

English Transcript

Foundations of the Christian Faith

Lesson 8 – The Trinity

Welcome back to Foundations of the Christian Faith, Course 1.

This is Lesson 8 – The doctrine of the Trinity.

This is the final lesson of this course, and we will continue on page 51 in your handout.

The Doctrine of the Trinity is easy to state, but difficult to understand. Yet it is one of the most important doctrines in Scripture. Matthew 3:16-17 is just one of numerous trinitarian passages in the Bible.

AND WHEN JESUS WAS BAPTIZED, IMMEDIATELY HE WENT UP FROM THE WATER, AND BEHOLD, THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED TO HIM, AND HE SAW THE SPIRIT OF GOD DESCENDING LIKE A DOVE AND COMING TO REST ON HIM; AND BEHOLD, A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAID, “THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.”

How is each member of the Trinity represented in these verses?

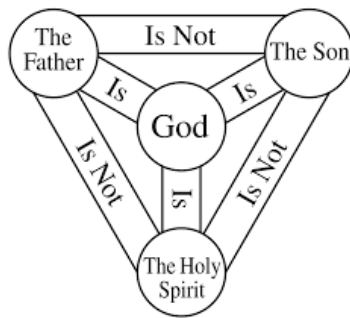
The Son is baptized, the Spirit descends, and the Father affirms the Son.

Consider these passages where God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are presented.

- **Creation (Genesis 1:1-3, John 1:1-4)** *God, Spirit hovering of darkness, the Word spoke.*
- **The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)** *Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All authority given to the Son by the Father.*
- **Born Again (John 3:1-16)** *God loved the world, the Son died for sinners, spiritually reborn of the Spirit.*
- **Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16)** *Numerous references to the Father, Son, and Spirit.*
- **Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)** *Different gifts but same Spirit; different ways to serve but same Lord; and different activities but the same God.*
- **Doxology (2 Corinthians 13:14)** *Grace of Lord Jesus, love of God, fellowship of Holy Spirit.*
- **Spiritual Blessings (Ephesians 1:3-14)** *The saving work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the believer’s life.*
- **Unity in the church (Ephesians 4:4-6)** *One Spirit, One Lord, One God, and Father*
- **Greeting (1 Peter 1:2)** *Foreknowledge of God the Father, Sanctification of the Spirit, and for obedience to Christ with his blood.*
- **Call to persevere (Jude 20-21)** *Pray in the Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*
- **Greeting (Revelation 1:4-5)** *From the seven Spirit, Jesus Christ, made to be a kingdom or priests to his God and Father.*

Although the word “Trinity” is never used in the Scriptures, it is illustrated throughout the Bible.

The Trinity is a theological truth that our finite minds will never be able to fully comprehend or adequately explain. On the surface to say there is one God, but three persons seems contradictory. Pictures can sometimes help to explain spiritual truths. The diagram in your handout is often used to communicate some of the doctrinal truths related to the Trinity.



There is one God and three distinct persons listed as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God.

But the Father is not the Son or the Spirit. The Son is not the Father or the Spirit. And The Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor The Son.

Other illustrations have been used but there is no one picture that can fully explain this theological truth.

- Three parts of one egg: shell, yolk, and clear fluid
- Three properties of one compound (H₂O): liquid, solid, and gas
- Three aspects of the Sun: We can see it, feel its heat, and observe its effects on nature.
- Three relationships in one person: I am a father, son, and husband (or also a brother)

As you turn to page 52, the evidence for *Trinitarianism* is on display throughout the Scriptures. Systematic Theology provides a helpful framework to develop this doctrinal truth.

Essential Elements of the Trinity

- God is one.
- Each of the persons within the Godhead is Deity.
- The “*oneness*” of God and “*threeness*” of God are not contradictory.
- The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal with no beginning or end.
- Each of the persons of God is of the same essence and co-equal.

There are many examples we could present in this section. I have just provided a few verses to help illustrate this point.

God is One

- OT: "Hear, O Israel" The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4)
- NT: "Now to the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

Three Distinct Persons as Deity

The Father

- OT: "He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'" (Psalm 2:7)
- NT: "... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." (1 Pet 1:12)

The Son

- OT: "He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'" (Psalm 2:7)
- NT: As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, who I love; with him I am well pleased.'" (Matthew 3:16-17)

The Holy Spirit

- OT: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)
- NT: The Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit ...? You have not lied to men but to God.'" (Acts 5:3-4)

Plurality of persons in the Godhead

- OT: The God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ...'". (Genesis 1:26)
The word for God used in Genesis 1 is Elohim and it is in the plural.
- NT: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

Another example involves the attribute of God that is repeated three times together in Isaiah 6:3. The seraphim are before the throne of God calling out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And then Isaiah says that God speaks and calls Isaiah into service and Isaiah responds, "Here am I, send me."

Yet about Jesus, The Son, the apostle John alludes to Isaiah 6 when he writes in John 12:41 that Isaiah saw the glory of the Messiah and attributed this same calling to Christ. And in Luke 28:25, Luke alludes to this same Isaiah 6 passage but says that the Holy Spirit was right in saying the things that Isaiah attributed to God. Thus some, theologians say that the phrase "holy, holy, holy" is meant to reinforce the triunity within the Godhead.

We can also look at the attributes of God and the different works and roles within the Godhead.

All the attributes of God are fully present in each person of the Trinity because each is co-equal and worthy of glory, honor, and praise. We have highlighted just a few of the attributes of God along with the Scripture references for each person of the Trinity.

Let us look together at the attribute of the eternal nature of God.

The Father: Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2)

The Son: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. (John 1:1-2)

The Holy Spirit: How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each eternal. They possess the same attributes. You will find the same for each of the attributes listed in the chart for omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, truth, goodness, holiness, immutability, and so forth.

Persons of the Same Essences: Attributes applied to Each Person

Attribute	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Eternal	Psalm 90:2	John 1:1-2; Rev 1:8, 17	Hebrews 9:14
Omnipotence/Power	I Peter 1:5	I Cor 12:9	Acts 1:8; Romans 15:19
Omniscience	Jeremiah 17:10	Col 2:2-3; Rev 2:23	Isaiah 40:13-14; I Cor 2:11
Omnipresence	Jeremiah 23:24	Matthew 28:20	Psalm 139:7
Truth	John 7:28	Revelation 3:7; John 14:6	I John 5:6-7; John 16:13
Benevolence (goodness)	Romans 2:4	Ephesians 5:25	Nehemiah 9:20

The chart below illustrates how each person of the Godhead plays a distinct role in biblical and theological events.

Consider the Creation of Man.

The Father: *Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7)*

The Son: *For in him (Jesus) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:16)*

The Holy Spirit: *The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4)*

Equality with Different Roles

Activity	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Creation of the World	Psalms 102:25	Colossians 1:16	Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30
Creation of Man	Genesis 2:7	Colossians 1:16	Job 33:4
Baptism of Christ	Matthew 3:17	Matthew 3:16-17	Matthew 3:17
Death of Christ	Hebrews 9:14	Hebrews 9:14	Hebrews 9:14

Source: Taken from *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* by H. Wayne House, Copyright 1992 by H. Wayne House.

We could also look to the *Incarnation* (Luke 1:35; John 1:14); the *Resurrection* (John 5:21; Romans 8:11); the *Inspiration of Scripture* (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Peter 1:21); the *authority to call people to ministry* (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 3:5-6; 1 Tim 1:12); and even the *indwelling presence of God in a believer* (Eph 4:6; Col 1:17; 1 Cor 6:19)

Five Key Perspectives

In discussing the Trinity, we may understand the significance of this doctrine by considering it from five different perspectives.

1. The Trinity is progressively revealed in Scripture.

It is partially revealed in the Old Testament.

There are many references to God which are plural such as Genesis 1:26 which says, "Let us make man in our image." There are also references which mention more than one member of the Trinity such as Isaiah 48:16: "And now the Lord God has sent me, and His Spirit..."

It is more completely revealed in the New Testament.

Jesus' entrance into the world demonstrates the plurality of God. At his baptism, all three members of the Trinity are present (Matthew 3:16-17). The Great Commission communicates the Trinity (Matthew 28:18-20), and the apostles deal with the Trinity in many passages.

2. Three statements summarize the biblical teaching on the Trinity.

There is One God.

This is clear in both the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 6:4; I Timothy 2:5).

God is three persons.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished in several passages such as John 14:26, Romans 8:27, and Matthew 28:18-20.

Each person is fully God.

The Father is clearly God throughout the Old and New Testaments. The Son is also described as God in many passages such as John 1:1 and Hebrews 1:3. The Holy Spirit is likewise referred to as God in passages such as Acts 5:3-4.

3. There are important distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They exist eternally as three distinct persons who together are one God. They also have distinct primary functions.

In creation God the Father spoke the creative words which brought the universe into being, but God the Son (the Word) carried out these words (John 1:3, Colossians 1:16). The Holy Spirit was also active in the process (Genesis 1:2).

In the redemption of those who believe, the members of the Trinity also have distinct functions. God the Father sent his Son into the world (John 3:16). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished the work (John 6:38). The Holy Spirit applies redemption to us (John 14:26). He also continues to work within us today.

These distinctions in the functions of the members of the Trinity are permanent as seen in the permanent relationship between God the Father and God the Son (I Corinthians 15:27-28).

For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

4. Humanity and creation reflect the unity and diversity of God.

- Unity and diversity are practiced in marriage (Genesis 1:27).
- Family life reflects unity and diversity (Ephesians 5:21-6:4).
- The Church reflects the unity and diversity of God as well (I Corinthians 12:12).
- The various races within humanity reflect this (Ephesians 2:16).
- All creation reflects unity and diversity as well (Philippians 2:10-11).

5. Denying the Trinity threatens many essential doctrines.

This is most often seen in the denial of the full deity of Jesus. This is also a denial of the Trinity. Atonement for the sins of humanity cannot occur if Jesus is not fully God. Salvation by faith in Jesus would not be possible. Our faith, worship, and prayers would all be useless if Jesus is not God.

We will close this lesson with a few common Doctrinal Errors related to the Trinity.

Biblical Trinitarianism **True**

One God who eternally exists as three distinct and equal persons — Father, Son, and Spirit — who are each fully and equally God.

Tritheism **False**

The false view that Christianity has 3 Gods, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Arianism **False**

The false view that one eternal God was distinct from the Son who was generated by the Father and who, thus had a beginning. Arius also taught that the Holy Spirit was created by the Son, since all things were made by the Son.

Modalism **False**

The false view is that the Father, Son, and Spirit are different modes or forms of the same divine person.

The Trinity is impossible to fully understand. Yet a denial of this doctrine is a denial of the faith itself! The atonement, justification by faith, worship of Christ, God as the source of salvation, the independent and personal nature of God and the basis of the unity of the universe would all be lost. The wondrous and mysterious nature of God are evident in this doctrine.

This concludes course 1 of Foundations of the Christ Faith. Course 2 will focus on the doctrine of Man, Sin and Salvation.