

After the Wind Part 10 – Additional Notes: The Trinity Doctrine

I. A Brief History of the Trinity Doctrine

As early as 110 A.D., **Ignatius of Antioch** was using such phrases as “God the Father” and “Jesus Christ Our God.” In one of his letters, Ignatius wrote, “Be confirmed in the decrees of the Lord and of the Apostles, in order that in everything you do, you may prosper in body and in soul, in faith and in love, in Son and in Father and in Spirit.”

Justin the Martyr, who lived from about 100 to 165 A.D., wrote: “It is inescapable that this [man] is the Christ of God...that He pre-existed as the Son of the Creator of all things, being God, and that He was born a man by the Virgin.”

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born in North Africa about 60 years after the death of the last Apostle, John. The son of a Roman centurion, he was raised a pagan, educated in Greek and Latin and trained as a lawyer. At age 35 he became a Christian; we know him today as Tertullian, one of the great leaders of the early church and a prolific author.

Tertullian lived in a time of great persecution of the church. It was he who first said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” To articulate his faith in Latin – the language that had arisen in the valleys of central Italy – Tertullian coined several new words. Among them were the phrases “Old Testament” and “New Testament” to describe the two parts of the Bible we now use.

In an effort to better communicate one of the central doctrines that had been taught for nearly 100 years prior Tertullian came up with the word “trinity” to help believers encapsulate in one word what the church had been preaching all along.

About the year 177 A.D. **Melito of Sardes** wrote: “Being God and likewise perfect man, He (Christ) gave positive indications of His two natures: Of His deity, by the miracles during the three years following after His Baptism; of His humanity, in the thirty years which came before His Baptism, during which, by reason of His condition according to the flesh, He concealed the signs of His deity, although He was the true God existing before the ages.”

About 180 A.D. **Athenagoras of Athens** wrote: “The Son of God is the Word of the Father, in thought and in actuality. By Him and through Him all things were made, the Father and the Son being one. Since the Son is IN the Father and the Father is IN the Son by the unity and power of the Spirit, the Mind and Word of the Father is the Son of God. And if, in your exceedingly great wisdom, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by ‘the Son’, I will tell you briefly: He is the First-begotten of the Father, not as having been produced – for from the beginning God had the Word in Himself...”

Clement of Alexandria who lived from about 150 to 216 A.D. wrote: “The Word, then, the Christ, is the cause both of our ancient beginning – for He was in God – and of our well-being. And now this same Word has appeared as man. He alone is both God and man.”

Origen, who was born about 185 A.D., became a key church leader in the early 200s. One of his major works is titled *On First Principles*. In that written work, Origen uses the word “trinity” in addition to speaking about what happens to the souls of people after death.

II. Trinity: The term “trinity” is not used in scripture; so how can it be a doctrine?

Although the word *trinity* is not found in the Bible, the concept is taught *implicitly* within its pages.

- *Explicit* refers to that which is “fully and clearly expressed; leaving nothing implied;”
- *Implicit*, by contrast, refers to that which is “implied or understood though not directly expressed.”

Explicit truth from the Bible, then, refers to truth that is fully and clearly expressed in the Bible.

- Example: *God created the heavens and the earth* (as explicitly stated in Genesis 1:1).
- Implicit truth from the Bible, by contrast, refers to truth that is implied in the Bible.
- An example of this is the truth that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are a Trinity—three persons in one Godhead.

The doctrine of the Trinity is built on explicit truths found in the Old and New Testaments:

1. There is only one God.

This is the consistent emphasis of Scripture:

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder.

2. The Father is God.

John 6:27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

1 Peter 1:2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

3. Jesus is God.

Titus 2:13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Revelation 1:17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

Isaiah 44:6 “This is what the Lord says — Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

The divine names “Yahweh” and “Elohim” are used in reference to the Messiah who is Jesus:

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Exodus 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

John 8:58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

Jesus performs works that only God can do, such as creating the universe:

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Isaiah 44:24 "This is what the Lord says — your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself,

4. *The Holy Spirit is God.*

Genesis 1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Exodus 31:3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts —

Romans 8:9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

The Holy Spirit possesses the attributes of deity, including omnipresence:

Psalms 139:7-9 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

Omniscience:

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Eternity:

Hebrews 9:14 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 Holy Spirit does things that only God can do, such as participating in the creation of the universe:

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

Psalms 104:30 When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

Begetting Christ in Mary's womb:

Luke 1:35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

Resurrecting Christ:

Romans 8:11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Inspiring Scripture:

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

2 Peter 1:21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Within the unity of the one God are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- But how are we to understand this?
- Are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit *modes of manifestation* of the one God, or are they *distinct persons* within the Godhead?
- These questions point to the importance of the next principle:

We encounter two further truths in Scripture that set definite limits on our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity:

5. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are persons.

- The Bible does not explicitly identify them as persons, but it is reasonable to infer that they are persons based on explicit affirmations in Scripture.
- In other words, what makes a person a *person*?
- A person engages in personal relations, and has the attributes of personality: intellect, emotions and will.

The Father engages in personal relations:

John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

The Father has the attributes of personality:

- Intellect
Matthew 6:8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
- Emotions
Genesis 6:6 The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.
Psalms 86:15 But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.
- Will
Matthew 12:50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

The Son engages in personal relations:

John 11:41-42 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

The Son has the attributes of personality:

- Intellect
John 2:24-25 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. 25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.
- Emotions
Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
John 11:35 Jesus wept.
- Will
Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

The Holy Spirit engages in personal relations:

Acts 8:29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

The Holy Spirit has the attributes of personality:

- Intellect
Romans 8:27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.
1 Corinthians 2:10-11 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.
- Emotions
Isaiah 63:10 Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.
Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- Will
1 Corinthians 12:11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

The personality of each of the three is therefore implied in Scripture.

6. *The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct from each other.*

- The Father and the Son know each other:
Matthew 11:27 All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
- The Father and the Son love each other:
John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.
- The Father and the Son speak to each other:

John 11:41-42 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

- The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism:
Luke 3:22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”
- The Holy Spirit is called another comforter:
John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—
- The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and Jesus:
John 15:26 When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.
- The Holy Spirit seeks to glorify Jesus:
John 16:13-14 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

Conclusion: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who together comprise the one God, are distinct persons and not modes of manifestation.

To come to any other conclusion means contradicting one or more explicit or implicit truths found in the Bible.

III. This brings us to the next principle:

Matthew 28:19 (NASB) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”

- The word *name* is singular in the Greek, thereby indicating God’s oneness.
- Notice, however, the definite articles in front of each person: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Greek scholar Daniel B. Wallace tells us that the definite article is often used to stress the identity of an individual.
- Theologian Robert L. Reymond observes:

Jesus does not say, (1) “into the names [plural] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” or what is its virtual equivalent, (2) “into the name of the Father, and into the name of the Son, and into the name of the Holy Spirit,” as if we had to deal with three separate Beings. Nor does He say, (3) “into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” (omitting the three recurring articles), as if “the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” might be taken as merely three designations of a single person. What He does say is this: (4) “in the name [singular] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” first asserting the unity of the three by

combining them all within the bounds of the single Name, and then throwing into emphasis the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article.⁴ (Insert added.)

Jehovah's Witnesses also try to argue that the Trinity ("three in one") is illogical.

- Christians may respond that the Trinity may be beyond reason, but it is not *against* reason.
- The Trinity does not entail three Gods in one God, or three persons in one person.
- Such claims would be illogical.
- There is nothing contradictory, however, in affirming three persons in one God.

May 8, 1775 – John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church and a great preacher, preached a sermon entitled, "On the Trinity."

- Wesley dealt little with the all the verses that I've presented.
- He relied essentially on one verse:

1 John 5:7 (NKJV) For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

[Author's note: It is interesting to note that this verse may well be the most theologically disputed verse in the Bible. It appears in only three ancient manuscripts, two of which are dismissed by scholars: one as a forgery, the other as written more than 1600 years after the original. The third text is considered genuine but is disputed by those who question why it does not match other manuscripts and by those who want no documentation to support the doctrine of the Trinity./PR]

Wesley focused instead on why we would choose to not believe something simply because we could not comprehend how it could be.

Here is an excerpt from John Wesley's sermon in which he introduces the concept that the Bible does not require us to believe how God did or does something but rather we are to believe in the fact that it God did it:

The Bible barely requires you to believe such facts; not the manner of them. Now the mystery does not lie in the *fact*, but altogether in the manner.

For instance: "God said, let there be light: And there was light." I believe it: I believe the plain *fact*: There is no mystery at all in this. The mystery lies in the *manner* of it. But of this I believe nothing at all; nor does God require it of me.

Again: "The Word was made flesh." I believe this fact also. There is no mystery in it; but as to the *manner how* he was made flesh, wherein the mystery lies, I know nothing about it; I believe nothing about it: It is no more the object of my faith, than it is of my understanding.

To apply this to the case before us: "There are three that bear record in heaven: And these three are One." I believe this *fact* also, (if I may use the expression,) that God is Three and One. But the *manner how* I do not comprehend and I do not believe it. Now in this, in the *manner*, lies the mystery; and so it may; I have no concern with it: It is no object of my faith: I believe just so much as God has revealed, and no more. But this, the *manner*, he has not revealed; therefore,

I believe nothing about it. But would it not be absurd in me to deny the fact, because I do not understand the manner? That is, to reject *what God has revealed*, because I do not comprehend *what he has not revealed*.

In his book *The Forgotten Trinity*, James R. White asks,

“If I believe everything the Bible says about topic X and use a term not found in the Bible to describe the full teaching of Scripture on that point, am I not being more truthful to the Word than someone who limits themselves to only biblical terms, but rejects some aspect of God’s revelation?”⁵ This is an important question—one that the Jehovah’s Witnesses would do well to ponder.

Citations:

- Dr. Ron Rhodes, president of Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries, author of an article in the Practical Hermeneutics column of the Christian Research Journal, volume 29, number 1 (2006).
- A Brief Explanation of the Trinity, James M. Arlandson
- A Biblical Response to Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry
- Is the Holy Spirit Worthy of Worship?, by Wayne Jackson
- Tertullian: His Life and Writings, The Crossroads Initiative
- Tertullian, Wikipedia
- The Trinity is a False Teaching, YouTube, Jonathan from Chicago, age 24, who writes on his YouTube home page: “I am apart [*sic*] of no organized [*sic*] religion for not one has it right. They steer from God's True teachings, and with my videos I wish to show you what is really being said. I want to show you how paganism was enveloped into Christianity and how corruption overtook Islam.”