

## **The Treasure of the Trinity**

**By David de Bruyn**

I love the Trinity. I love the majestic truth that our One God is three Persons. I love finding truths in the Bible that man could not have come up with – they are so far from our realm of understanding. The doctrine of the Trinity, like the doctrine of election, must be approached with a deep sense of reverence. This is not a doctrine to be treated like a scientific formula. Nor are we to irreverently try and dissect the nature of God, as if He is some sort of lab specimen whom we can curiously poke at with the scalpels of our own logic and wisdom. Instead, we are to enter into examining the mystery with extreme quiet, an awed silence that will allow the Scriptures to unfold the One to whom the seraphim cry out: “Holy, Holy, Holy”.

The truth of the Trinity is denied by millions who claim the Bible as their book. The truth of the Trinity has been the source of much conflict through the ages, and continues to be so. Something as sublime and mysterious as the very nature of God is bound to be misunderstood by those who live for the glory of their own intellect. To those who want the fame of their own names rather than truly seeking the nature of God, they will find:

*“Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.” (Isa 45:15)*

But for those who will hear, it becomes plain to see. I think God has scattered the truth of the Trinity throughout creation: The universe itself is a trinity – made up of time, space and matter. Time is a trinity – past, present and future. Space is a trinity – length, breadth and height. Matter comes in three modes – solid, liquid and gas. Music comes in a trinity – melody, harmony and rhythm. Even the chords we play in music are really threes. Colour is really a mixture of three primary colours. God has put the truth of the trinity in many object lessons in the universe.

It’s admittedly a difficult doctrine. It is not difficult to hear and understand the definition of the Trinity. It is difficult, if not impossible to imagine what it actually is.

And because millions deny the Trinity, we must make sure we know that it is a Biblical doctrine. If the nature of God is tri-une, then it is critical that we know where to find this in the Bible. We cannot worship the god we want, and hope he turns into the God Who is. We must worship the God who is. And as we go through the Bible we will find that the true God, Jehovah God – is a Tri-Une God. He is a unity of three Persons, to make up one Being.

The problem many people have had with the Trinity is that the way God has revealed Himself in Scripture is not in the form of a systematic theology textbook. God did not write the Bible in a form where we read – “chapter 5, The doctrine of the Trinity”. That is why we have systematic theology, to systematize what God chose to reveal in the way He did. And so people who want to see the Trinity outlined in that sort of way say things like “the word ‘Trinity’ is not found in the Bible”. And this is a very weak argument. The term we have come up with to describe the nature of God is not found in the Bible. Does that mean God’s nature is not found in the Bible? There are many other terms we use not found in Scripture. ‘Deity of Christ’ is a term not found

in Scripture. Does that mean it is not true? 'Premillennial return of Christ' is a term not found in Scripture? Does that mean it is not true?

The Trinity is not something Christians have forced into the Bible. It is a mysterious truth that has emerged from inspired Scripture, which we have given a name to. So what we want to do tonight is examine Scriptures upon which the doctrine of the Trinity emerges as a Biblical truth.

**Firstly, we find that the Bible teaches that God is one Being.**

*"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:" (Deu 6:4)*

*"Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." (Isa 44:6)*

*"Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any." (Isa 44:8)*

A host of other verses could be quoted which clearly state there is only One God. There is only one Being that is the Creator of the universe. God has no mini-gods competing with Him; He has no family, like the pagan Greek gods. There is only one, unique God. The Shema can actually be translated: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, He alone is God."

The conclusion we draw from this is monotheism – there is only one true God. This counters the false teachings of polytheism. Any religion which teaches that there are many gods – such as Hinduism, is contradicting Scripture. Mormonism is polytheistic. It teaches that there are many gods; that we ourselves can be exalted to god- status the same way Jesus was. As such, they deny this foundational teaching – that God is One Being.

However, as we go along, we find Scripture that clearly adds mystery to the concept of God being One Being. We find that the One Being of the Godhead is described in plurality.

**Scriptures that teach the plurality of the Godhead**

Our earliest introduction to this thought is the fact that we find plural pronouns being used by God when speaking:

*"And God said, Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness..." (Gen 1:26)*

*"And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of **us**, to know good and evil..." (Gen 3:22)*

*"Go to, let **us** go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." (Gen 11:7)*

*"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for **us**?..." (Isa 6:8)*

Now in all these cases, the One Being, God, talks about ‘us’ and ‘our’. Now, some have said that this is God speaking to the angels, or God pictured as a King in His council, and God’s Majesty being multiplied by using plural pronouns. Now we cannot rule those ideas out, but nor can we rule out the possibility that God’s One Being has a plurality of Persons. The door is open for that potential. That possibility gets even stronger when we see increasing appearances in the Old Testament of what it calls ‘the angel of the LORD’. The first appearance being to Hagar, the servant of Sarah, we increasingly see Him appearing to Abraham, then to Jacob, then to Moses in the burning bush, to Balaam, to Joshua, to Gideon, to Manoah and his wife. And in each case, the curious thing is that He speaks for God, but also as God – sometimes in the same sentence. He is God appearing, but yet He speaks on behalf of God. Very often, those who see Him, say: “I have seen God face to face”. This was what Jacob said, after wrestling with Him. After Manoah and his wife saw Him, Manoah said:

*“We shall surely die, because we have seen God.” (Jdg 13:22)*

God refers to Him in Exodus:

*“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.” (Exo 23:20-21)*

So God says this angel of the Lord has His name, but is different from Himself. Now none of the other angels carry the name of God. This angel is somehow God but yet distinct from God.

What this is underlining is the truth that the One Being of God must be in some way, more than one Person. We are not imagining this; we are seeing the texts and trying to explain them. Not only so, but the Old Testament begins to intimate that God may in fact have some sort of heir or son. Psalm 2 – spoken for David the king, definitely has implications that go beyond a mere earthly king. We read:

*“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” (Psa 2:7)*

David was anointed by God, but not begotten by God.

*“Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? **what is his name, and what is his Son's name**, if thou canst tell?” (Pro 30:4)*

The conclusion is: The only God seems to be a plurality. This counters the false teaching of Unitarianism which says that God is One. Likewise modern Judaism makes this error. God is not One. There is only One God. But He in His nature is not One.

In Deuteronomy 4:6, where it says – the LORD our God is one, the Hebrew word for one is *echad*, which means one. But, like the English word for one, it can mean compound unity. For example, it is used when Adam and Eve came together and the

Bible says they were one (*echad*) flesh (Gen 2:24). Obviously they were not one Person – but they were one flesh.. In fact, one of the Jewish sages Moses Maimonides went so far as to say God is not *echad*, but substituted the word *yachid*, which is a Hebrew word which means absolute singularity. Maimonides wanted to deliberately counter the Trinitarian doctrine of Christianity by saying God is One in nature. But that was Maimonides' word, not the Holy Spirit. God chose to say God is One – in the sense there is no other. But God is clearly not one in His nature.

But what is hinted at in the Old Testament becomes explicit in the New. There we find Scriptures that now name the Persons that make up the one Being of God. Fittingly, it was our Lord Jesus Christ who made it clearest who the Persons are. **Scriptures that name the three members of the Godhead**

*“And **I** will pray the **Father**, and he shall give you another **Comforter**, that he may abide with you for ever;” (Joh 14:16)*

*“But the **Comforter**, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the **Father** will send in **my name**, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (Joh 14:26)*

*“But when the **Comforter** is come, whom **I** will send unto you from the **Father**, even the **Spirit of truth**, which proceedeth from the **Father**, he shall testify of **me**.” (Joh 15:26)*

Notice Jesus mentions the Father, Himself and the Holy Spirit. He did this again in Matthew 28:19 when He said:

*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father**, and of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Ghost**.” (Mat 28:19)*

And as the apostles write, we begin to see a clear pairing up of these three Persons:

*“The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the communion of the **Holy Ghost**, be with you all. Amen.” (2 Co 13:14)*

*In Ephesians 1:3-14, we see the Father, the Son, and the Promised Holy Spirit.*

*“John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from **him which is, and which was, and which is to come**; and from **the seven Spirits which are before his throne**; And from **Jesus Christ**, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,” (Rev 1:4-5)*

Interestingly, I think there is a fascinating glimpse of the Trinity in the Old Testament in Isaiah 48:16:

*“Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am **I**: and now the **Lord GOD**, and his **Spirit**, hath sent **me**.” (Isa 48:16)*

In that verse, we have “I”, “the Lord GOD” and “His Spirit”.

The conclusion we draw is that the plurality of the Godhead that makes up this one Being called God is that of Father, Son and Spirit.

But now we must go a bit further. We have established there is only one Being, but this Being is a unity of more than One Person. Are all of those Persons God? Are they equal? Well, we cannot do a comprehensive search of all the Scriptures, but we can look at three.

**Scriptures that individually treat each of the members of the Trinity as God**

*John 6:27: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.” (Joh 6:27)*

The Father is called God:

*“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phi 2:6)*

The Son, Jesus Christ is God. He was the very form or shape of God, and so, for Him equality with God was not something He had to grasp like a thief. It was not robbery for Him to be equal with God. But instead, he willingly humbled Himself.

*“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2Co 3:18)*  
The Spirit is God.

Concl: Father, Son and Spirit are all God.

There is no inequality in the Trinity. They are co-equal and co-eternal. We learn from the Trinity that you can have submission without inequality. The head of Christ is God the Father, like the husband is the head of the wife, but no superiority or inferiority is meant.

An ancient heresy was spread in the early church called Arianism. A man called Arius, in the late third and fourth centuries, taught that Jesus was the first thing created by God, and the Spirit was the first thing created by the Son.

Arianism has a modern equivalent – Jehovah’s Witnesses. They deny that Jesus is God, or that the Spirit is God. They teach Jesus was the first thing God created, and He is an exalted angel. But in so doing they deny the truths we have just seen – the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God.

But the Mormon heartily agrees with this. But He believes the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God – they are all gods. So now we are close to a knife-edge of heresy. One God, in plurality three Persons – all of whom are God. Does that mean there are three Gods? No, the Bible makes it clear.

**Scriptures that Teach the Three Persons are One God**

*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (Mat 28:19)*

Notice it is not the “names” but the name. Jesus is speaking to Jews, who knew the significance of the Name. *‘If my people who are called by my Name’...* What He was really doing was saying – you are to understand the name of Yahweh as that of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are three Persons to make up one name. One God – Yahweh, still the one name of the Old Testament, but now explained to be that of three Persons.

A second verse that makes this clear in John 10:30:

*“I and my Father are one.” (Joh 10:30)*

In the original language, this is very revealing. Jesus says, I and Father of me, one, we are. There is a plural verb – ‘we are’. It is not one person. But we make up one. And the ‘one’ is neuter, not masculine. So He is not saying I am the Father, or we are the same Person. He is saying – we are one essence. So the conclusion is that they are not three Gods, but one God.

Now I know this can be heavy-going, but bear with me. As John Piper says, if you simply rake the surface, you’ll just get leaves, but if you’re willing to dig, you might find diamonds. Keep digging with me.

We’ve seen there is only one Being called God. But this one Being seems to be a plurality of Persons. Those Persons are identified as Father, Son and Spirit. And each one, in turn is identified as God. But they are not three gods; they are three Persons in One God.

But here is the thing: are each of those Persons God, or are they just different ways God manifests Himself? This was the teaching known as Sabellianism in the ancient church. Today it is with us again in the form of Oneness Pentecostalism, or the so-called Jesus Only teaching. CCM group Philips, Craig & Dean are Oneness.

Many Pentecostal ministers such as T.D. Jakes believe in a Oneness Pentecostal. And this teaching says that God has different modes of appearing and relating to man. Sometimes He relates to us as Father, sometimes as Son, sometimes as Spirit. But they are not three Persons; they are three modes or ways of manifesting Himself. In other words, they teach that Jesus is the Father, Jesus is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Father. There is only One Person, who appears in different ways. But there are a number of Scriptures which teach this is not so.

#### **Scriptures that the Members are Not Modes of the Same Person**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (Joh 1:1)*

This is the clearest statement we can find that the Word is God, but at the same time distinct from God. The Word was always there, He was with God, but at the same time He was the same essence as God. If the Word was not a different Person, then the middle phrase should not be there. The verse should simply read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.” But John takes the time to state – the Word was *with* God, but also God.

We also clearly see this by Jesus praying to His Father. He is not praying to Himself. He is not praying to His other nature. He is praying to another Person:

*“Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done”.*

He asks in John 17 for the glory which he had with the Father to be restored to Him. But God said He would give His glory to no other in Is 48:11. The conclusion is Jesus is God, but a different Person to the Father. He said in Matthew 11:27:

*“All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”*

At His baptism, we see three Persons – the Father speaking to the Son, the Son being baptised, and the Spirit descending upon Him. In the Old Testament too, we have some interesting verses showing God relating to God.

*“Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; (Gen 19:24)*

How did Jehovah reign fire upon the earth from Jehovah in heaven? Only if there are different Persons within the Godhead.

*“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Psa 110:1)*

Even Jesus quoted this verse to prove the deity of Messiah - God the Father said to God the Son. This is possible not if God has different modes, but if He is different Persons.

Concl: The Father is not the Son, the Father is not the Spirit, and the Son is not the Spirit. They are one, but not the same.

So, we have come to see what the Bible teaches. There is One Being – God, This being is not one in nature, He is one in Being. In His nature, there are three Persons. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each one is God, They are co-equal and co-eternal. None of them is less than the others. But they are not three Gods. They are three Persons making up one God. And they are not three modes of one Person. They are three Persons and one God.

C.S. Lewis captured this brilliantly when He said: “If you are using only one dimension, you could draw only a straight line. If you are using two, you could draw a figure: say, a square. And a square is made up of four straight lines. Now, a step further. If you have three dimensions, you can then build what we call a solid body: say, a cube- a thing like a dice or a lump of sugar. And a cube is made up of six squares”..

Do you see the point? A world of one dimension would be a straight line. In a two-dimensional world, you still get straight lines, but many lines make one figure. In a three dimensional world, you still get figures, but many figures make one solid body. In other words, as you advance to more real and more complicated levels, you do not leave behind you the things you found on the simpler levels: you still have them, but combined in new ways- in ways you could not imagine if you knew only the simpler levels...On the human level one

person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings—just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course we cannot fully conceive a Being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it. . . . It is something we could never have guessed, and yet, once we have been told, one almost feels one ought to have been able to guess it because it fits so well with all the things we know already."

Now, without going beyond what is revealed, perhaps for a moment we can peer into this mystery and reverently seek to understand what the inner relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is?

Jonathan Edwards had a remarkable way of putting it. He said that the Father is God in His prime and unoriginated manner – or God in His direct existence. He went on to show that if you could perfectly think, act, and be all that you are, at the same time as you are doing it now – you would really be two persons. So, he suggested, the Son of God is essentially God's perfect image or idea of Himself. God the Son is begotten in this sense – He is the Father's perfect reflection, perfect manifestation of Himself. And then in order for there to be love and communion between these two Persons, there must be a third Person – the Deity in action, God loving and delighting in Himself. This is how the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Did you ever consider- how could God be love, if He was only one? How is love possible in God without other persons?

Their inner relationship is a mystery. What seems to be clearer is their economic or working relationship. And it is a glorious thing to see in the Bible – what God does, the Father, Son and Spirit does. We see that in Creation. The Father chose to create. The Son created. The Spirit hovered over the creation, guiding and protecting it. We see that in the area of salvation in Ephesians. The Father chooses. The Son saves. The Spirit seals.

*"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." (1Pe 1:2)*

In the area of **revelation**: The Father communicates. The Son is the actual Word. The Spirit relates it to us.

In the **resurrection** of Christ – we see the Father raised the Son, the Son raised the Son, and the Spirit raised the Son.

It seems the relationship within the Trinity is always: "From the Father, By the Son, through the Spirit." In fact, their perfect oneness is given to us as an example of how unified we ought to be. . Church unity is based on the unity in the Trinity. Paul uses the Trinity in Eph 4:4-6 and in I Cor 12:4-6 to teach unity. Jesus prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one. We can be different persons, but one in heart – one body.

What then?

We are to know the true God as He is – not confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. The thought of the Triune God is supposed to awe us, not confuse us.

A.W. Tozer: “To meditate on the three Persons of the Godhead is to walk in thought through the garden eastward in Eden and to tread on holy ground. Our sincerest effort to grasp the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity must remain for ever futile, and only by deepest reverence can it be saved from actual presumption.”

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