

A Synopsis of the Doctrine of the Trinity:

A. Trinity means: “Three-in-oneness” or “Tri-unity.” One God (essence) in three Persons; Unity in Trinity.

B. “Trinity” in Scripture: Like some other theological terms (e.g., “Inerrancy” or “rapture”), the word “Trinity” is not mentioned in Scripture. It is a word that best explicates the sum-total of biblical data regarding the God of the Bible. The first time term was used was (Greek form) by Theophilus of Antioch AD c. 180.

C. Summary truths from the systematization of the whole of Scripture: 1. There is only One Essence (Deut. 6:4-5 cf. Exod. 15:11; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 45:21-22 cf. 44:6-8; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19): Pure actuality with no potentiality; God is the sum-total of His perfections. 2. God is three Persons; 3. Each Person is fully & equally God with all the prerogatives of God: **a. God the Father:** Bible; **b. Jesus Christ:** Isaiah 9:6-7, 40:3; John 1:1-4; 10:30; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Hebrews ch. 1; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; **c. Holy Spirit:** Psalm 139:7-8; Matthew 28:19; John 3:5-7; cf. 1 John 3:9; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:10-11. **d. Oneness & Threeness at same time:** **Matt. 28:19;** Also have Matt. 3:16-17 & 2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 4-5. **Other passages for Trinity:** **John 10:30; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jude 20-21.**

D. Descriptions of Trinity: There is only one “What” (essence) in God, but there are three “Whos” (persons) in that one “What.” God has three “I’s” in His One “I.” There are three “Subjects” in one “Object.”

E. The historical development of the Doctrine of Trinity: Trinitarian doctrine came forth in the Universal Church because of the emergence of and popularity of certain heresies. Thus, the Council of Nicea in AD 325 and Council at Constantinople in AD 381 described the orthodoxy of Trinity in clear simple outline form.

D. Why seek to understand Trinity if it is ultimately a “mystery?” Though this doctrine is beyond our capacity to fully grasp, especially since it cannot be known by human reason apart from special revelation and goes beyond our capacity to ultimately understand, this does not mean that the Trinity is contrary to reason. Instead, what we discover is that God has disclosed certain truths about His Tri-unity which to be explicated, grasped, & believed. Thus, based upon what God has disclosed about Himself, we are not to flippantly ignore or seriously dismiss what He has disclosed as difficult it might be to understand or fully know. Moreover, we are not to confuse contradiction with contrariety or paradox. The pursuit of understanding and reflecting upon the Trinity should lead us to developing a deep, abiding affection for His Person & Work. Thus, this doctrine has practical value.

F. What does “reason” (logical reasoning) contribute to the Doctrine of the Trinity (adapted from Chafer’s *Systematic Theology* (abridged), 1:186-187):

1. Divine Perfections are eternal: Since God exists eternally, His perfections must exist eternally; they are not acquired for God is pure actuality and no potentiality. **THE IAM OF EXODUS 3:14.**

2. Eternal Activity: God is not only Perfect & Eternal, the perfections must also possess eternal activity: “The fact of eternal attributes, however, does not mean that they have been eternally active in the same way. The thought that God has always been creating fails because it is based on the fallacy that God’s activity is confined to the creation of material things. Creation according to Scripture had its beginning and is not eternal. In affirming eternal attributes it should be understood that there has never been a time when God was completely inactive. There was a time when He could not create, but He did not exist in three Persons, there would have been no way by which God could have exercised some of these attributes before the Creation of the universe. This leads to the conclusion that God is not dependent on creation as an object for the exercise of His qualities or attributes as He depends on nothing beyond Himself” (1:187).

3. Agent and Object: “The exercise of attributes implies that there has to be an agent and object. Attributes such as power, love, and a disposition for communion necessitate both agent and object. The exercise relates to the activity between the Persons of the Godhead in which there was such complete unity in their relationship to each other as agent and object. Now, if there is a concept of eternally holy, just, and good even if there were no activity at the time relative to these attributes. An activity of God may be temporal in the sense of not always existing even though the attributes of God which lead to that activity have always been a part of God’s being” (1:187).

4. God is sufficient in Himself: “Inasmuch as God has existed from eternity past He has always sufficed within Himself without creating any eternal object. Hence, there must have been perfect harmony and satisfying fellowship within the Persons of the Trinity” (1:187).

5. Persons: “In the Godhead there were agent and object who necessarily were Persons. Since the divine nature includes plurality, it must be a plurality of Persons. Such a plurality could not be predicated of the divine Essence as God is one God. This plurality could not be predicated of the divine Essence as God is one God. This plurality cannot be that of mere offices or modes of manifestation for three persons in their relationship to each other as agent and object. Now, if there is a concept of eternally holy, just, and good even if there were no activity at the time relative to these attributes before the Creation of the universe. This leads to the conclusion that God is not dependent on creation as an object for the exercise of His qualities or attributes as He depends on nothing beyond Himself” (1:187).

Trinitarianism is the best explication of the sum-total of data found in Scripture. Though one may not be able to fully understand the Trinity of God, we should pursue what we can know about Him with our utmost. The Word “Trinity” means that God is a trinity: He is a plurality within unity. God has a plurality of persons and a unity of essence; God is three persons in one nature. **DTS’ catalog:** “We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes, and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence, and obedience (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 12:29; Jn. 1:14; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:4-6).” www.prshockley.org. ~ Dr. Paul R. Shockley

Hebrew Bible’s Intimations of Trinity:

A. Unity of God:

Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4 centers around the unity of God with emphasis on His incomparability & uniqueness over and against polytheism. See also Psalm 45:6-7. The use of “*one*” in Deut. 6:4 is significant because the adjective can refer to a single person—or to a single people. The corporate usage is used elsewhere in Hebrew Bible: Gen. 24; Exod. 24:3; 26:11; Judg. 6:16; Ezek. 37:19. These passages affirm a plurality in unity, not a single undiversified sameness.

B. The Plurality of Words as when God speaks of Himself:

a. Use of Hebrew plural pronouns such as “*let us*” in Genesis 1:26; “*become like one of us knowing good and evil*” in Genesis 3:22; “*Come let us go down, and there we confuse their language*” in Genesis 11:7; “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” in Isaiah 6:8; **b. Plural Verbs:** Genesis 1:26; 11:7.

C. Angel of the LORD:

(1) In Genesis 16:7-13 the Angel of the LORD first appears to Hagar. (2) The Angel of the LORD also appears at the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen. 19:15-18. See also Genesis 18:1-21; 19:1-28. (3) Malachi 3:1-2. The angel of the LORD is referred to God yet distinguished from Him: “*The Lord whom you seek will suddenly will come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?”* While Hebrew word for angel is “*mal'ak*” means “messenger.” In Gen. 16:13; Exodus 3:2-6; 23:20-22; 6:11, 14, angel of the LORD is called “*God*” or “*The Lord*.” (4) He is called “*Angel of the LORD*” and Angel of God using the designation “*Elohim*”: (cf. Genesis 33:11-13; 45:5, 15-16; Exod 32: cf. Acts 7:30-55; Exod. 13:21; 14:19; Judges 6:11-23; 13:9-23.) (5) Angel of the LORD is seen as distinct Person from God in Gen. 24:7 when Abram promised servant that the angel would go before Him and secure a wife for Isaac. The servant responds in vs. 40 and immediately addresses God as LORD. (6) Zechariah 1:12-13: Angel of the LORD addresses Jehovah as a separate Person while at the same representing Deity. See also Judges 2:1-5; 2 Kings 19:35.

D. Distinctions among Godhead: (a) The Lord is distinguished from the Lord: Genesis 19:24; Psalm 110:1 (cf. Jesus understood David in Psalm 110:1 referring to two persons in Matt. 22:41-46)

“*The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”* Hosea 1:7; (b) The Redeemer is distinguished from the Lord: “*I will deliver them by the LORD their God,”* implying that more than one person is called “*God*” and (Heb. Jehovah: “*God*” (Heb. Elohim). Isaiah 59:20-5. The Holy Spirit is distinguished from the Lord: Isaiah 48:16; 59:21; 63:9-10. In Isaiah 63:10 God’s people “*rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit*” implying Holy Spirit is distinct from God (“*HIS Holy Spirit*”). Holy Spirit is capable of being “*grieved*” in Hebrew Bible suggesting personality which is characteristic of divine Personality. See also Isaiah 61:1 “*The Spirit of the Lord God*” from “*the Lord*.” (c) God is distinguished from God in Psalm 45:6-7 & author of Hebrews applies to Jesus Christ in Hebrews 1:8.

E. Indications of Three Persons:

a. Numb. 6:24-26: Triple Blessing with a triple mention of God’s name; (b) Isaiah 6:3: “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.*” This triple invocation coupled with the plural pronoun usage implies three Persons (cf. Isaiah 68). **c. Three distinct persons** are also indicated in 2 Samuel 23:2-3; Isaiah 48:16; 63:7-10. The use of the word “*Elohim*” with the plural pronoun of “*us*,” and the plural for God in Isaiah 45:5 and Ecclesiastes 12:1.

[Portions of this section adapted from Charles C. Ryrie’s *Basic Theology*, pg. 58]

Biblical Evidences of Oneness & Threeness at Same Time in New Testament:

A. Matthew 3:16-17:

“*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased:*” God the Father speaks, God the Son is being baptized in Jordan River, & the Holy Spirit is descending from heaven to rest upon & empower Jesus for His ministry.

B. Matthew 28:19:

Jesus commands disciples at end of His earthly ministry to 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). (1) The repeated use of “*and*” brings equal emphasis to each member of the Godhead. (2) The familial names “*Father*” & “*Son*” imply distinction of personhood between Father & Son. (3) Since Holy Spirit is placed on par with Father and Son, this also implies the Holy Spirit’s personality.

C. John 1:1-2 & John 20:30-31:

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” The “*Word*” who is Christ in John 1:9-18 is “*with*” God demonstrates a distinction from God the Father. Moreover, the purpose for the Gospel of John is clearly stated in John 20:30-31: “*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.*”

D. John 17:24:

In His prayer on the eve of his crucifixion at the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus speaks to God the Father about “*my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world,*” demonstrates a distinction of persons in a relationship of love between Father and Son before the creation of the world.” Both share glory.

E. Hebrews 1:3 (cf. John 1:1-5, 14-18; Col. 1:13-20; Rev. 4-5):

1. Hebrews 1:3 clearly states that Jesus Christ is fully God: He is the perfect image of the invisible God; if you have seen Jesus, you have seen God (Upper Room Discourse). Jesus Christ not only created the world (vs. 2), but He also upholds all things (vs. 3). 2. He is not only the representation of God; He does (and has done) the work of God. Jesus Christ who is the God-Man, substituted Himself for sin on our behalf (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Jesus is undivided deity & perfect humanity in One Person. As the God-Man He now sits down at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Thus, Jesus is distinct from the Father, yet the Father, for the Father & the Son (Jesus Christ) are both God, but they are still distinct. Christ is the exact representation (vs. 3; Greek character, “exact duplicate”) of the nature or being (Greek hypostasis of God; the Son exactly duplicates the being or nature of God the Father in every way. Thus, whatever perfection or prerogatives the Father possesses, God the Son has them as well.

F. Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

1. God the Father raised Jesus: Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 10: 40; 13:30, 33, 34, 37, 2. God Raised Jesus Up: Rom. 4:24; 6:4 [through the glory of the Father]; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 1:1; Col. 2:12, 2, 3. The Holy Spirit is involved in the resurrection of Jesus: Romans 8:11: “*But if the Spirit of Him who raised...;*” Romans 1:4 “*who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord...*”

G. 1 John 2:1 (see also Hebrews 7:25):

Jesus stands as our Advocate before God the Father: “*If any does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*”

H. Eternality of Jesus Christ:

a. John 1:1-2: “*In the beginning was the Word*” is the Greek “*then*,” the imperfect tense of “*einai*,” which denotes the continual existence in past time: “*In the beginning the Word was continually existing.*” John 1:2 emphasizes the same theme: “*He was with God.*” The verb “*was*” (“*emphasizing*” in the beginning time) “*was*” is continually existing with the Father. **b. John 8:58:** Jesus claims both eternity and deity when he states, “*Before Abraham was born, I AM!*” The present tense of “*I am*” (“*eimi*”) is critical because Jesus was stating that before Abraham was born, Christ was continually existing. Coupled with the statement, “*I AM*,” he takes us back to Exodus 3:14 whereby God declares He is absolute, independent, & eternal. **c. John 17:5:** In eternity past Christ shared the glory of God with the God the Father. “*I had*” (“*eichen*”) is in imperfect tense, stressing continuous action in past time. Christ continually shared the glory of God in eternity past; there was a time when Christ did not have the glory of God. **d. Philippians 2:6:** Jesus Christ “*existed in the form of God.*” “*Form*” (“*morphe*”) refers to that which is intrinsic & essential; it applies to the perfections of the Godhead. The present tense, “*existed*” (“*hyparchon*”) stresses the continual existence of Christ in eternity past. **e. Colossians 1:7:** “*He is before all things.*” This phrase emphasizes the eternity & preexistence of Jesus Christ with the present tense (“*estin*”) stressing His eternal existence and sustains before all things before all things (vs. 16). **f. Hebrews 1:8:** “*Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever*” (vs. 8a) denotes the eternal sovereignty of Jesus Christ. **g. Revelation 22:13:** “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*” stresses the eternity of Jesus Christ. Earlier in Revelation 1:8 the statement, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega*” is also used by God the Father. **h. Since Isaiah 9:6** declares that the child that will be born and the Son that will be given, the title “*Eternal Father*” must refer to the Son. This is not a confusion within the Trinity. Rather, the members of the one & only True God share some of the same titles since they share the same infinite perfections. Thus, while the Son is not the Father, but the Son has father-like qualities (the complets in Isaiah 9:6: Wonderful Counselor; Mighty God; Eternal Father; Prince of Peace), the Son is called the Eternal Father. But what is critical to note is how the word “*eternal*” is used. Micah 5:2: Micah describes the coming Messiah who will be born in Bethlehem as one whose “*goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.*” Thus, the Messiah is eternal. (h). In Jesus’ encounter with doubting Thomas, the disciple responds, “*My Lord and my God!*” Here Thomas calls Jesus, “*my God!*”

I. Interpersonal Equality: Ontological Equality of the Three Persons:

a. All Three Persons are Named as God: Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3. **b. The application of Psalm 8 to Jesus,** the author of Hebrews presents the Father saying, “*But to the Son He says: Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.*” Thus, God the Father calls the Son “*God*.” **c. Romans 9:5:** “*Of whom... according to the flesh, Christ came who is over all, the eternally blessed God.*” **d. The Holy Spirit is called God:** Peter identifies the Holy Spirit as God when he confronts Ananias: “*Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God.*” (Acts 5:3-4). Ananias & Sapphira tested the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 5:9). Such “*lying is a sign against the Lord God* (Matt. 4:7). In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul states to the Corinthian Church, “*Do you [plural] not know that the Spirit of God dwells in you [plural]? If anyone [singular] defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you [plural] are.*” Believers constitute the temple of God. Paul equates God with the Holy Spirit.

J. Perfections of Triune God: Each Member is Equal and Fully God:

a. Eternality: Father: Psalm 90:2; Son: Micah 5:2; John 1:2; Rev. 1:8. **b. Omnipotence:** Father: 1 Peter 1:5; the Son: 2 Cor. 12:9; Spirit: Rom. 15:19; **c. Omniscience:** Father: Jer. 23:24; Christ: Matt. 18:20; Spirit: Ps. 139:7. **d. Holiness:** Father: Rev. 15:4; Christ: Acts 3:14; Spirit in 1:5; as Holy Spirit; **e. Truth:** Father: John 7:28; Christ: Rev. 3:7; Spirit: 1 John 5:6; **f. Benevolent:** Father: Rom. 2:4; Christ: Eph. 5:25; Spirit: Neh. 9:20. **g. Fellowship:** 1 John 1:3; 2 Cor. 13:14.

K. Works of the Trinity:

a. Creation: Father: Ps. 102:25; Christ: Col. 1:16; Spirit: Gen. 1:2. **b. Creation of Humanity** by Triune God: Gen. 2:7; Col. 1:16; Job. 33:4; Ecclesiastes 12:1 (“*Your Maker,*” though translated as singular is plural). **c. Incarnation:** Father involved; The Holy Spirit generated the Son, and the Son was the One who is born: Luke 1:35; John 1:14; **d. Inspiration of Scripture:** 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Peter 1:21 (Attributed to each Person of the Trinity); **e. A minister of the Gospel** receives his authority from the Trinity: Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; 1 Tim. 1:12. **f. Indwelling Presence of God is an indwelling of all three Persons of the Trinity:** Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19; **g. In John 14 all three Persons of the Trinity are promised the believer:** John 14:17, 23. **h. Work of Sanctification involves Trinity:** 1 Cor. 6:11; Heb. 2:11; Jude 1. **i. Trinity secures the believer:** John 10:29; cf. vs. 28; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 4:30.

L. Relationship between Father & Son in Jesus’ earthly ministry:

a. Matthew 26:39: “*My Father if it is your will... not my will but yours be done;*” **b. John 5:30:** “*for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me;*” **c. John 6:38:** “*For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of Him who sent me.*” Other passages include John 8:28; John 12:49; John 12:50. **d. Jesus recognized that His death was fulfilling the Father’s Will:** Ps. 22:15 cf. Rom. 8:32. **e. It was the Father’s will to give His only begotten Son:** John 3:16. **d. Jesus offers Himself to God “through the eternal Spirit” in Heb. 9:14.**

M. The Holy Spirit is called & identified with God, possesses the perfections of God, & performs the works of God:

a. Identified as God: Acts 5:31-32 & 2 Cor. 3:18; **b. Associated by name with Father & Son:** Isaiah 61:1; 2 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:10-11; **c. Holy Spirit is associated with the Father by 11 different titles & with the Son by 5 distinct titles** (these titles point to the equality of Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son and not to inferiority or dependence; e.g., “*The Spirit of God*” means that He is the very person of God; cf. 1 Cor. 2:11). **d. Possesses perfections of God:** 1. Eternality: Heb. 9:14; 2. Holiness (addressed as Holy that any other title): Rom. 1:4; 1 John 2:20; 3. Life: Rom. 8:2, 4. Truth: John 16:13; 5. Wisdom: Isaiah 11:2; 6. Grace: Heb. 10:29; 7. Glory: 1 Cor. 4:14; 8. Omniscience: 1 Cor. 2:10-11; 9. Omnipresence: Psalm 139:7-8; 10. Omnipotence: Gen. 1:2; **d. Performs the works of God:** 1. Creation: Psalm 140:30; 2. Revelation: Eph. 3:4-5; 3. Inspiration: 2 Peter 1:21; 4. Regeneration: John 3:5-8; Titus 3:4-7; 9. Sanctification: 2 Thess. 2:13-14; “*But we must always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*” *He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

A. Two Heretical Views in Church History: (1) Modalism, but also called Sabellianism after its founder in AD 217-220, Sabellius. Modalism holds that God is only one person who appears in different modes or roles at different times in the divine economy. In other words, God changes His mode of appearance. (2) Triniticism is the belief that there are three gods or three separate beings in the Godhead (three separate essences). Both Modalism and Triniticism are at odds with the whole of the Bible which presents God as one in essence and three in persons (oneness and threeness): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 5:21-23. B. Two ways of looking at Trinity: **Ontological Trinitarianism & Economic or Functional Trinitarianism.** Ontological Trinitarianism concentrates on the personal properties, operations of, or works within the Trinity (e.g., procession of the Trinity: “(1) The Father begets the Son and is He from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds, though the Father is neither begotten nor does He proceed. (2) The Son is begotten and is He from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds, but He neither begets nor proceeds. (3) The Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, but He neither begets nor is He the One from whom any proceed” [Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 62]. Functional Trinitarianism focuses on the “administration, management, actions of the persons, or the opera ad extra” (works outside); that is, on the creation and its creatures). For the Father this includes the works of electing (1 Pet. 1:2), loving the world (John 3:16), and giving good gifts (James 1:17). For the Son it emphasizes His suffering (Mark 8:31), redeeming (1 Pet. 1:18), and upholding all things (Heb. 1:3). For the Spirit it focuses on His particular works of regenerating (Titus 3:5), energizing (Acts 1:8), and sanctifying (Gal. 5:22-23) [Ibid.]. www.prshockley.org.