

THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON THE HOLY TRINITY.

(The Triune Nature of the Godhead)

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The early church recognised the doctrine of the Trinity by collecting together what our Lord and Scripture have to say, concerning the Godhead. Christ gave the clearest teaching on the subject in *Jn 14,15,16*. **In the Old Testament** the use of the Hebrew plural form "Elohim" (with a singular verb), gives a hint of the plurality of persons in the Godhead, which is, at the same time, recognised as a Unity.

Gen 1:1 – "Elohim" is plural, but is translated "God".

Gen 1:26 - The use of "our" and "us". Also in *Gen 3:22* and *Is 6:8*.

Deut 6:4 – "...the Lord is one!"

The Oneness of God is a major doctrine of the Old Testament, *Deut 6:4*, and stands in opposition to the polytheism of the surrounding nations.

The teaching of Our Lord impressed on the disciples the fact that there was **a distinction between Himself and His Father** and He also taught that there was **Another Person, "the Comforter"**, whom the Father would send in His Name. Jesus describes the three Persons as being quite distinct. *Jn 14:16,26, 15:26, 16:13-16*.

Our Lord's command in *Mat 28:19* is to disciple, and **baptise people** from all nations, **using a trinitarian formula**: "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," at the same time emphasising that there was only one "Name," (not "Names").

At Jesus' baptism the three Persons of the Godhead are revealed, *Mat 3:16,17, Mk 1:10,11*.

The Benediction emphasises the triune nature of the Godhead, *2Cor 13:14*.

(*Rev 1:4-6, 1Cor 12:4-6, Eph 4:3-6, Eph 3:14-16, Eph 2:18*).

The doctrine of the Trinity says that there are **three Persons** in the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who have **one Divine Nature**. We define human personality as the expression of a being, possessing mind, will and emotions, but this is inadequate when applied to the Persons of the Godhead if it implies any degree of limitation.

Scripture teaches that the three Persons of the Trinity have self-awareness and are self-directing, but it never hints that One Person could act in opposition to Another.

The word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible but was used by a church "father", Tertullian, in the last decade of the 2nd century. The doctrine of the Trinity was developed as the Church rose up to defend the truth of the deity of Christ.

The Church "fathers" Irenaeus, Origen and Tertullian share the responsibility for formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, and under the leadership of Athanasius the doctrine was proclaimed as the faith of the Church at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325).

See the Nicene Creed, No 83 - "Sermon and Teaching Notes."

The Council of Nicaea was called to deal with the Arian heresy. Arius (about 325AD), divided the Substance of the Godhead, and defined the Son and the Holy Spirit as being lesser Beings, whom the Father willed into existence for the purpose of acting as His agents, in His dealings with the world and man. It is very important to have a clear understanding of the deity of Christ, See No 94 Sermon and Teaching Notes.

It is also unscriptural and erroneous to suggest that the Trinity merely represents different aspects in which a Unitary God displays Himself. This error is known as “Sabellianism”, after the teaching of Sabellius (250 AD approx). On the other hand it is also wrong to emphasise the differences so as to represent three distinct Beings with different natures in the Godhead.

The truth is expressed by saying that there are **three Persons**, or Centres of Expression, in **One identical Nature**.

Jesus taught us to call these three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are co-equal in all attributes.

The central problem in the doctrine of the Trinity is to avoid the error of emphasising the unity of the Godhead at the expense of the distinctions of Personality, and also to avoid the error of separating the Persons at the expense of their essential unity.

In any teaching of the Trinity the relationship of the three Persons to One Another needs to be carefully safeguarded. Firstly there is a subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father, and secondly the Spirit of God is said to “proceed” from the Son as well as the Father. *Jn 15:26, 1Cor 11:3, Jn 5:30, Jn 6:38, Jn 16:13,14.*

The Nature of the Godhead has been a major battle ground in the history of the Church, and full Biblical, Christian doctrine demands that we hold and believe:

1. the **unity of the Godhead**,
2. the **full deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**,
3. the **subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father**.

The Father is God

1Pet 1:3, Is 45:5, Eph 1:3.

The Son is God

Tit 2:13, Jn 8:58, Jn 1:1, Mat 1:23, Is 9:6.

The Holy Spirit is God

Ac 5:3,4, Jn 15:26, 1Cor 2:10,11, Rom 8:9, Is 63:10, Mat 10:20, Gen 1:2, Is 40:13, Is 48:16 Is 59:19.

