

The Holy Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is a theological deduction¹ from the following lines of evidence that are taught in the Bible:

- (1) In Scripture There is Only One God.²
- (2) In Scripture Three Persons³ are Recognized as God.⁴
 - a. Three Persons are Explicitly Called God.
 - i. The Father is God.⁵
 - ii. The Son, Jesus Christ, is God.⁶

¹ While some may object to utilizing the term the “Trinity” for not being found in Scripture, it summarizes everything which God has revealed in Scripture. The term has been perfectly acceptable for numerous centuries in church history since being coined by the early Church Fathers (attributed to either Justin Martyr [c. 150 CE] or Tertullian [c. 200 CE]). It is a theological deduction from inductive evidence consistent with the methodology of apostolic exegesis and Jesus Christ. Jesus used a theological deduction from Exod 3:6 to argue for the bodily resurrection from the dead in his debate with the Sadducees in Matt 22:23-33, Mark 12:18-27, and Luke 20:27-40. For more details concerning Jesus’ argumentation see Peter L. Smith, “What Do the Patriarchs Have to Do with the Resurrection? Jesus’ Use of Covenant Language in His Debate with the Sadducees” (ThM thesis., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2008).

² In the OT: Deut 6:4; Exod 15:11; Deut 4:35, 39; 1 Kings 8:60; Psa 86:10; Isa 43:10; 45:5, 6; cf. 46:9. In the NT: Mark 12:28-30; John 17:3; Rom 3:29-30; 1 Cor 8:5-6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19. While Deut 6:4 primarily stresses that Yahweh is Israel’s God alone, two other nuances surface: (1) the uniqueness of Yahweh and (2) the unity of Yahweh. He is not merely first among the “gods” He’s the only one.

³ Personhood consists of intellect, emotions or sensibility, and will. This definition should work for creatures such as angelic beings and human beings as well.

⁴ The NT writers worshipped and proclaimed the one true God, the God of Israel. They did not place two new Gods by the side of Yahweh to be worshipped and served. They did speak of Yahweh as Father, Son, and Spirit, yet there is no indication that they felt they were being innovative. While their redefinition was a departure from Second Temple Judaism’s understanding it did not contradict the OT. The development of the doctrine in the NT seems to suggest that there was initially a binitarianism understanding and then ultimately a Trinitarian consciousness. The earliest disciples progressively understood the implications of Jesus’ incarnation and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. While Jesus laid the foundation for the Trinity in word, it was the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in deed that proved Jesus’ teaching was true. It appears that Jesus’ opponents understood the implications of Jesus’ claims to be God before the disciples. Thus Jesus was charged with blasphemy (Mark 14:26, 53-65; John 8:58, 59; 18:5-6). Cf. Darrell L Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism: The Charge against Jesus in Mark 14:53-65*, Biblical Studies Library (Grand Rapids: Mohr (Siebeck), 1998).

⁵ Matt 6:25-34; John 17:1-3; Matt 27:46 in conjunction with Luke 23:46; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; 1 Pet 1:2.

⁶ John 1:1 (for a dismissal of the Jehovah Witness’s *New World Translation’s* “a god” for the anarthrous pre-verbal predicate nominative one is permitted to employ Colwell’s rule, “Definite predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article... a predicate nominative which precedes the verb cannot be translated as an indefinite or a ‘qualitative’ noun solely because of the absence of the article; if the context suggest that the predicate is definite, it should be translated as a definite noun...”; cf. Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 256–70; Colwell’s Rule doesn’t deal with a third possibility, namely, that an anarthrous predicate noun may have more of a qualitative nuance when placed ahead of the verb), John 1:18; 20:28; Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1. Titus 2:13 and 2 Pet 1:1 both employ Granville Sharp’s rule (cf. *Ibid.*, 270–77.). Other possible passages include Acts 20:28; Heb 1:9; 1 John 5:20. Aside from being ascribed God, two other lines of evidence for Jesus Christ’s deity is set forth in the NT: **(1)** Titles ascribed to Yahweh in the OT are ascribed to Christ in the NT (“Lord,” Joel 2:32; Rom 10:9, 13; “The First and the Last,” Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev 2:8; 22:13-16; “I AM,” Exod 3:14; John 6:35; 8:12; 9:14; 10:7; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; “The Rock,” Gen 49:24; Psa 18:2; 95:1; 1 Cor 10:4; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4; Heb 13:20; “the Judge,”

- iii. The Holy Spirit⁷ is God.⁸
- b. Three Persons Possess the Attributes of God.⁹
 - i. The Father Possesses the Attributes of God.¹⁰
 - ii. The Son, Jesus Christ, Possesses the Attributes of God.¹¹
 - iii. The Holy Spirit Possesses the Attributes of God.¹²
- c. Three Persons Do the Works of God.
 - i. The Father Does the Works of God.¹³

Gen 18:25; Joel 3:12; Matt 25:31-46; cf. Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10); (2) The NT writers make ontological claims of deity for Jesus Christ (Phil 2:5-8; Heb 1:3; Col 2:9).

⁷ It should be noted that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are all portrayed with masculine language. On the other hand Feminist theology that argues God is not male (and maybe female!). While human language is analogical the Bible's language should not be ignored to invent a gender neutral or feminine god. First of all, the God of the Bible has no sexuality. Sexuality is confined within the limits of the created order. God is totally "other" than creation (Hos 11:9; Isa 31:3; 40:18). But secondly, the Bible uses masculine terminology for God because that is the terminology with which God has revealed himself. He is King (Psa 10:16; 24:8), Father (Acts 1:4), Judge (Gen 18:25; Psa 50:6), Husband (Hos 2), and Master (Col 4:1). Third, God names himself. One cannot pull names out of a hat and name God to suit one's own definition of God. The God of the Exodus (Exod 20:2), Jesus asserts, is His Father (Mark 12:29-30). Finally, the OT refers to other ANE goddesses and is decidedly against that worldview. See also the considerations of Daniel B Wallace, "Greek Grammar and the Personality of the Holy Spirit," *BBR* 13, no. 1 (2003): 97-125.

⁸ Acts 5:3-4. Other possible passages include Acts 7:51; 1 Cor 3:16-17; and 6:19-20.

⁹ Each Person of the Trinity has the same divine essence/nature. There are Three Persons in the Godhead. Each possesses the exact same essence and quality of divinity. Each Person is fully God. They have the same qualities of deity. If the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit did not have all the qualities associated with divinity they would not be fully God. God is who God is and you cannot detract from the divine essence. No single person of the Trinity has any attributes that are not possessed by the others. In the words of Athanasius,

"And the [Church Universal] Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [Essence]. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is: such is the Son: and such is the Holy Spirit. ... For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord: So are we forbidden by the [Church Universal]: to say There be [are] three Gods, or three Lords."

John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001); William G T Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Reprint., vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Charles Scribner, 1889); Robert L Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Book (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998); Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Three Volu. (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907); Charles C Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Book (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1982); Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, Reprint. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1853); Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Book, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Book (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989); Henry C Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Revised by. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Arthur W Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975); Arthur W Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); James I Packer, *Knowing God*, 20th-Anniv ed. (Downers Grove, Ill., 1973); Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

¹⁰ Rev 4:8; Matt 6:6-9, 13, 32.

¹¹ The Lord Jesus Christ is eternal (John 1:1); immutable (Heb 1:10-12); omnipotent (Phil 3:21; John 5:19; Col 1:15-17); omniscient (Rev 2:18-20; cf. John 2:24-25; 6:64; 21:17); and omnipresent (Matt 28:20; cf. 18:20).

¹² The Holy Spirit is omniscient (1 Cor 2:10-11; John 16:13); omnipresent (Psa 139:7); omnipotent (Job 33:4; cf. Rom 8:11); holy (Eph 4:30).

- ii. The Son, Jesus Christ, Does the Works of God.¹⁴
- iii. The Holy Spirit Does the Works of God.¹⁵
- d. Three Persons Receive the Honor Due Only to God.
 - i. The Father Receives the Honor Due to God.¹⁶
 - ii. The Son, Jesus Christ, Receives the Honor Due to God.¹⁷
 - iii. The Holy Spirit Receives the Honor Due to God.¹⁸
- (3) In Scripture Three Persons are Associated on an Equal Footing as God.
 - a. The Baptismal Command.¹⁹
 - b. The Apostolic Benediction.²⁰
 - c. Other Threefold Formulas.²¹
 - d. Other New Testament Evidence.²²
- (4) In Scripture the Three Persons are Distinguished from Each Other.²³

¹³ The Father creates (1 Cor 8:6); provides (Rom 8:28); reveals (Matt 11:25); draws people to Jesus (John 6:44); secures the believer (John 10:29); and executes judgment (John 5:27-29).

¹⁴ The Son creates (John 1:3-5; Heb 1:2-3; Col 1:16-20); sustains creation (Col 1:17); reveals the Father (John 1:18; Heb 1:2); and will judge the world (John 5:27-29; Matt 25:31-32).

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit is involved in creation (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 27:3; Ps 33:6; 104:30); the inspiration of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21); the incarnation (Luke 1:35); salvation (Jonah 2:9); conviction of sinners (John 16:8); regeneration (John 3:8; Titus 3:5) and sanctification (1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 2:13). The Holy Spirit pours out God's love (Rom 5:5), gives joy (Rom 14:17), hope (Rom 8:17-25), peace (Rom 8:6), and faith (2 Cor 12:9).

¹⁶ The Father is honored, worshipped, and glorified (Dan 7:9-10; Rev 4:8, 11; Isa 6:3; Rev 5:13; Matt 6:9; John 5:23; 17:1-4).

¹⁷ In the NT Jesus is believed, obeyed, worshipped, and receives the devotion of others (Matt 28:19; cf. John 6:54; 2 Pet 3:18; Rev 1:5; Acts 7:59-60; 1 Cor 16:22; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Rev 5:13; Heb 1:6; John 14:1; Rev 7:10). R T France, "The Worship of Jesus--A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?," *VE* 12 (1981): 19-33; R T France, "The Uniqueness of Christ," *Chm* 95, no. 3 (1981): 200-217; Larry W Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Book (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹⁸ When Jesus promises the Holy Spirit's coming he uses honorific language (John 16:13) who comes from the Father (John 16:17). Plus, if the Holy Spirit inhabits the temple he is the object of worship (1 Cor 3:16-17 and 6:19).

¹⁹ Matt 28:19. There is a tremendous implication of bearing the Name in the Hebrew mind. In Biblical thought a name represents the innermost being of its bearer (cf. Deut 28:58; Isa 30:27; 59:19; Jer 15:16; Lev 24:11). Jesus was obviously substituting for the great Name of Yahweh this other Name "of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This could only mean that Yahweh was now to be known to them by the new great Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

²⁰ 2 Cor 13:14.

²¹ In addition to Matt 28:19 and 2 Cor 13:14 there are other passages that offer Trinitarian formulas. For instance while Paul was intensely monotheistic (Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5) he habitually speaks of the blessings of redemption in Trinitarian fashion (2 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 12:4-6; Gal 3:11-14; 2 Cor 1:21-22; 3:3; Eph 2:18; 4:4-6; Rom 14:17-18; 15:16, 30; Phil 3:3; Col 1:6-8; Eph 2:20-22; 3:14-16; Titus 3:4-6). Peter is also Trinitarian (1 Pet 1:2) along with the author of Hebrews (Heb 2:3-4, 10:29), Jude (Jude 20, 21), and John (Rev 1:4-5).

²² Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, John, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, Jude, Revelation all mention all three persons of the Trinity explicitly. Only James, Philemon, 2 John and 3 John do not explicitly refer to all three persons. Every author of the NT except James refers explicitly to each member of Trinity in their writings, unless James is the author of Hebrews or refers to the Holy Spirit in Jas 4:5.

²³ There are twelve actions that prove they are distinct from each other: **(1)** One divine person loves another (John 3:35). **(2)** One person dwells in another (John 14:10, 11). **(3)** One person inflicts

- a. The Father is not the Son²⁴ and the Father is not the Holy Spirit.²⁵
- b. The Son is not the Father²⁶ and the Son is not the Holy Spirit.²⁷
- c. The Holy Spirit is not the Father²⁸ and the Holy Spirit is not the Son.²⁹

- (5) In Scripture the Tri-Personality of the Godhead is eternal and not merely temporal.³⁰
- (6) In the Hebrew Bible there are other traces that point to the doctrine of the Trinity.³¹

There are two heretical extremes to avoid: (1) An overemphasis on the oneness/unity of God by claiming he is one person manifesting himself in three forms/modes/masks as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³² (2) An overemphasis on the threeness by claiming there are *three separate Gods*.³³ If there's no Trinity, there is no love.³⁴

suffering on another (Zech 13:7). **(4)** One person knows another (Matt 11:27). **(5)** One person addresses another (Heb 1:8). **(6)** One person is the way to another (John 14:6). **(7)** One person speaks of another (Luke 3:22). **(8)** One person glorifies another (John 17:5). **(9)** One person confers with another (Gen 1:26). **(10)** One person plans with another (Isa 9:6). **(11)** One person sends another (John 14:26). **(12)** One person rewards another (Phil 2:5-11; Heb 2:9). Shedd argues that these twelve actions “demonstrate that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not one and the same person.” Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 1:279.

²⁴ Matt 3:13-17; 17:5; 26:39; John 5:32, 37; 3:16-17; Rom 8:3-4; Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:9-10; John 17:4; 1 Cor 15:22-26.

²⁵ John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 8.

²⁶ Matt 3:13-17; 17:5; 26:39; John 5:32, 37; 3:16-17; Rom 8:3-4; Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:9-10; John 17:4; 1 Cor 15:22-26.

²⁷ John's use of the pronouns “I” and “Him” clearly distinguish Jesus from the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 8).

²⁸ John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 8.

²⁹ John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 8.

³⁰ One might conclude falsely that the distinction of the three persons merely refers to the manifestations of God in time. However, the Father, Son, and Spirit are personal relations independent of creation and time. This can be proven through the following arguments: **(1)** the existence of the Word (λόγος) from eternity past *with* the Father (John 1:1; Phil 2:6); **(2)** Jesus claims pre-existence (John 8:58 and his allusions to Exod 3:14 by his usage of ἐγὼ εἰμὶ); **(3)** The pre-temporal relationship of Father and Son described (John 17:5, 24); **(4)** the creation of the world by Christ (John 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2); **(5)** the eternity of the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2; Heb 9:14).

³¹ Some intimations are stronger than others [**1**] the plurality of “Lords” in Psa 45:6 and Heb 1:8; [**2**] the plurality of “Lords” in Psa 110:1 and Matt 22:41-46 and Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; [**3**] the Son of Yahweh in Prov 30:4). However, once the Trinity was made more clear in the NT period, many other arguments have potential but are more debatable [**1**] the Plural Name for “God”; *ēlohîm*; [**2**] the Plural Pronouns for God; Gen 1:26; [**3**] The Angel of the Lord; Num 22:22, 31; Judg 6:11-23; [**4**] How can the Messiah be God in Isa 9:6-7, Jer 23:5-6, and Mic 5:2 and at the same time be distinguished from God in Psa 2, Psa 45:7? [**5**] the Spirit is divine, personal, and distinct from God in Joel 2:27-28, Exod 31:3, Exod 35:30-31, Num 27:18-19, Psa 51:11, and Isa 63:10; [**6**] The Wisdom of God is personal, eternal, and distinct from God in Prov 8:22-31; [**7**] the Seraphim who worship “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts in Isa 6:3 and then God asks, “Who will go for us?” in Isa 6:8 [also see John 12:41 where it is Christ who spoke and Acts 28:25 where it is the Holy Spirit who spoke].

³² This unorthodox position has been held by Sabellianism, Modalism, and Oneness Pentecostalism.

³³ This unorthodox position is known as Tri-Theism.

³⁴ For an example of how monadic monotheism, like Islam, fails to have a loving God, absent the Trinity, see Shehadeh, “The Predicament of Islamic Monotheism,” 142–162. Shehadeh remarks: “For the attribute of love to exist in God eternally there must be at least the lover and the one loved” (p. 146).