

The Doctrine of The Trinity

“There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.
B.B. Warfield

In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable. Augustine De Trinitate 1.3.5

“We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; 1 Corinthians 8:4), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)— each equally deserving worship and obedience.”

Excerpt from What We Teach (CFBC)

The Westminster Confession on The Trinity (1646)

III. 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.(o) The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding: the Son is eternally begotten of the Father:(p) the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.(q)

(o) I John 5:7; Matt. 3:16, 17; Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14.

(p) John 1:14, 18.

(q) John 15:26; Gal. 4:6.

The original text of 1646, from the manuscript of Cornelius Burges, Assessor to the Westminster Assembly, with the Assembly’s proof texts, as published in the modern critical edition of 1937 by S. W. Carruthers.

The Belgic Confession (1561) on The Trinity- Articles 8 and 9

Article 8: That God is one in Essence, yet nevertheless distinguished in three Persons

According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is the one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally

distinct, according to their incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Father is the cause, origin and beginning of all things visible and invisible; the Son is the word, wisdom, and image of the Father; the Holy Ghost is the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the Holy Scriptures teach us, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, have each his personality, distinguished by their properties; but in such wise that these three persons are but one only God. Hence then, it is evident, that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and likewise the Holy Ghost is neither the Father nor the Son. Nevertheless these persons thus distinguished are not divided, nor intermixed: for the Father hath not assumed the flesh, nor hath the Holy Ghost, but the Son only. The Father hath never been without his Son, or without his Holy Ghost. For they are all three co-eternal and co-essential. There is neither first nor last: for they are all three one, in truth, in power, in goodness, and in mercy.

Article 9: The proof of the foregoing article of the Trinity of persons in one God

All this we know, as well from the testimonies of holy writ, as from their operations, and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves. The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, that teach us to believe this Holy Trinity are written in many places of the Old Testament, which are not so necessary to enumerate, as to choose them out with discretion and judgment. In Genesis, chapter 1:26, 27, God saith: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, etc. So God created man in his own image, male and female created he them. And Genesis 3:22. Behold the man is become as one of us. From this saying, let us make man in our image, it appears that there are more persons than one in the Godhead; and when he saith, God created, he signifies the unity. It is true that he doth not say how many persons there are, but that, which appears to us somewhat obscure in the Old Testament, is very plain in the New. For when our Lord was baptized in Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard, saying, This is my beloved Son: the Son was seen in the water, and the Holy Ghost appeared in the shape of a dove. This form is also instituted by Christ in the baptism of all believers. Baptize all nations, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. In the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel thus addressed Mary, the mother of our Lord, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God: likewise, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you. And there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. In all which places we are fully taught, that there are three persons in one only divine essence. And although this doctrine far surpasses all human

understanding, nevertheless, we now believe it by means of the Word of God, but expect hereafter to enjoy the perfect knowledge and benefit thereof in Heaven. Moreover, we must observe the particular offices and operations of these three persons toward us. The Father is called our Creator, by his power; the Son is our Savior and Redeemer, by his blood; the Holy Ghost is our Sanctifier, by his dwelling in our hearts. This doctrine of the Holy Trinity, hath always been defended and maintained by the true Church, since the time of the apostles, to this very day, against the Jews, Mohammedans, and some false Christians and heretics, as Marcion, Manes, Praxeas, Sabellius, Samosatenus, Arius, and such like, who have been justly condemned by the orthodox fathers. Therefore, in this point, we do willingly receive the three creeds, namely, that of the Apostles, of Nice, and of Athanasius: likewise that, which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers.

The Belgic Confession is historically the first of the "Three Forms of Unity" (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dordt), having been composed in 1561. It is often called the Belgic Confession because it was written in the southern Lowlands, now known as Belgium. Its chief author was Guido de Bres, one of the several itinerant preachers during those days of persecution, who died a martyr's death.

Revised in the National Synod, held at Dordrecht, in the years 1618 and 1619.

Excerpts from “The Doctrine of the Trinity: No Christianity Without It”

Kevin DeYoung

If any doctrine makes Christianity Christian, then surely it is the doctrine of the Trinity. The three great ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—are all structured around our three in one God, underlying the essential importance of Trinitarian theology. Augustine once commented about the Trinity that “in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.”

More recently, Sinclair Ferguson has reflected on “the rather obvious thought that when his disciples were about to have the world collapse in on them, our Lord spent so much time in the Upper Room speaking to them about the mystery of the Trinity. If anything could underline the necessity of Trinitarianism for practical Christianity, that must surely be it!”

Yet, when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, most Christians are poor in their understanding, poorer in their articulation, and poorest of all in seeing any way in which the doctrine matters in real life...

First, what does the doctrine mean?

The doctrine of the Trinity can be summarized in seven statements...

- (1) There is only one God.
- (2) The Father is God.
- (3) The Son is God.
- (4) The Holy Spirit is God.
- (5) The Father is not the Son.
- (6) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
- (7) The Holy Spirit is not the Father.

All of the creedal formulations and theological jargon and philosophical apologetics have to do with safeguarding each one of these statements and doing so without denying any of the other six. ***When the ancient creeds employ extra-biblical terminology and demand careful theological nuance they do so not to clear up what the Bible leaves cloudy, but to defend, define, and delimit essential biblical propositions.***

The Athanasian Creed puts it this way: “Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons, nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit, still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.”

The two key words here are essence and persons. When you read “essence”, think “Godness.” All three Persons of the Trinity share the same “Godness.” One is not more God than another. None is more essentially divine than the rest. ***When you read “persons”, think “a particular individual distinct from the others.”*** Theologians use these terms because they are trying to find a way to express the relationship of three beings that are equally and uniquely God, but not three Gods. That’s why we get the tricky (but learnable) language of essence and persons. We want to be true to the biblical witness that there is an indivisibility and unity of God, even though Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can all be rightly called God. The Persons are not three gods; rather, they dwell in communion with each other as they subsist in the divine nature without being compounded or confused.

Sometimes it's easier to understand what we believe by stating what we don't believe.

- Orthodox Trinitarianism rejects monarchianism which believes in only one person (mono) and maintains that the Son and the Spirit subsists in the divine essence as impersonal attributes not distinct and divine Persons.
- Orthodox Trinitarianism rejects modalism which believes that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different names for the same God acting in different roles or manifestations (like the well-intentioned but misguided “water, vapor, ice” analogy).
- Orthodox Trinitarianism rejects Arianism which denies the full deity of Christ.
- And finally, orthodox Trinitarianism rejects all forms of tri-theism, which teach that the three members of the Godhead are, to quote a leading Mormon apologist, “three distinct Beings, three separate Gods.”

Second, where is the doctrine of the Trinity found in the Bible?

Although the word “Trinity” is famously absent from Scripture, the theology behind the word can be found in a surprising number of verses.

For starters there are verses that speak of God's oneness (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 44:6; 1 Tim. 1:17).

Then there are the myriad of passages which demonstrate that God is Father (e.g., John 6:27, Titus 1:4).

Next, we have the scores of texts which prove the deity of Jesus Christ, the Son—passages like John 1 (“the word was God”), John 8:58 (“before Abraham was born, I am”), Col. 2:9 (“in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form”), Heb. 1:3 (“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of his being”), Tit. 2:13 (“our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”)-not to mention the explicit worship Christ willingly received from his disciples (Luke 24:52; John 20:28) and the charges of blasphemy leveled against him for making himself equal with God (Mark 2:7).

Then we have similar texts which assume the deity of the Holy Spirit, calling Him an “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14) and using “God” interchangeably with the “Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 3:16 and 1 Cor. 6:19; Acts 5:3-4) without a second thought.

The shape of Trinitarian orthodoxy is finally rounded off by texts that hint at the plurality of persons in the Godhead (Gen. 1:1-3, 26; Psalm 2:7), texts like 1 Cor. 8:6 which place Jesus Christ as Lord right in the middle of Jewish Shema, and dozens of texts that speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the same breath, equating the three in rank, while assuming distinction of personhood (Matt. 28:19; Gal. 4:6; 1 Cor.12:4-6; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Cor. 2:21-22; 13:14; Eph. 1:13-14; 2:18, 20-22; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; 6:10-18).

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-doctrine-of-the-trinity-no-christianity-without-it/>

Why the Doctrine of the Trinity Matters...

- 1. The Bible, God's inspired, inerrant, infallible word clearly reveals God as Triune... "the greatest proof of the doctrine of the Trinity is that the authors of the New Testament could hardly explain the Gospel without it," (Ryan McGraw)**
- 2. Christianity is at its very heart Triune, and is distinguished from all other faiths as Triune... "Without the Trinity the gospel disappears...We should love the doctrine of the Trinity!...the Triune God is the only Savior. We should cherish this doctrine, study it in the Holy Scriptures, meditate upon it until it inflames our hearts, and teach and defend it with all the resources of the church." (Joel Beeke)**
- 3. God's work of redemption is integrally Triune... "it is not sufficient to salvation to have a vague or unbiblical view of God to be saved...we must hold and believe that God the Father is our Father, the Son our Redeemer, the Holy Ghost our Sanctifier and Comforter." (William Perkins)**
- 4. The believer truly has communion with the Triune God...**

"The full original title of Puritan John Owen's treatise is revealing: "Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace and Consolation." By grace alone, reconciled sinners are invited to enjoy communion with God, sharing personal communion individually with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We enjoy the Father's love, the Son's grace, and the Spirit's consolation."

Tony Reinke

The Believer's Communion with the Triune God...John Owen

Since we have communion with the Triune God, Owen's work is divided into three parts to show how we commune with each person of the Trinity distinctly.

Regarding the believer **communion with the Father**, Owen shows that it consists primarily in love. The Father initiates the relationship by showing love toward His people, and they respond by returning love to Him. This love is mediated through Jesus Christ.

The bulk of the book deals with the believer's **communion with Son**. While he begins by showing how Christ loves His church and how they response to his love, the majority of the section sets forth "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (2Co 13:14). He shows how the believer's love toward Christ is ultimately a result of them finding him to be "altogether lovely" on account of His being "full of grace" (Jn 1:14).

"Upon the payment of the great price of his blood, and full acquittal on the satisfaction he made, all grace whatsoever becomes, in a moral sense, his, at his disposal; and he bestows it on, or works it in, the hearts of his by the Holy Ghost, according as, in his infinite wisdom, he sees it needful. How glorious is he to the soul on this consideration! That is most excellent to us, which is suits us in a wanting condition – that which gives bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, mercy to the perishing. All our reliefs are thus in our Beloved. Here is the life of our soul, the joy of our hearts, our relief against sin and deliverance from the wrath to come."

The final section sets forth the believers **communion with the Holy Spirit**. Owen focuses in on the Spirit's ministry as "the Comforter." He shows how the Spirit works with the word of God to bring comfort to the soul in the midst of trials. He also addresses the believers responsibility to "not grieve the Holy Spirit" (Eph 4:30), to "not quench the Spirit" (1Th 5:19), and to not resist the Holy Spirit (Act 7:51). Let me end with these words by Owen concerning our fellowship with the Spirit,

"His work we look for, his fruits we pray for; and when any effect of grace, any discovery of the image of Christ implanted in us, gives us a persuasion of our being separated and set apart for God, we have a communion with him therein"

Highlights of Owen's treatise by Erik Raymond

The Athanasian Creed (Fifth Century AD)

“Athanasius was not fighting for a philosophical problem, but for the Christian religion itself, for the revelation of God, the teaching of the apostles, the faith of the church.”

Herman Bavinck

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except everyone 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 substance.

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 co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one Eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one Uncreated, and one Incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three lords, but one Lord.

For as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge each Person by Himself to be both God and Lord, so we are also forbidden by the catholic religion to say that there are three gods or three lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

And in Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect man, of a rational soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching His godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His manhood; who, although He is God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, He sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the quick and the dead. At His coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

Come, thou Almighty King

1 Come, thou Almighty King,
help us thy name to sing,
help us to praise.
Father, all glorious,
o'er all victorious,
come and reign over us,
Ancient of Days.

2 Come, thou Incarnate Word,
gird on thy mighty sword,
scatter thy foes.
Let thine almighty aid
our sure defense be made,
our souls on thee be stayed;
thy wonders show.

3 Come, Holy Comforter,
thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour.
Thou who almighty art,
now rule in ev'ry heart,
and ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of power.

4 To the great One in Three
eternal praises be,
hence evermore.
His sov'reign majesty
may we in glory see,
and to eternity
love and adore.

The earliest known publication of this hymn is a leaflet that was bound into the 6th edition of [George Whitefield's](#) *Collection of Hymns for Social Worship*, 1757. In this leaflet, the hymn had five verses of seven lines each, and was titled "**An Hymn to the Trinity**".