What is the Trinity?

Apologetics · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/what-is-the-trinity/

The Trinity is the Christian doctrine that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christians do not believe in three gods. Rather, the Bible teaches that there is one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5), and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully divine while remaining distinct from one another (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

The word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible. However, the doctrine itself is an attempt to summarize and faithfully explain what the whole Bible teaches about God's nature. In the same way that words like "incarnation" or "omniscience" are theological terms used to describe biblical truths, the word *Trinity* is a doctrinal shorthand for the biblical teaching about God.

The doctrine developed because early Christians found themselves confronted with several truths that Scripture clearly teaches:

1. There is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 44:6).
2. The Father is God (John 6:27; Eph. 4:6).
3. The Son is God (John 1:1; John 20:28; Titus 2:13).
4. The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3–4).
5. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct from one another (Matt. 3:16–17; John 14:16–17).

The Trinity is the Church's attempt to hold all five of those truths together at the same time.

One helpful way to understand the doctrine is to distinguish between *being* and *person*. **Being** answers the question, "**What** are you?" **Person** answers the question, "**Who** are you?"

Human beings are one being and one person. God, however, is unique. Scripture reveals Him as one divine being who eternally exists as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians therefore say that God is *one in being and three in persons.*

This is mysterious, but it is not a contradiction. A contradiction would be saying that God is one person and three persons at the same time and in the same way. The doctrine of the Trinity says something different: God is one *being* and three *persons.*

The roots of this teaching are found throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament, Israel confessed, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). Yet there are also passages that hint at a complexity within God's identity. For example, Daniel sees both the Ancient of Days and "one like a son of man" receiving divine authority (Dan. 7:9–14). Ancient Jewish scholars sometimes referred to these kinds of passages as evidence for what later became known as the "Two Powers in Heaven" tradition.

The New Testament brings these themes into clearer focus. Jesus claims divine authority, receives worship, forgives sins, and identifies Himself with Yahweh's own identity (John 8:58; Matt. 28:17; Mark 2:5–12). The Holy Spirit is likewise described as personal and divine, speaking, teaching, guiding, and being identified with God Himself (Acts 5:3–4; John 14:26; 16:13).

Perhaps the clearest Trinitarian scene occurs at Jesus' baptism. The Son stands in the water, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father's voice speaks from heaven (Matt. 3:16–17). All three persons are present simultaneously, yet there remains only one God.

For this reason, Christians throughout history have understood the Trinity not as a philosophical invention but as the best explanation of the biblical data. The doctrine did not create the Trinity; rather, the doctrine arose because believers sought to faithfully describe the God revealed in Scripture.

Key Scriptures to Study

- Deuteronomy 6:4 — God is one.
- Isaiah 45:5–6 — There is no God besides Yahweh.
- Matthew 3:16–17 — Father, Son, and Spirit appear distinctly at Jesus' baptism.
- Matthew 28:19 — Believers are baptized into the singular "name" of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- John 1:1–14 — The eternal Word is both with God and is God.
- John 14:16–17, 26 — Jesus distinguishes the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Acts 5:3–4 — Lying to the Holy Spirit is described as lying to God.
- 2 Corinthians 13:14 — A Trinitarian blessing involving Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Titus 2:13 — Jesus is called "our great God and Savior."

Objections & Misconceptions

Common Objection: "The word Trinity isn't in the Bible."

That's true. Neither are terms like "incarnation" or "omniscience." The question is not whether the word appears in Scripture, but whether the concept accurately summarizes what Scripture teaches. The doctrine of the Trinity arose from the Church's effort to explain the biblical data.

Common Objection: "Doesn't the Trinity teach three gods?"

No. Historic Christianity has always affirmed that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4). The doctrine teaches one divine being who eternally exists as three persons.

Common Objection: "The Trinity was invented at the Council of Nicaea."

Nicaea (AD 325) did not invent the doctrine. The council formalized language that Christians were already using to defend the biblical teaching that Jesus is fully divine. The roots of Trinitarian theology are found in the New Testament itself.

Common Objection: "The Trinity is illogical."

The Trinity is mysterious, but it is not logically contradictory. Christians do not claim that God is one and three in the same sense. Rather, Scripture reveals God as one in being and three in persons.

Why This Matters

The Trinity is not an abstract theological puzzle. It is about the identity of the God Christians worship.

The Gospel itself depends on who Jesus is. According to Scripture, our salvation was accomplished not by a created being or merely a prophet, but by God Himself entering human history in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14; Col. 2:9). If Jesus is not truly God, then the heart of the Christian message changes dramatically.

The doctrine of the Trinity also helps us understand God's eternal nature. The Father loves the Son (John 17:24), the Son glorifies the Father (John 17:1–5), and the Spirit bears witness to Christ (John 15:26). God has eternally existed in perfect communion, love, and fellowship.

Ultimately, the Trinity reminds us that God is greater than our ability to fully comprehend Him. We do not worship a God we have mastered intellectually, but the holy, infinite God revealed in

Scripture: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Recommended Resources

- *Delighting in the Trinity* — Michael Reeves
- *The Forgotten Trinity* — James R. White
- *The Deep Things of God* — Fred Sanders
- *The Trinity: An Introduction* — Scott R. Swain
- *Two Powers in Heaven* — Alan Segal