

**CREDO
I BELIEVE**

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL



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INTRODUCTION

In this sermon series, we are exploring the basics of our Christian beliefs. One of the basic doctrines of Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. In our sermons, we will talk about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. I wanted to provide this supplemental material so that you could study the doctrine of the Trinity in-depth at home. This information is to act as a “walk alongside” the sermons provided on Sunday. My prayer is this document will provide you information about God that will lead to a deeper relationship with Him!

GOD AS TRINITY

One of the basic tenets of the Christian faith is the idea of a triune God that reveals Himself and is characterized as perfect love.

The concept of the Trinity is critical for properly understanding what God is like, how he relates to us, and how we should relate to him. Some may argue that the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible and therefore we should not even discuss this doctrine. It is true that the word isn’t found, but the word “Bible” is also not found in Scripture, either. The word “Trinity” just gives us a vocabulary to help us understand what is revealed in the Bible. The word “Trinity” tells us that we are talking about a tri-unity. Three, but one at the same time. This three-in-oneness raises many difficult questions.

HOW CAN GOD BE BOTH ONE AND THREE? IS THE TRINITY A CONTRADICTION? IF JESUS IS GOD, WHY DO THE GOSPELS RECORD INSTANCES WHERE HE PRAYED TO GOD?

These are tough questions, and when one considers that we are talking about an infinite God while trying to use finite language, we realize that the task is daunting. The Trinity is not a concept that we can derive simply by observing nature or the created order. The Trinitarian nature of God would not be known by man unless it was revealed by God in sacred Scripture. In this essay, I will attempt to answer the questions posed above, as well as clarify what Scripture teaches about the triune God.

GOD THE FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT

GOD THE FATHER

The Old Testament reveals God the “Father” as the creator of the world (Deut 32:6). Israel is known as God’s firstborn son (Exodus 4:22). God is also known as the Father of the King of Israel. There is a beautiful picture of God in the Old Testament as the Father of the poor, the orphaned and the widowed (2 Samuel 7:14, Psalms 68:6).

From the Old Testament revelation of God the Father, we can learn two things about His nature: He is the origin of all things and He is intimately involved with His creation.

THE SON REVEALS THE FATHER

Jesus states in Matthew 11: 27, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”(NASB)

Jesus states that the Son reveals the Father, and one can turn to the pages of the New Testament and find this to be true. It is in the pages of the New Testament that the doctrine of the Trinity is made clear in the annals of salvation history. The Father’s relationship to the Son is an eternal relationship in which the Father is eternally the Father and the Son is eternally the Son. In other words, there was never a time that the Father did not exist or that the Son did not exist. The Father-Son relationship revealed in Scripture does not mean that the Father created the Son but just denotes the relationship between the Father and the Son.

John 1:1-2 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

John leaves no doubt that the Word (in John 1 the apostle John uses the term “Word” to denote the Son) has always existed through all eternity with the Father.

THE HELPER – THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus, just before His final Passover, mentions another “Helper” (Paraclete) that will be sent to empower the Church (John 14: 17, 26; 16:13).

Jesus tells us in John 14:16-18, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him,

but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

Jesus states again in John 16:12-15, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore, I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.” (NASB)

The completion of Christ’s revelation of the Trinity is found in the sending of the Holy Spirit into the world, especially after His glorification by the resurrection from the dead and His coronation in Heaven (John 7:39) The Spirit will share this new life won by Christ on the cross with Christ’s followers after His glorious ascension. Jesus taught His disciples that it would be better for Him to ascend to the Father because of the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit would bond the followers of Jesus together, but would also reveal God’s truth to them. This idea of truth and unity go hand-in-hand.



SPHERES OF WORK IN THE TRINITY

In the relational names of the persons of the Godhead, we can observe the following: The Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to both. While they are called three persons in relation to one another, we believe that they are one nature or substance (the early Church used the term “consubstantial” to illustrate this oneness in nature, which literally means “of the same substance”).

- 1) All things come from and originate in the Father (Romans 11:36, 1 Corinthians 8:6)
- 2) All things are created through the Son – The Son is the instrument of the Father in Creation.

John 1: 1-3 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (NASB)

- 3) The Holy Spirit brings life into the world and energizes it. The word “Spirit” in Hebrew (Ruah) is synonymous with breath or wind.

The word in Greek (Pneuma) is also connected with breath or wind. The Holy Spirit also brought order from the primordial chaos in the beginning. (Job 26:13; 33:4, Psalms 33: 6; 104: 30, Genesis 1:2; 2:7)

This community of love found in the Trinity is evidenced in the role of the Trinity in the redemption of man.

One of the earliest evidences of this is found in the baptism of Jesus found in Matthew 3:13-17. In this passage, we observe Jesus go into the waters of the Jordan River. When He comes out of the water, we witness the descending of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and hear the voice of the Father from Heaven. In this one instance, we see the confirmation of the Trinity together in the plan of redemption by the ratification of Christ's mission in His baptism.

The most obvious place in the New Testament that we witness the role of the Trinity in God's plan of salvation is in the Great Commission of Matthew 28. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus instructs His followers to baptize new converts in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, thus tying in the entrance into the Church with calling on the authoritative name of the Triune God. Matthew 28:19 also shows that the Father, Son and Spirit are all on the same level of power.

The epistles of the New Testament make it clear the Trinitarian shape of our redemption.

Ephesians 2:18 "For through Him (Jesus), we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father (NASB)."

Ephesians 2: 18 shows that through Jesus, we have access to the Father through the Spirit. Paul tells us that it is the work of Christ on the Cross and the mediating of the Spirit that brings us back into the courts of God the Father and back to the family relationship that God had planned for us from the beginning.

GOD AS TRIUNE LOVE

God's Love is first revealed in the Creation of the Universe. God is not in need of things, but created man so that He can share His love with man. Pure love is always expressed by wanting to share, and that is exactly what the Bible reveals as God's nature and desire. God wants to share His love and glory with us.

Consider the following analogy in helping us understand why God wanted to create the Universe: We may ask ourselves, "Why do people have children?" The purest answer to this question is that we have children so the woman

and man will be able to share their love with a child. In marriage, we see an example of trinitarian love (in a very limited and imperfect sense). A man and woman love one another so much that they become ONE flesh, and that unity is so real that in nine months it becomes a tri-unity. The love that a child shares with their parents was already there in the family before the child arrived. In the same way, God the Father, the Son and the Spirit already existed in a community of love before we were created. We were created to share in that divine love and to live in a covenantal family bond with God.

One of most revealing passages about the love of God comes from Jesus' High Priestly Prayer found in John 17.

John 17:22-26 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one ; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." (NASB)

Jesus makes it clear that the ultimate purpose for His ministry is for man to share in the love of God, and that love had already existed for eternity between the Father and Son. The Church is to "image" that love of God by loving one another. The love that the church has one for another is to be a sign to the world about the unity and love of God.

1 John 4:8 expounds upon a spiritual law that is unshakeable: God is Agape. God is Love. One should consider God's love as a spiritual gravity that pulls all men to Him. God desires to pull men back into communion with Him. Christ tells us in John 17 and in John 14: 23 that the person that keeps His words will have fellowship with God the Son and the Father.

One can see this displayed in the worship scene before the throne of God in Revelation chapters 4 and 5. We observe in Revelation chapter 4 that the human representatives and the entire created order worships God the Father as Creator. A shift in that worship occurs in Revelation chapter 5 when worship and adoration turns its attention to the Lamb (the Son) for redemption. This worship is all enabled through the Spirit, and this worship is all in the Spirit.

WE CAN SUMMARIZE IT AS FOLLOWS:

- 1) God the Father sends His Son in an act of Love. (John 3:16)
- 2) Christ the Son submits Himself to God the Father in humility, and out of self-sacrificial love, He gives up His life for man. (see Philippians 2)
- 3) Because of this sacrifice and victory, the Spirit is sent into the world to bring communion between the Father and man. (John 14, John 16, Acts 1 and 2, et al)

TRINITY BASICS AND OBJECTIONS TO THE TRINITY

CONCLUSION #1

There is only one God.

The prayer that every Israelite prayed on each day was the Shema, and the content of this prayer is found in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (ESV)

This verse makes it clear that there is only ONE God. Here are other verses that make this clear: Isaiah 43:10-11, 1 Corinthians 8:6, James 2:19, Jude 1:25, 2 Timothy 2:5, Isaiah 45:18, et al.

A COMMON OBJECTION TO THE TRINITY

Some cult groups, as well as Muslims, will look at these passages and tell Christians that the doctrine of the Trinity contradicts Scripture. They claim that if a Christian claims that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God, then they are tri-theistic (three gods) worshippers rather than monotheistic (one god) ones.

A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE

We do NOT claim a tri-theistic system. The doctrine of the trinity does not claim there are three gods. We faithfully claim from Scripture that there is one God.

CONCLUSION #2

The Father, the Son and Spirit are three distinct Persons. The Bible speaks of the Father as God (Philippians 1:2), Jesus as God (Titus 2:13), and the Holy Spirit as God (Acts 5:3-4).

Are these just three different ways of looking at God, or simply ways of referring to three different roles that God plays?

The answer must be no, because the Bible also indicates that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons.

For example, since the Father sent the Son into the world (John 3:16), he cannot be the same person as the Son. Likewise, after the Son returned to the Father (John 16:10), the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit into the world (John 14:26; Acts 2:33). Therefore, the Holy Spirit must be distinct from the Father and the Son.

In the baptism of Jesus, we see the Father speaking from Heaven, and the Spirit descending from Heaven in the form of a dove as Jesus comes out of the water (Mark 1:10–11). John 1:1 affirms that Jesus is God, and at the same time, that he was “with God,” thereby indicating that Jesus is a distinct Person from God the Father (see also John 1:18). Also, in John 16:13–15, we see that although there is a close unity between the three persons, the Holy Spirit is also distinct from the Father and the Son.

The ramifications of God being three distinct Persons is the following: The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. Jesus is God, but he is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, but he is neither the Son nor the Father. They are different Persons, not three different ways of looking at God.

A MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE TRINITY

There exists a common heresy known as modalism. Modalism teaches that there is one God that can “appear” or “have the role of” a Father, Son or the Spirit. They use the example that a man can be a husband, father and uncle, all at the same time. Some use the example of water and say that the phases of water reflect the Trinity. This also is a false image of the Trinity. Biblical Trinitarian teaching makes the point that God is three distinct persons. One God, but three Persons that are distinct from one another (when I use the word “distinct” I do NOT mean “independent”).

A COMMON OBJECTION TO THE TRINITY

Some make the claim that the Trinity is a violation of logic and reason. They make the claim that it violates the Law of non-contradiction. They claim that it violates this law by claiming that something cannot be one and three at the same time. You can either be one or three, but you cannot be both at the same time.

In order for something to be contradictory, it must violate the law of non-

contradiction. This law states that “A cannot be both A (what it is) and non-A (what it is not) at the same time and in the same relationship.” In other words, you have contradicted yourself if you affirm and deny the same statement.

Here is an easy illustration of how the Law of non-contradiction works. Imagine if I told you one Sunday from the pulpit that Allison and I are expecting a new baby (we are not by the way!). If you saw Allison after services and said, “Congratulations,” and Allison said, “I don’t know what you are talking about; we are not having a baby,” you would not walk away from that conversation feeling very good about getting the truth. Guess what – you would be right. This would be a violation of the Law of non-contradiction. Allison could not be both A (with child) and non-A (not with child) at the same time.

Theologian R.C. Sproul cites as an example Dickens’s famous line, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Obviously, this is a contradiction if Dickens means that it was the best of times in the same way that it was the worst of times. But he avoids contradiction with this statement because he means that in one sense it was the best of times, but in another sense it was the worst of times.

When you carry this argument over to the Trinity, you will see that the Trinity does not violate this Law. God is one and three in different ways. The doctrine of the Trinity NEVER claims that God is one-in-three in the same WAY. This is a critical distinction. He is three in a different way than he is one. We are not speaking doubletalk. We are not saying that God is one, and then denying that He is one by saying that He is three. This is very important: God is one and three at the same time, but not in the same way.

How do we claim that God is one? We claim that God is one in Essence. How do we claim that God is three? We claim that he is three in Person.

ESSENCE

All three Persons are one God because they are all the same essence. “Essence” means the same thing as “being.” Thus, since God is only one essence, He is only one being, not three.

Essence is what you are. There is a risk of sounding too physical but essence can be understood as the “stuff of which you consist.”

It is difficult to draw analogies because God is pure spirit, and all physical analogies are strained. “God is spirit” (John 4:24).

Further, we clearly should not think of God as “consisting of” anything other than divinity. The “substance” of God is God, not a list of “ingredients” that, taken together, yield deity.

PERSON

The idea of "Person" is difficult for modern people to understand. We tend to focus on individuality when we think of being "our own person." The earliest Christians understood the idea of "Person" a little differently. Therefore, it is often difficult to have a concrete definition of "Person" as we use it in regard to the Trinity.

What we do not mean by "Person" is an "independent individual" in the sense that both I and another human are separate, independent individuals who can exist apart from each other.

A "Person" is one that sees him/herself as the "I" with regard to the other "You."

Maybe a helpful corrector for our individualistic understanding of the term "Person" would be to view it in the Trinity in relational terms. It describes how the ONE God relates within Himself.

The Father, for example, is a different Person from the Son because he regards the Son as a "You," even though he regards himself as "I." Thus, with regard to the Trinity, we can say that "Person" means a distinct subject which regards Himself as an "I" and the other two as a "You."

These distinct subjects are not a division within the being of God, but "a form of personal existence, other than a difference in being (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology pgs. 255-257)."

CONCLUSION

When one looks at all the data from Scripture, the only conclusion you can come to is that there is one God and that the one God is triune. The Bible makes it clear that the Son is fully God and the Spirit is also fully God. We don't believe that the Father is 1/3 God, the Son is 1/3 God, and the Spirit is 1/3 God. They are all fully God, one in Essence, and three in Persons.

SUMMARY¹

1. The Trinity is not a belief in three gods. There is only one God, and we must never stray from this.
2. This one God exists as three Persons.

3. The three Persons are not each part of God, but are each fully God and equally God. Within God's one undivided being there is an "unfolding" into three interpersonal relationships, such that there are three Persons. The distinctions within the Godhead are not distinctions of His Essence, and neither are they something added onto His Essence, but they are the unfolding of God's one, undivided being into three interpersonal relationships such that there are three real Persons.
4. God is not one person who took three consecutive roles. That is the heresy of modalism. The Father did not become the Son and then the Holy Spirit. Instead, there have always been and always will be three distinct Persons in the Godhead.
5. The Trinity is not a contradiction because God is not three in the same way that He is one. God is one in Essence, three in Person.

APPENDIX: HELP WHEN CULTS COME TO YOUR DOOR

Many of us cringe when we see groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons come to our door. I try to see them as people made in the image of God for whom the Lord Jesus died. I want to help them see the truth of the Gospel. When they come to your door you need to understand that they differ on their doctrine of God. When they claim that Jesus is God, they don't mean the same thing that you mean. They believe that Jesus is a god but not THE God, and this is a huge difference. Here is a wager I make with them when they come to my door. I tell them that if I can first ask them four questions from the Bible, I will be glad to sit and listen to anything they have to say afterward.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF AN EXCHANGE WITH A CULT MEMBER

I ask them if I can use their Bible, if possible. If not, I just use my copy of the Bible.

I turn to Philippians 2:9-11: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (ESV)

Now read Isaiah 45:22-23: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone out in righteousness, a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'"

1ST QUESTION: Philippians 2 tells us that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Isaiah 45 tells us that God states that there is no other God but Him, and that to Him (God) every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. Do you think Paul, in Philippians 2, is making Jesus equal with Jehovah (Yahweh²) in the Old Testament?

Next turn to Exodus 34:14: "For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (ESV)

2ND QUESTION: Do you believe, according to this passage, that only God (Jehovah/Yahweh) should be worshipped?

Turn to Matthew 28: 16-18: "Now the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (ESV)

3RD QUESTION: If only God can receive worship, why do the followers of Jesus worship Him if He is not God (Yahweh/Jehovah)?

4TH QUESTION: Are you like the disciples that doubted Jesus, or are you like the ones that worshipped him (as Thomas said in John 20:28) as your Lord and your God?



2 In Hebrew the name of God is spelled YHWH. Since ancient Hebrew had no written vowels, it is uncertain how the name was pronounced originally, but vowels were later added. One early transliteration of this word is "Jehovah." It is probably more accurate to say "Yahweh." For the purpose of this exchange, I use "Jehovah" and "Yahweh" interchangeably because Jehovah's Witness usually only use the name Jehovah to refer to God. If you are dealing with a Jehovah's Witness, I recommend only using the word Jehovah for God.