

### 19 WCF 19 Of God, and of The Holy Trinity 2.3 – The Triune God Who Lives

**WCF 2.3 In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.(1) The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;(2) the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.(3) (WCF 2:3 WCS)**

**Illustration:** I grew up next door to a family of Mormons. They had 10 children and the mother was actually my first piano teacher. My sister and I played quite a bit in our backyards in our younger years with the kids next door, but there were many very odd conversations that took place when matters turned to spiritual things. My father gave me his copy of “The Kingdom of the Cults” by the late Dr. Walter Martin and had me read the section on Mormonism. As only he could say: “Son, read this chapter. It’s kind of like reading bad science fiction.” I had no earthly idea what he was talking about until I read that chapter. If you ask Mormon missionaries if they believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, they will say: “Yes, we believe in God, the Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” However, nearly every word in that statement is so radically redefined according to Mormon theology that it is really quite meaningless. One thing Mormonism and all other Christian *counterfeits* have in common is: All of them deny the doctrine of the Trinity – primarily due to their denial of the full deity of Jesus Christ. Dr. Martin, in that very good book which I highly recommend, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, speaks about the essential doctrines of Christianity which, if denied, destroy the faith altogether. While we certainly want to believe everything God has revealed to us in Scripture – and do NOT want to reduce it to a few fundamental truths we have to believe in order to be saved – there are certain doctrines which are essential to the Christian faith. The doctrine of God is one of them. The bodily resurrection of Christ is another. Justification by grace alone through faith alone on account of Christ alone is a third. There are other critical doctrines as well such as the substitutionary and legal debt-payment view of the atonement of Christ. The Virgin Birth of Christ. And so forth... But if you look closely at *all* Christian counterfeits, they will always deny one if not all three of those essentials: The doctrine of God, the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and justification by faith alone.

**The history of the controversy** over the correct doctrine of God is long and detailed. The fact is, we owe our Christian forefathers a tremendous debt of gratitude for recognizing heresies on the doctrine of God, for meeting together in councils and hammering through all the key biblical passages on these matters, and publishing creeds to refute false teachings. The capstone creed on the doctrine of God as the Trinity is what’s known today as the *Athanasian Creed*. It begins with these words:

**Whosoever will be saved**, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite.

**And it goes on from there.** It would take about 4 or 5 minutes to recite the entire Athanasian Creed, but it does reflect the incredible labors of about 600 years’ worth of godly churchmen who loved the Word of God and the gospel. It first shows up in 633 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Council of Toledo.

**If every professing Christian in conservative, Bible-believing, gospel-preaching churches** was told to take out a sheet of paper and define the doctrine of the Trinity, I think the results would likely duplicate nearly every heresy all of those churchmen in those first 7 centuries fought and worked so hard to refute!

**Illustration:** In a tape on Mormonism my dad gave me by Walter Martin, he tells the story of an undergraduate bible class he taught in which he told the students to take out a blank sheet of paper and write down their understanding of the Trinity and he said that *every* student gave him *heresy*. I'm confident most here would be able to give a standard, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Our confession summarizes it nicely here. The Westminster Shorter Catechism has 2 questions which summarize it nicely as well (and the Larger Catechism expands it):

**WSC 5 Are there more Gods than one? A. There is but one only, the living and true God.(1)**

**WSC 6 How many persons are there in the Godhead? A. There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.(1)**

**Dr. James White** has rightly identified 3 basic biblical pillars for the doctrine of God as the Holy Trinity. Those 3 foundations are: "1. There is only one God (monotheism); 2. There are three Persons - the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is in direct contradiction of modalism, Sabellianism, or the "Jesus Only" teachings that deny the separate personhood of Father, Son and Spirit; 3. There is full equality of the Persons. This is in direct contradiction of Arianism and all systems that would deny the full Deity and equality of the Son and the Spirit. Each of these truths is part of God's revelation of Himself, and no system can claim to be based on the Bible unless these truths are taken into account. The denial of any one of these Biblical teachings leads directly to heresy and false doctrine - denial of monotheism leads to polytheism (such as in Mormonism); denial of the three Persons leads into modalism (such as the United Pentecostal movement); and denial of the equality of the Persons leads to subordination-ism (Jehovah's Witnesses, the Way International, etc.)."

**Let's take up our Bibles and I want us to look up and walk through a number of passages together to see the clear biblical support for each of these 3 pillars:**

#### **A. There is One God:**

**Deut. 4:35** To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.

**Indeed, the first commandment God gives in Exodus 20 is: You shall have no other gods before Me.**

**Deut. 6:4** "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!

**Isaiah 43:10** "You are My witnesses," says the Lord, "And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.

**Isaiah 44:6, 8** "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. ... [8] Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.' "

**Isaiah 45:5-6** I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, [6] That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other;

**Isaiah 45:21-23** Tell and bring forth your case; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me. [22] "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. [23] I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath.

**Isaiah 46:9** Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,

**John 17:3** And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

**1 Tim. 2:5** For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

### **B. There are three Persons: Father, Son and Spirit:**

**Matthew 3:16-17** When He had been baptized, 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 alighting upon Him. [17] And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

**Matthew 11:27** All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. **[Clearly, there are 2 distinct persons here. The Father is not the Son. And yet, there is only one God]**

**Matthew 17:1-9** Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; [2] and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. [3] And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. [4] Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." [5] **While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"** [6] And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. [7] But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." [8] When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. [9] Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

**Matthew 27:46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

**John 1:18** No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

**John 14:16-17** And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- [17] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

**Acts 5:4-5** While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." [5] Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

**Always remember that the Holy Spirit is a person – not a force or a thing. He is a person.** You cannot lie to a tree, or to a dog or a cat, or to a "force."

**Illustration:** In a church I was part of long ago, there was a very nice fellow who would pray an invocation before each service and he would refer to the Holy Spirit as "it" constantly. "We pray that your Spirit would be here among us, that it would help us, that it would guide us, that it would enlighten our minds..." and I would sort of cringe each time he called the Holy Spirit "it" instead of "he."

**Can you see why it took 600+ years of study and heresy to hammer all of this out and summarize it faithfully and accurately?**

### **The Pre-existence of the Son:**

**Col. 1:13-17** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, [14] in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. [15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. [16] For by Him all things were created

that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. [17] And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

**Hebrews 1:2-3** has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; [3] who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

### **C. Equality: the Deity of Christ:**

**Col. 2:9** For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

**John 20:28** And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

**Titus 2:13** looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **2 Peter 1:1** Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

**John 1:18** No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

### **Jesus Christ is identified as Yahweh:**

**John 12:39-41** Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: [40] "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." [41] These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

**Isaiah 6:10** "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."

**Hebrews 1:8, 10-12** [8] But to the Son He says... [10]"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. [11] They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; [12] Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail."

**Psalms 102:25-27** Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. [26] They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. [27] But You are the same, And Your years will have no end.

**The Triadic Formula in Scripture.** I want to encourage you to see the glory of the Trinity all through the Word of God. The doctrine is everywhere once you begin to notice more. Just listen to these passages – all 3 person are in view over and over again:

**1 Thes. 1:3-5** remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, [4] knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. [5] For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit ...

**2 Thes. 2:13** But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,

**1 Cor. 2:2-5** For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ... [4] And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

**1 Cor. 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

**1 Cor. 12:4-6** There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. [5] There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. [6] And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

**2 Cor. 1:21-22** Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, [22] who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

**2 Cor. 13:14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

**Romans 14:17-18** for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. [18] For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

**Romans 15:16** that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 15:30** Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,

**Col. 1:6-8** which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; [7] as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, [8] who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

**Ephes. 2:18** For through Him [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

**Ephes. 3:14, 16-17** For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... [16] that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

**Ephes. 4:4-6** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

1. There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence (ousia, essentia).
2. In this one Divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.
4. The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.
5. There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished.
6. The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.

**Does this really matter?** Yes, and here's why. If your God is anyone other than the Triune God of Scripture, then you are not worshipping the correct God. Remember that first commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me. We must worship the right God – otherwise, we are idolaters! To deny the Trinity requires that you have a Jesus who is something *less* than fully God, and if you believe in a Jesus who is something less than fully God, then you have a Jesus who cannot save you.

**Isn't this just a little complicated and odd?** In the final analysis, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity is to be accepted exactly as God has told us, and *that's where we make an end of speaking*. There is an element of mystery to this. But the Bible, when interpreted accurately, forces us to believe in the beautiful doctrine of the Trinity. And personally, I think it is one of the grand proofs of Scripture's divine inspiration. There is no parallel of any kind in any of man's religions to this marvelous conception of the one true God. And lest we feel a bit distracted in trying to fully understand this doctrine...

**The great Francis Turretin wrote:** "The mind of the worshiper will not be distracted by the consideration that there are three Divine persons, if he remembers that the whole Divine essence is in each of the persons, so that if he worships one he worships all."