

The Doctrine of the Trinity: NT

As we saw in our study of the Trinity from the OT, the word “Trinity” is not found in either testaments, old or new. However, as we will see, the tri-unity of God is everywhere found in the Bible, in the words of Augustine, “concealed in the old, revealed in the new.”

In the words of theologian Robert Raymond,

It is unlikely that anyone reading only the Old Testament today, with no knowledge of the New Testament, would conclude that within the inner life of the divine being resides a real and distinct manifoldness. This is not to suggest, however, that the Old Testament is not “Trinitarian,” for it is – to the core. Nor is it to suggest that the saints of the Old Testament...were *totally* ignorant of a personal manifoldness in God. It is just taking seriously [the progressive, unfolding nature of Scripture].”¹

B.B. Warfield’s delightful metaphor sheds light on this:

[The OT] is like a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.²

The NT writers – thoroughly Trinitarian in their theology – evidently saw no incongruity between their doctrine of God and the monotheism of the OT.

¹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 207.

² Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 22 (cited from Reymond, 207).

This is why when we turn to the NT, we find the doctrine of the triune nature of God everywhere *assumed*. In the words of Warfield, the doctrine is not ‘in the making, but already made.’

That is, the triune nature of God was not ‘birthed’ or invented by the apostles who wrote the NT, nor the church fathers who followed in their theological steps. In the words of Warfield:

The revelation of the Trinity was the inevitable effect of the accomplishment of redemption. It was in the coming of the Son of God in the likeness of sinful flesh to offer Himself a sacrifice for sin; and in the coming of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, that the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead was once for all revealed to men...The doctrine of the Trinity, in other words, is simply the modification wrought in the conception of the only God by His complete revelation of Himself in the redemptive process...*In a word, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are the fundamental proof of the doctrine of the Trinity.*³

In other words, it was the two great objective redemptive events of the Incarnation and Pentecost which precipitated and concretized the modification in the thinking of the first Christians about the one living and true God.⁴

Many object that since the word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible and since the doctrine was not formulated until the third and fourth centuries after Christ, the doctrine is an imposition of later theology on the biblical text. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are three things the NT says repeatedly about God: (1) there is only one God, (2) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all equally God, indeed “*all of the fullness of the deity*” dwells in each (cf. Col. 2:9), not just one-third of the divinity, and (3) the three persons know and love one another and work together in distinctive ways for salvation.

³ Warfield, 33-34. Theologian Louis Berkhoff agrees: “The fuller revelation of the Trinity in the NT is due to the fact the Word became flesh, and that the Holy Spirit took up His abode in the church.” *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), 85.

⁴ Reymond, 211.

- Only the doctrine of the Trinity accounts for all three biblical propositions.
 - J.I. Packer uses the illustration of something being “in solution.” Sugar dissolved in tea is not visible – it is “in solution,” but a chemist could crystallize it if necessary. Packer rightly insists that the Trinity was “in solution” in the Bible, and all the early church did was crystallize it (Packer and Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way*, 23-24).⁵

Everywhere the NT declares that this one God is revealed in three persons, all equally divine: Father, Son and Spirit.

The best place this is seen is in Matthew 28:19, where the resurrected Jesus commands His followers to, “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

- Here, all three persons are combined within the bounds of the single Name. Yet all three have definite articles, emphasizing the distinctness of each person.

Furthermore, when one appreciates the significance of the term “the Name” in the Hebrew mind, this text screams Trinity.

- In the OT, the term does more than serve as the mere external designation of the person. Rather, it refers to the *essence* of the person himself.

Again, Warfield is quite helpful:

When our Lord commanded His disciples to baptize those whom they brought to His obedience “into the Name of,” He was using language charged to them with high meaning. He could not have been understood otherwise than as substituting for the Name of Jehovah this other Name “of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The only alternative would have been that, for the community which He was founding, Jesus was supplanting Jehovah by a new God. There is no alternative, therefore, to understanding Jesus here to be

⁵ Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 67, footnote 134.

giving for His community a new Name to Jehovah and that new Name to be the threefold Name of “the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”⁶

The “Name” – Yahweh – equally defines the very essence and nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That is, they share the same “Godness” and are all equally God.

When we understand this, we see all the members of the Trinity appearing together at crucial points of Jesus’ ministry, such as His baptism.

- Matt. 3:16-17 – 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 Son⁷, with whom I am well pleased.”

As Grudem notes, here at one moment we have the three members of the Trinity each performing three distinct activities: God the Father is speaking from heaven; God the Son is being baptized and is then spoken to from heaven by God the Father; and God the Holy Spirit is descending from heaven to rest upon and empower Jesus for His ministry.⁸

Other passages which address all three members of the Trinity together also include the following:

- 1 Cor. 12:4-6
 - Almost exclusively, when Paul uses “*Lord*” (Greek = *kurios*), he is referring to “the Lord” Jesus Christ, who by His resurrection has been vindicated for who He truly is, Yahweh (that is, “the LORD”).
 - ➔ For this, see Phil. 2:9-11 (in fulfillment of Isa. 45:23).

⁶ *Ibid*, 42.

⁷ The Greek literally reads, “This [One] is My Son, the Beloved [One], in whom I am well pleased.” This clearly distinguishes Jesus from Israel, who was also designated as God’s “son” in the OT. Jesus will be Yahweh’s true “Son”; His true “Servant”; His true “chosen One”; His true “Messiah/Anointed One [with/by the Spirit].”

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 230.

- 2 Cor. 13:14
- Eph. 4:4-6
- Jude 20-21

Scriptural Warrant for the Deity of the Son and the Spirit

The deity of the Father is virtually uncontested. However, many cults challenge the deity of the Son and the Spirit.

A. The Deity of the Son⁹

According to the Reymond, the biblical evidence for the deity of the Son includes:

1. The OT adumbrations and predictions of a divine Messiah

a. As we saw in our previous studies, the “angel/messenger of the LORD” showed us a being that was differentiated from God as His angel/messenger, and yet this messenger is everywhere declared to be God Himself.

- According to John 8, Jesus tells the religious Jews that He had indeed met with Abraham, something that elicited their mocking incredulity.
 - This makes it clear that Jesus, who in John 8:58 declares Himself to be “I AM” (i.e. the LORD = Yahweh), was Himself the messenger of the LORD that met with Abraham in Genesis 18, who repeatedly in the chapter not only speaks *for* the LORD, but *as* the LORD.

⁹ It is no exaggeration that the NT is absolutely and literally saturated with the truth that the Son of God – Jesus – is eternal God come in the flesh. I will only be dealing with but a few of the plenteous passages in the NT that declare that Jesus is Lord (i.e. the LORD = Yahweh). For a much fuller treatment, Robert Reymond has more than 100 pages (!) that deal with all the passages that affirm this (see his *Systematic Theology*, 211-317).

- This is also confirmed in Jude 5¹⁰, where we read that it was “Jesus who saved a people out of the land of Egypt and afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”
 - In the book of Exodus, we see that often Israel’s deliverance is attributed to the “messenger/angel of the LORD.”

→ E.g. 3:2¹¹; 14:19; 23:20-25¹²; 32:34-33:3

b. Many times the NT says that Jesus is the fulfillment of a particular OT Scripture that is referring to God Himself. A few include¹³:

- According to Heb. 1:8, Jesus is the God of Psa. 45:6-7.
- According to Heb. 1:10-12, Jesus is the LORD who creates all things of Psa. 102:25-27.
- According to Heb. 1:13, Jesus as Messiah is David’s “Lord” (Psa. 110:1), a title that clearly carries implications of divinity.
- According to Matt. 1:23, Jesus is “God with us” (Isa. 7:14).

2. Jesus’ self-testimony in both words and deeds

a. Jesus, “the Son of Man”

Used 82 times in the gospels, this was Jesus’ favorite self-designation for Himself. Though somewhat ‘cryptic’, we see that in light of the

¹⁰ The KJV and NKJV have “the LORD who once saved a people...”. These manuscripts likely have been tampered with in order to give an ‘easier’ reading, and thus we should stick with the rendering of all the other translations (i.e. “Jesus”).

¹¹ Note how “the LORD” and “the angel of the LORD” are used interchangeably. Amazingly, the angel is “in” the burning bush.

¹² In 21:21, the LORD says to Moses, “Pay careful attention to Him [the angel of the LORD] and obey His voice; do not rebel against Him, for He will not pardon your transgression, for My name is in Him.” Again, this is an extremely clear attribution of divinity to this Messenger/Angel.

¹³ See Reymond, 213-14 for more.

clear Messianic tones of Dan. 7:14, Jesus was repeatedly ascribing divinity to Himself, though somewhat veiled.¹⁴

- However, in Matt. 26:63-68 (and the parallels in Mark and Luke), when Jesus uses this title of Himself, the high priest charged Him with utterly blasphemy, which would inevitably lead to Jesus' death on the cross.
 - By calling Himself "the Son of Man," then, Jesus fulfills *both* the role of the suffering Servant (Mark 10:45), *and* of coming Judge and eschatological King (cf. Acts 17:31).

b. Jesus, "the Son of God"

As Son of God, Jesus repeatedly claimed essential divine oneness with God His Father.

- For example, in Matt. 11:25-27 we are told that *only* the Father has exclusive knowledge of the Son, and *only* the Son has exclusive knowledge of the Father.
 - Simply put, only God can truly and fully know God.
 - ➔ Shockingly, Jesus says that for His hearers to be saved, they must not come to the Father, but to Him!¹⁵ Were Jesus not God Himself, this would have been scandalous blasphemy!

According to the apostle John, this title – "the Son of God" – not only refers to Jesus' role and title as Israel's "King"¹⁶, but also ontologically to His eternal person: He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father.

¹⁴ Raymond (p.215) notes, Jesus chose this as a self-designation precisely because, although assuredly messianic, the title was ambiguous in meaning to the current popular imagination. This enabled Him to claim to be the Messiah with little danger of erroneous views being read into it before He had the opportunity to infuse it with the full-orbed content of the messianic task which was foreshadowed in and predicted by the OT."

¹⁵ Of course, in light of John 14:6, we know that coming to Jesus means ultimately coming to the Father.

¹⁶ For example, in Psalms 2, Israel's king is called God's "son." This seems to be how Nathaniel initially "saw" Jesus in John 1:49: "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" The two are clearly a Hebrew parallelism, where the two things are to be interpreted as equivalent. However, as his gospel narrative 'advances', John begins

- This is seen clearly in passages such as John 5, where Jesus – as “Son” – has prerogatives that belong to the Father.
 - As the Father “works”, so does the Son (5:17).
 - ➔ The Jews knew exactly what this meant, for in the very next verse, they seek to kill Jesus because “he was even calling God His own Father, [and thus] making Himself equal with God” (5:18).
 - As “Son”, Jesus does things that only God can do: “whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (5:19b). Things like:
 - ➔ Giving spiritual life to “whomever He wills” (5:21, 25).
 - ➔ Rendering judgment as God (5:22, 27, 28-29).
 - ➔ Receiving from men the same “honor” as they give the Father (5:23).
 - ➔ As the Father has life in Himself, so also does the Son (5:26).

Moreover, that the Son and the Father are “one” is a clear declaration of Jesus’ divinity.

- According to 10:30, when Jesus says, “I and the Father are one,” the Jews picked up stones to stone Him for His apparent blasphemy (10:31), that He, “being a man, had made [Himself] God” (10:33).
- Because the Son and the Father were “one,” Jesus can say things like: “Whoever believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And whoever sees Me sees Him who sent Me” (10:44-45).

to show the reader that Jesus, as the Son of God, is much *more* than merely the King of Israel. He is the second member of the Godhead – the eternal Son of the eternal Father; He indeed is the divine Messiah of Isaiah 9.

- Cf. 14:8-9 – “Philip said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you [then] say, ‘Show us the Father’.”

Finally, all of Jesus’ “I AM” statements in John clearly show us Jesus’ eternal pre-existence as the eternal Son of the eternal Father.¹⁷

- The clearest passage is of course John 8:58.
 - Cf. 6:35, 48, 51 (the Bread that gives life); 8:12; 9:5 (the Light of the world); 10:7, 9 (the Door of the sheep); 10:11, 14 (the Good Shepherd); 11:25 (the Resurrection and the Life); 14:6 (the Way, the Truth, and the Life); 15:1, 5 (the Vine).

3. Jesus’ Divine Acts

A. Jesus Forgives Sins

- Matt. 9:2 (cf. Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20; 7:48)

B. Jesus Hears and Answers Prayer

- John 14:13 – “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”
- Cf. Acts 1:24; 7:59; 9:10-17; 2 Cor. 12:8; 1 Thes. 3:11; 2 Thes. 2:16

C. Jesus Receives People’s Adoration and Praise

- Immediately after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when asked by the indignant chief priests to silence the children who were praising Him (Matt. 21:16), Jesus defended their praise by appealing to Psalm 8 (cf. Heb. 8:3), which speaks of children praising God.
- Cf. Matt. 20:9, 17; Luke 25:52; John 20:28

¹⁷ In other words, Jesus is not a created “son”, as the Arians assert.

D. Jesus is the Object of People's Faith

- John 14:1 (NIV) – “Trust in God; trust also in Me.”
 - Cf. John 3:16; 11:26; 12:44; 17:20

E. Jesus is Sovereign

- Over nature (Mark 4:35-41; 6:30-44, 45-52)
- Over demons (Mark 5:1-20)
- Over disease and death (Mark 5:21-43)
- In bestowing eternal life to whomever He chooses (Matt. 11:27; John 5:21, 28-29).
- To lay down His life and “take it up again” (John 10:18).
- As the resurrection Son-of-God-in-Power, all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus (Matt. 20:18), including the end-time judgment of God (John 5:22, 27; cf. Acts 17:31).

F. Jesus is Omniscient

- John 1:48; 2:24-25; 18:4; 19:28; Acts 1:24
 - Cf. Matt. 9:4; Luke 9:33; John 6:61

G. Jesus is Omnipresent

- Matt. 18:20 – “For where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am among them.”
- Matt. 28:20 – “I am with you to always, to the end of the age.”

4. NT references in which “God” is used as a title for Christ.

- John 1:1
- John 20:28

- Rom. 9:5
- Tit. 2:13
- Phil. 2:5
- 2 Pet. 2:1

B. The Deity of the Spirit

Not only do the Scriptures ascribe deity to the persons of the Father and Son, they also affirm the full, unabridged deity of the Holy Spirit.

1. He is identified as “God”: Acts 5:3-4
2. He is identified as Yahweh
 - a. What Isaiah reports that Yahweh said in Isa. 6:9-10, Paul asserts that the Holy Spirit said (Acts 28:25-27).
 - b. What the Psalmist puts in the mouth of Yahweh in Psa. 95:7-11, the author of Hebrews puts in the mouth of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 3:7-9).
 - c. Where Lev. 26:11-12 foretells Yahweh’s “dwelling with His people,” Paul, citing the Leviticus passage, says this is fulfilled as He dwells in Christ’s church (2 Cor. 6:16) by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:22).
3. Though distinguished from God the Father and God the Son in the great Trinitarian passages of the NT, He is nevertheless represented as equal to them (Matt. 3:16; 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2:18; 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2).
4. As God, He possesses divine attributes
 - a. He is eternal (Heb. 9:14; cf. John 14:16)¹⁸
 - b. He is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-10)
 - c. He is omnipotent (Psa. 104:30; Rom. 15:19)

¹⁸ Moreover, since He “proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26), He is eternal, since the Father from whom He eternally proceeds is eternal (the same argument can be used for the eternity of the Son).

- d. He is omniscient (Isa. 40:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:10-11)
 - e. He is sovereign (John 3:8)
5. Accordingly, He does divine works
- a. He creates (Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13a; 33:4; Psa. 104:30a)
 - b. He recreates/regenerates (Eze. 37:1-14; John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5)
 - c. He resurrects (Eze. 37:12-14; Rom. 8:11)
 - d. He exercises divine authority in Christ's church (Acts 13:2, 4; 15:28; 16:6-7)

Thus the Holy Spirit is represented in the Holy Scripture as fully divine.

Moreover, the Scriptures clearly reveal that the Holy Spirit is not merely some kind of divine 'force' or 'power,' but rather – like the Father and the Son – is a divine Person.

1. Personal pronouns are regularly used of Him ("I", "He" and not "it").¹⁹
2. Personal properties are ascribed to Him, such as understanding or wisdom,²⁰ will,²¹ and power.²²
3. Personal activities are ascribed to Him: He speaks²³, reveals²⁴, guides²⁵, teaches²⁶, comforts, counsels, and loves the believer²⁷, He encourages²⁸,

¹⁹ For example, see John 15:26; 16:13-14; Acts 10:19-20; 11:12; 13:2

²⁰ Isa. 11:2; 1 Cor. 2:10-11

²¹ 1 Cor. 12:11; John 3:8

²² Isa. 11:2; Mic. 3:8; Acts 10:38; Rom. 15:13; Eph. 3:16

²³ Mark 13:11; Acts 13:2; 21:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7; 10:15

²⁴ Luke 2:26; 1 Pet. 1:11

²⁵ John 16:13

²⁶ Luke 12:12; John 14:26

²⁷ John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Rom. 15:30; James 4:5

²⁸ Acts 9:31

warns²⁹, appoints to offices³⁰. He may be grieved³¹, lied to³², resisted³³, and blasphemed³⁴.

Simply put, the Bible knows no other God than the one living and true God who has eternally existed as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in the words of Calvin,

“God so proclaims Himself the sole God as to offer Himself to be contemplated in three Persons. Unless we grasp these, only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God.”³⁵

The words of church father Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329 – c. 389) are not only a fitting conclusion to our study of the Trinity, but also should provide an example of how we as Christians must “behold our God”:

“I cannot think of the One, but I am immediately surrounded with the splendor of the Three; nor can I clearly discover the Three, but I am suddenly carried back to the One.”³⁶

Close with “The Trinity” prayer from *The Valley of Vision*.

²⁹ 1 Tim. 4:1

³⁰ Acts 13:2; 20:28

³¹ Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30

³² Acts 5:31

³³ Acts 7:31

³⁴ Matt. 12:31-32

³⁵ *Institutes, I. xiii, 2.*

³⁶ Taken from Robert Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 315.