



THE TRINITY

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

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Introduction

Let's get started! Whether you're wanting to learn more about the Trinity or you're wanting to help others learn more about this important Christian doctrine, this Bible study guide will help you reach that goal.

This guide does not develop the history of this doctrine, nor does it explore the philosophical and logical debates that surround it. Instead, it identifies the important elements of this doctrine and shows how the Bible teaches them.

This guide works well for personal and small group study and is most effective with an open Bible (or Bible app). Each section concludes with engaging questions related to the material, and the entire study concludes with a list of ways that this doctrine should impact a believer's life.

I pray that you will be able to use this study effectively to strengthen your relationship with God and equip yourself to teach others this foundational truth.

Opening Questions

Christians encounter all sorts of questions about the Trinity. Some of these questions come from our own thoughts, while others come from people around us. Some come from people who are critical of Christianity, while others come from people who are sincerely seeking after God.

Though the doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to the Christian faith, it is also difficult to understand. For this reason, we often find ourselves unprepared and unable to answer questions about this doctrine. If we are willing to admit it, the Trinity is a theological fact that we gladly accept, but not a personal belief that we can explain and defend from Scripture.

To resolve this dilemma, we need to identify the core elements of this doctrine and be able to find them in Scripture. Having this basic knowledge equips a believer to enjoy a more vibrant relationship with God and to explain the Christian faith to others with greater confidence.

This Bible study shows you how to describe and defend the doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture. It begins by noting some questions that nonbelievers ask about the Trinity. Then it provides a basic definition of the Trinity. After this, it offers a series of evidence from Scripture that teaches the important components of this doctrine. The study concludes by giving six ways that you should respond to this doctrine of the Trinity as a believer.

Questions for Review

1. What questions do you have about the Trinity?
2. How would you explain the Trinity to someone else?
3. What Bible verses do you already know that teach about the Trinity?

Lesson 1: Common Misunderstandings about the Trinity

From Jehovah's Witnesses

Some questions about the Trinity come from people outside of the Christian faith. Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, deny this doctrine. To them, it is nothing more than polytheism, an errant belief in multiple gods.

To uphold their belief in one true God, they teach that only the Father is God, but that Jesus is an angel and the Holy Spirit is a force that emanates from God to accomplish his will. This perspective rejects the deity of the Son while also rejecting the deity and personality of the Spirit.

Since the advent of the Watchtower magazine in 1882, Jehovah's Witnesses have trained extensively to defend their faulty view with vigor. (If you've ever tried to speak with a Witness about this topic, you know what I mean!) Furthermore, their Bible translation (the New World Translation) features numerous deliberate attempts to scrub any passages that appear to contradict their view or support a Trinitarian view.

For example, John 1:1 reads as, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The NWT alters the final, crucial phrase to say, "The Word was a god" [emphasis added], removing a direct reference to Jesus as God.

In another place, Colossians 1:16 reads, "By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth." The NWT alters the final phrase to say, "By means of him all *other* things were created in the heavens and on the earth" [emphasis added], which accommodates their wrong belief that God created Jesus first and then created everything else through him.

In both cases, the NWT blatantly misrepresents the underlying Greek text in an attempt to eliminate trinitarian evidence from Scripture.

From Muslims

Muslims also adhere to a form of monotheism (a belief in one God) and consider the Trinity as a form of polytheism (the belief in multiple gods). In fact, they consider belief in more than one God to be among the greatest possible sins, which they call "ash-shirk."

Some scholars interpret the Quran, the primary Muslim religious text, as improperly portraying the Christian Trinity as an odd threesome of God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son. If this is true, then the Quran wrongly accuses orthodox Christianity of ascribing deity to Mary.

Others understand the Quran to properly identify the Christian Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit. If this is true, then it renounces this Christian doctrine outright as polytheism.

Whatever the case, Muslims clearly forbid calling any being God apart from Allah. For this reason, they cannot accept Jesus or the Spirit as God.

From Other Religions

Religions that are not monotheistic also misunderstand the Trinity. These include various forms of pantheism, which is the belief that all things are God.

Buddhism, for instance, teaches a concept called *trikaya*, which it claims is a three-part reality. This reality supposedly emanates from Buddha as Essence, Bliss, and Appearance.

Hinduism teaches a concept called *Trimurti*, which it describes as a threefold manifestation of the Absolute as emanator, destroyer, and preserver.

Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science cult, taught a threefold nature of God as Life, Truth, and Love. Ironically, she also called the Christian Trinity a polytheistic tritheism.

Though these pantheistic examples include some three-in-one overtones, they differ from the biblical Trinity in significant ways. They portray God as a single, ultimate reality, for instance, but omit the plurality of three distinct persons in the Godhead. They prefer abstract concepts and impersonal forces instead. Such an understanding is unrelated to the biblical Christian.

Questions for Review

1. What do Jehovah's Witnesses say about the Trinity?
2. What do Muslims think about the Trinity?
3. How do other religions misunderstand the Trinity?

Lesson 2: More Common Misunderstandings About the Trinity

The Word ‘Trinity’

While other religions wrongly portray the doctrine of the Trinity, other critics raise questions as well. Perhaps you’ve realized that the word *trinity* appears nowhere in the Bible. Some suggest that the absence of this word in Scripture undermines the credibility of the doctrine.

Such concern is unwarranted, however, because the crucial question is not whether this word appears in the Bible, but whether the Bible teaches the ideas that the word *trinity* represents.

Consider the irony of how the word *bible* appears nowhere in the Bible! This omission does not undermine the reality of the Bible, because the Bible is both a historical and theological reality, nonetheless.

The same is true for words like *omniscience* (God is “all-knowing”), *omnipotence* (God is “all-powerful”), and *omnipresence* (God is “present everywhere”). These theological words appear nowhere in the Bible, yet they accurately portray and refer to divine attributes of God that Scripture clearly teaches.

Such is the case for the word *trinity*. The word itself does not appear in Scripture, but the truth it represents does appear.

The Trinity and the Catholic Church

Some critics claim that the Catholic Church fabricated the concept of a divine Trinity as a manmade, extrabiblical tradition.

They raise this question because seven ecumenical councils convened between AD 325-87 to discuss some pressing theological questions about the nature of God. In particular, the Councils of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381) published formal statements that articulated and codified trinitarian doctrine.

These statements, however, did not create the doctrine of the Trinity, nor do they carry authority because the Catholic Church published them.

These doctrinal explanations are true for the simple reason that they accurately represent what Scripture had always taught and affirmed.

Answering Questions from Scripture

Since Scripture affirms the doctrine of the Trinity, a Christian should be able to show where it teaches this doctrine. In addition to locating this doctrine, a believer should also be able to teach this doctrine to others, defend it against criticism truth, and respond to it with enthusiasm and worship.

Unfortunately, Christians who claim to believe in the triune God often find themselves unable to support their belief with Scripture. With this awkward dilemma in mind, one person observes, “It is little wonder that a veteran Jehovah’s Witness, after a lengthy discussion with one who believed in the Trinity, said, ‘I never before met a Trinitarian who actually seemed to believe the doctrine!’”

Knowing that Jehovah’s Witnesses, for instance, rigorously prepare to deny the doctrine of the Trinity, Christians should prepare to answer such challenges with even more vigor. They should not be lethargic, relegating this preparation to pastors and theologians alone (Heb 5:12).

To fulfill this personal responsibility, they should learn to state this doctrine clearly and to show its biblical basis.

Questions for Review

1. Since the Bible does not use the word *trinity*, is it an unbiblical doctrine? Why not?
2. Did the Catholic Church invent the doctrine of the Trinity? Why not?
3. How would you support your belief in the Trinity to a person who denies this doctrine?

Lesson 3: Stating the Doctrine Accurately

A Basic Definition

Any definition of the Trinity must include two basic elements.

- It must affirm that there is one eternal God.
- It must affirm that this one God has always existed as three persons.

Theologians use *trinity* to describe this “three-in-oneness” of God. He is both one God (*uni-* means “one”) and three persons (*tri-* means “three”), so he is triune.

One basic explanation of the Trinity describes God as “three distinct persons in one divine essence.” A similar statement affirms that “God exists as three persons, yet he is one God.”

More specifically, it is appropriate to define the Trinity as one eternal God who exists in three coeternal, coequal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Authenticity of the Doctrine

Statements like this, which insist that there is one God but three persons, may seem incompatible and contradictory. Yet this difficulty only serves to strengthen the authenticity of the doctrine because no person would have devised such a concept.

In this way, the doctrine of the Trinity underscores the divine origin and authority of Scripture as God’s self-revelation. It demonstrates that the Bible is not the result of mere human imagination (2 Pet 1:20-21).

So then, the tri-unity of God upholds the divine nature of Scripture, and the Scripture upholds the tri-unity of God as orthodox doctrine. Furthermore, the Trinity sets apart the Christian faith as unique from all other religions, for no other faith worships such a triune God.

Potential Errors in Explaining the Doctrine

To explain the triunity of God responsibly, you should avoid the following erroneous explanations. Though you may easily

- Modalism (or Unitarianism), for instance, rightly emphasizes the oneness of God, but it fails by denying that God is three eternal persons. This view alleges that God is one divine being who manifests himself in three alternate ways, either as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit – but only one at a time. According to this view, he changes his appearance as needed, from Father to Son to Spirit, but he is not all three simultaneously. This is a wrong, heretical view.
- Tritheism alleges that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three independent persons. This view emphasizes the three eternal, divine persons, but not as one unified God. As such, it portrays God in a polytheistic way, as three gods rather than one. This is also a wrong, heretical view.

Any description of the Trinity must avoid both of these errors. It must present the oneness of God and the three persons of God as harmonious truths and eternal realities.

A Balanced, Biblical Perspective

Christians believe that God is triune – both one God and three persons – not because the concept makes sense to our finite minds, but because God reveals himself this way in Scripture. It is therefore necessary to accept this doctrine by faith.

In doing so, a believer must avoid any attempt at resolve apparent contradictions. The doctrine of Trinity ultimately defies full comprehension.

Consequently, believers should refrain from using analogies and illustrations to describe the Trinity. Popular examples of this approach include:

- The three states of water (ice, water, and steam)
- The three parts of an egg (yolk, white, and shell)

Though such illustrations may help to explain the Trinity to some degree, they misrepresent the Trinity in other ways. They end up resembling errors like modalism or tritheism instead.

Such difficulty does not mean that the doctrine of the Trinity is erroneous, nor does it mean that God has revealed himself in a faulty or incomplete way.

As human beings, we endeavor to understand God through our finite abilities, yet our limitations prevent us from understanding the infinite, incomparable God completely.

Still, God expects for us to understand him as fully as possible. He desires for us to know him to the extent that he has revealed himself in Scripture (Deut 29:29). This knowledge requires prayerful, humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit and the careful study of his Word.

Questions for Review

1. Any description of the Trinity must include which two basic elements?
2. How does the difficulty of this doctrine demonstrate that it is truly from God?
3. Why is modalism a wrong way to explain the Trinity?
4. Why is tritheism a wrong way to understand the Trinity?
5. Why should you avoid using common illustrations to describe the Trinity?

Lesson 4: There is One God

To understand the Trinity properly, you should begin by recognizing that the Bible reveals one God, not three.

- The Old Testament affirms this reality from the opening line by saying, “In the beginning God” (Gen 1:1).
- The Ten Commandments likewise open this way, saying, “I am the Lord your God ... you shall have no other gods before Me” (Exo 20:2-3).
- The central command of all Scripture, called the *shema*, rests squarely on this monotheistic reality, announcing emphatically, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deut 6:4). Jesus repeated this truth in his public teaching ministry centuries later (Deut 6:4; cf. Mark 12:29, Luke 10:27).
- At the outset of the church era, James reaffirmed to the church this monotheistic belief in one God. He said, “You believe that there is one God. You do well” (Jam 2:19).
- Paul also draws attention to this timeless doctrine. He said, “We ... know that there is no other God but one” (1 Cor 8:4).

The oneness of God reveals more than the singular number of God. It also refers to his divine essence. “Divine essence” refers to all that being the one true God requires. It refers to all the qualities that are essential to being God and includes the extent and proportion of those qualities.

As such, God perfectly embodies all the necessary attributes of God. This divine essence is unchangeable and indivisible and has always been this way. No one else shares these qualities.

Theologians call this truth the doctrine of simplicity, meaning that the nature of God cannot be divided into parts. He is always God and totally God in every way. In that sense, he is one.

He is also one with regards to his purpose. This refers to a mutual harmony of the three persons within the Godhead. Neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit ever functions independently, or out of harmony with one another or out of sync with the single, shared will of God (John 5:19; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10).

Questions for Review

1. Where does the Old Testament (OT) teach there is only one God?
2. Where does the New Testament (NT) teach there is only one God?
3. What is *divine essence*?
4. What is the doctrine of simplicity and how does it relate to the “oneness” of God?

Lesson 5: There is a Plurality in the Godhead

While Scripture clearly teaches that there is only one God, it also reveals some kind of plurality within the Godhead. Moses intimated this from the beginning when he recorded God as saying, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26). In this statement, God referred to himself with a plural form, even though he is a singular God.

Some theologians have suggested that this phenomenon is nothing more than a plural of majesty. If this is true, then God only referred to himself in a regal fashion as when the Queen of England refers to herself as “we.” In contrast, however, early church fathers and the Reformers alike have interpreted this as an unmistakable reference to a plurality within the Godhead.

God referred to himself this way twice more in Genesis and once in Isaiah.

- “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us...’ (Gen 3:22).
- “Come, let Us go down...” (Gen 11:7).
- “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us...” (Isa 6:8).

To be sure, these plural references do not prove that there are three divine persons. They only indicate plurality – so more than one, or two at a minimum. They also do not name or identify the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit in any specific way. Even so, they do reveal that there is a plurality within the Godhead.

Some will object to this plurality by claiming that since God is one, then any plurality within the Godhead is impossible (Deut 6:4). This criticism fails to acknowledge that the Hebrew word for *one* allows a plurality.

An example of this occurs when a husband and wife together are called “one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Regarding this nuance, a dictionary explains how *one* conveys the idea of “unity while recognizing diversity within that oneness.” From this, you can see that the meaning of this word beautifully accommodates a trinitarian perspective.

Questions for Review

1. How do both Moses and Isaiah provide evidence of a plurality in the Godhead?
2. How does the example of marriage show that something can be both “one” and “plural” at the same time?

Lesson 6: The Father is God

Having established both the plurality and oneness of God, it is necessary to establish that Scripture presents three distinct members of the Godhead as equally and eternally God. Each is fully God no more and no less than the others.

To begin with, you should recognize the deity and eternality of God the Father. From Genesis 1:1 to the end of the Bible, general references to God normally refer to the Father (i.e., John 3:16, et al.).

Even so, Scripture provides repeated and explicit references to the Father as God.

- The OT, prophet Malachi identifies the one true God as Father, saying, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?” (Mal 2:10).
- In the NT, Paul affirms that there is one God called the Father, saying “There is one God, the Father...” (1 Cor 8:6).
- Isaiah repeatedly alludes to God this way. He said, “Doubtless You are our Father...You, O Lord, are our Father” (63:16) and then, “O Lord, You are our Father” (64:8).
- James does the same, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (1:17).
- Jesus does the same, as well. He said, “Our Father, in heaven” (Matt 6:9), “One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matt 23:9), and “Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Luke 10:21-22).

Furthermore, God the Father is eternal, indicating both that he must be God and that he has always been God (Deut 33:27; Psa 90:2; Isa 63:16).

Questions for Review

1. What OT prophets call the Father God?
2. What NT writers call the Father God?
3. What fact about God indicates that he has always been God?

Lesson 7: The Son is God

Though critics abound, Scripture strongly supports the deity of the second person of the Godhead.

John begins his gospel by declaring that Jesus has always been God, and as such has always been in perfect union with God the Father. “The Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Matthew also declares that the Son, in his earthly, human existence, was named Immanuel because of who he was, which is “God with us” (Matt 1:23; cf. Isa 9:6).

What’s more, Jesus himself claimed to be God. In fact, he claimed to be the same God who had revealed himself famously to Moses as Yahweh at the burning bush (John 8:58; cf. Exod 3:14).

Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews provides explicit, emphatic evidence for the deity of the Son. In this instance, God the Father said to the Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Heb 1:8). So here the Father called the Son “God,” a declaration that originates in the OT (Ps 45:6-7).

Furthermore, the Son is eternal, just as the Father is eternal. This demonstrates that he must be God and that he has always been God, just as the Father (Mic 5:2; John 8:58).

In his gospel, John quotes Jesus as saying, “O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5).

Then in Revelation, he records the words of Jesus saying, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8).

Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the deity of the Son, claiming that this identity as a “son” proves the opposite, that he is not equal to the Father. They misunderstand the meaning of this title, however.

Consider how the unbelieving Jewish rabbis agreed that the claims by Jesus for God as his Father were claims to personal deity, making himself equal to the Father.

- At one point, “the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He ... also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18).
- In another instance, he said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

One theologian says this: “The designation ‘Son of God’ when used of our Lord means of the order of God and is a strong and clear claim to full Deity.” The Jewish authorities who harassed Jesus, knew this as well. That’s why they rejected his claim and attempted to execute him for blasphemy (John 10:31-38).

The believing disciple Thomas also recognized the divine claims of Jesus, but unlike the rabbis, he accepted this fact, giving worship to Jesus instead. Most stunningly, Jesus accepted this worship, further validating his claim to be God (John 20:28).

In addition to the title “Son of God,” Jesus also referred to himself as the “Son of Man.” He referred to himself this way far more than as the Son of God. By doing this, he identified himself as the Son of Man that Daniel had prophesied (Dan 7:13-14). This “Son of Man” would come from heaven with power and glory to rule over the kingdoms of the world. Jewish religious leaders understood this to be yet another claim to be God (Matt 26:63-66).

Questions for Review

1. How does John 1:1 teach that Jesus is God?
2. How do the names of Jesus show that he is God?
3. How does Jesus himself teach that he is God?
4. How does the writer of Hebrews show that Jesus is God?
5. How do we know that the title “Son of God” proves that Jesus is God?
6. How do we know that the title “Son of Man” proves that Jesus is God?

Lesson 8: The Spirit is God

In addition to the Father and the Son, Scripture also identifies a third person, the Holy Spirit, as God. According to Luke, Peter said that to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God, thereby identifying the Spirit as God (Acts 5:3-4). Elsewhere, Paul calls the Holy Spirit “the Lord” (2 Cor 3:17).

In the OT, Job claimed that the Spirit had created him, an activity that only God can perform (33:4). In another place, David ascribes omnipresence to the Spirit, which is an attribute reserved for God alone (Ps 139:7).

Elsewhere, Paul attributes omniscience, another divine attribute, to the Spirit (1 Cor 2:11). Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews calls the Spirit eternal, indicating that he must be God and that he has always been God, just as the Father and the Son are God and have always been so (Heb 9:14).

Questions for Review

1. How does Luke show that the Holy Spirit is God?
2. How does Paul show that the Holy Spirit is God?
3. How does the writer of Hebrews show that the Holy Spirit is God?
4. How does the OT teach that the Holy Spirit is God?

Lesson 9: The Three Members of the Godhead are Persons

Having recognized the equally divine and eternal nature of each member of the Godhead, it is also necessary to recognize that Scripture portrays them each as persons. This means that each one has the attributes of a personal being and not just the qualities of an abstract force, an emanation of some kind, a philosophical idea, or the product of imagination.

Scripture reveals that each divine person can think, feel, and make purposeful choices, each of which are characteristics of a personal being. **The Father**

Knows

- “Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” (Matt 6:8)
- “Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” (Matt 6:32)

Feels

- “You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion...” (Psa 86:15)
- “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven...” (Rom 1:18)

Makes Intentional Choices

- “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt 6:10)
- “Elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...” (1 Pet 1:2) **The**

Son

Knows

- “Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.” (John 2:24)
- “We are sure that You know all things...” (John 16:30)

Feels

- “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them...” (Matt 9:36)
- “He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved...” (Mark 3:5)

Makes Intentional Choices

- “As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous...” (John 5:30)
- “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you...” (6:38)

The Spirit

Knows

- “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things...” (John 14:26)
- “The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” (1 Cor 2:10)

Feels

- “They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit...” (Isa 63:10)
- “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” (Eph 4:30)

Makes Intentional Choices

- “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.” (Gen 6:3)
- “One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” (1 Cor 12:11)

Questions for Review

1. Why must we recognize that each member of the Godhead is a personal being?
2. What do we know about the Father that shows he is a person?
3. What do we know about the Son that shows he is a person?
4. What do we know about the Spirit that shows he is a person?

Lesson 10: The Three Members of the Godhead are Distinct from One Another

Just as Scripture acknowledges the personality of each member of the Godhead, it also distinguishes each one from the other. This is an important observation because although the three persons of the Godhead are equally the same God and share the entire divine essence, they are not the same person.

- For instance, the Son is not the Father because he speaks of “going to” the Father (John 20:17).
- Likewise, we know that the Spirit is not the Father because the Father “sends” the Spirit (John 14:26).
- Furthermore, we know that the Spirit is not the Son because the Father sent him to dwell within us, taking the place of the Son who was departing (John 14:16).

This previous reference by John to the Holy Spirit as “another helper” is especially helpful because it identifies the Spirit as both equal to Jesus in divine essence and work, yet distinct from Jesus at the same time because he would replace Jesus.

In addition to these instances of distinction from one another, consider how Luke records Jesus as describing each member of the Trinity as having a distinct role in the life of a believer. See if you can spot all three!

Jesus said, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ...” (Acts 1:7-8).

Further evidence of a distinction between the persons of the Godhead may be found in those occasions where Scripture shows them acting separately from one another, yet in harmony with one another at the same time.

The example of the Son requesting the Father to send the Spirit has already provided one such occasion (John 14:16, 26). Another compelling example appears at the baptism of Jesus.

“Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” (Matt 3:13-17)

In this example, all three persons of the Godhead act separately and in the same moment. Jesus came up from the water, the Spirit came on him as a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven. This is important because it shows that God does not reveal himself as the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, changing his form or appearance one at a time (which is a heresy called *modalism*). He is one God and three distinct persons all at the same time.

Questions for Review

1. Why must we recognize that each member of the Godhead is distinct from the others?
2. How do we know the Son is not the Father?
3. How do we know the Spirit is not the Father?
4. How do we know the Spirit is not the Son?
5. How does John 14:16 show us both the equality and distinction of the Son and the Spirit?
6. How does the baptism of Jesus prove that the Father, Son, and Spirit are not the same person?

Lesson 11: The Three Members of the Godhead are Equally Divine

We have demonstrated that there is one God and that there are three distinct persons within the Godhead. Now it is important to see where Scripture presents each member of the Godhead as sharing the divine nature equally.

This observation verifies that one is not somehow more divine than another. It also underscores that all three persons are fully and equally the same God.

The most distinct example of this equality appears when Christ gave instructions for baptizing new disciples (Matt 28:19). He instructed believers to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

This instruction echoes the baptism of Jesus, which has already been cited as evidence for the triune God (Matt 3:12-17; 4:17). It also features a significant grammatical detail – the way that Jesus used a singular form of the word *name*, even though three separate persons follow (not one).

You would normally expect him to say, “In the names of...,” but he used the singular form instead (“the name of”), followed by the names of all three persons of the Godhead. This unusual grammatical arrangement indicates both unity (i.e., “the name” of one God) and a plurality (three divine Persons – the Father, Son, and Spirit) within the Godhead.

Beyond this clear witness to the three-in-one God, other examples also exist. Paul names the three persons of the Godhead as equal associates within the Godhead, saying, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14).

One commentator highlights the significance of this pronouncement: “Paul’s final benediction mentions blessings that all three members of the Trinity bring: grace from Christ, love from God, and *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit. Paul does not elaborate a doctrine of the Trinity, but as a Jew, he would not offer such a blessing in the name of anyone but the one God.”

This observation underscores the significance of this threefold blessing as support for three equally divine persons within the Godhead. It also underscores the significance of a similar allusion at the beginning of this same letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:21-22), along with similar trinitarian references elsewhere (Rom 8:9-11; Gal 4:4-6; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:4-6; Eph 1:3, 13-14; 2:18; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; Jude 20-21). So Scripture reveals that there is one God, in three distinct persons, each of whom shares the same divine essence equally.

Questions for Review

1. What NT verse proves most clearly that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each fully and equally God?
2. How do the many statements of blessing from Paul in the NT show us that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each fully and equally God?

Lesson 12: Concluding Thoughts

Properly understood from Scripture, the Trinity teaches one eternal God who exists in three coeternal, coequal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So then, God is eternally one while also existing as an eternal plurality within the Godhead.

As such, it is appropriate to call the Father God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God. These three are distinct persons, and they are each equally and completely divine. Though such statements may seem contradictory and impossible, they accurately portray the way that God has revealed himself in Scripture.

By reading and studying Scripture, you should be able to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical and true because it accounts for what the Bible says about God. This biblical perspective should equip you to answer questions, both from your own reflection and from people around you.

Whether you are teaching a Sunday School class, speaking with a colleague over lunch, or responding to a Jehovah's Witness or Muslim neighbor, you should be able to explain this doctrine in a clear and thoughtful way, referring directly to what the Bible says. Best of all, this truth about the Trinity makes possible a more meaningful and vibrant relationship with God.

Questions for Review

1. In what situations might you need to be prepared to show that the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity?
2. What evidence from the Bible do you find most helpful for teaching this doctrine?
3. What Bible verses would you like to memorize so that you are ready to answer questions about the Trinity at any time?
4. What questions do you still have about the Trinity?

Lesson 13: Your Personal Response to this Doctrine

The doctrine of the Trinity should awaken certain personal responses from a believer. The following proposals suggest what some of these responses may be.

Enhanced Worship

The believer who contemplates the incomparable nature of the triune God realizes his or her extreme unworthiness to approach the supreme majesty of God. Like Isaiah in the presence of God, he must bow down to worship in humility and awe (Isa 6:1-8).

Sharing this perspective, one theologian has properly exclaimed: “One cannot reflect upon the nature and uniqueness of our God without being filled with awe and praise. We shall forever ponder these sacred mysteries and learn of this infinite Being. Meanwhile, it is our joy to fellowship with the members of the Trinity and to express our love for them by our trust and obedience (Mark 12:30; John 14:15, 21, 23).”

Increased Evangelism

The believer should also embrace God’s mandate to speak to people on his behalf (Isa 6:9-10). Today we do not share Isaiah’s exclusive prophetic mission of exclusively proclaiming judgment. We share a more glorious and inclusive mission instead, one that proclaims the good news of victory and deliverance from judgment through Christ. As with Isaiah, a humble and obedient response to the reality, authority, and presence of the triune God undergirds our mission to make disciples throughout the world (Matt 28:18-20).

Attentive Bible Study

Preparing to answer questions about the Trinity should motivate the believer to read and study the Bible with greater awareness (1 Pet 3:15). Sometimes God reveals the truth about himself through Scripture in obvious, clear statements, while at other times he does so through details in Scripture, whether difficult and obscure (2 Pet 3:16). In either case, the Bible provides far more evidence for the Trinity than this Bible study guide alone provides. Will you begin to look for these additional clues for yourself (Luke 16:29; 24:25-27)?

Improved Prayer

Increased knowledge of the triune God fosters a greater familiarity and confidence in approaching the Godhead through prayer. The believer should learn what it means to engage the Trinity by praying “to the Father (Matt 6:6) in the name of the Son (John 16:24) through or in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20).” Praying this way is more profound than simply praying, “Dear God...” and interacts with God more intimately and knowledgeably.

More Meaningful Singing

Knowledge of the Trinity enables a believer to sing hymns to God with greater devotion and understanding (1 Cor 4:15; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). This will be especially true when singing songs about the triune God.

Scholars believe that the early church sang such hymns regularly. The texts for some of these hymns appear to be recorded in the NT (Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-3). Traditional examples today include “Holy, Holy, Holy,” “Come, Thou Almighty King, and “Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow,” and so much more. An attentive worshipper will soon realize just how many hymns extol the glories of the triune God.

Strengthened Relationships

Finally, believers who reflect upon the triune nature of God will learn how to relate with other people in a more meaningful way. From the beginning, God created people (men and women together) after his own image and likeness, saying, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26-27). Therefore, the believer should seek to learn from God how to best relate to the people he places into his or her life (Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; Phil 2:1-8).

This pursuit of healthy, vibrant relationships answers the heart-cry of Jesus when he prayed for believers to share a similar kind of unity as the Trinity: “That they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And the glory which you gave me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one” (John 17:21-22). From this statement, you can see that the Trinity serves as the ultimate example of a unified, personal relationship.

Questions for Review

1. How should the doctrine of the Trinity affect your attitude towards God?
2. How should this doctrine affect your witness for God in the world around you?
3. How should this doctrine affect the way you read and study the Bible?
4. How should this doctrine affect the way that you pray to God?
5. How should this doctrine affect the way that you worship God through music?
6. What songs remind you of the Trinity?
7. How should this doctrine affect the way that you interact with other people?
8. Which relationships, in particular, come to mind?

Appendix: Explaining the Trinity to Your Muslim Neighbor

Inquisitive Muslims, curious about Bible Christianity, find the doctrine of the Trinity difficult to accept. How can one God be three distinct persons at once? Has a Muslim, whether friend or stranger, ever questioned you about this? How should you answer? Here is an approach that may help.

First, affirm that there is one God.

- The prophet Moses, in the Old Testament, clearly teaches that there is one God, not several (Exod 20:3, Deut 6:4). Islam respects Moses as a prophet, so this is a terrific place to start.
- Next, Jesus and the New Testament prophets agree (Mark 12:29, Jam 2:19).
- Furthermore, this God is not isolated to the Jewish people but is the God whom all nations and all people must worship (Rom 3:29-30).

So if we must worship this one true God, what does he say about himself?

Pause to clarify an important misconception.

Though the Quran denies the Trinity, it refutes a *misconception* of the Trinity: that the Trinity is God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son, each a separate God.

This, of course, is entirely different than the Trinity of the Bible. In fact, Jesus flatly denies that Mary has anything to do with his spiritual relationship to God the Father (Matt 12:46-50). So, you can assure any Muslim friend that you also reject this false trinity.

At this point, you can tell them that the Bible teaches a *different* kind of Trinity, one which affirms that there is only one God.

Take a look at the words of Jesus.

Though Muslims do not view Jesus as God, they accept him as a great prophet and generally respect his teaching. So, it is helpful to thoughtfully show them what Jesus, as a prophet and teacher, said about God and himself. If Jesus as a prophet taught something, then it must be true. If he said anything that is not true about God or himself, then he would be teaching false things, making himself a false prophet instead. • The prophet John taught that Jesus, called 'the Word', was eternal, existing from the beginning of time.

- He also taught that Jesus was *with* God, indicating that in some way, Jesus the Son and God the Father are different *persons*. At the same time, he also taught that Jesus actually *was* God (John 1:1-2).
- So, Jesus is a distinct person alongside God the Father (*with* God) but is also equal to God in nature (*was* God) at the same time. And it has always been this way.

Furthermore, John taught that Jesus was not always a human being, but rather *became* a human being in the first century AD. So, he did not *come into existence* at his birth. Instead, he was *sent* into existence by God the Father (Gal 4:4).

He was equal in glory (in nature) to God the Father, even as a human being (John 1:14). No other prophet, whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim, is described this way, distinct from God the Father as a separate person, but the *same* as God the Father in nature at the same time.

During his earthly ministry as a prophet sent from God, Jesus claimed that he had been working throughout history and throughout his ministry the *same way* that God the Father had been working; there was no difference in what they were doing (John 5:17).

How did the Jewish rabbis interpret this teaching? They properly understood this to be an unmistakable claim of being equal with God in nature (John 5:18). On this basis, they rejected him as a false teacher and attempted to execute him.

Muslims do not reject Jesus in the same way, but like Christians, they must decide what to do about these claims. If Jesus was speaking the truth, then he *was* equal to God and deserved to be worshiped *as God*, not stoned (John 20:28). He made a similar claim in John 10:25, 30.

If Jesus was not speaking the truth on this point, then he does not deserve to be called a prophet. He is a false teacher instead.

Beyond these claims of Jesus to be equal to God, what about the Holy Spirit? He also taught that the Holy Spirit had a similar identity. He used a single name to refer God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). This instance describes three persons, distinct in their own identity but equally the same in nature. Together, they share a name and authority as God.

Ultimately, pray for spiritual understanding.

For a Muslim to accept the truth of the Trinity requires spiritual understanding, not just intellectual proofs (1 Cor 1:22-24; 2:14). This is true for any person of any religious or nonreligious persuasion.

A Muslim understandably questions the apparent quandary of how one God could exist in three distinct persons at the same time. So it is reasonable to ask them why we should expect God to make complete sense to us at all (Job 36:26).

God is invisible, they will agree (1 Tim 1:17). So to understand him, we must rely on what he tells us about himself. If what he tells us doesn't make sense, we should accept it anyway, because he is God and we are not. He is infinite and we are finite (Rom 11:33, Isa 55:8-9). Is that not the right way to approach God?

God is more complex than our human mind can comprehend. And we should expect this complexity and challenge because he is greater. And if the clear statements of Jesus, and the Old and New Testament prophets, teach that the one true God exists in three distinct persons at the same time, then it is true whether it makes sense or not.

Further Reading

- For a helpful post by Joel Arnold about the glorious mystery of the Trinity and how we should respond, [click here](#).
- For a helpful study about how God can be incomprehensible and comprehensible at the same time, [click here](#).