

TRINITY

I. Biblical references to "trinity"

A. There are no references to the word "trinity" in the Bible. Or to the "Rapture" concept either.

B. Development of the word "trinity" in reference to God.

1. Greek word *trias*

- a. Means "threefold" or "threesome"
- b. Used by Theophilus of Antioch c. 175 A.D.

2. Latin word *trinitas*

- a. *tri* means three; *unitas* means unity
- b. Used by Tertullian c. 210 A.D.
- c. Root of English word "trinity"

3. The word was employed in attempt to correlate and integrate the revelation of God as singular, yet functionally diverse in three distinct personages.

- a. necessity of correlating oneness and threeness of God
- b. concept of "trinity" inherent in Scripture "in solution"

C. References to the oneness or unity of God

1. Old Testament

Deut. 6:4 - "The Lord our God, the Lord is one!"

Deut. 32:39 - "I am He, and there is no god besides Me"

Isa. 43:10 - "Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me"

Isa. 46:9 - "I am God and there is no other; there is no one like Me"

2. New Testament

I Cor. 8:4-6 - "there is no God but one. ...there is but one God, the Father...; and one Lord, Jesus Christ..."

Gal. 3:20 - "God is only one"

D. References to the diversity of God

1. Old Testament

Gen. 1:1 - "In the beginning God (*Elohim* - plural) created..."

Gen. 1:26 - "Let Us (plural) make man in Our (plural) image"

Isa. 6:8 - "Who will go for Us (plural)?"

Isa. 9:6 - (Messianic) "Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace"

2. New Testament

Matt. 3:16,17 - "being baptized, Jesus...saw the Spirit of God descending...and a voice, saying, 'This is My beloved Son...'"

Matt. 28:19 - "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"

II Cor. 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"

Gal. 4:6 - "God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts..."

Eph. 4:4-6 - "one Spirit...one Lord...one God and Father of all..."

I Pet. 1:2 - "foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ..."

I Jn. 5:7 (KJV) - (without adequate MSS evidence; interpolation)

a. Father as God

Jn. 6:27 - "the Father, God, has set His seal"

Eph. 4:6 - "one God and Father"

I Pet. 1:2 - "God the Father..."

b. Son as God - (cf. I Jn. 5:20; Phil. 2:6)

Jn. 1:1 - "the Word was God"

Jn. 20:28 - "My Lord and my God"

Titus 2:13 - "our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus"

Heb. 1:8 - "of the Son, Thy throne, O God, is forever..." 1:10- "You, YHWH, in beginning..." Ps. 102:25

II Pet. 1:1 - "God and Savior, Jesus Christ" Also see Micah 5:2 versus Ps. 90:2; 93:2

c. Holy Spirit as God

Acts 5:3,4 - "lie to Holy Spirit...you have lied to God"

Rom. 8:9 - "the Spirit...Spirit of God...Spirit of Christ"

I Cor. 6:11 - "the Spirit of our God"

II Cor. 3:17,18 - "the Lord is the Spirit"

II. A brief history of Christian discussion concerning the "trinity"

A. Justin Martyr (100-165) - while arguing for monotheism, refers to Jesus as "a second God in number"

B. Theophilus of Antioch (c. 175) - first to use Greek *trias* for "threesomeness" of God.

C. Tertullian (160-220) - first to use Latin terms: *trinitas* explained as 3 *personae* in one *substantia*.

D. Origen (c. 182-251) - subordinated Jesus and Spirit to the Father; Father is God in Himself, Son is image of Father, Spirit is image of Son.

E. Arius (c. 250-336) - Son brought into being by God, and thus made God.

F. Athanasius (296-373) - first to employ Greek *homoousion* as explanation of trinity. (*same substance*)

G. Council of Nicea (325) - accepted Athanasius' *homoousion* explanation as orthodox Christian teaching. Some wanted *homoiousion*. (*like substance*)

H. Cappadocian theologians (4th century), Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus - Settled on 3 *hypostaseis* in 1 *ousia*. (three persons in one essence)

I. Augustine (354-430) - Three persons in 1 nature or essence. Many psychological analogies (ex. mind, knowledge, love)

J. Eastern Orthodox Church (1054) - rejected *filioque* (*means "and the Son"*) concept of Spirit generated from Father "and the Son"; division from Western Latin Church

K. Richard of St. Victor (c. 1120-1173) - God as love demands a plurality of persons.

L. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) - three subsistences in one God.

M. John Calvin (1509-1564) - made more distinction between Son and Spirit.

N. Karl Barth (1886-1968) - three modes of being in one God, who is both I and Thou.

III. Issues of consideration concerning the "trinity"

A. Identifying the Oneness

1. Being
2. Essence
3. Substance
4. Nature
5. Reality
6. Person
7. Godhead

B. Identifying the Threeness

1. Persons
 - a. psychologically - personalities, self-conscious beings
 - b. sociologically - interrelational, interpersonal
 - c. distinct agents (Jesus praying to the Father or All three at Jesus' baptism)
2. Individualities
3. Identities
4. Roles of activity

- 5. Modes of expression
- 6. Entities
- 7. Emanations
- C. Interrelational factors of threeness
 - 1. Father, Son, Holy Spirit
 - a. paternity, filiation (derivation), procession
 - b. unbegotten, begotten, procession
 - 2. Priority and subordination
 - a. in relational function, but not essential being
 - b. eternity of such
 - 3. Eternal interpersonal relations
 - a. God is Person
 - b. God is Love
 - c. God is Faithful
 - d. Dynamic Being
 - e. Fellowship
- D. The tension or dialectic between
 - 1. Oneness and threeness
 - 2. Unity and diversity
 - 3. Indivisibility and distinctness
 - 4. Coinherence and community
- E. Avoidance of extremes
 - 1. Unitarianism, monad (indivisible)
 - 2. Tritheism, polytheism
 - 3. Modalism (three masks or modes), Monarchianism
 - 4. Subordinationism (functional versus ontological)
- F. Inadequacy of all human analogies
 - 1. father, son, husband
 - 2. water: liquid, gas, solid
 - 3. music: 3 notes, 1 chord
 - 4. light: 3 bulbs, 1 lumination
 - 5. atom: neutron, electron, proton
 - 6. space, matter, time
 - a. space: length, width, height
 - b. matter: energy, motion, phenomenon
 - c. time: past, present, future
 - 7. source, manifestation, meaning
 - 8. cause, event, consequence
 - 9. spirit, soul, body
- G. Necessary balance
 - 1. Ontological trinitarianism
 - 2. Operational trinitarianism
 - a. relational trinitarianism
 - b. administrative trinitarianism
 - c. economic trinitarianism
 - d. sociological trinitarianism
 - e. ergonomic trinitarianism
 - f. synergistic trinitarianism
 - g. functional trinitarianism

IV. Implications of attempting to understand the "trinity" of God

- A. Correlates with age old philosophical question of one and many
 - 1. Emphasis on one
 - a. monism
 - b. unity
 - c. singularity
 - d. simplicity
 - 2. Emphasis on many
 - a. complexity
 - b. diversity
 - c. relativity
 - d. random
 - 3. Einstein's "theory of relativity" and "unified field theory" were attempts to explain that the diversities relate to a constant and a singularity.
- B. Three alternatives of response to Scriptural teaching of oneness/threeness
 - 1. Reject as incompatible with human reason - absurdity
 - 2. Reduce to human reason - emphasize oneness or threeness
 - 3. Accept the revelation of God - hold in balance/tension of dialectic or antinomy.
 - a. Natural reason will never arrive at trinitarian understanding of God.
 - b. Must accept God in the manner He has revealed Himself
 - c. Failure to do so is deification of human reason
- C. Centrality of trinitarian understanding to all Christian teaching
 - 1. Pervades every doctrinal category
 - a. Christology
 - (1) Incarnation - Jesus as God-man
 - (2) Redemptive efficacy
 - b. Pneumatology
 - c. Soteriology
 - d. Sanctification
 - e. Ecclesiology
 - 2. Necessity of trinitarian assent for Christian belief
 - a. God has revealed Himself in His Son, by the Spirit
 - (1) He cannot be known in any other way, except through the Son, by the Spirit - Jn 14:6,7
 - (2) The gospel of salvation/sanctification requires the persons and work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - b. Must allow for latitude of differentiation in human struggle to understand and express the tension between oneness and threeness
 - (1) Can never adequately express in human thought or words
 - (2) Point out dangers and fallacies of overemphases
 - 3. Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 329-389 A.D.) - "I cannot think of the One, but I am immediately surrounded with the glory of the Three; nor can I clearly discover the Three, but I am suddenly carried back to the One."

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<http://www.christinyou.net/pages/trinity.html>

An Illustration to Attempt to Understand the Trinity

