

If God Is One, How Can There Be a Triune God?

Examining Christianity's Most Distinctive Doctrine

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Gen 1:1, Gen 1:2, Gen 1:26, Deut 6:4, Psalm 110:1, Matthew 22:37-40, John 14:17, John 1:1, 14, ,
KEY SCRIPTURES John 17:3, Acts 5:3-4, 1 Cor 8:6, Heb 1:3

Introduction: This Question is at the Heart of Christian Faith

The doctrine of the Triune God is an essential and unique one, for the true Christian faith. It is also much misunderstood. Christianity is a monotheistic faith. Muslims believe it to be polytheism. Jehovah's Witnesses simply deny it. Some Christians tend to avoid it as too complicated and not relevant for the practical outworking of their faith. There are even those who are genuine in their faith struggle over how one God can be three revelations, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? We cannot dismiss any of these, but as Peter wrote:

"... in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.." – 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

This study will take the question with all seriousness. It will not pretend the question of a Triune God is simple. it is certainly a deep mystery of Christian faith. However, it will attempt to show that it is nether irrational, unbiblical and a later invention. The truth is, that the Triune God is the only way to make sense of everything the Bible tells us about God.

The question is addressed with two convictions that are held together: humility (we are finite beings wrestling to understand an infinite God) and confidence in our faith (God has given us the Scriptures, in which He has revealed Himself, and what he has revealed is trustworthy and with the Holy Spirit leading we can discover the truth).

I do not use the term 'Trinity' or 'Persons'. These do not sit right with the revelations of God in the Bible. Rather, I use the term Triune God and Revelations. This is more in keeping with the Scriptures. For example, ***'God had revealed himself'*** (Genesis 35:7 and

elsewhere). ***'to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'***, (Referring to Jesus (John 12:38). ***'But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit'*** (1 Corinthians 2:10). I acknowledge that personal pronouns are used, but these are for the human reader to be able to understand the text and activity of God. The only revelation that is truly able to be referred to as 'person', is the Lord Jesus, as He walked the earth in human form. Both God the Father and the Holy Spirit are spirit and do not have a personal body. Furthermore, the use of 'person' does give rise to the idea of three gods and hence the criticism from others.

A Definition

The doctrine of the Triune God teaches: There is one God, who eternally exists as three distinct revelations: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each one is fully and equally God, yet each are distinct from the others. One in essence; three in the revelations that are revealed in Scripture.

Part 1: God Is Absolutely One — The Bedrock of Scripture

Any discussion of the Triune God must begin exactly where the Bible begins: with the absolute, uncompromising oneness of God.

However, before we get to the meet of the question, let us understand words that are used of God in Scripture. In the opening verse of the Bible re read:

"In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth;" Genesis 1:1 (HRB)

The word *Elohim* is a plural word. Throughout the creation account, it is used. This is further emphasised in the creation of man:

"And Elohim said, let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creepers creeping on the earth." Genesis 1:26 (HRB)

The Hebrew Shema — the great confession of Israel — speaks loudly through both Testaments:

***“Hear, O Israel, YAHWEH our Elohim is YAHWEH echad [one].”
-Deuteronomy 6:4 (HRB)***

Echad (one), the Hebrew word, used here reflects a compound oneness. When the Scriptures talks of marriage the word for the unity of two is also *echad*. (Genesis 2:24) When a sole solitary one is intended, *yachid* would be used.

We must be clear. This does not mean polytheism – the claim of multiple gods. The Scriptures are clear that the Christian faith holds to monotheism. In that it enriches the Christian faith as it demonstrates the wondrous God who is able to reveal Himself in ways that are to the benefit of humanity. God as Spirit cannot be seen. The Hebrew Roots Bible brings this out:

“Elohim is spirit, and the ones worshiping Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24 (HRB)

Indeed, no man can see God and live:

“And He said, “You are not able to see My face; for no man can see Me and live.”” Exodus 33:20 (HRB)

Yet God did meet man face to face in a number of places: Check these Scriptures as examples:

Genesis 18, Exodus 33:11, Deuteronomy 34:10, Numbers 12:8,

These visitations are known as Theophanes, when God appears in a form, as a man. This is the eternal, divine and pre-existent Son of God, who came into the world as a man, in order

to reveal the Father, and to carry out the plan of Salvation.

As with the Holy Spirit, His presence is seen all over Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

“..and the earth being without form and empty, and darkness on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of Elohim moving gently on the face of the waters” Genesis 1:2 (HRB)

Jesus Himself speaks of the Holy Spirit with personal pronouns:

“,,the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you.” John 14:17

This again demonstrates the grace of God, who is enthroned in the heavens, sends the Holy Spirit, to allow human beings to live out the life of God on the earth.

It must be stressed this is not Modalism, that is three persons with different roles. It is the same one God, who reveals Himself through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Neither is it Tritheism, that is three gods who cooperate. Rather it is a wonderful unity of the One God, who reveals Himself to humanity in a more personal way than we can ever conceive. Philo, a Jewish philosopher who was around before the birth of Jesus, in discussing the matter, said of it, that it ‘resembles an enigma’. This is indeed the case. The concept of the God we worship is indeed a mystery, beyond human comprehension. We can only be guided in our understanding by the Scriptures. Jesus said:

“I and the Father are one.” John 10:30

Paul writes

“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” — 1 Corinthians 8:6

(NIV)

“For YAHWEH is one (echad), also there is one Mediator of YAHWEH and of men, the Man Messiah Yeshua...” — 1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV)

Part 2: Scripture Reveals Three Who Are Fully God

While the word “Trinity” or the term ‘triune God’, do not appear in Scripture (neither does the word “Bible”), they are terms that help us wrestle with the concept under discussion. The truth is that the idea of the Triune God is seen throughout both Testaments, producing a rich picture of a great God. All the writers of the Scriptures were committed Jewish men (Luke may be an exception, but he too was committed to the God of Jesus). devoted to God, and latterly to Jesus, were monotheists. Yet they all, without exception, speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each as fully divine and yet, as distinct from one another.

The Father Is God

In both Testaments, the God of Israel: the Creator, Covenant-maker, and Sovereign Lord, is addressed as Father, particularly by Jesus himself. Jesus spoke of “my Father” and “your Father”. There is demonstrated in the Gospels, an intimacy and authority that indeed scandalised His hearers (John 5:18). The hearers of the time, could not grasp the awesomeness of what Jesus was teaching. It is written:

“And this is everlasting life, that they may know You, the Elohim of truth, and Yeshua Messiah, whom You have sent.” — John 17:3 (HRB)

The Son Is God

Jesus as the Son of God is the doctrine that challenges many. It is also the most crucial. The New Testament is very clear: Jesus of Nazareth is not merely a great teacher, prophet, or even the highest angel. He is God incarnate revealed to the world.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Elohim, and the Word was Elohim.... And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.” — John 1:1, 14 (HRB)

John's opening, as captured by the Hebrew Roots Bible, which captures the original language used, is staggering. Even in the Greek we see the Word (Logos) was distinct from God ("with God" in a relationship) and yet was God ("the Word was God": divine in nature). Both truths are stated in the same verse. There exists so called 'christian' groups, who would deny the very words that appear in this Scripture.

***"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."* — Colossians 1:15–17 (RSVA)**

Remember Paul was a well-trained Pharisee. Equipped with a detailed knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. Yet Paul attributes to Jesus the Messiah the very act of creation, which the Jewish Tanach points exclusively to God as creator (Genesis 1, Isaiah 44:24). This is not exalted language for a creature; it is the language of deity.

***"For He is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His being, and upholding all things by the power of His Word; having made purification of our sins through Himself, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.."* — Hebrews 1:3 (HRB)**

We also have the internal dialogue of God Himself, again from the Tanach, that confirms the previous verse:

***"A declaration of YAHWEH to my Adonai: Sit at My right hand, until I place Your enemies as Your footstool."* Psalm 110:1 (HRB)**

Then we have the Jewish Thomas' exclamation when he meets the risen Jesus. The sight of a resurrected Jesus, crucified as a man, now raised in glory, captures it perfectly: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Jesus does not reject the either title but He confirms and

commends his faith.

The Holy Spirit Is God

The Holy Spirit is wrongly often referred to as “it” in popular speech. The error in this is to suggest that the Holy Spirit is just a force or influence. Scripture is clear: the Spirit is a direct revelation of God Himself having intellect, will, and emotion – and fully divine. The shocking account in Acts is clear:

“But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart for you to lie to the Holy Spirit, and for you to keep back for yourself from the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain yours? And after it was sold, was it not in your control? Why have you purposed this thing in your heart? You did not lie to men but to God.” — Acts 5:3–4 (EMTV)

This is direct and deliberate: lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. Paul warns the Corinthians:

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” — 1 Corinthians 3:16 (EMTV)

Paul makes clear that God dwells in believers because the Spirit of God is within them. If that were not so, then Paul’s argument that the believer’s body is a temple, the dwelling place of the divine, would be false. However, as we know, the Scriptures are God breathed and profitable for doctrine, (2 Timothy 3:16) which is being studied here

Part 3: The Three Are Distinct

The three Revelations are not merely three names in a book for the same God. Neither are they three masks God wears at different times, as if in a Greek play. No. They are truly, personally distinct. We see this most clearly in the baptism of Jesus:

“And having been baptised, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him. And behold, a voice

came out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I have found delight."" — *Matthew 3:16–17 (EMTV)*

In one single moment, the one God is revealed as the unique *echad*: the Son in the water, the Spirit being seen descending, and the Father speaking from heaven. Three simultaneous, distinct presences — and yet one God. This scene alone destroys the views of Modalism, discussed earlier, and shows their views to be impossible.

The relationship between the Revelations of the one God is also relational and powerful: This is demonstrated in the Father sending the Son (John 3:16); the Son praying to the Father (John 17); the Father and Son sending the Spirit (John 14:26, 15:26); the Spirit interceding for believers before the Father (Romans 8:26–27). A single divine Person cannot send, pray to, or intercede before Himself – the conclusion must arrive at the truth of the One God of our faith.

The Great Commission — One Name, Three Revelations

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus commands believers to be baptised “in the name” (singular - one God) “of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (three distinct Revelations). If the three were merely roles of one Person or revelation, Jesus would have said “in my name only.” If they were three separate gods, he would have said “in the names” (plural). Surely the use of the singular “name” encompassing three Revelations is the grammar of the Triune God.

Part 4: The Three Persons at a Glance

The following brings together the distinct identity and work of each Revelation of the Triune God, as revealed in Scripture. Each describes the same One God - viewed from a different personal dimension of His eternal being.

We must be clear that the distinction of distinct works, in no way implies inequality of nature. All three Revelations are equally, fully, and eternally God. Paul makes this clear in Philippians:

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the *form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but*

made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming to be in the likeness of men.” Philipians 2:6–8 (EMTV)

*As appears to the sight

This the humility of Jesus. His submission to the Father in the incarnation was a voluntary, eternal-purposeful submission – it is not evidence of lesser divinity. Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Augustine on the Triune God and Love

“You see the Triune God if you see love. For there are three: the one that loves, the one that is loved, and the one that is love itself.” (Translation)

Augustine gives insight from his *De Trinitate* that brings to our mind, that the eternal life of God is not an isolated, self-contained individuality but a communion of perfect love - a life eternally shared within the Triune God.

Part 6: The study of the Triune God, not as academic exercise

The Triune God should not simply be treated as an abstract Scriptural conundrum with little or no practical consequence or purpose. This would be a mistake. The doctrine of the Triune God is the foundation of Christian salvation, prayer, community, and mission.

1. Salvation Needs the Triune God

The gospel story cannot be shared without Trinitarian language. As stated above, The Father sent the Son into the world (John 3:16). The Son brings to fulfilment, redemption through his life, death, and resurrection. It is the Spirit who brings that redemption to individual hearts through conviction of sin, regeneration of the soul, and the sealing of the convert (Ephesians 1:13–14). If any Revelation is removed or activity diminished, salvation collapses.

2. Prayer Is Trinitarian

Christian's prayers are addressed to the Father. Prayed through the Son, and in the power of the Spirit (Ephesian 2:18, Romans 8:26–27). Every genuine act of prayer is direct involvement in the Trinitarian life of God - the Spirit prays within us (Romans 8:26), in line with Christ's mediation, toward the Father. Prayer is not a monologue aimed at a remote God but an invitation into a divine relationship, where dialogue between the Father and His child can take place.

3. Church Reflects the Triune God

In John 17:20–23, Jesus prays that his followers “may be one as we are one.” The unity of the Church is clearly modelled on the unity of the Triune God. The Father, Son, and Spirit each distinct but perfectly united in love, purpose, and self-giving. Christian community is called to be a reflection of that divine communion — diverse persons, genuinely united. As God is the *echad*, a composite one, the Church is also a composite one, united in the Triune God. The truly amazing and wonderful joy is that the Triune God is rooted in Eternal Love. Jesus communing with the Father expresses this sentiment:

“Father, I desire that those whom You have given Me, that they may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world. — John 17:24 (MKJV)

Before the world began, the Father was loving the Son. Creation did not create love, it is, the overflow of an eternal love already perfectly complete within the Godhead. That loving unity is the heart of the Triune God, for the Church. Jesus referring to the earlier Testimony:

“And Yeshua said to him, “You shall love YAHWEH your Elohim with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Deut. 6:5) This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lev.19:18) On these two commandments all the Torah and the Prophets hang.” Matthew 22:37-40 — (HRB)



