

## *826 "Is God Three Persons?"*

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### *God's Answers to Life's Questions*

Many people hear the word "trinity" and get confused about its meaning. Some think there are three Gods. Some think there is only one Person in three forms. Well, today, we'll look into the Bible and investigate what the Bible says about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God's Word always has the right answers, and that's why studying the Bible is so important. Today we're asking the question, "Is God Three Persons?" I was recently asked about the nature of God. Some people think that the Bible teaches there really is only one person in the Godhead, and that he merely takes three different forms. This is actually an old idea that was shown to be in error many years ago, but errors seem to come back now and then. People think they have come across something new, but their beliefs really aren't new at all. The belief in one God in three persons can be difficult to understand, so it is good to revisit this belief and ask important questions.

The word "trinity" is not found in the Bible but is certainly a Biblical concept. The word refers to the concept that God is one in essence or substance and three in person. God is one in essence but is known in three distinct persons as Father, Son, and Spirit. Among the first words of the Bible is Genesis 1:26: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

That God is one, that there is no other, that He has no equal is the forceful testimony of above fifty passages in the Scriptures. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 4:35, "To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him." Every Jewish child from the days of Moses would confess what the Bible says in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." God spoke through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:10-11, "Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior." Again, God Himself said in Isaiah 45:5, "I am God, and there is none else; besides me there is no God."

The New Testament proclaims in 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6, "Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

The Scriptures speak of God as a united one as in the case of Genesis 2:24 where a man and a woman are said to become "one flesh" or in Ex. 26:6 and 11 where many pieces are put together so that the tabernacle may be one. This same word is used to describe God in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 where the Bible says, "the Lord our God is one Lord." This is a united one. Three persons united into one God. Yet we have just as positive teaching that the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God.

We are not saying that one God is three Gods; we are saying that there is but one infinite Spirit Being, but within that one Spirit essence there are three personal distinctions, each of which may be, and is called God. Each is capable of loving and being loved by the others (John 14:31). Each has a distinct part to play in the creation of the universe, and in the creation and salvation of mankind. If we said there are three Gods, we would be polytheists like the pagans of ancient Greece and Rome who said there are many Gods. No, we don't say that. We say there is but one God in three persons.

Jesus described the kind of unity or oneness that He had with the Father in John 17:22-23, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me." The oneness of God is a unity of purpose and mind with a deeply committed mutual love. God is unified and wants His people to have the kind of unity that He has with His Son and His Spirit. The current state of division among so many Christians has led many people to quit believing in God. How sad. We must all unite under the will of God the Father.

In Matthew 3:16-17 while Jesus was being baptized into the Jordan River, the Father spoke from heaven; and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Now it is obvious that the voice from heaven, the Lord Jesus, and the dove are distinct. In John 15:26 Jesus said, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." Such language clearly makes distinctions between the persons of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Other passages which show this distinction: Matthew 28:19 says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The word "and" shows these distinctions: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet we are baptized into their name. Three persons yet just one name. When the Jews were stoning Stephen, the Bible says in Acts 7:55, "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." In 2 Corinthians 13:14 the apostle Paul wrote: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." Again we see that these are three distinct persons who are united.

These Divine Three are equal. This does not mean we cannot arrange them with the Father first, the Son second, and the Spirit third. This is not a difference in glory, power, or length of existence, but simply one of order. Jesus said in John 12:49-50, "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." Jesus came to earth not to do His own will but to do the will of the Father. We can all remember His words at the garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Friends, we need that kind of attitude.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit only acted according to the will of the Father. The Lord Jesus told the apostles in John 16:12-15, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." So, we see both the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit followed the will of the Father.

Through the ages men have debated two things about the trinity, whether Jesus was Divine and whether the Holy Spirit was a person. For just a moment I want to consider the deity of Jesus; then I want to investigate whether the Holy Spirit is indeed a person. That Jesus is God, divine, or deity, is clearly taught in Scripture. In John 1:1-4, the Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." Such statements make it very clear Jesus Christ is more than a mere man.

Again, the Bible says in Philippians 2:5-11, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness

of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Jesus has always existed in the form of God, even though He appeared for a time on earth as a human. One day every person will bow the knee and confess Jesus as Lord. To confess Jesus as Lord means that He is indeed Divine. God the Father is honored when Jesus His Son is honored as Divine.

Contrary to the beliefs of some who think there is only one person in the Godhead, there are many clear Scriptures that indicate the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray as He does and address our prayers, “Our Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). A person, of course, by definition refers to someone who engages in relationships with others, who communicates with others, who displays emotions, and who can make decisions and plans. Certainly the Father in heaven displays these characteristics, and it is clear Jesus displayed all the characteristics of a person. Usually people do not question that the Father and His Son Jesus are persons. People do, however, wonder if the Holy Spirit is a person.

The Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit is indeed a person. He is not a thing or a “force” or merely an influence; the Holy Spirit is a person in every sense of the word. The Holy Spirit, for instance, engages in interpersonal relationships with others. In Romans 8:26-27 the Bible says, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” In this passage the Bible clearly shows the Spirit understands, thinks, feels, intercedes with the Father, and communicates. Only a person can do these things.

The Bible warns the Ephesians in Ephesians 4:30, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” One doesn’t talk about grieving a thing or an unintelligent influence; one only speaks of grieving a person. In 1 Corinthians 12:11 that the Holy Spirit distributes the various miraculous gifts “as He wills.” This is certainly not the kind of language used to talk about a thing or an influence. To will is to use judgment in order to make decisions, choices and plans. People have a will, not things.

The Scriptures regard the Holy Spirit as a divine personality. In Acts 5:3-4 when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, they were lying to God. When the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 6:19 that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, it is saying that the Holy Spirit is Divine. In Psalm 139:7-10 the prophet David asks, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.” God’s authority is shown through the Holy Spirit. Seven times in the book of Revelation, the Bible says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The idea of three in one is somewhat mysterious. One might find analogies helpful to understand how three things can be of the same substance but different. H<sub>2</sub>O is the same in substance whether it is solid, liquid or gas in form. Yet ice, water and steam are different in temperature and in function. We might think of an apple. The same genetic makeup of an apple is in the tree, the fruit and the seed. Each has its own distinction and function, yet all may be truly regarded as “apple.” Now God, or the Godhead, is not water or apple; but these illustrations do help us to understand how things can be alike in substance and yet be distinct. While the word “trinity” doesn’t occur in Scripture, the concept of three persons in one God is certainly clearly taught.

We have God’s wonderful promise about the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:11. The Bible says, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” The same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us up at the last day. Aren’t you glad God, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have a plan for our future in heaven? Aren’t you glad that the Word of one is the Word of all three? Aren’t you glad they are united in wanting us to know the truth and to go to heaven?

My friend, I do want you to go to heaven to be with the Lord forever. To do that you have to unite your will with the will of God. You have to love God and trust in His Word to the point that whatever He asks of you, you will be willing to do it. There simply is no salvation outside the will of God. The Bible says about Jesus in Hebrews 5, verses 8 and 9, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.” You have to be willing to say, “not My will, but Yours be done” in your own life. That means out of love and trust, you are willing to repent of your sins and be baptized in water so that you sins will be forgiven. That’s what the apostle Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and that is what you too must do. Won’t you become a Christian today?

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