

A Short Summary of the Triune Nature of God

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Initial Keys to Understand the Terms and Ideas

What is a Person?

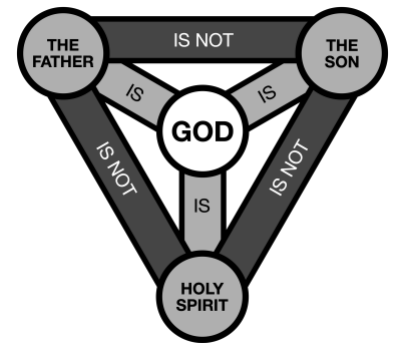
- Apart from physical individuation, “person” refers to a self-conscious, rational will.
- God appears to transcend the limitations we refer to as the distinctness of persons. We cannot reduce God to the plane of physical creatures.
- When we say the Father, Son, or Spirit is God, we mean they are divine persons with a self-conscious, rational will.
- Problem: We do not truly know what a “Divine person” is exactly like. All we know is that the oneness of the three persons transcends our understanding. A fusion between the persons of the triune God.

Understanding Three-in-One

- The idea of “three-in-one” is not a contradiction.
- It is only a contradiction if you say they are both three and one *in the same way*.
 - Is a three-leaf clover three or one? Three with respect to leafness. One with respect to cloverness.
 - A two-headed snake is two in one respect (number of heads) and one in another respect (body).
- The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit appear to share wills as one but still have three consciousnesses.
- Some tension remains since we cannot know all the respects in which “threeness” and “oneness” differ, but this resolves the contradiction.

The Bible Affirms:

1. One and only one God (the oneness and unity of God): One divine existence.
2. There are three united, divine persons comprising God (often called the “Trinity”).
3. The three persons are not identical to each other.
 - a. The Father is not the Son or Spirit. The Son is not the Father or Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father or Son.
4. The three persons are fully divine and thus co-equal, co-eternal, and self-existent.
 - a. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.



The Bible Avoids:

- Tritheism – Three gods (overemphasizes threeness).
- Modalism – One person manifested in three modes (overemphasizes oneness).
- Subordinationism – The Son and/or Spirit are eternally subordinate to the Father in some way.
 - Adoptionism – Jesus is a man who was “adopted” as God at His baptism.
 - Arianism – Jesus was created at some time in the past.
 - Semi-Arianism – Jesus was begotten by the Father (eternally generated from the Father), and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father or Son (this heresy varies).

1 – The Biblical Data: God’s Oneness and Unity

- “The Lord our God, the Lord is one Lord” (Deut 6:4; Gen 2:24 uses “one” similarly)
- Jesus refers to Deut 6:4. Paul and James agree that “God is one” (Mk 12:29; Jn 5:44; 1 Cor 8:4; Gal 3:20; Jas 2:19).
- YHWH is God, and there is no other besides Him (Deut 4:35, 39).
- There is no God besides God (2 Sam 7:22; 1 Chr 17:20; Isa 45:5; 37:20; 44:6; 2 Kgs 19:19; Ps 83:18; 86:10).
- YHWH is the great “I AM,” and there is no other god formed before or after Him (Ex 3; Isa 43:10; 42:8).

2.1 – The Biblical Data: God’s Threeness: New Testament Evidence

- “Make disciples... baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).
- “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14).
- “There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4–6).
- “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons” (1 Cor 12:4–6).
- “The foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:2).
- “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him” (Matt 3:16).
- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1).
- “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30).

- Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? . . . You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3, 4).
- Jesus' lengthy discourse on the three persons (John 14–16).

2.2 – The Biblical Data: God’s Threeness: Old Testament Evidence

- The Angel of the Lord is sometimes identified as God Himself. Consider Hagar (Gen 16:7, 13), Jacob (Gen 32:30; cf. Hosea 12:3–5), Manoah (Judges 13:13–22), and Moses (Ex 3:2, 4).
 - In Zech 3:1–5, the Angel of the Lord is the Lord Himself.
- “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD And the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us,... So He became their Savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit;... Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them” (Isa 63:7–11).
- “The LORD says to my Lord” (Ps 110:1).
- “Let Us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26, cf. Gen 3:22, 11:7).
- God speaks, yet clearly distinguishes Himself from the other persons (Isa 48:12–16; 63:7–14).
- Plural formulas, “The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.” “So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them” (Num 6:24–27). “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts...” (Isa 6:3).

3 – The Biblical Data: The Distinctness and Divinity of the Divine Persons

The Father and Son

- The Father and Son shared a love relationship before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:24, cf. Jn 1:1).
- “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt 26:39).
- Thomas explicitly addresses the resurrected Jesus as “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28).
- Jesus accepts worship in John 9:38; (cf. also Matt 2:11; 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; Heb 1:6; Rev 5:8–14). Yet, only God should be worshiped (Ex 34:14; cf. Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8; Rev 19:10). God himself is reported as saying of the Son, “Let all God’s angels worship him” (Heb 1:6).
- Jesus said, “Before Abraham Was, I am” (John 8:58)
- Jesus is fully God (Jn 8:58, Col 1:15–20; 2:9; Heb 1:8–9; cf. Ps 45:6–7; Isa 9:6; Rev 1:8, 18; 22:13).
- Father/Son terminology is accommodative. It is used to define the role Christ took in the plan of salvation (e.g., “therefore” in Lk 1:35; future tense in Heb 1:5b). Jesus was co-equal (Phil 2:6) but is now exalted (Phil 2:9–11).
- Jesus created everything (John 1:1–3, Col 1:16–17), so He cannot be created. When Hebrews 1–2 says He was “begotten” or “made lower,” angels already exist (Heb 1:5–6). Hebrews 1:5 speaks not of Christ coming into being but his resurrection and coronation according to Heb 1:3–4.
- The Father is God to the Son (Heb 1:9), but Jesus is also Lord and God to the Father (Hebrews 1:8, 10).
- Yahweh in the OT was *always* the Son. The Father was not heard or seen (John 5:37, 46; 1:18; 14:6–9). Only in the NT does He speak occasionally (Matt 3:17; Matt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35).
- “Lord” [κύριος] is the Greek word translated from YHWH in the LXX. Consider (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Rev 4:11).
- Every knee bows to Him (Phil 2:10–11 cf. Isa 45:23). Believers call upon Him (1 Cor 1:2; Lk 7:5–9; Gen 13:4; Ps 105:1).
- Jesus is called God (Rom 9:5; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1 [cf. 2:20; 3:2, 18]; 1 Jn 5:20; Jn 5:18 “equal,” and possibly Acts 20:28).

The Holy Spirit

- Christ speaks of the Holy Spirit as “another” distinct from Himself (Jn 14:16, cf. 14:26; 15:26)
- Christ says one who “speaks a word against” Himself can be “forgiven,” “but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him...” (Matt 12:32). Thus, they cannot be the same.
- The Holy Spirit exhibits characteristics of personality such as: speaking (Acts 8:29), forbidding/allowing (Acts 16:7), teaching (Luke 12:12), bearing witness (Jn 15:26), interceding (Rom 8:26–27), giving gifts to whom He wills (1 Cor 12:11), searching (1 Cor 2:10,11), guiding (Acts 8:29), has a name (Matt 28:19–20), can be “grieved” (Eph 4:30), can be lied to (Acts 5:3) and is God (Acts 5:4).
- The Holy Spirit is also eternal (Heb 9:14), omniscient (1 Cor 2:10,11), and omnipresent (Jn 14:16).
- Before quoting from Psalm 95:7–8, Hebrews 3:7–9 states, “as the Holy Spirit says.” Then, it goes on to quote, “your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.” Here, the Holy Spirit is speaking. In the Old Testament, it is YHWH who is tested and tried (cf. Ex 16:7). The Holy Spirit is God, according to Hebrews.