

The Trinity: Beholding the Wonders of God

To the participant,

This study guide is just that – a guide for your own study. Hopefully our meetings will stir your heart and mind to write down notes of your thoughts and questions, as well as topics and cross-references that will lead you to private study and devotion time with God. Let us be like the Bereans from Acts 17:11. Let us seek the Lord in prayer and the Word. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). I am glad for our time together. May Christ be exalted, may the Word go forth, may the Spirit guide us, and may the Father be glorified.

Your friend and brother in the Lord,
Matt Fortunato
856-397-3556
atimeiscoming@gmail.com

Order of Study

- Study #1 – Introduction: The Basics of the 3in1 God
- Study #2 – The Deity of Jesus Christ
- Study #3 – The Deity of the Holy Spirit
- Study #4 – The Deity of the Father
- Study #5 – The Trinity and the Old Testament
- Study #6 – The Self-Consciousness of Christ
- Study #7 – The Solution to Our Deepest Questions
- Study #8 – God's Purpose: Redemption and the Trinity

Study #1

Introduction: The Basics of the 3in1 God

→ *The purpose of this study is to give an outline and overview of how we will prove that God reveals Himself as a Triune God. We will also talk about the overall purpose and approach of such a study.*

Summary of the Doctrine

The doctrine of the Trinity refers to the biblical teaching that **there is one God who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

The Bible teaches that:

- There is one God, not three Gods.
- The Father is God (Philippians 1:2), the Son is God (Colossians 2:9), and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4).
- The Father, Son, and Spirit are eternally, personally distinct. In other words, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father.
- There is not one God who changes from Father to Son to Holy Spirit.
- There is mysteriously, gloriously, one eternal and perfect God who exists in three distinct, divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The burden of this study is to show how this teaching comes directly from the text of Scripture, not from human speculation.

Renewing Our Minds

1. Why study this? Because we want to know God!

Think about the connection between learning more about a person and growing in your relationship with him/her. Also, think about how if you love something (e.g. a city), you want to see and experience more of it. In turn, seeing and experiencing more of it increases your love, which in turn leads you to see and experience even more of it, and so on.

2. What is the right method? Exegetical, non-speculative.

The Bible is our source and standard of truth, not human logic. We must resist the temptation to bring incomprehensible truth down in order to make them fit into the limits of our own minds. Doing so will only cause us to lose the wonder of who God is. If we are not careful, before we know it, our minds will function as the ultimate standard of truth, rather than God's revelation.

3. The critical role of biblical mystery! Incomprehensible, but true.

Truths that transcend our minds and experience should drive us to worship God, not reject Him or alter what He has revealed. We should embrace, not erase biblical mystery! For examples, Jesus is both God and man; the Bible was written by both men and the Holy Spirit; God is both three and one; God is sovereign over all things and yet man is responsible and makes genuine choices that lead to genuine actions. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and were guilty of sin, and yet behind it all, it was God that "sent" Joseph into Egypt for a purpose. See Romans 11:33-36. Mystery transcends our logic, but not God's!

Important Terminology

The following terminology is not found in the Bible. It is only used to express what is taught in the Bible. The truth does not stand or fall with our terminology! The important thing is that we accept and submit to what the Bible teaches.

1. **Trinity** – *from tri-unity*. "In three, one." "Threefold oneness."
2. **"God is one in substance (or essence), three in persons."** This is the most concise, most common way to express the Biblical teaching that there is one God who exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. **Substance, essence** – *a particular kind of thing or being*. A human being has one essence; a plant has another. A created thing has a created, dependent essence; God has a divine, independent essence.
4. **Person** – *a distinct self*. A person is self-aware, acts in distinction from other persons, and can interact with other persons.
5. **Tertullian** (AD 155-240) – a Christian apologist in Carthage, Africa. He was the first to use this set of terminology to articulate the biblical teaching on the Trinity. See his, *Against Praxeas*, chapter 3, where he defends "the doctrine of the Trinity in unity" against misunderstandings of the Biblical teaching.

Building Blocks: There is One God

This is the first and most essential building block. God is one, and there is only one God. These verses are just the tip of the iceberg!

- **Deuteronomy 4:35-39**, To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. [36] Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. [37] And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, [38] driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, [39] know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.
- **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
- **2 Samuel 7:22**, Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears.
- **1 Kings 8:60**, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other.
- **Isaiah 43:10-11**, "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.[11] I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior."
- **Isaiah 45:5**, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no God." (see 55:5)
- **John 17:3**, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."
- **Romans 3:30**, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

- **1 Corinthians 8:4-6**, Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." [5] For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—[6] yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.
- **1 Timothy 1:17**, To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
- **1 Timothy 2:5**, For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.
- **Galatians 3:20**, Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.
- **James 2:19**, You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

From the Ancient Church

The Nicene Creed, From the First Council of Nicaea, AD 325

Some context: One of the central issues was whether the Son of God is of the same substance of the Father, or of a similar, but essentially different substance. In other words: Is Jesus fully and truly God, or simply god-like?

The Arian Controversy was the defining controversy at the time. The two sides were led and represented by Arius and Athanasius, both bishops in Alexandria, Egypt. Arius taught that the Son of God had a beginning and was created out of nothing, like the rest of creation. Athanasius represented the biblical teaching that the Son of God is eternal and uncreated and, in fact, was active in creation (see John 1:1-3).

Arius reasoned: "If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a **beginning of existence**: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he had his **substance from nothing**".

The Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God of God, light of light, true God of true God,
begotten not made, of one substance with the Father,
through Whom all things came into being,
things in heaven and things on earth,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down, and
Became incarnate, and became man,
and suffered, and rose again on the third day,
and ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and dead,
And in the Holy Spirit.
But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and,
Before being born He was not,
and that He came into existence out of nothing,
or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance,
or created, or is subject to alteration or change
- these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.

Heresies Old and New

There is one trademark, one telltale sign of any heresy regarding the Trinity. It will either make God's oneness ultimate but sacrifice God's threeness, or make God's threeness ultimate but sacrifice God's oneness.

Subordinationism – Any belief that the Son and/or the Holy Spirit are subordinate in essence or being to the Father. In other words, it is any belief that the Son or Spirit are not truly, eternally divine.

What does the Bible teach? The Bible teaches that the Son is God and that the Spirit is God. Therefore, subordinationism conflicts with and denies specific passages of Scripture.

Arianism is an example of subordinationism. Jehovah's Witnesses are a contemporary example. Here is an excerpt from their official doctrine (www.jw.org):

“Jesus. We follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ and honor him as our Savior and as the Son of God. (Matthew 20:28; Acts 5:31) Thus, we are Christians. (Acts 11:26) However, we have learned from the Bible that Jesus is not Almighty God and that there is no Scriptural basis for the Trinity doctrine. — John 14:28.

What does John 14:28 teach? Jesus said: “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”

Jesus submitted to the Father in his role in redemption. In the work of God to save sinners, the Son gladly, humbly, lowered himself to serve and obey the Father. In this sense, Jesus could honestly say, “the Father is greater than I.” This does not mean that the Son is not divine in essence, but only that he freely lowered himself in his role in God’s redeeming work.

First, the context of John 14 is the relationships between Father, Son, and Spirit in the context of God’s work for and presence with his people.

Second, Philippians 2:5-11 explicitly teaches that the Son, though equal to God, voluntarily lowered himself in humble obedience to the Father. These two facts do not contradict one another, but mutually inform one another.

Third, John 1:1-3 explicitly teaches that the Word was equal to God, distinct from God, and personally (“he”) God. The Word, or the Logos, is another term the Bible uses for the eternal Son.

Fourth, earlier in John 10:30, Jesus declared, “I and the Father are one.” This is the balancing truth for his declaration, “the Father is greater than I.” When Jesus says he is one with the father, he does not mean that he and the Father are the same person with no distinction whatsoever. He only means that he and the Father have the closest possible relationship, an eternal, unbreakable, divine relationship. So, the one statement expresses the essential equality between Father and Son; the other statement expresses the redemptive, relational submission of Son to Father.