

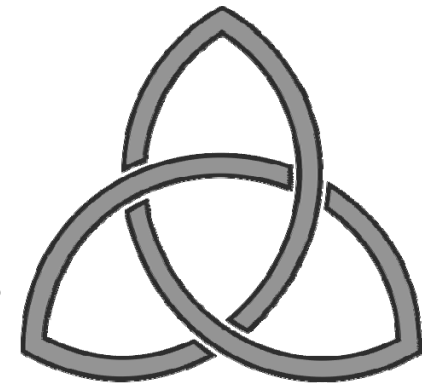
nal, since does not appear in any ancient text of the New Testament and is quoted by none of the Greek Fathers. It began to appear in manuscripts of the Old Latin and Vulgate families from the sixth century onwards. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971), pp. 716-718.

4. Jehovah's Witnesses sometimes ignorantly assert that it should be translated "the Word was a god" (trying to demonstrate that Jesus was a divine being, but not on the level of the Father), but clearly they misunderstand the Greek grammar. A careful study on the divinity of Christ can be found in Bruce M. Metzger, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ," *Theology Today*, April 1953, pp. 65-85.
5. Ralph F. Wilson, "Six Reasons Why Mormonism Can't Be True Christianity."
6. Ralph F. Wilson, "Seven Ways Jehovah's Witnesses Distort True Christianity."
7. Robert M. Bowman, Jr., "Oneness Pentecostalism and the Trinity." This is a careful and thoughtful article that explains and then refutes Oneness views of the trinity. <http://www.gospeloutreach.net/optrin.html>
8. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Trinity," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans, 1979-1988) 4:914-921. Plantinga, a systematic theologian from the Reformed tradition, is very careful in the way he states his conclusion based on the Bible evidence: "In sum, the NT does testify to the Spirit's distinct personhood and divinity, but mutedly and ambiguously. The Spirit in the NT is personally less distinct than the Father and Son, and His divinity less clearly stated; He appears as a nearly transparent agent for God and Christ. One properly concludes that the NT is overall clearly binitarian in its data, and probably trinitarian" (p. 917).
9. Though in English we sometimes refer to ships with a feminine gender as "her sails."
10. C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Second Edition, Westminster Press, 1978), p. 482, commenting on John 15:26. See also George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 295.
11. See Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Harvest House, 1993), chapter 8. Citing the New World Translation of Genesis 1:2.

4 Reasons Why I Believe in the Trinity

By Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

- Is Jesus God?
- Is the Holy Spirit a Person or an impersonal Force?
- Why do Oneness Pentecostals, Unitarians, and Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Trinity?
- How can God be Three and One at the same time?
- What does the Scripture actually teach about the Trinity?



What is God like?

You can make up your own god, a god that fits all your preconceptions. Or you can study what God reveals about himself, and from that data seek to understand more about him.

I'm convinced from studying the Bible since childhood that you can't understand God, especially in the New Testament, unless you properly discern the relationship of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We've got to deal with this, and simplistic answers won't do. Fortunately, God doesn't follow our logic; we must be humble enough to follow his. I'm convinced that the New Testament teaches the trinitarian nature of God — an essential unity of God, who is made up of three distinct Persons.

I'm going to explain why I believe this as simply as I can, but don't let my simplicity shroud the fact that this is a very complex subject. Many, many volumes have been written about it. It is complex, make no mistake. And frankly, I feel like a toddler trying to wade in the ocean, so I'm dependent upon what the Bible reveals for a hand to hold onto as I explore God.

Now you'll hear detractors say things like: "The word 'trinity' doesn't appear anywhere in the Bible." And that's right, it doesn't. More on that in a moment. People also say things like "three can't be one," and they're right — if we were talking about simple mathematics. What we are talking about, however, is a complex relationship, not a simple equation. So I propose we gather our understanding from the Bible itself, not from a detractor's caricature or misunderstanding.

This is not a question of whether you or I can wrap our minds around the concept of the trinity. Electrons make

nature because some groups specifically deny that the Holy Spirit is a divine being. The Jehovah's Witness New World Translation, for example, sometimes even omits the word "Spirit" and substitutes the phrase "God's active force" in its place (hardly a faithful translation!), a phrase that strips away any sense of personhood.¹¹

Conclusion

There is much, much more that could be said about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But I have tried to keep my points simple. Even though the New Testament doesn't use the word "trinity," it is clear to me, as I have demonstrated above, that an honest reading of the New Testament must conclude that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are spoken of as both divine beings, and distinct from one another — and that the New Testament affirms monotheism, the essential oneness and unity of God.

While some later theological statements about the trinity go beyond what is taught in the New Testament, I believe that the New Testament clearly teaches the central concepts of the trinity: The divinity of three distinct persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — who are essentially one God.

Do you and I understand this well? No. We struggle to expand our earth-bound thinking to encompass such a thought. But the New Testament requires us to stretch so that we might obey Jesus' own words to make disciples and baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

References

1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Tenth Edition; Merriam-Webster, 1993), p. 1293. I have chosen not to capitalize "trinity" since it refers to a doctrine about God, rather than to God directly. I mean no disrespect by this.
2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.5.
3. The verse in the King James Version, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 John 5:7) should not be considered part of the origi-

tament is usually an act of verbally injuring someone divine.⁸

The Spirit Performs Functions We Ascribe to Persons

But here is the solid biblical evidence that points to the Holy Spirit as a distinct person in his own right and performs functions we attribute to personhood. The Holy Spirit appoints missionaries (Acts 13:2; 20:28), he leads and directs them in their ministry (Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; 16:6-7; 1 Corinthians 2:13), he speaks through the prophets (Acts 1:16; 1 Peter 1:11-12; 2 Peter 1:21), he corrects (John 16:8), comforts (Acts 9:31), helps us in our infirmities (Romans 8:26), teaches (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 12:3), guides (John 16:13), sanctifies (Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11), testifies of Christ (John 15:26), glorifies Christ (John 16:14), has a power of his own (Romans 15:13), searches all things (Romans 11:33-34; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11), works according to his own will (1 Corinthians 12:11), dwells with saints (John 14:17), can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), can be resisted (Acts 7:51), and can be tempted (Acts 5:9).

These are functions we attribute to persons, not to impersonal forces.

In many languages, including Greek, words have masculine, feminine, or neuter genders or inflections that have no real counterpart in English.⁹ While the Spirit is often referred to by a neuter Greek pronoun, since the *pneuma* has a neuter gender in Greek (such as John 14:17, 26; 15:26), on several occasions the masculine pronoun is used, apparently to emphasize the Spirit's personhood.

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom (neuter pronoun) the Father will send in my name, he (masculine pronoun) will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26, RSV).

We see similar language in John 15:26, and especially John 16:13: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he (masculine pronoun) will guide you into all truth.” C.K. Barrett observes, “The Spirit is thought of in personal terms.”¹⁰

I make a point of the Holy Spirit's divinity and personal

lights turn on without a toddler understanding any more than how to flip a light switch. Right now passing by your head are dozens of radio and TV signals if you just had an internal tuner to sort them out and tune them in. Just because you can't hear them, doesn't mean they aren't there. The question is simply: What does the Bible teach about the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

A Definition

First, let me define what we mean by “trinity.” The trinity refers to “the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons.”¹ The word “trinity,” of course, is formed from the words “tri-” and “unity,” and describes “the state of being threefold.” In other words, to believe in the trinity means to believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are essentially one God, even while they retain their own set of differences. (Feel the fog beginning to blow around your legs....?)

John Calvin put it this way: “That Father and Son and Spirit are one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a particular quality.”² Theologians discuss complex concepts such as “one substance” (Greek *homoousios*) to make important distinctions. But I'm going to leave that aside.

I believe in the trinity for four good reasons — Bible reasons. Please consider them with me.

1. Because of the trinitarian statements in the NT

One of the main reasons I believe in the trinity is the several clear statements in the Bible that seem to put the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together on the same level.³

“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....” (Matthew 28:19)

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

“... Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood....” (1 Peter 1:2)

Of course, there are many places where the Father and the Son appear without the Holy Spirit mentioned, and the Son with the Spirit, etc. But I think these three passages are undeniably distinctive, especially Matthew 28:19. At this point, of course, the *word* “trinity” hadn’t been thought of, but the *concept* certainly seems to be present in the New Testament. That’s unmistakable.

2. Because the NT teaches monotheism AND that Jesus is divine

The second main reason I believe in the trinity is that clearly the New Testament teaches both monotheism AND that Jesus is divine.

Monotheism

Monotheism is the belief, pioneered by Judaism and affirmed by Christianity, that there is but one God. You see it often in the Old and New Testaments (for example: Mark 12:29; Deuteronomy 6:4; Acts 17:22-31; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

The Divinity of Jesus

But at the same time, the New Testament is quite clear: Jesus is divine, that is, he shares God’s nature. Jesus’ “beloved disciple” the Apostle John puts it this way:

“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.” (John 1:1-3)⁴

The Apostle Paul is equally clear about Jesus’ divinity.

“[Christ Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,

other as separate persons do.

A very common, but overly simply, explanation of the trinity is in terms of **modes or manifestations**. These are comparisons, explaining the trinity like water manifesting itself as ice, liquid water, and vapor. On the surface it seems helpful. But the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must more than manifestations of a single person, otherwise prayer and submission would be meaningless. The Bible requires us to see the Father and Jesus as one God but also as distinct persons.

4. Because the Holy Spirit is both divine and has personal attributes

The fourth biblical reason that I believe in the trinity is because the Holy Spirit is referred to in personal terms in the Bible, indicating that he, too, is a distinct person, different from either the Father and the Son.

I must concede at the outset that we don’t have nearly as much data about the interaction between the Spirit and the other persons of the trinity as we do about the relationship between Jesus and the Father. And sometimes the biblical data about the Holy Spirit seems ambiguous — at least for the purposes of trying to form a consistent explanation.

The Holy Spirit Is Spoken of as God

“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have **lied to the Holy Spirit** and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have **not lied to men but to God.**’” (Acts 5:3-4)

The Spirit Performs Divine Functions

The Holy Spirit also performs divine functions, such as judging (John 16:8-11), pouring out the love of God (Romans 5:5), giving joy (Romans 14:17), hope (Romans 8:17-25), peace (Romans 8:6), regeneration (John 3:5), and faith (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Holy Spirit can also be blasphemed (Mark 3:29 and Luke 12:10), which in the New Tes-

in the Father and the Father is in me....” (John 14:9-11)

Jesus Is Distinct from the Father

It is important, though, to recognize that the Son, Jesus, is a distinct person from God the Father. Why do I say that?

Jesus prays to the Father. (John 17). This wouldn't make any sense if Jesus and the Father were the same person or entity. Jesus is not talking to himself when he prays to the Father. That is a foolish notion. But I make the point because one branch of the Pentecostal movement is not trinitarian. They believe that the term “Father” designates Christ's deity, while “Son” designates either his humanity or his deity as manifested in the flesh. Thus they believe that while the Father is not the Son, they hold that Jesus is both the Father and the Son.⁷ Pretty confusing, isn't it!

Submission to the Father

You can also see in the New Testament that the Father (often designated in the Bible as “God” without the word Father), is the leader, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit voluntarily subservient to him. They seem to be “equal” in terms of divinity, but not in terms of role. The Father is the leader, much like in a human family of Jesus' day the father was typically the leader. No doubt that is why Jesus described the relationship as Father - Son. Paul includes a fascinating passage that explains more about this relationship:

“Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he ‘has put everything under his feet.’ Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

I think it is important to recognize that New Testament presents the Father and Son as separate persons, differentiated from one another in function, and interacting with each

being made in human likeness.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

Here is another description of Jesus' position:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him....” (Colossians 1:15-19)

Unity with the Father

I could go on and on. The New Testament asserts Jesus' divinity again and again in numerous ways beyond the scope of this article. Jesus himself affirms his unity with the Father in ways that might be considered blasphemous — unless they were actually true.

“‘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 10:30-33)

“ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’ At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.” (John 8:58-59)

“‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’

“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.’” (Matthew 16:15-17)

In Jesus' presence, doubting Thomas calls him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28) Jesus doesn't rebuke him or correct him, but comments on Thomas's faith.

At his trial, Jesus is questioned directly:

“The high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’

‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” (Mark 14:61-62)

I’ve spent some time on this because some groups today either deny monotheism, or deny that Jesus was divine in any unique sense. I’m not trying to divide, but bring clarity. A belief in the divinity of Jesus and monotheism are the bedrock of true Christianity. But it is wise to be aware that a contrary view is very much alive in our day:

The Jesus Seminar members assume that Jesus “couldn’t have said” such things about himself, therefore the disciples must have made these things up.

The Latter Day Saints seem to be monotheistic until you realize that every good Mormon male aspires to be a god to another planet, and that the founders of Mormonism saw God the Father only as the God of planet Earth, not of the universe, since he was appointed to be the God of the Earth by the council of the gods.⁵ This is not actual monotheism but a kind of polytheism.

Jehovah’s Witnesses see Jesus as a divine being, but not in any unique sense as sharing the Father’s nature. John 1:1 should read: “and the Word was God.” They translate it: “and the word was a god.”⁶

Unitarians reject the deity of Christ.

To summarize, I think it is pretty clear throughout the whole Bible that there is only one God, but at the same time the New Testament affirms again and again that Jesus is divine. Somehow you have to explain this apparent paradox. Either Jesus is God or he is only godlike. You have to face it; you can’t just ignore it.

3. Because Jesus and the Father are different persons

The third Bible reason I believe in the trinity is that the New Testament indicates many times and in many ways that Jesus and the Father are different and distinct persons.

The Father and the Son

The reason we talk about the Father and the Son is not because some theologian made it up, but because that is the way Jesus himself explained the relationship between himself and God. For example:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Matthew 11:27)

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.... He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.” (John 5:19, 23)

“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.... And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” (John 17:1, 5)

I could go on, but the Bible — especially John’s Gospel — is very clear. Jesus also asserts an essential unity between him and his Father:

“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am