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## The Doctrine of the Trinity

### Various Passages

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*Last week we began this two part doctrinal series. Last time we discussed the Doctrine of God the Father. This week we will consider a more difficult subject, the Doctrine of the Trinity. This is a more problematical discussion because, if we are limited on our ability to understand God the Father, we are even more limited in our ability to understand the Triunity. Again, this relates to the infiniteness of God and our finiteness. As you already noticed, I will be using the word Triunity instead of Trinity because I believe it gives a clear picture of how we are going to discuss God.*

*What I won't do is to give the usual illustrations provided for trying to understand this doctrine. The reason is because they all fall so far from the reality that I believe they don't add to the discussion but actually cloud it even further.*

*Also, as noted last time these studies are simply introductions to the subjects. I could spend extended amounts of time on each of these topics, but for various reasons have chosen not to do so here. If you feel so moved, I would highly recommend that you explore these subjects at greater depth on your own.*

*I will be relying to a great extent on the same resources I used last time. These are Through the Bible in One Year<sup>1</sup> and Willmington's Guide to the Bible.<sup>2</sup>*

**I Introduction:** Let me start by quoting Mikolaski's introduction to the subject.

*“ Belief in the triune nature of God, in which each person of the triad is thought of as fully personal, pervades NT teaching. To argue that the doctrine of the Trinity is no where explicitly defined or discussed in the NT is to fail to recognize that other crucial doctrines are similarly implicit in Scripture and must be developed by careful study. The total NT presentation of salvation and all NT teaching rest on the trinitarian understanding of the nature of God. Not only is trinitarian teaching strongly evident in the NT proclamation of the gospel message, but the theological logic of trinitarian faith fits in with other important aspects of the biblical revelation. The NT Christians confess the two truths that God sent his Son into the world and that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:19). It was the Son, not the Father, who died on the cross. The Father raised the Son from the dead, vindicating both. Other language concerning Christ's ascension, his session at the right hand of God, and his promised return means little apart from the trinitarian faith.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Stringfellow, Alan B., ed., Through the Bible in One Year, Vol. 3 Great Truths of the Bible, Copyright © 1981 by Virgil W. Hensley, Inc. Publisher, Tulsa, OK, p. 25-29.

<sup>2</sup> Willmington, Dr. H. L., Willmington's Guide to the Bible, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1981, p. 591-608.

<sup>3</sup> Mikolaski, Samuel, J., The Theology of the New Testament, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990, Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by Oak-Tree Software, Inc.

The Westminster Catechism of 1646 describes the Trinity this way:

*“ In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”*<sup>4</sup>

The NIV Dictionary defines it as follows:

*“ TRINITY There is one eternal God, the Lord, who is holy love. Through his self-revelation he has disclosed to his people that he is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet he is not three deities but one Godhead, since all three Persons share the one Deity/Godhead. The biblical teaching of the Trinity is, in a sense, a mystery; and the more we enter into union with God and deepen our understanding of him, the more we recognize how much there is yet to know. Based on the biblical teaching, the traditional Christian confession is that God is One in Three and Three in One.”*<sup>5</sup>

**II Basic Scriptures:** Before we look at specific verses I just want to remind you that neither the word Trinity nor Triunity are found in Scripture. They are simply the labels that have been assigned to the clear doctrinal teaching found in God’s Word.

Obviously, I’m not giving all references, only a sampling. As with the previous teachings we will first look at the Old Testament. Also, I’d like to refer you to Genesis, Chapters 1-3 to consider the creative work of the Trinity.

*“ Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel — because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:1-9).*

*“ The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. ... When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home” (Genesis 18: 1-2, 33).*

*“ I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Psalm 2:7, 12).*

*“ The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”” (Psalm 110:1).*

*“ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”” (Isaiah 6:8).*

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<sup>4</sup> The Westminster Catechism, 1645, p. 58., The Master Christian Library, AGES Software, Albany, OR, Version 6.0 © 1998

<sup>5</sup> Douglas, J. D. and Merrill C. Tenney., editors, NIV Bible Dictionary, Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989, Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc.

### III The Nucleus of this Truth

*“This truth of the Bible is a pure revelation from God. There is only one God—not three. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. God, the eternal Father did not make the Son and Holy Spirit. God, the eternal Father did not make the Son and Holy Spirit as His creations at His set time. In other words, God the eternal Father, the eternal Son and the eternal Holy Spirit always have been. The God head is a Trinity in Unity.”*<sup>6</sup>

Some find the best illustration of the Triunity is in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 which states. **“I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is seen as showing how we are *“not three persons, but a three-in-one person. God is three in One.”* All illustrations fall short because God is infinite and we are finite. We will never be able to grasp the fullness of this great truth.

### IV The Great Truth: “God the Triunity”

#### A. The Triunity in the Old Testament

##### 1. The Truth is Revealed in Names in the Old Testament.

- a. *“In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1) “This name “Elohim” is a plural noun. As we noted last week, Plural, in English, means two or more. In the Hebrew, we have three terms referring to the grammatical number: singular, meaning one; dual, equaling two; plural, meaning three or more. Therefore “Elohim” is a plural noun meaning three or more. ...  
Moses used this name, “Elohim,” 500 times in the Pentateuch.”*<sup>7</sup>
- b. *“And God (Elohim) said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness—so God (Elohim) created man in His own image, in the image of God created He them—“ (Genesis 1:26-27). “This is another use of the plural noun indicating the Trinity at work in the creation of man—yet indicating one God in the phrase, “in His own Image.” The Godhead is a Trinity in Unity.”*<sup>8</sup>
- c. *“The man is become as one of us” (Genesis 3:22). Notice the name of the One who spoke, “The Lord God said.” ... Here the name “Lord” is used (English form). In the Hebrew the name is “Yahweh.” “Yahweh is the personal name of God because it means “Redeemer” and was used only after the fall of man. “Yahweh” always relates in a redemptive way to man.”*<sup>9</sup> Here again note the use of “us.”

##### 2. The Scriptures State the Trinity.

- a. *The Holy Spirit is stated in Genesis 1:2: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Also in Isaiah 11:1-2 you will find the Holy Spirit named. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge ...”*
- b. *The Son, Jesus Christ is stated in Psalm 2:7: “I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” Again in Verse 12: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way ...”*

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<sup>6</sup> Stringfellow, p. 19

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

- c. *The Trinity is revealed in Genesis 18:1-2 and Isaiah 48:16: “The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.” ... “Come near me and listen to this: “From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there.” And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit.”*

## B. The Triunity in the New Testament

### 1. A Declaration of the Triunity in the New Testament.

The New Testament spells out more clearly what is hinted at in the Old. This is consistent with the concept of progressive revelation. Here are a few of the individual scriptures from the gospels:

*“ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him” (John 1: 1, 32).*

*“ For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit” (John 3:34).*

*“ I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form,...” (John 5:36-37).*

*“ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.” ... “Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me” (John 8:18 42).*

### 2. The Lord’s Birth Gives Testimony to the Trinity.

*“ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). ...*

*“ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”” (Matthew 1:20-23).*

### 3. The Lord’s Baptism Proves the Trinity.

*“ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. 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. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”” (Matthew 3:13-17).*

#### 4. Jesus Announced the Trinity in the Baptismal Formula.

*“ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”” (Matthew 28:16-20).*

#### 5. Paul’s Epistles are Filled with References to the Trinity. Paul in his epistles states the fact the Trinity in so many places that I won’t list them all here. But, here a just a few examples:

*“ ... regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” ... (Romans 1:3-4).*

*“ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ... For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ... And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. ... The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:1, 3, 11, 16-17).*

#### 6. The General Epistles and Revelation Declares the Trinity.

- a. Peter presents the Triunity in 1 Peter 1:2: *“... who have been 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: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.” ... “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13).*
- b. John presents the Triunity, as we have already seen and again in 1 John 4:2, 12-15: *“This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,” ... “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.” ... “For there are three that testify:...” (1 John 5:7).*
- c. Here are Jude’s comments in verses 20-21. *“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”*
- d. Finally lets consider Revelation 1:4-6: *“John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”*

**V What this Bible Truth Teaches us Today.** I thought with this difficult subject the best way to conclude was to give one more summary of the Doctrine of the Trinity. In this case I am quoting Bruce Shelly.

*“ The designations Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do in fact refer to something real within God.*

*To identify these distinctions, the church used the Greek term **hypostases** and its Latin counterpart **personae**. Our English word **persons** comes from the Latin. Whether in Greek or Latin, the early Christians intended to designate something genuinely threefold when they spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They knew that the Trinity is more than three attributes or three appearances of God. Within his own mysterious being God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The designations are just ways in which God is God. Within the Godhead there are three “persons” who are neither three Gods nor three parts of God, but coequally and coeternally God.*

*The trouble with our English word **person** is its connotation of “personality.” It carries the idea of an individual center of conscious life and independent activity. So three “persons” suggest to us Tom, Dick, and Harry. Such an idea is obviously inappropriate of God. But early Christians speaking either Greek or Latin never intended these ideas when they spoke of God “in three persons.”*

*What early Christians wanted to affirm were the actual distinctions within the Godhead—the bears of the differing relations within the one Almighty God. “Person,” applied to God, meant a genuine and self-supported presentation of the reality of God.*

*While Christians knew that the names, Father, Son or Logos, and Spirit were analogies of God’s inherent life, they believed actual distinctiveness was behind the titles Father, Son, and Spirit. And that distinctiveness was not three gods, but a trinity within the one personal God.*

*In summary, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. The result is not three gods, but one. What they share equally and completely is deity. At the same time, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. The distinctions are real. The “Persons,” then, are within one personal deity.”<sup>10</sup>*

Or, as Hank Hannegraaff puts it: *“There is one What and three Who’s. One in substance and three in person.”* I hope this has provided some clarity, but most of all, like last week with our consideration of the Doctrine of God the Father, I hope it encourages to pursue these studies in the Word on you own.

*“ Praise ye the Father for His loving kindness;  
Tenderly cares He for His erring children.  
Praise Him, ye angels, praise Him in the heavens.  
Praise ye Jehovah!*

*Praise ye the Savior—great is His compassion;  
Graciously cares He for His chosen people.  
Young men and maidens, ye old men and children,  
Praise ye the Savior!*

*Praise ye the Spirit, Comforter of Israel,  
Sent of the Father and the Son to bless us.  
Praise ye the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—  
Praise ye the Triune God!”<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Shelley, Bruce L., Christian Theology in Plain Language, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1985, p. 142-143.

<sup>11</sup> Charles, Elizabeth R., “Praise Ye the Triune God,” The Celebration Hymnal, Word/Integrity, 1997, #155.

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(*John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19*).

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**II Basic Scriptures:** Neither the word \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_ are found in \_\_\_\_\_.  
(see *Genesis, Chapters 1-3; 11:1-9; 18:1-2, 33; Psalm 2:7, 12; 110:1; Isaiah 6:8*)

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<sup>1</sup> Mikolaski, Samuel, J., *The Theology of the New Testament, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990, Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by Oak-Tree Software, Inc.

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### **III The Nucleus of this Truth**

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### **IV The Great Truth: “God the Triunity”**

#### **A. The Triunity in the Old Testament**

##### **1. The Truth is Revealed in Names in the Old Testament.**

a. *(Genesis 1:1)*

b. *(Genesis 1:26-27).*

c. *(Genesis 3:22).*

##### **2. The Scriptures State the Trinity.**

a. *(Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 11:1-2)*

b. *(Psalm 2:7, 12)*

c. *(Genesis 18:1-2; Isaiah 48:16)*

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<sup>4</sup> Stringfellow, p. 19



B. The Triunity in the New Testament

**1. A Declaration of the Triunity in the New Testament.**

*(John 1: 1, 32; 3:34; 5:36-37; 8:18 42).*

**2. The Lord's Birth Gives Testimony to the Trinity.**

*(Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:20-23)*

**3. The Lord's Baptism Proves the Trinity.**

*(Matthew 3:13-17)*

**4. Jesus Announced the Trinity in the Baptismal Formula.**

*(Matthew 28:16-20)*

**5. Paul's Epistles are Filled with References to the Trinity.**

*(Romans 1:3-4; Romans 8:1, 3, 11, 16-17)*

**6. The General Epistles and Revelation Declares the Trinity.**

a. *(1 Peter 1:2; 4:13)*

b. *(1 John 4:2, 12-15; 5:7)*

c. *(Jude 20-21)*

d. *(Revelation 1:4-6)*

**V What this Bible Truth Teaches us Today.**