

The Tri-Unity of God

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1. What is the Tri-Unity of God?

Or when Christians say that the Christian God is Triune, what should we mean?

A. The doctrine stated

"We believe that there is one, and only one, living and true God, an infinite, intelligent Spirit, whose name is JEHOVAH, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven ... that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption." (Emmanuel Bible Church, Confession, Article II)

"Now this is the true Christian faith: We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, without mixing the persons or dividing the divine being. For each person—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is distinct, but the deity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory and coeternal in majesty. What the Father is, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Spirit." (Athanasius)

Three propositions:

- i. There is one God (Deut 6:4-5)
- ii. Three persons are God (Jn 1:1-2; Acts 5:3-4)
- iii. Three persons are eternal and distinct (Matt 28:19)

Two perspectives:

- i. In essence or being: one
- ii. In person or function: three

B. The doctrine traced progressively

- i. *Creation (Gen 1:1-2, 26)*
- ii. *Fall (Gen 3:22)*
- iii. *Israel*
Law (Deut 6:4)
Prophets (Is 11:1-5; 42:1; 44: 6-8; 48:16)
Writings (Ps 45:6-7; 51:10-11; 110:1; 143:10)
- iv. *Christ*
Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke)
Conception (Lk 1:35)

Baptism (Lk 3:22)
Transfiguration (Lk 9:34)
Cross (Matt 27:46 [Heb 9:14])
Session (Mrk 16:19)

John's Gospel

Jesus' ministry (10:29-30)
The help of the church (14:16-17)
Inscripturation (14:26; 16:13-15)
The witness to Christ (15:26-27)
Mutual praise and delight (16:14; 17:1, 4, 5)
The archetype for the unity of the church (17:21-23)

v. *Church*

Its identity (Matt 28:19)
Its salvation (Eph 1:3-14; 1 Pt 1:2; Heb 9:14)
Its gifts (1 Cor 12:4-6)
Its doctrine (Rom 3:30; Gal 3:20; Jms 2:19)
Its prayer: To God, through Christ, by the Spirit (Eph 2:18)
Its edification (Jd 20-21)
Its benediction (2 Cor 13:14)
[Not 1 Jn 5:7]

vi. *Consummation (Rev 22:1, 17)*

C. Three Inadequate Explanations

- i. Three gods
- ii. Three manifestations
- iii. Two inferiors

2. How coherent is Trinitarian belief?

Or is it rational to believe in a God who is three and one?

- A. For the Christian, Scripture itself finally proves validity and truthfulness.
- B. The Scripture leads to belief in the Tri-Unity of God, and the Tri-Unity of God is essential to understanding the Scriptures.
- C. The Gospel is not possible if the Trinity is untrue.

"Remove the Trinity, and the whole Christian faith disintegrates." (Bruce Ware)

3. What the trinity means for life in our world, our homes, and our churches? Or moving from orthodoxy to orthopraxy?

A. World

- i. Community is fundamental to reality. And the Trinity is the ideal community.

"By offering the Trinity as the foundation of human sociality, Christianity gives the only coherent basis for social theory." "The Rosetta Stone of Christian social thought is the Trinity." (Nancy Percy)

- ii. Individualism and collectivism are harmfully one-sided.
- iii. The Christian conception of God promotes racial harmony (Rom 3:30).

B. Church

- i. By imaging the Trinity, a local church can be a most ideal community among humanity (Jn 17:21).
- ii. Recognize which member of the one body you are and fulfill your role (1 Cor 12:12).
- iii. Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength (Mrk 12:28-34).

C. Home

- i. Singles: Aloneness is still not good (Gen 2:18). Pursue community in a family that goes deeper than blood (Matt 12:50).
- ii. Fathers and sons: The generation gap is fixed in the life and cross of Christ (Phil 2:1-11; 1 Pt 5:5).
- iii. Father, mother, and children: Christian homes can beautifully and enjoyably image the tri-unity of God through harmonious family life.

Questions for application:

1. Can I explain to a non-believer what belief in the tri-unity of God means? Can I defend to a skeptic that belief in the tri-unity of God explains the nature of God and the persons of Father, Son and Spirit from the Scripture and that it is a highly desirable truth for the skeptic?
2. Think through your role at work. How does knowledge of the relationship and roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit correct or better inform your relationships to your boss, coworker and/or the worker under you? How does it encourage true teamwork even with a boss or a team that you don't particularly admire?
3. Think through your role at home. How does knowledge of the relationship and roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit correct or better inform your role in your home? What needs to change as a result of better understanding the implications of the Trinity?
4. As a son (or daughter), how does reading Jesus' interaction with his Father (John 14-17) inform your view of yourself in relationship to your father and mother? How does it adjust your attitude and actions toward your parents? What should you do in order to encourage unity and harmony in your home?
5. In what ways does the community of the Trinity inform our understanding of the church? What was most surprising in that section? What was most correcting?

For Further Reading (in descending order from most readable to most technical)

Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, & Spirit: Relationships, Roles, & Relevance*.

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (pp. 67-75).

Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*.

Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*.

Andreas Kostenberger and Scott Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*.

John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*.

See also the Athanasian, Nicene, and Chalcedonian Creeds.