

## KEVIN DEYOUNG WRITES –

If any doctrine makes Christianity Christian, then surely it is the doctrine of the Trinity. The three great ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—are all structured around our three in one God, underlying the essential importance of Trinitarian theology. Augustine once commented about the Trinity that “in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.”

**First, what does the doctrine mean?** The doctrine of the Trinity can be summarized in seven statements. (1) There is only one God. (2) The Father is God. (3) The Son is God. (4) The Holy Spirit is God. (5) The Father is not the Son. (6) The Son is not the Holy Spirit. (7) The Holy Spirit is not the Father. All of the creedal formulations and theological jargon and philosophical apologetics have to do with safeguarding each one of these statements and doing so without denying any of the other six. When the ancient creeds employ extra-biblical terminology and demand careful theological nuance they do so not to clear up what the Bible leaves cloudy, but to defend, define, and delimit essential biblical propositions. The Athanasian Creed puts it this way: “Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons, nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit, still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.”

The two key words here are essence and persons. When you read “essence”, think “Godness.” All three Persons of the Trinity share the same “Godness.” One is not more God than another. None is more essentially divine than the rest.

When you read “persons”, think “a particular individual distinct from the others.”

Theologians use these terms because they are trying to find a way to express the relationship of three beings that are equally and uniquely God, but not three Gods. That’s why we get the tricky (but learnable) language of essence and persons. We want to be true to the biblical witness that there is an indivisibility and unity of God, even though

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can all be rightly called God. The Persons are not three gods; rather, they dwell in communion with each other as they subsist in the divine nature without being compounded or confused.

Sometimes it's easier to understand what we believe by stating what we don't believe.

- Orthodox Trinitarianism rejects monarchianism which believes in only one person (mono) and maintains that the Son and the Spirit subsists in the divine essence as impersonal attributes not distinct and divine Persons.
- Orthodox Trinitarianism rejects modalism which believes that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different names for the same God acting in different roles or manifestations (like the well-intentioned but misguided “water, vapor, ice” analogy).
- Orthodox Trinitarianism rejects Arianism which denies the full deity of Christ.
- And finally, orthodox Trinitarianism rejects all forms of tritheism, which teach that the three members of the Godhead are, to quote a leading Mormon apologist, “three distinct Beings, three separate Gods.”

The doctrine of the Trinity, as summarized in the seven statements earlier, is not a philosophical concoction by some over-zealous and over-intelligent early theologians, but one of the central planks of orthodoxy which can shown, explicitly or implicitly, from a multitude of biblical texts.

### The Holy Spirit

Pneuma – Greek word for breath, translated in the NT as “spirit.” The two concepts are intimately combined.

John 20:22 - And when He had said this, He breathed (emphysaō) on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (hagion pneuma)

God is a Spirit. He is not corporeal or physical.

Gen. 1:1 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Gen. 1:2 And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Gen. 1:3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

God: elohym – plural. "Let us make man in our image."

There are over 100 references to the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. And, according to the NT writers, they refer to the Holy Spirit who is promised by God to His people, whom Jesus explained in John 14.

Acts 7:51 - "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did."

2Pet. 1:20 - But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation,

2Pet. 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Matt. 22:41 - Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question,

Matt. 22:42 saying, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "*The son of David.*"

Matt. 22:43 He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying,

Matt. 22:44 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT THINE ENEMIES BENEATH THY FEET"?"

Matt. 22:45 "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?"

Matt. 22:46 And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

Acts 1:15 - And at this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,

Acts 1:16 "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy

Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Acts 1:17 (quoting Psalm 41) "For he was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry."

Acts 4:24 - And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is Thou who DIDST MAKE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,

Acts 4:25 who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?

Acts 28:23 - And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

Acts 28:24 And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.

Acts 28:25 And when they did not agree with one another, they *began* leaving after Paul had spoken one *parting* word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

Acts 28:26 saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;

Acts 28:27 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM."

Acts 28:28 "Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

Heb. 3:7 - Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, (quoting from Psalm 95) "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,

Heb. 3:9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*,

AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.

Heb. 3:10 "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART; AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"

Heb. 3:12 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.

Heb. 10:15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

Heb. 10:16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM

AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND UPON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," *He then says,*

Heb. 10:17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."