

An Outline of Biblical Trinitarianism  
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The Bible presents us with two truths which at first seem to be incongruous, God is one and three are God. Some choose to call this a mystery (not the Biblical definition), a truth which is just too hard to really understand. Biblical Trinitarianism is the synthesis from the Bible of these two sets of facts. It is the teaching concerning the Trinity, the Three in One.

This synthesis begins with the Bible's teaching that there is only one God!!! By this statement, we are not saying that there is only one God for us, but that only one God exists anywhere! Idols and demons are called gods but are not real gods; they are not the true God. Man's fallen human nature is bent toward idolatry. Man's history involves the worship of multiple gods. When God gave the law to Israel, one of the points which He emphasized is that there is but one God and not many. This was to be a contrast between Israel and the nations around them. Biblical Trinitarianism does not contradict this fact. Biblical Trinitarianism is monotheistic [belief in one God].

We then must consider passages which reveal more than one person being God, called God or related as God. These passages do not state the truth of the Trinity but may imply it and are its basis. What is interesting is that many of these passages are found in the Old Testament, which Trinitarians agree supported monotheism and was not Trinitarian, (though it is not anti-Trinitarian). David, himself, recognized two distinct persons who were both God, one was addressed as his Lord [Adonai] and one as Jehovah [LORD]. Yet David was a monotheist living under the Mosaic Law which forbid having other gods. Therefore, if David did not recognize his Adonai as being in some sense equal with Jehovah, David was in violation of that Law. This does not mean that David was a Trinitarian but it demonstrates that even with the limited revelation concerning the Godhead available to him, he did see more than one person being God. Isaiah records the activity of three who are identified as Jehovah and interact with one another, speak to one another and cooperate. While the Old Testament established the existence of only one God, it did not contradict the idea that the one God is more than one person.

In the New Testament, the doctrine of the Trinity comes into focus. The Old Testament passages which hinted at the Trinity, find their explanation in plain statements. When Jesus declared Himself equal with God, we understand how David could have a Lord distinct from Jehovah. When Jesus united three in one name, we understand how Isaiah could relate three as each being Jehovah and yet in some sense three distinct persons. The New Testament limits the number of persons who are God to three and reveals them to be the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is necessary for us to look at the Scriptures which plainly unite more than one person to the title God, the characteristics of God, the prerogatives of God and the works of God.

One hindrance to understanding the Trinity are the relationships of the three persons to one another. When we study God, we find both ontological and economic relationships between them. Their ontological relationships involve everything that is true of them as God. Each is God. Each equally possesses and can use all of the divine nature. On an ontological level, each one sees Himself as being equal to the other two persons and they being equal to Him. Their economic relationships revolve around the out working of their plan, a plan concerning which

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they counseled together (Acts 2:23). God is not a God of disorder and therefore, the members of the Trinity do not trip over one another trying to do the same work. Consider; only one person of the Godhead became man, lived among man, died on a cross and rose again. While the Son did this, the Father and Spirit carried out works relative to His incarnation. These relationships were related to time. Most of the problems people have with the Trinity arise from a failure to identify economic relationships. They see the Son in subordination to the Father's will and therefore deduce that He is eternally subordinate. Subordination is economic. Ontologically, the Son is not subordinate to the Father. It is necessary to distinguish which relationships are eternal and which are temporary.

Finally, we must realize that we are finite beings, one person existing in one single, limited essence. No two persons share a human nature. God is not human. God is spirit and infinite spirit at that. God's spirit essence is one of the reasons that the three can indeed be equal. They can each equally use every part of their nature at the same time without limitation. That could never happen in a human nature. To illustrate, three persons would have to take turns using a human hand if one wished to eat cake, one wished to swim underwater and one wished to dribble a basketball. It would be impossible to do all three simultaneously with the same hand. That is because of the limitations of a physical human nature. Therefore, Biblical Trinitarianism isn't impossible to understand, it isn't even hard to understand; it's just different than anything which we might experience in this created universe. God is different! God is unique and in that we praise Him.

### I. God is one God.

A. 1 Corinthians 8:4 - Many are called god but are not genuinely gods.

B. Only one is genuinely God.

1. Deuteronomy 6:4 - Jehovah is one God.

2. Isaiah 45:5 - "I am Jehovah, and no other, no other God beside Me." "Before Me no god was formed, and after Me none shall exist, none but Me, the Lord..." (43:10, 11; see also 44:6; 45:21.

3. Romans 3:30 - Since indeed there is one God who ...

4. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 - Turn to serve the living and true God.

5. 1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God ...

### II. A plurality is indicated in several Old Testament passages.

A. Some passages use the plural title of God [elohim- אֱלֹהִים] with the plural pronoun. (Normally, this plural noun is used with the singular pronoun, therefore, these are unusual).

1. Genesis 1:26 - "Let US make man in our image".

2. Genesis 3:22 - "Now man has become like one of US".

3. Genesis 11:7 - "Let US go down and see..."

4. Isaiah 6:8 - "Whom shall I send, and who will go for US?"

B. Some passages speak of more than one person being God. We can't determine how many, though like the New Testament, we find no more than three.

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1. Hosea 1:4 & 7 relate two persons both called Jehovah. “(4) Then Jehovah said to him ... (7) yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by Jehovah their God.”
2. Isaiah 44:6 relates two persons. “Thus says Jehovah, King of Israel, and His Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts.”
3. Isaiah 48:12 & 16, 17 relates three persons. “(12) I am He, I the First, I the Last ... (16) I have not spoken in secret... the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me. (17) Thus says Jehovah, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am Jehovah your God...”
4. Isaiah 61:1 relates three persons. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because Jehovah has anointed Me.” The Me is “Jehovah your Savior” in 60:16 (remember chapter and verse divisions were not original and therefore, they break the thought). Jesus quotes this in Luke 4:18 and identifies Himself as the “Me.”
5. Haggai 2:4,5, 7 relates three persons. “(4) ... says Jehovah of hosts ... (5) so my Spirit remains ... (7) they shall come to the Desire of Nations.”

### III. New Testament revelation clarifies that only three are God.

#### A. Two persons are considered equal as God.

1. In John 10:30 Jesus identified Himself and the Father as being One. One is a neuter adjective [hen ε[ν], therefore, one thing. Jesus’ enemies clearly understood His statement to be blasphemy.
2. In John 5:17-29 Jesus identified the Father as uniquely [ιδιον ιδιου] His Father. This meant that He was making Himself “equal things” with God. Equal things is a neuter form of ισος.
3. The Spirit is identified as being the very same kind [αλλος] Helper that Jesus had been (John 14:16).

#### B. Three persons are associated with divine activities.

1. In giving gifts it is the same Spirit, same Lord, same God (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).
2. In the unity of the believer there is one Spirit, one Lord, one God even Father (Ephesians 4:4-6).
3. In Christ’s earthly ministry, John was told by the One having sent him (the Father), that He could identify the One baptizing by the Spirit (the Son), by seeing the Spirit descend and remain upon Him (John 1:29-34).
4. In the giving of grace and peace, three are the source: the One who is, and the One who was, and the One who is coming (the Father), the seven Spirits before the throne, Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness and firstborn from among the dead, the One ruling the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:4-5).
5. In believer’s water baptism, three share one name: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20).
6. In Paul’s closing to His second Corinthian letter, he saw each person providing a benefit for the Corinthians, “grace from the Lord Jesus Christ and the love from God and the fellowship from the Holy Spirit” (13:13). This passage is interesting because the Father (the God) is placed between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit.

### IV. Three Persons are called or declared to be God.

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- A. The Father is called God.
  - 1. “One God the Father” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Grammatically, this is the same kind of construction in the final clause of John 1:1 “the Word was God.”
  - 2. “One God the Father” indwells us (Ephesians 4:6).
  - 3. He is “the God even Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:6). The title Father is connected to our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - 4. The Son will turn the kingdom over to “the God even Father” (1 Corinthians 15:24).
  - 5. The Father, the God sealed the Son (John 6:27).
- B. The Son is called God.
  - 1. He personally claimed to be God.
    - a) He told Satan, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.” (Matthew 4:7). This was in response to Satan’s words, “Since you the Son of the God...” (v. 6).
    - b) He agreed with the Highpriest’s question, “Are you the Christ, the Son of God?” (Matthew 26:63-64; John 9:35-38; 10:34-38).
    - c) He called Himself the I AM, God’s Old Testament name Jehovah (John 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5, 6, 8; 4:26; 6:20; 13:19).
    - d) The Father called Him God (Hebrews 1:8, 9).
    - e) Others called Him God.
      - (1) Matthew (Matthew 1:23).
      - (2) Paul (Philippians 2:6,7; Acts 20:28). Our Great God even Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).
      - (3) Peter, “Our God even Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1).
      - (4) John (1 John 5:20; John 1:1, 18; Revelation 1:8, 11).
- C. The Spirit is called God.
  - 1. He is the Spirit of God (Matthew 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:11-12). This can be “the Spirit who is God.” “Of God” [του θεου] is in the Genitive case, the common use of which is further description. “A quality that could have been described by an adjective might be put in the genitive. This use of the genitive is nearest to the basic meaning of the case.” [David Alan Black It’s Still Greek To Me p. 50].
  - 2. He is God and by His dwelling in the believer, constitutes the believer a temple of the God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).
  - 3. He is the Spirit of the Living God (2 Corinthians 3:3).
  - 4. Paul called Him the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)
  - 5. Peter called Him God (Acts 5:3-4). They had not lied to men but to God, to the Spirit.
- V. Three Persons have the characteristics which are ascribed to God.
  - A. God is eternal (Romans 16:26).
    - 1. The Father is eternal (1 Timothy 1:17).
    - 2. The Son is eternal “Father of eternity” (Isaiah 9:6). “Eternal Father” is not an accurate translation.
    - 3. The Spirit is eternal (Hebrews 9:14).
  - B. God is present everywhere (omnipresent) (Jeremiah 23:23-24).
    - 1. The Father is present everywhere (Matthew 6:4, 6).

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2. The Son is present everywhere (John 3:13 ...” the one in heaven” omitted at the end of the verse in some texts. Matthew 18:20; 28:20; Hebrews 13:5).
3. The Spirit is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10).
- C. God is self-existent (no one created or made God) (Exodus 3:14- “I AM that I AM).
  1. The Father is self-existent
  2. The Son is self-existent (John 1:1-3). He caused everything that ever came into existence to come into existence. If He had a beginning or a cause, He was His own cause and not the product of another. This is absurd and therefore, we conclude that He is self-existent.)
  3. The Spirit
- D. God is Truth (1 Thessalonians 1:9).
  1. The Father is truth (John 3:33).
  2. The Son is truth (John 14:6).
  3. The Spirit is truth (John 14:17; 15:26).
- E. God is Good (Mark 10:18). Good is not a moral term but one of well-being and happiness.
  1. The Father is good (Matthew 7:11).
  2. The Son is good (Romans 9:3 - “blessed”, 1 Timothy 6:15 “blessed” - “happy”).
  3. The Spirit is good (Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 143:10).
- F. God is Holy (Leviticus 19:2).
  1. The Father is holy (John 17:11).
  2. The Son is holy (Acts 4:27, 30).
  3. The Spirit is holy (Romans 1:4; Ephesians 4:30).
- G. God is life (Matthew 26:63).
  1. The Father is life (John 6:57).
  2. The Son is life (Colossians 3:4; John 14:6; 1 John 1:2; 5:20).
  3. The Spirit is life (Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6).
- H. God is light (1 John 1:5).
  1. The Father is the father of lights (James 1:17).
  2. The Son is light (John 1:4, 9; 8:12; 9:5).
  3. The Spirit is light (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).
- I. God knows all things (omniscience)
  1. The Father is omniscient (Matthew 6:8).
  2. The Son is omniscient (John 1:47-48; 2:24-25).
  3. The Spirit is omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).
- VI. Three Persons exercise or experience the prerogatives of God. Prerogative is a “special right or privilege, esp. of one holding a certain rank or status.” [Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary Revised Edition, p. 541].
  - A. God alone can be worshipped (Revelation 22:8, 9).
    1. The Father is worshipped (John 4:23).
    2. The Son is worshipped (John 20:28; 9:28).
    3. The Spirit is worshipped. The word worship is not used but the activities of worship are directed to the Spirit (Hebrews 10:29 “Spirit of grace”).

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- B. God alone is to be the object of faith (Mark 11:22).
    - 1. The Father is the object of faith (John 5:25; Romans 4:24).
    - 2. The Son is the object of faith (John 1:12; Acts 16:30).
    - 3. The Spirit is the object of faith (Galatians 3:14). He is the promised Spirit. Promise becomes hope, and hope is the basis of faith.
  - C. God alone gives the good gifts (James 1:17).
    - 1. The Father gives gifts (1 Corinthians 12:18, 24).
    - 2. The Son gives gifts (Ephesians 4:8, 11).
    - 3. The Spirit gives gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7-8).
  - D. God alone can be sinned against (Psalm 51:4).
    - 1. The Father can be sinned against (Daniel 9:11; Romans 3:23).
    - 2. The Son can be sinned against (1 Corinthians 8:12). This passage sees Jesus Christ connected to His body the church. An action with disregard for the body is then seen not as a sin against the body but against the Christ.
    - 3. The Spirit could be sinned against (Matthew 12:31).
  - E. God alone is sovereign, has absolute power and is not directed by others.
    - 1. The Father is sovereign (Matthew 11:25-27).
    - 2. The Son is sovereign (1 Timothy 6:15). The word "Sovereign" NASB and Potentate AV is a word meaning powerful one, one who rules with absolute power and sovereignty.
    - 3. The Spirit is sovereign (Isaiah 40:13).
- VII. Three Persons do the works of God.
- A. God is creator (Isaiah 45:18).
    - 1. The Father created (1 Corinthians 8:6).
    - 2. The Son created (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).
    - 3. The Spirit created (Job 26:13). He beautified the heavens. (John 33:4; Psalm 104:30).
  - B. God makes alive or raises the dead (Luke 20:37, 38; 2 Corinthians 1:9).
    - 1. The Father raises the dead and makes alive (John 5:21; Ephesians 2:5).
    - 2. The Son raises the dead and makes alive (John 5:21; 1 Corinthians 15:22).
    - 3. The Spirit raises the dead and makes alive (Romans 8:11).
  - C. God alone can save and be savior (Isaiah 43:11).
    - 1. The Father forgives sins and saves (Mark 2:6-7; Acts 8:22).
    - 2. The Son forgives sins and saves (Luke 5:20; Titus 2:13).
    - 3. The Spirit saves (Titus 3:5).
- VIII. Three are connected as one. God is one spirit essence in which the attributes inhere.
- A. The Scriptures do not present three spirit essences but one.
  - B. The Scriptures distinguish three persons who are this one God.
    - 1. Modalism (Sebellianism) is the errant view only one person is God and that this one person reveals Himself in different modes.
    - 2. The persons speak to one another. Unless one person is speaking to Himself or misleading others to think there are three persons, these passages demonstrate that there are three distinct persons who are this one God.
      - a) The Son prayed to the Father on several occasions (John 17).

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- (1) John 11:41-42 "... I thank You that You heard Me, I know that You always hear Me..."
- b) The Father spoke out of heaven while the Son was present. "This one is My beloved Son" (Matthew 17:5).
- c) The Father spoke while the Son was present and the Spirit descended upon the Son. "And the Holy Spirit, in a bodily form like a dove, descended upon Him (the Son), and a voice came from heaven, which said, You are my beloved Son; in You I am well pleased. (Luke 3:22).
3. The persons function together with distinct works.
  - a) The Son asked the Father to send the Spirit (John 14:16).
  - b) The Son sent the Spirit in cooperation with the Father (John 15:26; 16:7).
  - c) The Spirit spoke what He heard, He did not speak from Himself (John 16:13).
- C. The Scriptures do present one God.
- D. The Father and Son are one essence (John 10:30).
  1. One is singular and neuter.
  2. One indicates that the Father and Son are the same essence and attributes.
  3. One indicates that the Father's "hand" and the Son's "hand" are one hand. Hand is a metaphor for God's power, not a literal hand as God is spirit.
  4. One does not indicate one in purpose. Jesus applied one to essence by the use of "hand."
- E. The Father and Son can represent each other (John 14:8-11).
  1. The one who has seen the Son has seen the Father (v. 9).
    - a) They are not the same person.
    - b) They are the same God.
    - c) They are so one, that when the Son worked, He did exactly what the Father would have done.
    - d) They can not be two separate beings with two similar or identical divine essences as this would be insufficient for representing each other as completely as Jesus did.
  2. The Father and Son interpenetrate one another (vv. 10-11). This is Christ's explanation of seeing the Father in Himself. It is so true that they are one, that they are within each other as one. Being of one essence makes them totally interrelated.
    - a) The Son is in the Father.
    - b) The Father is in the Son.
  3. The Father is the Son's own (John 5:18).
    - a) The Son used the term **ιδιος** which indicated a special relation to the Father distinct from Israel's relation to God as a Father.
    - b) The Son and Father ideas in the Hebrew and Roman world did not involve the idea of generation but one of special privilege and position. It meant that the Son was a perfect representative of the Father (see above).
    - c) The Son's use of the pronoun **ιδιος** made this even more true, therefore the Jews accurately understood Him to be making Himself equal to God.
  4. The Son is equal things with the Father (John 5:18).
    - a) The word equal is not masculine but neuter.

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- (1) Normally its gender matches the words with which it is used.
  - (2) Father and Son are masculine nouns, therefore it does not derive gender from either.
  - (3) Equal things in this context explains how the Son is able to do the works of the Father and was working right up to that point just as the Father was working.
  - (4) Equal things points to their singular shared essence, with its abilities and qualities.
5. The Son and the Holy Spirit are one.
- a) The Son would send another Helper. Another is  $\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\varsigma$  rather than  $\epsilon\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$  and indicates one of the same quality. Therefore, the Spirit is of the same quality that the Son is!
  - b) The Spirit must be of the same essence that is the Son's or else He could not be compared to the Son by the adjective  $\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ . He might be similar but can not be the same.
  - c) The Son is God, equal with the Father.
  - d) The Spirit is equal with the Son.
  - e) Therefore, the Spirit is God, equal with the Father. (If  $A=B$  and  $B=C$ , then  $A=C$ .)