

The Doctrine Of The Trinity

2 Corinthians 13:14

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The Doctrine of the Trinity is part of our series titled, Great Doctrines of the Bible. The word “doctrine” simply means “teachings.” So far we’ve covered The Doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of the Bible itself; that it is given by inspiration of God, it is the Word of God and it is inerrant and infallible. We’ve covered The Doctrine of God the Father, and we saw that there is only one, true, living God. Then we looked at The Doctrine of God the Son, where we looked at Jesus Christ’s deity, His Incarnation and all that Christ is. And we looked at The Doctrine of God the Holy Spirit, the forgotten member of the Trinity.

Today we will look at The Doctrine of the Trinity. Jude 3 says that we should “Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” So the Trinity is an essential part of orthodox Christianity. If you deny the Trinity, you deny Christian theology or Christian doctrine. All of the cults and false religions deny this doctrine that is taught in the Word of God. So the Trinity is unique to Christianity, and it is a revelation from God.

Some say that the problem is that this doctrine is not in the Bible, because the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible. But that’s really not a problem. The word “Trinity” is used to describe the revelation of God, as three-in-one, so we coined the term to describe that God is Triune. The word is “Trinity” or “Tri-unity.” It means that there are three Persons in the one God, and that He is three-in-one. So the word’s not in the Bible, but the concept is.

Neither are the words “omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresence” or “providence” in the Bible. But we believe their meaning, because they are a revelation from God in His Word. So the fact that the word “Trinity,” that describes this teaching is not found in the Bible does not negate the fact that it is doctrine, that it is clearly taught in the Bible.

Augustine, the celebrated fifth-century, church father, said about the Trinity, “In no other subject is error more dangerous or enquiry more laborious or discovery of the truth more profitable.” So the Trinity is an absolute, foundational, essential truth taught in the Scriptures. The Trinity has been called “the great mystery of all divine relation and truth.”

The Trinity is basically this: one God, three Persons, coequal and coeternal. That’s my simple definition of the Trinity.

Some say the Trinity is a contradiction. But the truth is that it is not a contradiction. If we were to say there is one God and three Gods, it would be a contradiction. If we were to say there is one Person and three Persons, it would be a contradiction. But we have two categories: one divine Being—God; and three, separate Persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. One in essence but three in Persons.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly taught in the Bible, but it is actually clearly implied.

Let me explain what I mean. You can't turn to a book of the Bible that explains in detail that there are three Persons in one God. But you can conclude that the doctrine is true by the overarching teaching of the Bible. That's so very important.

What is revealed progressively from the Old Testament, which is not really clear on the Trinity, becomes clear when you come into the New Testament about the Trinity of God, with its sunlight of revelation. So it is a doctrine that is clearly revealed, and thus we deduce from what the Bible does teach that it is true.

And it is a doctrine that is incomprehensible.

You say, "You just told us that you were going to preach on the Trinity, and now you tell us it's 'incomprehensible'?!"

"That's right." I'm not going to give you any illustrations about the Trinity, because all illustrations break down and don't accurately convey the fact of the Trinity. It means that God is unique and different than anything else. There is nothing that is analogous to the Triune God. It is incomprehensible, but a truly revealed doctrine in the Bible, so we accept it by faith.

And that doesn't bother me; I believe in a lot of things I don't understand. I don't understand electricity or my smart phone or computer science. I don't understand how God can be in the flesh, in the person of Christ, in the Incarnation. I don't understand how the Holy Spirit can move upon human authors, so that the words they wrote were the very words of God. I don't understand the virgin birth. There are many things in the Bible I don't understand, but God reveals them, so I accept them. God is infinite and transcendent, but we are finite and limited.

Remember this about doctrine: you can only know the truth about God as God chooses to reveal it to us. Since God is transcendent, He must reveal Himself to us. And God has chosen to reveal the Trinity to us. It's dangerous to deny or distort the doctrine of the Trinity.

Let me give you a more technical definition of the Trinity. The Trinity is within the one Being that is God; there exists eternally three, coequal Persons; namely, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So you have one Being and one essence that is God—that's the unity. And you have three Persons, which are coequal and eternal—that's the diversity. That's the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The one God is manifested in three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Holy Spirit, nor the Father; and the Holy Spirit is not the Father, nor the Son. But all three are divine Persons. They are one God, three Persons. This is called "the shield of the Trinity." It has been used by the church for many years to depict this incomprehensible doctrine known as the Trinity.

Now I want to point out the Bible basis for the Trinity. There are two, fundamental, Biblical teachings that support the doctrine of the Trinity. Number one, there is one, and only one, God. Unequivocally, the Bible is monotheistic. There is only one, true, living God. There are not

three gods—it's not tritheism. There is only one God, in three Persons. Number two, they are three, distinct Persons who are God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Let me break this down. Number one, there is one, and only one, God. Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which is called "the great Shema" and means "hear," says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." So the Shema prayer of Israel declares a monotheistic God, one God. Also in Isaiah 44:8, God is speaking and says, "Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one." So God, who is omniscient and eternal, says that there is no God besides Himself. In Isaiah 43:10, God says, "Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me." In 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul says, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."

So Christianity is clearly monotheistic. We don't believe in three gods. We don't believe in multiple gods; we're not polytheistic. We believe in only one God.

There is a false view of the Trinity, which I want to mention. It's known as "tritheism." It teaches that there are actually three, separate gods. That could also be considered "polytheism." All the cults and false religions deny the doctrine of the Trinity. They say Christians are tritheistic, that we believe in three gods: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. No; we believe in One in essence in three Persons.

Number two, there are three, distinct Persons, who are God. The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. John 6:27 says, "God the Father has set His seal on Him," meaning Jesus, and in 1 Peter 1:2, it says, "...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." These verses show us that there is a Father who is God. No one denies that. But the Bible also teaches us that the Son, Jesus Christ, is God.

Some people believe because Jesus is called "the Son of God" that He's not God. Or because He's called "the Son of Man" that He's not God. These are titles to His deity and to His Messiahship. So as the Son of God, He is God. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God..."—this supports the Trinity, because "with" means "face to face"—"...and the Word was God" or "God was the Word." So Jesus Christ is the eternal Word—"In the beginning was the Word"; He's the personal Word—"the Word was with God" the Father; and He is the divine Word—"and the Word was God." In Hebrews 1:8, God the Father says to God the Son, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom." In John 20:28, when Thomas saw the resurrected Jesus, Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

So there is a Father who is God, a Son who is God and there is a Spirit who is God. In Acts 5:3-4, Peter asked Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?...You have not lied to men but to God." So here Peter actually said that the Holy Spirit is God." In John 14:16 Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper," who is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. So here we have the Son praying to the Father that the Father would

send the Holy Spirit. And the word “another” here means “another of the same kind or essence.”

By the way, the Father and the Son, equally, sent the Spirit. All three are divine, all three have the same, divine attributes, all are coequal and all are coeternal. This is Christian doctrine and Christian theology 101. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are all distinct Persons.

There is another false doctrine called “Arianism.” It teaches that Jesus is not God. Those who believe this deny the deity of the Spirit and the deity of the Son. They believe there is only one God, so it becomes Unitarianism. It’s the denial of the three Persons in the one Godhead. But God is one essential Being in three distinct Persons.

Another false view of the Trinity is known as “modalism.” This teaches that Jesus is actually the Father and that Jesus is the Holy Spirit. All three are one in that they take on different modes. So the Father became the Son, and the Son became the Spirit. He put on different masks. So it is one person or Being with three different modes. The oneness- Pentecostals, who are Jesus-only, believe this modalistic, false teaching. That’s why they say you must be baptized in the name of Jesus only; they don’t baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” They believe it’s Jesus only, taking on different modes. This is heretical, false teaching; it’s not the true doctrine of the Bible.

Let me give you some verses which combat this false teaching. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,” which means “face to face.” So you have at least two Persons there from eternity past. Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17. He said, “Father, the hour has come.” Every time Jesus prayed in the Gospels, He was talking to the Father. So in His prayers, Jesus was talking to God the Father. At Jesus’ baptism, the Father spoke, the Spirit descended as a dove and the Son was being baptized in the Jordan River.

Now let’s look at the shadows of the Trinity in the Old Testament. There are four verses which show that. Number one, Genesis 1:1, which is the very first book, the very first verse of the Bible. “In the beginning God...”—“God” here is the Hebrew word “Elohim”—“...created the heavens and the earth.” The word “Elohim” for God here is actually plural. It could be translated “gods,” but it is treated as singular because the word “created” is singular. “In the beginning God [Elohim, plural] created [singular] the heavens and the earth.”

Number two, Genesis 1:26, where God is speaking, says, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” There is only one explanation for this verse: that God the Father is speaking to the other Persons of the Trinity; God the Father is talking to God the Son and to God the Holy Spirit.

Number three, Genesis 3:22 says, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil.” Again, God is using the plural: “Us.”

Number four is Isaiah 6:8. It says, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” When Isaiah saw the vision of Yahweh in the Temple where the angels cried, “Holy, holy, holy,” many think

that it supports the doctrine of the Trinity—three holies. So this is a communication taking place within the Godhead, within the Trinity.

But the sunlight of complete revelation takes place in the New Testament. It is clearly seen here. First, it is called the Great Commission. Mark 16:15 says, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” And Matthew 28:19 includes a baptismal formula. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name...”—singular—“...of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” When we baptize, we use that formula.

I heard of a little girl who went to church one Sunday, and they held a baptism. She was quite impressed with the baptism of people “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” So when she got home, she got all her dolls out, took them to the bathroom, filled the tub and lined them all up to be baptized. Her mother was watching. She grabbed the first doll and said, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and in the hole you go.” She didn’t quite get it right.

We are commissioned to go preach the Gospel and baptize, singular, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” They are all three Persons of the Godhead. It would be blasphemous to couple the name of the Son and the Spirit with the Father in the baptismal formulation if they weren’t divine Persons in one God.

And I’ve already mentioned the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16-17. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus, who is God the Son, went into the water; He was God incarnate. If you don’t believe in the Trinity, you have trouble with the Incarnation. When Jesus went into the water, the heavens opened and God the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove and alighted on Jesus’ head. Then God the Father audibly spoke from heaven and said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” So you have God the Son being baptized, God the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove and God the Father speaking from heaven.

And in John 14:16, which I’ve already mentioned, Jesus prays to the Father—God the Son to God the Father—and asks the Father to send the Spirit of God, the Comforter, who is the Parakletos.

In Jude 20-21, it says, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit...”—as God the Spirit—“...keep yourselves in the love of God...”—that’s God the Father—“...looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ...”—that’s God the Son—“...unto eternal life.”

And Peter says in 1 Peter 1:2, “...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” We are foreordained by God the Father, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and we are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, who is the Redeemer. So all three members of the Godhead are mentioned.

I just used a few verses; there are many more verses that support the doctrine of the Trinity from the New Testament. But our text is sometimes missed. It is one of the most beautiful, apostolic benedictions in all the Bible. Paul, in his epistle, said, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God..."—who is God the Father—"...and the communion..."—or "fellowship"—"...of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." I've underlined the words "grace... love...communion." The three are coupled together.

We have God's love: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Jesus came and saved us by His grace, so we could have the Holy Spirit and have communion with God the Father and God the Son through God the Holy Spirit. So we have all three Persons of the Trinity mentioned, and we have the fact that they bring love, grace and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

By way of application, I want to wrap this up. Some of you may be saying, "I can't believe we're getting a theological lecture on Sunday morning on the doctrine of the Trinity!" But you are. Your average Christian believes in the Trinity, but they have no clue how to defend it Biblically.

When a Jehovah's Witness or a cultist knocks on your door, and they say, "Oh, you're one of those Christians who believe in the Trinity; right?" They challenge you, but you don't know how to answer them. You don't know how to explain the Trinity. They accuse you of tritheism. They accuse you of modalism. They're actually Arianists, because they don't believe Jesus is God; they believe Jesus was created. And you don't know how to answer them. That's why this is so very important to understand.

How does the Trinity apply to us? I have put this into three categories: number one, we are loved; number two, we are saved; and number three, we worship a Triune God.

Number one, we are loved. This is the beauty of the Triune nature of God. In 1 John 4:8, it says, "God is love." If God existed from eternity past, before Genesis 1:1 or John 1:1 or Hebrews 1:8, who did God love? If there was only one Person in the Godhead, who did God love? Love must have an object to love.

If I lived on a desert island with no one else on it, I would be the most loving person in the world. I would just have love flowing from my being. I would have love, love, love for everybody—but there isn't anybody else on the island. Love must have an object to love.

So the whole concept of love originates in the Triune God; the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Father, the Son loves the Father, the Spirit loves the Son and the Father loves the Spirit. There was a love communion, a love relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. And it actually conveys the idea of unity and diversity, which is so very important today.

Think about the marriage relationship. The man and his wife become "one flesh." They both have their own role, they are different persons, but they are one in Christ. It's an awesome picture. So it's a reflection of the Triune God in that we have love. From our text, we have "the

love of God" the Father.

Number two, we are saved. Our salvation is based on God being Triune. Someone said, "God the Father drew salvation's plan. God the Son brought it down to man." And God the Holy Spirit made it acceptable, actualized it by redeeming us and regenerating us and giving us life and bringing us into Christ in a union and communion. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all involved in your salvation.

In Ephesians 1, note that we are chosen by God the Father, we are redeemed by the blood of God the Son and we are sealed by God the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. We are chosen, we are forgiven and we are sealed. Jesus' Incarnation, Jesus being our propitiation and Jesus as our Mediator to the Father all depend on Jesus being a separate Person from God the Father and from God the Holy Spirit. So our salvation depends on God in three Persons.

Number three, by way of application, we worship a Triune God. We sing, "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." The cool thing about this is that it is beyond us. Many times the heart of sinful man wants to worship a god of his own making, a god who is so much like him, so much less than the true God.

When Jesus met with the woman at the well, in John 4:23, He said, "The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." We must worship God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible to us. So we worship the Father, through the merits of the Son, in the power of the Spirit, glorifying God for who He is. We worship our Triune God.

I like that; I like the fact that God is unique and not like anything else. I like that God is mysterious, that God is wonderful, that God is transcendent, that God is amazing, that God is past our finding out, that we can't fathom Him.

And when we pray, we pray to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name....Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Jesus died to redeem us and to forgive us. And Jesus prayed, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that I am enabled and empowered to live a victorious, Christian life.

So the Bible is very clear that our God is three-in-one. We worship Him, we serve Him and we praise our Triune God.