
Basic Doctrines

God—The Trinity

1) Who is God?

A) **God is a spirit.** As physical, material beings, it is difficult for us to comprehend the idea of a non-material being. God doesn't have a physical body like we do (John 4:24). This means that God is invisible. Paul called Him "the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), and "the King eternal, immortal, invisible" (1 Timothy 1:17). John tells us that "no man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18).

(1) Because God is a spirit, you can know Him apart from your physical senses. You do not have to see Him or feel Him to know Him. Communion with God does not depend on physical, material things because it takes place internally in the spiritual part of your being. That was the point of Jesus' comment to the woman at the well—since God is spirit you must worship Him in spirit (John 4:24).

B) **God is personal.** God is not an impersonal force that acts without purpose or reason. The essence of personality is self-consciousness and self-determination, and God has both. He is conscious of His own being—He told Moses that His name was, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Only a person who is aware of Himself could make that statement. He also has the freedom to choose His own course of action according to what He considers best. He demonstrated it when He subsequently told Moses to return to Egypt, gather the elders together, and inform them that the nation was about to be delivered from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3:15–17). An impersonal force does not speak and give logical directions like that.

(1) Because God is personal, He has the basic characteristics of personality—intellect, emotions, and will. He thinks, He feels, and He acts (Isaiah 57:15–21; Jeremiah 3:12–13), and because of this you can know Him personally and communicate with Him. If God were an inanimate object or an impersonal force there would be no hope of a personal relationship with Him.

C) God is infinite. God had no beginning and will have no end—He has always existed and will always exist (cf. Psalm 90:2; 93:2; Revelation 4:8). When speaking of God’s infinity, we generally use terms like omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence:

(1) Omniscience means that God is all-knowing—He has unlimited knowledge. His infinite knowledge is what qualifies Him to be sovereign ruler and judge over all things. Not only does God know everything that has and will happen, He also knows all things that could have happened. Nothing takes God by surprise, and no one can hide their sin from Him. There are many verses in the Bible where God reveals this aspect of His nature. One such verse is 1 John 3:20: “...God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (NASB).

(2) Omnipotence means that God is all-powerful—He has unlimited power. This is important because it establishes God’s ability to carry out His sovereign will. Because God is omnipotent and has infinite power, nothing can stop His decreed will from happening. There are many verses in the Bible where God reveals this aspect of His nature. One such verse is Psalm 115:3: “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases” (NASB). Also, when answering His disciples’ question, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus answered them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:25–26, NASB).

(3) Omnipresence means that God is always present. There is nowhere you can go to escape God’s presence—He is present at every point of time and space. There are many verses in the Bible where God reveals this aspect of His nature. One such passage is Psalm 139:7–10: “I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me” (NLT).

(4) Because God is an infinite spirit being, we could not know about Him unless He revealed Himself. Thankfully, God has not left us in the dark. Instead, He has revealed Himself to us through both general revelation (creation and our conscience) and special revelation (the Written Word of God, the Bible, and the living Word of God, Jesus Christ). Therefore, we can know God, and we can know how to be reconciled to Him and how to live according to His will. Despite the fact that we are finite and God is infinite, we can know and understand God as He has revealed Himself to us.

D) **God is a Trinity.** The word “Trinity” (lit. “a unity of three”) is a theological term that is used to express what the Bible teaches about the nature of God. In the simplest of terms, it means that God exists as three Persons. The three Persons are: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit (also called the Holy Ghost).

(1) Early Christians used a diagram to visually explain the Trinity (last page of lesson). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God; they are not three names for the same person. The Persons are distinct: the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

2) Where does the Bible teach that God is a Trinity?

A) The Bible clearly teaches there is only one God, yet it also teaches that there are three distinct Persons who are referred to as God. It follows then that God is a tri-unity (Trinity): one God who exists as three Persons who share the same nature. Here is the progression of logic that leads us to this conclusion:

(1) There is only one God:

(a) “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4, NASB).

(b) “Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me” (Isaiah 43:10, NASB).

(2) The Father is God:

(a) “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:2, NASB).

(b) “For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’—” (2 Peter 1:17b, NASB).

(3) The Son is God:

(a) “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30–33, NASB). Don’t believe anyone who tells you that Jesus never claimed to be God.

(b) “The Word [Jesus Christ] was God” (John 1:1–5, 14, NASB).

(c) Jesus' disciple Thomas addressed Him as "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28, NASB). Jesus did not tell Thomas that he was mistaken; instead Jesus accepted this claim as true.

(4) The Holy Spirit is God:

(a) "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God'" (Acts 5:3-4, NASB).

3) What are some misunderstandings about the Trinity?

A) Misunderstanding #1: The word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible, therefore it cannot be true.

(1) It is true that the word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible. But there are many biblical concepts which are not mentioned directly in Scripture. For example, the words "omniscience," "omnipotence," and "omnipresence," are not found in the Bible, but we use them to describe the attributes of God. We don't have to see a specific word in the Bible in order for the concept it describes to be true.

B) Misunderstanding #2: Christians believe there are three Gods.

(1) Because Christians refer to the Father as God, the Son as God and the Holy Spirit as God, some people think that Christians believe in three gods. But this is not true. Christians believe in one God who exists in three Persons. Over the centuries people have tried to come up with simple illustrations of the Trinity. There are limits to every illustration, but you may find some of them to be helpful. For example, God is NOT $1+1+1=3$, God is $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. St. Patrick is believed to have used the shamrock as an illustration of the Trinity: a leaf with one stem but 3 lobes.

C) Misunderstanding #3: Jesus is not God.

(1) Jesus IS truly God. He accepted worship as God and claimed to deserve the same honor as the Father (Matthew 14:33; 28:17-18; John 5:22-23; 9:38). He

claimed to be the divine Son of God, a title the Jews rightly understood to be a claim to equality with God (John 5:17–18; John 10:30–33; John 19:7).

D) Misunderstanding #4: The Father, Son and Spirit are just different ways that God has revealed himself.

(1) Not true. The Bible clearly shows that the Father, Son and Spirit are distinct Persons.

(a) The Father sends the Son (Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:14).

(b) The Father sends the Spirit (John 14:26).

(c) The Father and the Son count as two witnesses (John 5:31–37; 8:16–18).

(d) The Father and the Son glorify one another (John 17:1, 4–5) and the Spirit glorifies Jesus the Son (John 16:14).

4) What are some modern religious movements that deny the doctrine of the Trinity?

A) Examples of major religious movements that deny the doctrine of the Trinity include the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism), the Unitarian Universalist Church, and Oneness Pentecostalism.

(1) Jehovah's Witnesses—they believe the doctrine of the Trinity has no explicit basis in Scripture and deny the deity of Jesus Christ.

(2) Mormons—they believe that the Godhead consists of three distinct beings who are one in purpose but not in nature. Mormonism affirms the existence of many gods.

(3) Unitarians—they deny the deity of Jesus Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit.

(4) Oneness Pentecostals—they believe that the Father, Son and Spirit are merely manifestations of a single God.

