

God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity

The Trinity Deduced

After the tragic destruction of the World Trade Center by Islamic Extremists, there was a dangerous backlash against American Muslims. Such attack against people—just because of their country of origin or religion—was misguided and wrong. But in trying to stop such acts of bigotry, President Bush said something that was theologically inaccurate, even heretical. He said Americans should not focus on what divides us, but what unifies us. And in fact, Christians, Jews, and Muslims all worship the same God.

That last sentence is not true.

Jews proclaim their bedrock doctrine of God in the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is **one!**” Muslims repeatedly proclaim, “There is **One** God whose name is Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.”

But the God of Christianity is a Trinitarian Unity. To Christians God is composed of three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The God of the Christian is not anything like the god of monotheistic religions (Judaism and Islam) or polytheistic religions (Buddhism and Hinduism). None of these religions contain anything like the doctrine of the Trinity.

Why in the world do Christians hold on to a belief that is so difficult to understand as three persons in one God? You probably know the word “Trinity” isn’t even in the Bible.

Why then do we believe it? We believe it because the doctrine of the trinity is “deduced.” In the children’s version of the sermon outline being “deduced” is explained this way: “Do you know what “deduced” means? It means after you look carefully at clues, you come to a conclusion. The Bible gives us clues about what God is like. God the Father is God. God the Son, Jesus Christ, is God. And God the Holy Spirit is God. But the Bible also says there is only one God. So the conclusion is that although there is only one God, He exists in three persons.” The fact that the actual word “Trinity” is not in the Bible should not concern us. It is—like many theological terms—a word used to sum up or to describe that which is clearly present in the Bible.

The focus of this sermon is not demonstrating from Scripture the deity of each of the Persons of the Godhead. But if you want to see that full study, I have included it in the sermon manuscript below.

The Deity of God the Father

- 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6, “...We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one...

- 1 Timothy 2:5-6, “For there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”
- Matt. 6:26, 30, “...Yet your heavenly Father feeds them...But if God so arrays the grass...”

The Deity of God the Son

Statements About Jesus Christ		Statements By Jesus Christ	
Only God Is...	Only God Does...	Only God Is...	Only God Does...
“Existed in the form of God...” (Phil. 2:5-11)	“By him all things were created” (Col. 1:16)	Calls the angels of God (Luke 12:8-9; 15:10) his own (Mt. 13:41)	Has the authority to judge (Mt. 25:31; Mark 14:61-62) and to reign (Mt. 24:30)
“The Son...is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature.” (Heb. 1:2-10)	“Upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3)	Claims to have existed before Abraham was born (John 8:56-59; see Ex.3:14)	Forgives sins (Mark 2:8-10)
“The Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:1-14)	Brings us to God by his death (1 Peter 3:18)	Claims to be one with the Father (John 8:19; John 10:30-33)	Jesus accepts worship from disciples (Mt. 14:33), those he healed (John 9:35-39), women after the resurrection (Mt. 28:9), and believing Thomas (John 20:28)—even though worship is reserved for God only (Mt. 4:10; Acts 10:25-26; Rev. 19:10; 22:9).

The Deity of God the Holy Spirit

Indications of the Deity of the Holy Spirit	Scripture References	
Holy Spirit references interchangeable with God	Lied to the Holy Spirit...to God.	Acts 5:3-4
	Temple of Holy Spirit...of God.	1 Cor. 3:16-17 w/ 1 Cor. 6:19-20
Holy Spirit involved with activities of God	Convicting the world	John 16:8-11
	Regenerating	John 3:8
	Bestowing spiritual gifts	1 Cor. 12:4-11
Holy Spirit given equality in parallel formula statements	Baptism	Matt. 28:19
	Benediction	2 Cor. 13:14

The Trinity Displayed

The Hebrew Scriptures give glimpses and hints of the plurality of God's Persons within the single divine being. But the fuller display of the Trinity is reserved for the revelation of God in the New Testament.

- **Baptism of Jesus**

Matthew 3:13-17, Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

- **Baptismal Formula**

*Matthew 28:19, Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the **name** of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

- **Jesus' request for Another Helper from the Father**

*John 14:16, 26, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you **another** Helper, that He may be with you forever...But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."*

- **Benediction**

2 Corinthians 13:14,

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all."*

The Trinity Defined

The Bible teaches that God the Father is God, that God the Son, Jesus Christ, is God; and that the Holy Spirit is God. Yet, it also teaches that there is only One God. The conclusion is deduced, therefore, that there is a Tri-Unity. We could state a definition of the Trinity this way: **One God, composed of three divine, equal, eternal, distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.**

In this definition there are four important adjectives describing each of the members of

the Trinity. Any religion or belief system that does not embrace all four of these characteristics of each of the three persons of the Trinity is heretical. Each of persons of the Trinity are

- Divine (none are semi-gods or lesser gods)
- Equal (all have all attributes of deity)
- Eternal (none came into existence along the way)
- Distinct (each is an individual person)

The Trinity Described

Can we ever fully understand it? I don't think so. I hope you don't have to understand everything in order to believe it. If I could understand everything about God's ways, then he would not be infinite, or else I would no longer be finite.

As Billy Graham was quoted in this week's Newsweek magazine (08/14/06): "Like Saint Paul, I believe human beings on this side of paradise can grasp only so much. 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face.' Then believers shall see: not now, but then."

Part of what we see only dimly is the mystery of how God can be Three Persons, but only One God. Someone once said, "Try to explain it, and you'll lose your mind. But try to deny it, and you'll lose your soul."

Can we ever describe it by an illustration that conveys the truth? Not completely. Some have tried to describe the Trinity by analogy. If any of these illustrations are helpful to you, good. But please recognize each one has a limitation that—if taken too far will fall into heresy.

- **Egg** (distinct, unity, but not equal). In the egg, we have a unity—just one egg. But within the unity of that one, we have three [break it]: the shell, the white, and the yoke. This illustrates the unity of God and the distinctiveness of three parts, but it fails to illustrate the equality of each part. A shell does not have the same characteristics as the white, and the white has different attributes than the yoke.
- **H₂O** (equal, but no simultaneous unity). Water has also been used to describe how three can be one [pour water from one pitcher to another]. Children, if I placed this glass container in your freezer in your kitchen and left it for a day, what would happen? [Responses] And if I put this glass container filled with water in a microwave and turned it on for 10 minutes, what would happen? [Responses]. The three states of water have been used to illustrate how one thing—H₂O—can be in three different forms. This illustration is good for showing equality, for whether solid, liquid, or gas H₂O has the same molecular structure, H₂O. But, unlike the Trinity of God, a molecule of water cannot simultaneously be all three. There is no simultaneous unity. Today God exists

fully as Father, fully as Son, and fully as Holy Spirit.

- **Triangle** (equal, distinct, but no unity). An equilateral triangle is good to illustrate the equality and distinctiveness of each of the three persons of the Trinity. Each one has the same dimension, and together they form one shape. But the illustration breaks down when any of the sides are removed. Whereas the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit are fully God in and of themselves, the triangle ceases to exist as soon as any of the sides are separately examined.
- **Three identical balls** (equal, distinct, but no unity). Here I have three balls [begin juggling] that are identical as to color, shape, circumference, and number of stitches. They represent God the Father [toss it higher], the Son [toss it higher], and the Holy Spirit [toss it higher]. They too are equal in their characteristics and attributes of [look one ball from right to left on each attribute] omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, love, compassion, wisdom, creativity, personhood, patience, faithfulness, integrity, and justice. The Godhead has existed forever and ever without ever coming into conflict [pass two balls in orbit at the apogee] in their plans of character. Although the juggling of three identical balls may illustrate their separateness and their equality, it fails to illustrate God's unity.

Now, every one of these illustrations are just human attempts to explain some aspect of the Trinity. But all fail to explain all aspects of the Trinity. There is only one illustration that I believe God intended to picture what God is like. And that is marriage.

- **Marriage** (Gen. 1:27; 2:24)

In Genesis 1:27; 2:24 says *“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them...For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

Somehow the image of God—which may include plural individuals making up one unified being—is demonstrated by the creation of a man and a woman. Two individuals become one entity in marriage.

Sometimes the creation of a new family unit out of two separate individuals is illustrated during wedding ceremonies. Do you know what that wedding service ritual is called? The unity candle. Two tapers are lit—often by the mothers of the young adults getting married—at the start of the ceremony. Then, often just after saying their vows, the man and the woman each take one of the taper candles, representing themselves, and, merging the flames together they light the unity candle.

When I performed the wedding of Ben and Carolyn two weekends ago, they decided to go against the custom of blowing out their individual taper candles after lighting the unity candle. They were illustrating by that the fact that, though they had come together to form one union in marriage, they remained two separate individuals too.

That is true. In marriage there are two people, and one unit. Just as with the Triune God, there are three people, but one unit. God created marriage. It was his illustration that a plurality can be a unity of one.

It would have been a perfect illustration, of course, if it were not for what happened in the next chapter of Genesis. For in chapter 3, sin enters the human race and forever mars marriage. Never again can there be the perfect picture of two individuals who selflessly and ceaselessly pursue the best of the marriage union.

Even so, even in this world of sin and shortcomings, we see glimmers of how this can be so true. Read the testimony of Annie Lawrie about her marriage to Jim in the Heart Link women's newsletter, and you will see how two can become one.

Marriage can be great, because it is God's creation. When Miriam is exhilarated in life, my heart thrills for her, as much—or more so—than if it had happened to me. And when I am discouraged or criticized, Miriam feels as badly as if it had been directed at her. After 34 years of marriage, we haven't arrived, but we can at least see what God was getting at when he used the marriage of a man and a woman to illustrate the formation of one unit.

The Trinity Adored

I would like to focus our application of this message. Each member of the Trinity is a distinct person with specific responsibilities within the Godhead and areas of action toward us. We should, therefore, feel the freedom to address our petitions for help and praises in of thanks to that member of the Triune Godhead who is most closely involved in that petition or praise.

Let me give you an example. Suppose this afternoon Miriam invited Eddie and Melody and their two boys over for dinner. And suppose Miriam spent all afternoon in the kitchen, baking roast beef, peeling potatoes for scalloped potatoes like only Miriam can make. And, to top it off, she picked our rhubarb and cubed it and baked a pie with flaky crust—like only Miriam can make. And suppose after that meal was totally consumed and enjoyed, that Eddie and Melody came up to me and said, “Wow, dad, we just want to say, that meal was fantastic. Thanks so much for inviting us over and fixing such a feast.” If that were to happen, what should I say? “Thanks, it was nothing”? I don't think so. I would say, “Don't thank me. Go thank your mom. She's the one who picked the rhubarb and peeled the potatoes and baked the pie. She's the one who is sitting over in the corner in a puddle of tired sweat.”

And when they went to thank Miriam, I would be listening in and I would be enjoying hearing the female half of my marriage union being appreciated.

Similarly, our prayer life may find fresh expressions in its petitions and its praises as we consider which of the Triune Persons are most closely associated with our need and thanks.

- “Dear Sovereign Father, I praise you for your providential care over me and my family as we traveled this week. Although we passed several accident scenes along the way, we thank you that your mercy spared us from being directly involved.”
- “Dear Jesus, Lamb of God, thank you for your willingness to die for my sins, for going through with the cup of suffering; instead of the joy set before you, you endured the cross and despised its shame. For this, I am eternally grateful.”
- “Oh, Spirit of God, thank you for your work in my behalf at the moment of my belief. Thank you for regenerating my dead soul, for baptizing me into Christ, for sealing me for the day of redemption, and for indwelling me so I could be your temple.”

My homework assignment for each of us is to study the Scripture to learn this week what are the works and actions that are primarily the responsibility of each person of the Godhead. List the work and cite the reference. You can use this chart to record your research.

	The Father	Jesus, the Son	The Holy Spirit
Works and actions that are primarily the responsibility of this Person of the Godhead (Cite a Scripture reference?)			
Spend time thanking each for their specific benefits to you.			

May our prayer life be informed by our knowledge of and adoration for the One God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity.