co 12:13 ***“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”***

1Co 12:14 ***“For the body is not one member, but many.”***

Ecc 12:1 ***“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’;”*** The word Creator is the plural of **bara** which is **bowraeykaa**.

Pro 9:10 *“The respect of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One [qadoshiym - plural - Holy Ones] is understanding.”*

Job 35:10 *“But no one says, ‘Where is God my Maker [the plural of asah which is ‘osaay - Makers], Who gives songs in the night.’”*

Isa 54:5 *“For your husband is your Maker [plural], Whose name is the Lord of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One [plural] of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth.”*