

God – Trinity or Unity?

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God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Three-in-one? Or are they each separate? This is the question that has been causing great debate for many, many centuries, since the 4th century in fact.

One cannot deny the fact that these three are truly remarkable, but do they form a threefold Godhead, with each part being co-equal and co-eternal? Most Christians of today think so.

It seems strange though that a central belief in the Christian churches of today - that is the doctrine of the Trinity - can form the core values on which they base their understanding of God and Jesus, yet few of these Christians actually have any understanding of the Trinity and few are aware of the problems that come with it. They simply take it for granted, leaving the finer points of this mysterious doctrine to the theologians.

Let us look what has been said about the mystery of the Trinity:

“The mind of a man cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. He who would try to understand the mystery fully will lose his mind. But he who would deny the Trinity will lose his soul”

(Harold Lindsey and Charles Woodbridge, *A Handbook of Christian Truth*, pp. 51-52)

In essence, either accept this concept of the Trinity or else. Don't try to understand it, but just believe in it. But, merely to accept it, is contrary to what the Bible says:

God inspired Paul to write: 1 Thess 5:21 “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”

... and further to this Peter wrote 1 Peter 3:15 “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you...”

So where do we prove these things and find our answers? From the Bible of course!

Therefore the Christian is obliged to prove whether or not God is a Trinity or a Unity, not just accepting what others say, but finding out for him or herself. Your relationship with God is a personal relationship. You can't claim that you have a relationship with God if all you know about him comes from information passed on to you. How can you know someone if you have never met them - I'm sure you have all experienced the time when you have been told all about someone, only when you finally meet them they are not at all how you imagined them.

If you want to get to know God then you must approach Him yourself and God has given us that means through his word printed on these pages - it is through the Bible that God reveals himself to us.

If you were to confine yourself to reading articles about the Trinity aimed at your average Christian, you would perhaps think that the Trinity was to be found everywhere in the Bible, but if you read some of the more technical articles, the encyclopaedias, and dictionaries you would come to an entirely different conclusion. The more you studied the Bible, the more you would realise that the doctrine of the Trinity is built on a very shaky foundation indeed.

All I can do is open your eyes, but don't automatically believe (or disbelieve) what I have to say. It is so important to discover the truth about God for yourself by reading and analysing the scriptures - only then will you discover who God really is.

I shall try and help you on your way by taking an analytical look at the scriptures as a whole and then you can make your own informed decisions.

I'd like to look at a quote from the New Catholic Encyclopaedia:

"It is difficult, in the second half of the 20th century, to offer a clear objective, and straightforward account of the revelation, doctrinal evolution, and the theological elaboration of the mystery of the Trinity. Trinitarian discussion, Roman Catholic as well as other, presents a somewhat unsteady silhouette."

New Catholic Encyclopaedia (Vol. XIV, p. 295)

But why should such a central doctrine be so difficult to understand, why is it so confusing? Why should such an important doctrine present an unsteady silhouette? Didn't Christ and his apostles plainly teach it?

Surely the Bible is filled with teaching of the Trinity, but the word Trinity never appears in the Bible and not only does it never appear, there is no proof that such a doctrine is even indicated.

Okay perhaps some of the better versed of you will say, ah, but what about 1 John 5:7? Surely that proves the doctrine of the Trinity?

[1 John 5:6-8]

It certainly sounds like proof for the Trinity, but many theologians have conceded that this scripture was added to the New Testament manuscripts, perhaps as late as the 8th century. There are no respectable Greek manuscripts that contain these words, and the modern versions of the New Testament tend to omit these words, and quite rightly so.

Scholars clearly recognise that the scripture has been altered, and these words have no place in the New Testament, but some misguided Christians still hold onto this passage as proof of the Trinity.

In actual fact it should read this...

6 οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι· καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστι τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια.

7 ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες,

8 τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἶμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.

(Greek New Testament - Nestle-Aland - 27th Edition)

When in doubt always go back to the original text.

7 ὅτι (ho-tee in that) τρεῖς (trace three) εἰσιν (a-sin they are) οἱ (hoy - the) μαρτυροῦντες (mar-too-rune-tes bear witness),

8 τὸ (toh - the) πνεῦμα (p'new-mah breath, spirit) καὶ (kye and) τὸ (toh the) ὕδωρ (hoo-dor water) καὶ (kye and) τὸ (toh the) αἶμα (ayma blood), καὶ (kye and) οἱ (hoy the) τρεῖς (trace three) εἰς (ace into) τὸ (hoy the) ἓν (en one) εἰσιν (a-sin they are).

So, verse 7 is essentially an addition and should be omitted, leaving verse 8.

So we have seen there is no biblical basis for the trinity doctrine, but how did it arise if it wasn't taught in the scriptures?

Firstly let us consider *when* it arose. The doctrine of the Trinity did not in fact appear until 300 - 400 years after the days of Christ and his apostles. To go even further, the early church fathers, the theologians who wrote in the period 100 - 300 A.D. knew nothing of it. There was no question of Jesus being co-equal or co-eternal with his father. He was the Son of God and was set lower than his Father.

The teachings of the Trinity were actually decisions made by a number of general church councils. These are the important ones:

325 AD - First General Council at Nicea, declared that the Son was from the beginning of the same nature as the Father.

381 AD - Second General Council at Constantinople, declared that the Holy Spirit was to be worshipped with the Father and the Son

431 AD - Third General Council at Ephesus, decreed that Jesus had two natures, a human and a divine; also that Mary was the 'mother of God', in opposition to those who maintained that she was the 'mother of Christ'.

451 AD - Fifth General Council at Chalcedon, decreed that the two natures in Christ constituted only one person and one will.

As you can see the formation of the Trinity did not happen overnight, and took a considerable amount of time, but you can see the progressive nature of this doctrine by comparing the major creeds of the church.

I have picked out the general emphasis from each creed:

The **Apostle's Creed**, is an early creed, date unknown, but expresses the relationship between God and Jesus....

"... God the Father Almighty... Jesus Christ His only Son ... conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary ..."

And after his resurrection *"... ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead ..."*

This is in complete agreement with what the Bible says... but the same cannot be said of the later creeds.

The **Nicene Creed**, 325 AD declares that Jesus Christ is *"... the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds ... God of God, Very God of Very God, being of one substance with the Father ... the Holy Ghost with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified ..."*

The **Athanasian Creed**, of unknown date, but soon after 500 AD.

"We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity ... there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate..."

All are declared to be eternal, “yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal”.

The Creed concludes by saying: “He that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity.”

Even theologians agree that the Trinity did not materialise until the 4th century, a time when the Christian movement was having a hard time establishing itself in a pagan world.

It is not clear why the formation of such a doctrine was necessary, especially as it did not seem to be based on biblical teachings, but as Greek philosophy was popular at the time (which contained non-biblical concepts such as immortality of the soul and dualism) perhaps it was thought that Christianity would be more palatable if they used the philosophy of the day.

Another possible reason is idea of knowledge equals power. If the churches could formulate some mysterious doctrine that required a high level of education to even begin to understand they would be able use their new found authority on scriptural matters to keep the people under control, which is similar to how the Pharisees behaved throughout the New Testament.

What is certain though is that the doctrine of the Trinity was largely based on political grounds, not Biblical.

Let us look at Bible evidence for the unity of God... and show that Jesus is neither co-equal nor co-eternal with God. There are a number of reasons which clearly show that God cannot be Jesus and that Jesus cannot be God.

Note these are not isolated passages I’m going to use, but themes that run throughout the Bible and many more examples could be used, whereas many of the Trinitarian claims are based on the odd passage here and there which have no weight when it comes to considering the Bible message as a whole.

1. No-one has ever seen God

Exodus 33:20 “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live”

John 1:18 “No man hath seen God at any time”

1 Timothy 1:17 “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.”

1 Timothy 6:13, 16 “I give thee charge in the sight of God ... whom no man hath seen, nor can see:”

1 John 4:12 “No man hath seen God at any time”

So these, and other passages from the Bible, show that no man can look upon God, and live, not that he can be seen anyway. Jesus as we know had walked the earth and been seen by great multitudes of people, so it follows that Jesus cannot be God.

2. Jesus has a separate will from God

Matthew 26:39 “And Jesus went a little further ... and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

John 5:30 “I can of mine own self do nothing... I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”

John 6:38 “For I came... not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

Romans 15:3 “For even Christ pleased not himself.”

Philippians 2:8 Jesus “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death”

Jesus had separate thoughts and desires from God. When he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, he did not want to die on the cross, but despite this he submitted himself to the will of God and humbled himself becoming obedient unto death.

You might be thinking here, what about...

John 10:30 “I and my Father are one”

Jesus is merely saying here that they understand each other; they are at one with each other and have a complete understanding. Jesus is not saying that he is God.

If Jesus had been God, then their wills must have been the same and indistinguishable; that would mean he could never have submitted his will to that of God.

3. God has always known everything

Large portions of the Bible make clear that God knows everything. In particular he declares that he knows the future:

Isaiah 46: 9, 10 “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.”

Jesus of course knew far more than an ordinary man could ever know, but we learn through the Bible that there were still some things that he did not know and which he had no power over:

When asked about positions of authority by his disciples Jesus said:

Matthew 20:23 “but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.”

And regarding the time of his return:

Acts 1:7 “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power”

Mark 13:32 “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”

If Jesus was God, he would have known all these things.

4. God cannot be tempted

James 1:13 “God cannot be tempted with evil.”

God is not able to sin and hence it is not possible to tempt him. Jesus, on the other hand, was quite clearly tempted on many occasions.

Not only do we have the account of Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days when he was tempted, but also

Luke 22:28 “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations”

Hebrews 2:18 “For in that he [Jesus] himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted”

Hebrews 4:15 “[Jesus] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

The temptations that Jesus had to suffer were just as real as the temptations that you and I face. The fact that Jesus could be tempted into sin implies that, although he never sinned, he could have committed sin. Jesus himself declared this when speaking to the rich young ruler who called Him “Good master”.

Mark 10:18 “Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.”

It is clear that Jesus cannot be God and he never claimed to be God.

5. God never changes

God is perfect, he has no need to change for his wisdom is infinite, his power is infinite and his knowledge is infinite. But Jesus was not perfect, at least not to begin with, and he had to learn and increase his wisdom like you and me.

Luke 2:52 “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.”

He did however achieve perfection after his resurrection

Luke 13:32 “Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.”

Hebrews 2:10 “For it became him, for whom are all things ... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

Hebrews 5: 8, 9 “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation...”

Even the way that the nature of Jesus developed after his resurrection shows his development as a person. Before his resurrection he could be tempted to sin, now he cannot. Jesus passed through death into life eternal. God cannot die. Before Jesus was made perfect, he developed in person, but now he is the same forever. Clearly Jesus is not God.

6. God is more exalted than Jesus

God says of Jesus:

Matthew 12:18 “Behold my servant, whom I have chosen”

1 Corinthians 11:3 “the head of every man is Christ ... and the head of Christ is God.”

John 14:28 “My Father is greater than I.”

The Bible makes it clear, if God is the head of Jesus, and Jesus is God’s servant and if Jesus will be subject to God even in times to come, then God must be greater and more exalted than Jesus:

[1 Cor 15:24-28]

The fact is that God is still higher than Christ, even after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus will perfect the kingdom on earth and then hand it over to his Father but there is no possibility of Jesus being raised to equality with God.

7. The Bible carefully distinguishes between God and Jesus

In all passages where Jesus and his Father are mentioned, the Bible is always careful to point out which of them is God.

Acts 2:22 “Jesus of Nazareth (was) a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you.”

Romans 15:6 “That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Timothy 2:5 “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

It is again clear out of the Father and Son, which one of them is God, and even looking at a verse with all three parts of the Trinity...

Acts 10:38 “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...”

If you were to apply the doctrine of the Trinity, just think how absurd this verse would be. God anointing himself with himself!?

Perhaps now is a good time to comment briefly on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power by which God achieves his purpose. In the very beginning, “the spirit of God moved over the face of the waters...” and the result was the various acts of creation we read about. It was this power, the Holy spirit, that Jesus was anointed with and he was able through it, to perform the many wonderful miracles he did. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that the Holy Spirit should be regarded as a person, and especially not as part of a threefold Godhead.

I think that from the reasons I have shown you, it is clearly apparent that Jesus is not equal to God. But what about being co-eternal? If he was co-eternal Jesus must have existed from the beginning of time. This again is not without its problems. For if Jesus was to have been there from the beginning of time, then he would had to have had some pre-knowledge of the world before his birth. Yet, we have already seen that he came to earth as a child and had to learn his wisdom and obedience to his Father. He was not perfect, and could be tempted to sin. Whereas God is perfect and cannot change. The idea that Jesus pre-existed is completely against what we see throughout the scriptures.

In the Old Testament, God declares that he is alone: “I am the LORD and there is none else, there is no God beside me;... that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me; I am the LORD, and there is none else.” (Isaiah 45: 5, 6)

But in the New Testament things have changed, and where we find God we often find Jesus.

“But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things... and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him” (1 Cor 8: 6)

Jesus did not exist in the Old Testament, other than in the foreknowledge of God, there is no mention of him existing. When we get to the New Testament, he is there.

Another way of looking at it is looking at the language used. In Matthew 1:18 it reads “Now the birth of Christ was on this wise:...”

The word birth here is the word genesis, which means beginning. The same word is found in Matthew 1:1, “The book of the generation (genesis) of Jesus Christ”. This word is also the name of the first book of the Bible, which describes how the world came into existence. The word cannot be used to simply denote a change from one form to another, or from one state of being (the pre-existent Christ) to another state of being (the baby Jesus). It is not possible to have a genesis twice. The theologians of the 4th century recognised this problem and dropped the word genesis in favour of the word incarnation, but to all those who spoke ancient Greek the word genesis had always meant absolute beginning.

And so that brings our look at scriptures to a close...

I hope that I have given you the encouragement you need to discover more about God and Jesus. Christians of all people should be readers of the Bible. It has come from God and we ought to appreciate its worth and read it often throughout our lives. Only those who do this can hope to learn about God and worship him in a way that is acceptable to him. Unfortunately most Christians have ignored the one book that can help them, thinking that they don't have to read it and this has resulted in ignorance and confusion.

The Bible teaches that there is one God and only one God. There are many Christians who believe that there are three persons who are entitled to the name of God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but as we have heard there are many passages and themes throughout the Bible that clearly show this not to be the case. Jesus is a mediator between God and man, he is not God, but he *is* able to bridge the vast gulf between man and God, for Jesus said “I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” (John 14:6)

To come before God on behalf of man, Jesus had to be a man himself, he had to fully understand the weakness of men before he could plead their cause to the righteous God. He could only gain this through personal experience and because he was a man, he was tempted, he suffered and he died, on behalf of us. He was perfected at his resurrection and was able to go to his Father.

Why is God called Father anyway? Why is Jesus called Son? The answer is astoundingly simple - so simple in fact, that most people have missed the obvious truth. Jesus is called the Son of God, because God *was* his Father. It was the Father that caused the Son to be born. How can God be a Father? It is through his power of the Holy Spirit that he caused a woman, a virgin named Mary to conceive and bear the holy child.

If we think of God, the Most High, the one and only God, who comes first and think of him as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ; and if we think of the Lord Jesus Christ as God's son, who came to do his Father's will. If we think of the Holy Spirit as God's power, then we shall avoid a great deal of confusion, and even more importantly, we shall be basing our understanding on the Bible, the true Word of God, and not the doctrine of man.