

FACT SHEET: The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine (formal belief) of the "Trinity" is one of the foundational concepts of the Christian faith. Often criticized by those outside of Christianity as a philosophically inferior belief, it is an enduring truth of orthodox faith held dearly by Christians because of its thoroughly scriptural basis. The doctrine of the Trinity could be stated: **"We believe in one God who has eternally existed as three distinct, and co-equal persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."**

While the word "Trinity" never is used in the Bible, it is, nevertheless a useful theological term that captures the Biblical teaching of the "oneness" and "threeness" of God. The term "Trinity" did not come into common use until four centuries after Christ, as church leaders attempted to clarify, in precise philosophical language, the major teachings of the Christian faith, particularly the complex nature of Jesus Christ. For this reason Christians are often accused of "changing" the Biblical belief in one God, in favor of the Trinity, which is said to reflect the belief in many gods that pagan religions held to. Nothing could be further from the truth as to why the doctrine developed.

The doctrine of the Trinity can be demonstrated by a careful examination of what scripture actually teaches about the relationship of God (often called "the Father" in the New Testament) to the persons of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Regardless of "Trinity critics," if scripture actually teaches the unity and equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity is Biblically sound! Here's the test - **Does the Bible actually speak of the oneness of these persons, or call Jesus or the Holy Spirit "God," or ascribe attributes or roles reserved for God alone to them?**

Sample references in which Jesus claims for himself, or is referred to as God:

(John 5:17-18) Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

(John 5:22-23) "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."

(John 12:44-45) Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me."

(John 5:22, 27) "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son...And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."

Note that Jesus' favorite way to refer to himself in all four gospels is as "the Son of Man" this is undoubtedly done to identify himself with the Old Testament prophecy found in Daniel : *(Daniel 7:13-14) In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

(Mark 2:27-28) Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

(Matthew 28:18) Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

(Titus 2:13-14) We wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

(1 John 5:20) We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

(John 1:1,14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

References in which the Holy Spirit is referred to as, or shares attributes of God:

(Hebrews 3:7-9) So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers **tested and tried me** and for forty years saw what I did." This passage identifies the Holy Spirit as the God of the Old Testament whom the Israelites constantly rebelled against. Notice how this next passage presumes the same about the Holy Spirit: (Hebrews 10:15-17) *The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."*

(Acts 5:3-4) *Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that **you have lied to the Holy Spirit** and have kept for yourself some of the money...What made you think of doing such a thing? **You have not lied to men but to God.**"*

(2 Corinthians 3:17-18) *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

(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!*

(1 Thessalonians 5:23) **May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.** *May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Combine this passage Paul penned with the following passage from his second letter to the same Christians: (2 Thessalonians 2:13) *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning **God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit** and through belief in the truth.**

Note in the following passage how Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as one in identity with himself: (John 14:16-20) *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you [in the person of Christ himself] and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. [in the person of the Spirit] Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."* [in the person of the Spirit]

References showing the Trinity at work in oneness:

(Matthew 28:19) *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* Note here that Jesus refers to the "Name" (singular) and then makes as its direct object the three separate persons.

Note this description of God's manifest presence at Jesus' baptism: (Matthew 3:16-17) *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

(John 3:34) *For the one whom God has sent [Jesus the Son] speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.*

(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."*

(2 Corinthians 13:14) *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

(Ephesians 2:18) *For through him [Jesus, the Son] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

(2 Thessalonians 2:13,16-17) *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth...May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

(1 Peter 1:2) [Believers in Christ] *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.*

(Jude 1:20-21) *But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*