

# THE TRINITY

By Barry L. Davis

God is a Trinity of Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the same Person as the Son, the Son is not the same Person as the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the same Person as the Father. They are separate Persons, yet they are all one God. They are in absolute perfect harmony consisting of one substance. They are co-eternal, co-equal, and co-powerful.

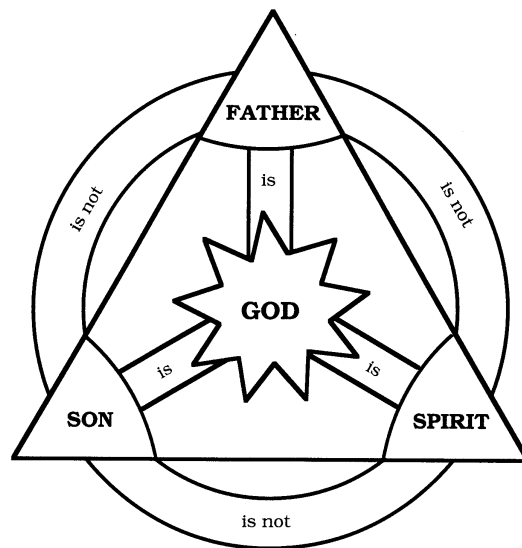
## Three Facts Concerning The Trinity

**Fact #1:** God is three Persons

**Fact #2:** Each Person is God (divine)

**Fact #3:** There is only one God.

Confused Yet? Consider the following ancient diagram:



Notice that in the above diagram the center represents God. The Father, Son, and Spirit are all featured equally as God. The Father *is* God, the Son *is* God, and the Spirit *is* God. There is commonality in that all three are perfectly and equally God. Yet, the outer circle on the diagram represents the distinction the Bible makes between each Person of the Godhead. The Father *is neither the Spirit nor the Son*, the Spirit *is neither the Son nor the Father*, and the Son *is neither the Father nor the Spirit*. If any one of the three were removed, there would be no God. Each is divine in nature, but each is not the totality of the Godhead. When it comes to the Trinity  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ .

## A Rough Analogy

While realizing that all analogies eventually break down, the following should be helpful to our understanding. Let's compare the Trinity to a book. For example, a book has length, width, and thickness. The length is not the book's width, nor its thickness, the width is not the book's thickness, nor its length, and the thickness is neither the length nor the width. These three dimensions can be described separately, yet they are connected together. If you remove one dimension, you are no longer describing a book. In the same way, the Godhead has three separate members that are connected together, and if you remove one you no longer have the Godhead.

## Some More Analogies

Following are some more common analogies used to describe the Trinity. Again, remember that no analogy is perfect. When scrutinized, none of these will be an exact representation of the Trinity but should be helpful in forming a partial understanding.

- Three Burning Matches Held Together – there is only one flame, with three distinct parts to the flame.
- Shamrock: there are three unique petals distinct from one another, but they make up one plant.
- A Three-Stranded Rope: there are three strands, but only one rope.
- The Sun: made up of heat, light, and motion.
- An Egg: there are three distinct and unique parts yet only one egg.
- Water: is a solid, liquid, and can be turned to steam.
- A Tree: has branches, leaves, and roots, yet is still one tree.

## The Biblical Evidence

The Bible has many references to the Trinity, even though the word *Trinity* is never used. Both Old and New Testaments teach the Unity and the Trinity of the Godhead. The idea that there is only one God, who created all things, is repeatedly emphasized in Scripture. Consider the following passages:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deut. 6:4)*

*For this is what the LORD says-- he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited-- he says: "I am the LORD, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:18)*

*"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Mark 12:29)*

*So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if*

*there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. (1 Cor. 8:4-6)*

*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder. (James 2:19)*

Notice that all of the above passages testify to the oneness of God. At the same time, the Scriptures bear witness to the Tri-Unity, or Trinity of God. Is the Bible contradicting itself? No, not at all! The Scriptures are not to be pitted against one another, but harmonized into a collective whole. The three Persons of the Trinity are noted among the same context of the testimony toward the oneness of God. The following verse precedes the passage noted above (Isaiah 48:18):

*"Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit. (Isaiah 48:16)*

The one speaking in this passage is obviously God the Father, yet He says he has been "sent" by "the Sovereign Lord" (a reference to the Father) and "his Spirit" (a reference to the Holy Spirit). In some ways, the different members of the Godhead are indistinguishable from one another. They work in complete and total partnership.

The creation account testifies to the Trinitarian nature of God:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)*

Here, in the very first verse of the Bible, there is a solid witness to the Trinity. The word translated *God* is the Hebrew word *Elohim* (eh-lo-heem). This noun is plural in form but not in number. It is used frequently in the Old Testament with a singular verb. In other words, it speaks of the one God in a plural fashion, yet acting as one in action. The God who creates is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Notice the use of both the plural and singular pronouns in reference to God in the following passage:

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)*

The plurality as well as the unity of God is implied by the text. God describes Himself as "us" and "our", but also as "he". This is a fascinating example of the way

God is the Three in One. Three separate Persons acting in perfect harmony with one another.

Notice also, some representative passages from the New Testament where all three members of the Trinity are mentioned in relation to the church and the individual Christian:

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19)*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)*

*...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Pet. 1:2)*

It is clear that all three members of the Trinity have a specific role to play. How each role was determined or decided upon is beyond any knowledge God has chosen to give us. Suffice it to say, God knows what He is doing!

### **Common Errors**

We close this article with three common errors that many people make concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. Unfortunately, many who claim to be Christians are among those who hold to these erroneous beliefs:

#### **Error #1: Modalism**

This flawed teaching explains the Godhead by saying that there is one God that reveals himself in three ways – sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. They believe that God is never all three Persons at the same time. Most contemporaries who hold this belief are known as *Oneness Pentecostals*.

#### **Error #2: Tritheism**

Tritheism teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each three separate Gods. While the orthodox understanding of the Trinity (presented in this article) recognizes the uniqueness of each Person of the Trinity, it also recognizes that all three Persons are one God. Tritheism believes that the three members of the Godhead are completely distinct from each other – in other words, they believe in three Gods, rather than one.

#### **Error #3: Arianism**

Arianism teaches that the Father is God, the Son is a created being, and that the Holy Spirit is a non-personal force. According to this belief the Father is the only eternal being, with both the Son and the Holy Spirit having a fixed point of time at which they entered the world.

Any view of the Trinity that denies the eternal nature of the Father, Son, and/or the Holy Spirit must be rejected as false. Any teaching that purports that there are three separate Gods, or that one or more members of the Godhead are somehow less than fully God must also be dismissed.