

The Biblical Basis of the Doctrine of the Trinity: An Outline Study

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Introduction

It is often alleged that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a biblical doctrine. While the word *Trinity* is not in the Bible, the substance of the doctrine is definitely biblical.

The following outline study presents an overview of the biblical basis of the doctrine of the Trinity. Comments on the texts have been kept to a bare minimum; the emphasis is on the many biblical texts themselves (about 700 references are listed, including references from 26 of the 27 books of the New Testament).

An exposition of many of the texts discussed here can be found in the author's book *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989). Unfortunately, it is currently out of print, but you may be able to locate a copy through Amazon.com's out-of-print service.

Proper evaluation of the biblical evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity will depend on the faithful application of sound principles of biblical interpretation. Here I will mention just two principles which, if followed, would prevent almost all interpretive errors on this subject.

The first is to interpret the implicit in light of the explicit. That is, texts that explicitly state that such-and-such is true are to govern our understanding of passages that do not address the issue directly. For example, many passages of the Bible state explicitly that God is omniscient, that is, that he knows all things, including the thoughts of men and all future events (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chron. 28:9, 17; Job 37:16; Psa. 139:1-4; Isa. 41:22-23; 42:9; 44:7; Jer. 17:10a). These texts must govern our understanding of passages which might seem to imply, but which do not assert, that God did not know something (e.g., Gen. 3:9-13; 4:9; 18:9, 20-21).

The other principle is that we interpret logically but not rationalistically. Using the same illustration, if God knows everything ahead of time, then logically He must have known that Adam and Eve would fall into sin. However, to argue that if God knew Adam and Eve would sin then they would not be responsible for their choosing to sin is not "logical," is rationalistic. It may be difficult to understand how persons could be responsible for their sinful actions if God knew ahead of time that they would sin, but it is not illogical (not self-contradictory) to say so.

It should be noted that a study of the Trinity should not be undertaken apart from a study of the nature of God.

I. There Is One God

A. One God: Explicit Statements

1. OT: Deut. 4:35; 39; 32:39; 2 Sam. 22:32; Isa. 37:20; 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5; 14; 21-22; 46:9
2. NT: John 5:44; Rom. 3:30; 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim.

1:17; 2:5; James 2:19; Jude 25

B. None like God (in his essence)

1. Explicit statements: Ex. 8:10; 9:14; 15:11; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kgs. 8:23; 1 Chr. 17:20; Psa. 86:8; Isa. 40:18, 25: 44:7; 46:5, 9; Jer. 10:6-7; Micah 7:18

2. Being like God a Satanic lie: Gen. 3:5; Isa. 14:14; John 8:44

3. Fallen man become "like God" only in that he took upon himself to know good and evil, not that he acquired godhood: Gen. 3:22

C. Only one true God: 2 Chr. 15:3; Jer. 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 John 5:20-21

D. All other "gods" are therefore false gods (idols), not gods at all: Deut. 32:21; 1 Sam. 12:21; Psa. 96:5; Isa. 37:19; 41:23-24, 29; Jer. 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:19-20

E. Demons, not gods, are the power behind false worship: Deut. 32:17; Psa. 106:37; 1 Cor. 10:20; Gal. 4:8

F. How human beings are meant to be "like God"

1. The image of God indicates that man is to represent God and share his moral character, not that man can be metaphysically like God: Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 1 Cor. 11:7; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10

2. The goal of being like Christ has the following aspects only:

a. Sharing His moral character: 1 John 3:2; Rom. 8:29

b. Being raised with glorified, immortal bodies like His: Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:49

3. Becoming partakers of the divine nature refers again to moral nature ("having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust"), not metaphysical nature: 2 Pet. 1:4; see also Heb. 12:10; on the meaning of "partakers," see 1 Cor. 10:18, 20; 2 Cor. 1:17; 1 Pet. 5:1

G. Are mighty or exalted men gods?

1. Scripture never says explicitly that men *are* gods

2. Powerful, mighty men are explicitly said not to be gods: Ezek. 28:2, 9; Isa. 31:3; 2 Thess. 2:4

3. Men and God are opposite, exclusive categories: Num. 23:19; Isa. 31:3; Ezek. 28:2; Hosea 11:9; Matt. 19:26; John 10:33; Acts 12:22; 1 Cor. 14:2

4. Moses was "as God," not really a god: Ex. 4:16; 7:1
5. Ezek. 32:21 speaks of warriors or soldiers as "mighty gods," but in context they are so regarded by their pagan nations, not by God or Israel; cf. Ezek. 28:2, 9
6. The *elohim* before whom accused stood in Exodus was God Himself, not judges, as many translations incorrectly render: Ex. 22:8-9, 28; compare Deut. 19:17
7. The use of *elohim* in Psalm 82, probably in reference to wicked judges, as cited by Jesus in John 10:34-36, does not mean that men really can be gods.
 - a. It is Asaph, not the Lord, who calls the judges *elohim* in Psa. 82:1, 6. This is important, even though we agree that Psa. 82 is inspired.
 - b. Asaph's meaning is not "Although you are gods, you will die like men," but rather "I called you gods, but in fact you will all die like the men that you really are"
 - c. The Psalmist was no more saying that wicked judges were truly gods than he was saying that they were truly "sons of the Most High" (v. 6b)
 - d. Thus, Psa. 82:1 calls the judges *elohim* in irony. They had quite likely taken their role in judgment (cf. point 5 above) to mean they were *elohim*, or gods, and Asaph's message is that these so-called gods were mere men who would die under the judgment of the true *elohim* (vss. 1-2, 7-8)
 - e. Christ's use of this passage in John 10:34-36 does not negate the above interpretation of Psalm 82
 - f. The words, "The Scripture cannot be broken," means "the Scripture cannot go without having some ultimate fulfillment" (cf. John 7:23; Matt. 5:17). Thus Jesus is saying that what the OT judges were called in irony, He is in reality; He does what they could not do, and is what they could never be (see the Adam-Christ contrasts in Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45 for a similar use of OT Scripture)
 - g. The clause, "those against whom the word of God came" (John 10:35) shows that this "word" was a word of judgment against the so-called gods; which shows that they were false gods, not really gods at all
 - h. Finally, these wicked men were certainly not "godlike" or

"divine" by nature, so that in any case the use of *elohim* to refer to them must be seen as figurative, not literal

8. Even if men were gods (which they are not), this would be irrelevant to Jesus, since He was God as a preexistent spirit before creation: John 1:1

H. Are angels gods?

1. Scripture never explicitly states that angels *are* gods

2. Demonic spirits are not gods, 1 Cor. 10:20; Gal. 4:8; thus, being "mighty spirits" does not make angels gods

3. Satan is therefore also a false god: 2 Cor. 4:4

4. Psalm 8:5 does not teach that angels are gods

a. Psa. 8:5 is paraphrased in Heb. 2:7, not quoted literally (cf. Psa. 68:18 with Eph. 4:8). In Psa. 8:5, *elohim* certainly means God, not angels, since Psa. 8:3-8 parallels Gen. 1:1, 8 16, 26-28. Note that the Psalmist is speaking of man's exalted place in creation, whereas Hebrews is speaking of the lower place taken by Christ in becoming a man. Thus, Heb. 2:7 may not mean to equate angels with gods at all.

b. Even if Heb. 2:7 does imply that angels are "gods," in the context of Hebrews 1-2 these angels would be those falsely exalted above Christ: Note Heb. 1:6 (which quotes Psa. 97:7, which definitely speaks of "gods" in the sense of false gods); and cf. Col. 2:16 on the problem of the worship of angels.

5. Elsewhere in the Psalms angels, if spoken of as gods (or as "sons of the gods"), are considered false gods: Psa. 29:1; 86:8-10; 89:6; 95:3; 96:4-5; 97:7-9 (note that these false gods are called "angels" in the Septuagint); 135:5; 136:2; 138:1; cf. Ex. 15:11; 18:11; Deut. 10:17; 1 Chr. 16:25; 2 Chr. 2:5.

6. Even if the angels were gods (which the above shows they are not), that would be irrelevant to Jesus, since He is not an angelic being, but the Son who is worshipped by the angels as their Creator, Lord, and God: Heb. 1:1-13.

I. Conclusion: If there is only one God, one true God, all other gods being false gods, neither men nor angels being gods, and none even like God by nature - all of which the Bible says repeatedly and explicitly - then we must conclude that there is indeed only one God.

II. This One God Is Known in the OT as "Jehovah/Yahweh" ("The Lord")

A. Texts where Jehovah is said to be *elohim* or *el*: Deut. 4:35, 39; Psa. 100:3; etc.

B. Texts where the compound name "Jehovah God" (*Yahweh Elohim*) is used: Gen. 2:3; 9:26; 24:3; Ex. 3:15-18; 4:4; 2 Sam. 7:22, 25; etc.

C. Only one Yahweh/Jehovah: Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29

D. Conclusion: Jehovah is the only God, the only *El* or *Elohim*

III. God Is a Unique, Incomprehensible Being

A. Only one God, thus unique: See I.A.

B. None are even like God: see I.B.

C. God cannot be fully comprehended: 1 Cor. 8:2-3

D. God can only be known insofar as the Son reveals Him: Matt. 11:25-27; John 1:18

E. Analogical language needed to describe God: Ezek. 1:26-28; Rev. 1:13-16

F. God is transcendent, entirely distinct from and different than the universe, as the carpenter is distinct from the bench

1. Separate from the world: Isa. 40:22; Acts 17:24

2. Contrasted with the world: Psa. 102:25-27; 1 John 2:15-17

3. Created the world: Gen. 1:1; Psa. 33:6; 102:25; Isa. 42:5; 44:24; John 1:3; Rom. 11:36; Heb. 1:2; 11:3

IV. Is God One Person?

A. God is one God (cf. I above), one Yahweh, one Lord (cf. II above), one Spirit (John 4:24)

B. However, the Bible never says that God is "one person"

1. Heb. 1:3 KJV speaks of God's "person," but the word used here, *hupostasis*, is translated "substance" in Heb. 11:1 KJV; also in Heb. 1:3 "God" refers specifically to the Father

2. Gal. 3:20 speaks of God as one party in the covenant between God and man, not as one person

3. Job 13:8 KJV speaks of God's "person," but ironically the Hebrew literally means "his faces"

C. The use of singular and plural pronouns for God

1. Over 7000 times God speaks or is spoken of with singular pronouns (I, He,

etc.); but this is proper because God is a single individual *being*; thus these singular forms do not disprove that God exists as three "persons" as long as these persons are not separate beings

2. At least three times God speaks of or to himself using plural pronouns (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7), and nontrinitarian interpretation cannot account for these occurrences.

a. A plural reference to God and the angels is possible in Isa. 6:8, but not in the Genesis texts: in 1:26 "our image" is explained in 1:27, "in God's image"; in 3:22 "like one of us" refers back to 3:5, "like God."

b. The "literary plural" (possibly, though never clearly, attested in Paul) is irrelevant to texts in which God is *speaking*, not writing.

c. The "plural of deliberation" (as in "Let's see now...") is apparently unattested in biblical writings, and cannot explain Gen. 3:22 ("like one of us").

d. The "plural of amplitude" or of "fullness" (which probably does explain the use of the plural form *elohim* in the singular sense of "God") is irrelevant to the use of plural pronouns, and again cannot explain Gen. 3:22.

e. The "plural of majesty" is *possibly* attested in 1 Kgs. 12:9; 2 Chron. 10:9; more likely Ezra 4:18; but none of these are certain; and again, it cannot explain Gen. 3:22; also nothing in the context of the Genesis texts suggests that God is being presented particularly as King.

D. The uniqueness of God (cf. III above) should prepare us for the possibility that the one divine Being exists uniquely as a plurality of persons

V. The Father of Jesus Christ Is God

A. **Explicit statements:** John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; etc.

B. **The expression,** "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ": 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3

VI. Jesus Christ Is God

A. **Explicit statements**

1. Isa. 9:6; note 10:21. Translations which render "mighty hero," are inconsistent in their rendering of 10:21. Also note that Ezek. 32:21 is (a) not in the same context, as is Isa. 10:21, and (b) speaking of false gods, cf. I.G.5. above.

2. John 1:1 Even if Jesus is here called "a god" (as some have argued), since there is only one God, Jesus is that God. However, the "a god" rendering is incorrect. Other passages using the Greek word for God (*theos*) in the same construction are always rendered "God": Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38; John 8:54; Phil 2:13; Heb. 11:16. Passages in which a shift occurs from *ho theos* ("the God") to *theos* ("God") never imply a shift in meaning: Mark 12:27; Luke 20:37-38; John 3:2; 13:3; Rom. 1:21; 1 Thess. 1:9; heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 4:10-11
3. John 1:18. The best manuscripts have "the unique God" (*monogenês*, frequently rendered "only-begotten," actually means "one of a kind," "unique," though in the NT always in the context of a son or daughter). Even if one translates "only-begotten," the idea is not of a "begotten god" as opposed to an "unbegotten god."
4. John 20:28. Compare Rev. 4:11, where the same construction is used in the plural ("our") instead of the singular ("my"). See also Psa. 35:23. Note that Christ's response indicates that Thomas' acclamation was not wrong. Also note that John 20:17 does show that the Father was Jesus' "God" (due to Jesus becoming a man), but the words "my God" as spoken by Thomas later in the same chapter must mean no less than in v. 17. Thus, what the Father is to Jesus in His humanity, Jesus is to Thomas (and therefore to us as well).
5. Acts 20:28: "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." The variant readings (e.g. "the church of the Lord") show that the original was understood to mean "His own blood," not "the blood of His own [Son]" (since otherwise no one would have thought to change it). Thus all other renderings are attempts to evade the startling clarity and meaning of this passage.
6. Rom. 9:5. While grammatically this is not the only possible interpretation, the consistent form of doxologies in Scripture, as well as the smoothest reading of the text, supports the identification of Christ as "God" in this verse.
7. Titus 2:13. Grammatically and contextually, this is one of the strongest proof-texts for the deity of Christ. Sharp's first rule, properly understood, proves that the text should be translated "our great God and Savior" (cf. same construction in Luke 20:37; Rev. 1:6; and many other passages). Note also that Paul always uses the word "manifestation" ("appearing") of Christ: 2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2. Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8.
8. Heb. 1:8. The rendering, "God is your throne," is nonsense - God is not a throne, He is the one who sits on the throne! Also, "God is your throne," if taken to mean God is the source of one's rule, could be said about any angelic ruler - but Hebrews 1 is arguing that Jesus is superior to the angels.
9. 2 Pet. 1:1. The same construction is used here as in Titus 2:13; see the parallel passages in 2 Pet. 1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18.
10. 1 John 5:20. Note that the most obvious antecedent for "this" is Jesus

Christ. Also note that the "eternal life" is Christ, as can be seen from 1:2.

B. Jesus is Jehovah/Yahweh

1. Rom. 10:9-13: Note the repeated "for," which links these verses closely together. The "Lord" of 10:13 must be the "Lord" of 10:9, 12.
2. Phil. 2:9-11. In context, the "name that is above every name" is "Lord" (vs. 11), i.e., Jehovah.
3. Heb. 1:10: Here God the Father addresses the Son as "Lord," in a quotation from Psa. 102:25 (cf. 102:24, where the person addressed is called "God"). Since here the Father addresses the Son as "Lord," this cannot be explained away as a text in which a creature addresses Christ as God/Lord in a merely representational sense.
4. 1 Pet. 2:3-4: This verse is nearly an exact quotation of Psa. 34:8a, where "Lord" is Jehovah. From 1 Pet. 2:4-8 it is also clear that "the Lord" in v. 3 is Jesus.
5. 1 Pet. 3:14-15: these verses are a clear reference to Isa. 8:12-13, where the one who is to be regarded as holy is Jehovah.
6. Texts where Jesus is spoken of as the "one Lord" (cf. Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29): 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5; cf. Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:5.

C. Jesus has the titles of God

1. Titles belonging only to God
 - a. The first and the last: Rev. 1:17; 22:13; cf. Isa. 44:6
 - b. King of kings and Lord of lords: 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16
2. Titles belonging in the ultimate sense only to God
 - a. Savior: Luke 2:11; John 4:42; 1 John 4:14; Titus 2:13, cf. v. 10; etc.; cf. Isa. 43:11; 45:21-22; 1 Tim. 4:10; on Jesus becoming the source of salvation; Heb. 5:9, cf. Ex. 15:2; Psa. 118:14, 21
 - b. Shepherd: John 10:11; Heb. 13:20; cf. Psa. 23:1; Isa. 40:11
 - c. Rock: 1 Cor. 10:4; cf. Isa. 44:8

D. Jesus received the honors due to God alone

1. Honor: John 5:23

2. Love: Matt. 10:37

3. Prayer: John 14:14 (text debated, but in any case it is Jesus who **answers** the prayer); Acts 1:24-25; 7:59-60 (cf. Luke 23:34, 46); Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 12:8-10 (where "the Lord" must be Jesus, cf. v. 9); 2 Thess. 2:16-17; etc.

4. Worship (*proskuneô*): Matt. 28:17; Heb. 1:6 (cf. Psa. 97:7); cf. Matt 4:10

5. Religious or sacred service (*latreuô*): Rev. 22:13

6. Doxological praise: 2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 1:5-6; 5:13

7. Faith: John 3:16; 14:1; etc.

E. Jesus does the works of God

1. Creation: John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14 (where *archê* probably means ruler); on "through" and "in" cf. Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10; Acts 17:28; cf. also Isa. 44:24

2. Sustains the universe: Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3, 11-12

3. Salvation:

a. In General: See C.2.a. above

b. Forgives sins: Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26; note that Jesus forgives sins not committed against Him.

4. All of them: John 5:17-29 (including judgment, cf. Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10)

F. Jesus has all the incommunicable attributes of God

1. All of them: John 1:1; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15; 2:9; Heb. 1:3

2. Self-existent: John 5:26

3. Unchangeable: Heb. 1:10-12 (in the same sense as YHWH); 13:8

4. Eternal: John 1:1; 8:58; 17:5; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:2

5. Omnipresent: Matt. 18:20; 28:20; John 3:13; Eph. 1:23; 4:10; Col. 3:11

6. Omniscient: John 16:30; 21:17; cf. 2:23-24

7. Incomprehensible: Matt. 11:25-27

G. Jesus is "equal with God"

1. John 5:18: Although John is relating what the Jews understood Jesus to be claiming, the context shows they were basically right: In v. 17 claimed to be exempt from the Sabbath along with His Father, and in 5:19-29 Jesus claimed to do all of the world of the Father and to deserve the same honor as the Father
2. Phil. 2:6: Jesus did not attempt to seize recognition by the world as being equal with God, but attained that recognition by humbling himself and being exalted by the Father (vv. 7-11)

H. Jesus is the *Son* of God

1. "Son" in Scripture can mean simply one possessing the nature of something, whether literal or figurative (e.g. "Son of man," "sons of thunder," "sons of disobedience," cf. Mark 3:7; Eph. 2:1).
2. Usually when "son of" is used in relation to a person (son of man, son of Abraham, son of David, etc.) the son possesses the nature of his father.
3. Jesus is clearly not the **literal** Son of God, i.e., He was not physically procreated by God.
4. On the other hand, Jesus is clearly the Son of God in a unique sense (cf. "only-begotten son," John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) and in a preeminent sense (i.e. the term is more fitting for Him than for anyone else).
5. Scripture is explicit that the Son possesses God's essence or nature (cf. F. above).
6. Jesus' repeated claim to be the Son of God was consistently understood by the Jewish leaders as a blasphemous claim to equality with God, an understanding Jesus never denied: John 5:17-23; 8:58-59; 10:30-39; 19:7; Matt. 26:63-65.
7. Jesus is therefore by nature God's Son, not God's creation or God's servant; Jesus is God's Son who **became** a servant for our sake and for the Father's glory (John 13:13-15; 17:4; Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. 1:4-13; 3:1-6; 5:8; etc.).

I. Objections

1. Prov. 8:22: This text is not a literal description of Christ, but a poetic personification of wisdom (cf. all of Prov. 1-9, esp. 8:12-21; 9:1-6), poetically saying that God "got" His wisdom before He did anything - i.e., that God has always had wisdom.
2. Col. 1:15: Does not mean that Christ is the first creature, since He is here presented as the Son and principal heir of the Father (cf. vv. 12-44); thus

"firstborn" here means "heir" (cf. Gen. 43:33; 48:14-20; Ex. 4:22; 1 Chron. 5:1-3; Psa. 89:27; Jer. 31:9); note that v. 16 speaks of the Son as the Creator, not creature (cf. E.1. above).

3. Rev. 3:14: "Beginning" (*archê*) in Rev. as a title means source or one who begins, i.e. Creator (cf. Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13); elsewhere Christ is called the *archê* in the sense of "ruler," Col. 1:18, cf. plural *archai*, "rulers," in Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15, also Luke 12:11; Rom. 8:38; Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Tit. 3:1; cf. Luke 20:20; Jude 6; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21.

4. 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28: Jesus is still subordinate to God, but as the Son to the Father; i.e., they are equal in nature, but the Son is subordinate relationally to God.

5. John 20:17; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Cor. 1:3; Rev. 1:6; 3:12: Jesus calls the Father "My God" because He is still man as well as God; note the distinction between "My God" and "your God" in John 20:17 (i.e., Jesus never speaks of "our God" including Himself with the disciples).

6. Mark 13:32: Jesus' statement that He did not know the time of His return is to be explained by His voluntary acceptance of the humble form and likeness of a man (Phil. 2:7); in fact Jesus, as God, did know all things (John 16:30), and after His resurrection He does not including Himself as not knowing (Acts 1:6-7).

7. Mark 10:17-18: Jesus does not deny being God, but simply tells the man that he has no business calling anyone "good" in an unqualified sense except God.

8. Heb. 5:14: Jesus was tempted, cf. James 1:13; but note that Jesus could not sin, John 5:19.

9. John 1:18: No one has seen God, but men have seen Jesus, e.g. 1 John 1:1-2; but note that no man can see the glorified Jesus either, 1 Tim. 6:16, and to see Jesus is to see the Father, John 14:9.

10. 1 Tim. 1:17: God cannot die, but Jesus did, e.g. Phil. 2:8; but note that no one could take Jesus' life from Him, He could not remain dead, and He raised Himself: John 10:18; Acts 2:24; John 2:19-22.

11. 1 Cor. 8:6: Father called God, Jesus called Lord: but here "God" and "Lord" are synonymous (cf. v. 5; cf. also Rom. 14:3-12 for a good example of "God" and "Lord" as interchangeable); moreover, this text no more denies that Jesus is God than it does that the Father is Lord (Matt. 11:25); cf. Jude 4, where Jesus is the only Lord.

12. 1 Tim. 2:5: Jesus here supposedly distinct from God; but Jesus is also distinct from (fallen) men, yet is Himself a man; likewise Jesus is distinct from God (the Father), but is also God.

13. Deut. 4:12, 15-25; God not appear in a human form to Israel, lest they fall into idolatry; but this does not rule out His appearing in human form later after they had learned to abhor idolatry.

14. In many texts Jesus is distinguished from God: He is the Son of God, was sent by God, etc.; in all these texts "God" is used as a name for the person most commonly called God, i.e., the Father.

VII. The Holy Spirit Is God

A. **Equated with God:** Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17-18

B. **Has the incommunicable attributes of God**

1. Eternal: Heb. 9:14

2. Omnipresent: Psa. 139:7

3. Omniscient: 1 Cor. 2:10-11

C. **Involved in all the works of God**

1. Creation: Gen. 1:2; Psa. 104:30

2. Incarnation: Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35

3. Resurrection: Rom. 1:4; 8:11

4. Salvation: Rom. 8:1-27

D. **Is a person**

1. Has a name: Matt. 28:19; note that even though "name" **might** be used of a nonperson, here, in conjunction with the Father and the Son, it must be used of a person

2. Is the "Helper"

a. Is **another Helper:** John 14:16, cf. 1 John 2:1; note also that "Helper" (*paraklêtos*) was used in Greek always or almost always of persons.

b. Is sent in Jesus' name, to teach: John 14:26.

c. Will arrive, and then bear witness: John 15:26-27.

d. Is sent by Christ to convict of sin, will speak not on his own but on behalf of Christ, will glorify Christ, thus exhibiting humility: John 16:7-14.

3. Is the **Holy Spirit**, in contrast to unholy spirits: Mark 3:22-30, cf. Matt. 12:32; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 3:24-4:6.
4. Speaks, is quoted as speaking: John 16:13; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 16:6; 20:23; 21:11; 28:25-27; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7-11; 10:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13,22.
5. Can be lied to: Acts 5:3
6. Can make decisions, judgments: Acts 15:28
7. Intercedes for Christians with the Father: Rom. 8:26
8. "Impersonal" language used of the Spirit paralleled by language used of other persons
 - a. The Holy Spirit as fire: Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; cf. Ex. 3:2-4; Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29
 - b. The Holy Spirit poured out: Acts 2:17, 33; cf. Isa. 53:12; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6
 - c. Being filled with the Holy Spirit: Eph. 5:18, etc.; cf. Eph. 3:17, 19; 14:10

VIII. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Are Distinct Persons

A. Matt. 28:19

1. "**the** Father and **the** Son and **the** Holy Spirit": use of definite article before each personal noun indicates distinct persons unless explicitly stated otherwise; compare Rev. 1:17; 2:8, 26
2. The views that "Father" and "Son" are distinct persons but not the Holy Spirit, or that the Holy Spirit is not a person at all, or that all three are different offices or roles of one person, are impossible in view of the grammar (together with the fact that in Scripture a "spirit" is a person unless context shows otherwise).
3. Does singular "name" prove that the three are one person? No; cf. Gen. 5:2; 11:14; 48:6; and esp. 48:16
4. "Name" need not be personal name, may be title: Isa. 9:6; Matt. 1:23. If a single personal name is sought, the name shared by all three persons is "Yahweh" or "Jehovah."

B. Acts 2:38 and Matt. 28:19

1. Neither passage specifies that certain words are to be spoken during baptism;

nor does the Bible ever record someone saying, "I baptize you in the name of...."

2. Those said to be baptized in the name of Jesus (whether or not the formula "in the name of Jesus" was used) were people already familiar with the God of the OT:

- a. Jews: Acts 2:5, 38; 22:16
- b. Samaritans: Acts 8:5, 12, 16
- c. God-fearing Gentiles: Acts 10:1-2, 22, 48
- d. Disciples of John the Baptist: Acts 19:1-5
- e. The first Christians in Corinth were Jews and God-fearing Gentiles: Acts 18:1-8; 1 Cor. 1:13

3. Trinitarian formula for baptism (if that is what Matt. 28:19 is) was given in context of commissioning apostles to take the gospel to "all the nations," including people who did not know of the biblical God

C. God the Father and the Son Jesus Christ are two persons

1. The salutations: Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; 6:23; Phil. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1, 2; 1 Tim. 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Phm. 3; James 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:2; 2 John 3

2. Two witnesses: John 5:31-32; 8:16-18; cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15

3. The Father sent the Son: John 3:16-17; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:10; etc.; cf. John 1:6; 17:18; 20:21

4. The Father and the Son love each other: John 3:35; 5:20; 14:31; 15:9; 17:23-26; cf. Matt. 3:17 par.; 17:5 par.; 2 Pet. 1:17

5. The Father speaks to the Son, and the Son speaks to the Father: John 11:41-42; 12:28; 17:1-26; etc.

6. The Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father: Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 7:29; 8:55; 10:15

7. Jesus our Advocate with the Father: 1 John 2:1

D. Jesus is not God the Father

1. Isa. 9:6: "Father of eternity" means eternal; compare other names formed with word "father": *Abialbon*, "father of strength" = strong (2 Sam. 23:31);

Abiasaph, "father of gathering" = gatherer (Ex. 6:24); *Abigail*, a woman's name(!), "father of exultation" = exulting (1 Chron. 2:16).

2. John 10:30

- a. Jesus did not say, "I am the Father," nor did He say, "the Son and the Father are one person."
- b. The first person plural *esmen* ("we are") implies two persons.
- c. The neuter word for "one" (*hen*) is used, implying essential unity but not personal unity (compare John 17:21-23).

3. John 5:43: Jesus' coming in His Father's name means not that He was the Father because He had the Father's name, but that, while others come in their own name (or their own authority), Jesus does **not**; He comes in His Father's name (on His Father's authority).

4. John 8:19; 16:3: Ignorance of Jesus is indeed ignorance of the Father, but that does not prove that Jesus is the one He calls "My Father."

5. John 14:6-11

- a. Jesus and the Father are one being, not one person.
- b. Jesus said, "I am **in** the Father," not "I am the Father."
- c. The statement, "the Father is in Me," does not mean Jesus is the Father; compare John 14:20; 17:21-23.

6. John 14:18: An older adult brother can care for his younger siblings, thus preventing them from being "orphans," without being their father.

7. Colossians 2:9: Does not mean that Jesus is the Father, or that Jesus is an incarnation of the Father; rather, since "Godhead" (*theotês*) means Deity, the state of being God, the nature of God, Jesus is fully God, but not the only person who is God. "The Godhead" here does not = the Father (note that Jesus is in the Father, John 10:38; 14:10, 11; 17:21), but the nature of the Father.

8. The Father and the Son are both involved in various activities: raising Jesus (Gal. 1:1; John 2:19-22), raising the dead (John 5:21); 6:39-40, 44, 54, 1 Cor. 6:14), answering prayer (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23), sending the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7), drawing people to Jesus (John 6:44; 12:32), etc. These common works do prove that the two persons are both God, but not that Jesus is the Father

E. The Son existed before his Incarnation, even before creation

1. Prov. 30:4: This is **not** predictive prophecy; "prophecy" in 30:1 translates *massa*, which is rendered elsewhere as "burden."
2. The Son created all things: See [V.I.E.1](#)
3. Jesus was "with" (*pros* or *para*) God the Father before creation: John 1:1; 17:5; *pros* in John 1:1 does not mean "pertaining to," although it does in Hebrews 2:17; 5:1 (which use *pros* with *ta*).
4. Jesus, the Son of God, existed before John the Baptist (who was born before Jesus): John 1:15, cf. 1:14-18, 29-34
5. Jesus, the Son, came down from heaven, sent from the Father, and went back to heaven, back to the Father: John 3:13, 31; 6:33; 38, 41, 46, 51, 56-58, 62; 8:23, 42; 13:3; 16:27-28; cf. Acts 1:10-11; cf. the sending of the Holy Spirit, John 16:5-7; 1 Pet. 1:12
6. Jesus, speaking as the Son (John 8:54-56), asserts His eternal preexistence before Abraham: John 8:58
7. The Son explicitly said to exist "before all things": Col. 1:17, cf. 1:12-20
8. These statements cannot be dismissed as true only in God's foreknowledge
 - a. We are **all** "in God's mind" before creation; yet such passages as John 1:1 and John 17:5 clearly mean to say something unusual about Christ.
 - b. To say that all things were created **through** Christ means that He must have existed at creation.
 - c. No one else in Scripture is ever said to have been with God before creation.
9. Texts which speak of the Son being begotten "today" do not mean He became the Son on a certain day, since they refer to His exaltation at the **resurrection** (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:3-5; 5:5; cf. Psalms 2:7; cf. also Rom. 1:4).

F. Jesus is not the Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit is "another Comforter": John 14:16; compare 1 John 2:1.
2. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit: John 15:26; 16:7.
3. The Holy Spirit exhibits humility in relation to, and seeks to glorify, Jesus (John 16:13-14).
4. The Son and the Holy Spirit are distinguished as two persons in Matt. 28:19.

5. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus: Luke 3:22.

6. Is Jesus the Holy Spirit?

a. 2 Cor. 3:17: the Spirit is here called "Lord" in the sense of being Yahweh or God, not Jesus (cf. v. 16, citing Ex. 34:34; cf. v. 17 in the Revised English Bible); note Acts 28:25-27, cf. Isa. 6:8-10.

b. 1 Cor. 15:45: Jesus is "a life-giving Spirit," not in the sense that He is the Holy Spirit whom He sent at Pentecost, but in the sense that He is the glorified God-man; and as God He is Spirit by nature. All three persons of the Trinity are Spirit, though there are not three divine Spirits; and only one person is designated "the Holy Spirit."

c. Rom. 8:27, 34: the fact that two persons intercede for us is consistent with the fact that we have two Advocates (John 14:16; Rom. 8:26; 1 John 2:1).

d. John 14:18: Jesus here refers to His appearances to the disciples after the resurrection (compare 14:19), not to the coming of the Spirit.

e. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are both involved in various activities: raising Jesus (John 2:19-19-22); Rom. 8:9-11), raising the dead (John 5:21; 6:39-40, 44, 54, Rom. 8:9-11), dwelling in the believer (John 14:16; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27), interceding for the believer (Rom. 8:26; Heb. 7:25), sanctifying believers (Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 1:2), etc. These works prove that the two persons are both God, but not that Jesus is the Holy Spirit.

G. The Father is not the Holy Spirit

1. The Father sent the Holy Spirit: John 14:15; 15:26.

2. The Holy Spirit intercedes with the Father for us: Rom. 8:26-27.

3. The Father and the Holy Spirit are distinguished as two persons in Matt. 28:19.

4. Is the Father the Holy Spirit?

a. Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35: It is argued that the Holy Spirit is the Father of the incarnate Son of God; this argument ignores the fact that the "conception" is not a product of physical union between a man and a woman!

b. The Father and the Holy Spirit are both said to be active in various activities; the resurrection of Jesus (Gal. 1:1; Rom. 8:11),

comforting Christians (2 Cor. 1:3-4; John 14:26), sanctifying Christians (Jude 1; 1 Pet. 1:2), etc. The most these facts prove is that the two work together; they do not prove the two are one person.

IX. Conclusion: The Bible teaches the Trinity

A. All the elements of the doctrine are taught in Scripture.

1. One God
2. The Father is God.
3. The Son is God.
4. The Holy Spirit is God.
5. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons (i.e., they are not each other, nor are they impersonal; they relate to one another personally).

B. The New Testament presents a consistent triad of Father, Son, Holy Spirit (God, Christ, Spirit): Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:34; also Luke 1:35; 3:21-22 par.; 4:1-12; John 4:10-25; 7:37-39; 14:16; 20:21-22; Acts 1:4-8; 2:33, 38-39; 5:3-4, 9, 30-32; 7:55-56; 10:36-38, 44-48; 11:15-18; 15:8-11; 20:38; 28:25-31; Rom. 1:1-4; 5:5-10; 8:2-4, 9-11, 14-17; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:4-6, 11-12, 18; 2 Cor. 1:19-22; 3:6-8, 14-18; Gal. 3:8-14; 4:4-7; Eph. 1:3-17; 2:18, 21-22; 3:14-19; 4:4-6, 29-32; 5:18-20; Phil. 3:3; 1 Thess. 1:3-6; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Tit. 3:4-6; Heb. 2:3-4; 9:14; 10:28-31; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 John 3:21-24; 4:13-14; Jude 20-21; Rev. 2:18, 27-29.

C. Therefore, the Bible does teach the Trinity.

X. What Difference Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Make?

A. **Sovereignty:** Because the three persons have each other, we can be assured that God created us only to share the love they have and not as a means to His own end: Acts 17:25; John 17:21-26.

B. **Mystery:** The triune God is totally unlike anything in our world, and therefore greater than anything we can comprehend: Rom. 11:33-36; Isa. 40:18.

C. **Salvation:** God alone planned our salvation, came to save us, and dwells in us to complete our salvation: 1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:3-18; etc.

D. **Prayer:** We pray to the Father through the Son, and also pray to the Son directly, in the Spirit: John 14:13-14; Eph. 2:18; etc.

E. **Worship:** We worship Father and Son in the Spirit: John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 1:8; etc.

F. **Love:** The love among the three persons is the basis and model for our love for one

another: John 17:26.

G. **Unity**: The unity of the three persons is the basis and model for the unity of the church: John 17:21-23.

H. **Humility**: As the persons of the Trinity seek the glory of each other, so we should seek the interests of others above our own: Phil. 2:5-11; John 16:13-14.

I. **Sonship**: We are "sons of God" as we are united with the Son of God by the work of the Holy Spirit and the adoption of the Father: John 1:12-23; Rom. 8:14-17.

J. **Truth**: All those who wish to worship and love God must seek to know Him as He is in truth, for God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is truth: John 4:24; 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:13.

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