

## **The Trinity** – GCA – Feb. 18, 2024

From the beginning, God is spoken of in the plural.

**Gen. 1:3** -- Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

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

**Deuteronomy 6:4** --Hear (shama), O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one!

The doctrine of the Trinity means that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons--the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Stated differently, God is one in essence and three in person. These definitions express three crucial truths: (1) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, (2) each Person is fully God, (3) there is only one God. God as God is three-in-one.

It is definitional to Christianity: The three historic creedal statements of the church—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.

Apostles’ Creed: An early version of what later became the Apostles’ Creed, called the “Old Roman Creed,” was in use as early as the second century. The earliest written form of this creed is found in a letter that Marcellus of Ancyra wrote in Greek to Julius, the bishop of Rome, about AD 341. About 50 years later, Tyrannius Rufinus wrote a commentary on this creed in Latin. In it, he recounted the viewpoint that the apostles wrote the creed together after Pentecost, before leaving Jerusalem to preach. The title “Apostles’ Creed” is also mentioned about 390 by Ambrose, where he refers to “the creed of the Apostles which the Church of Rome keeps and guards in its entirety” (Ep. 42, trans. in Saint Ambrose: Letters).

The Nicene Creed: The Nicene Creed, a significant Christian statement of faith, was originally formulated during the First Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. It was later amplified, adopted, and authorized as a true expression of the faith during the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381 C.E.12, convened to settle a contention about how God the Father and God the Son could be equal. A priest named Arius challenged this belief, claiming that God created Jesus (this heretical line of thought became known as Arianism).

The Chalcedonian Creed, adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, declares Christ's nature as fully God and fully man.

The Athanasian Creed: The Creed is attributed to Athanasius, a theologian from Alexandria. He was secretary for Alexander, who served as Alexandria's bishop during the Arian debate. Alexander strongly supported Jesus' co-divinity at the Council of Nicaea, and his views strongly impacted Athanasius. Athanasius was elected bishop at Alexander's death. The Athanasian Creed is often attributed to Athanasius because he holds a reputation for fiercely defending the doctrine of the Trinity. This creed was likely developed and written after his death. Athanasius died in 373 AD. The first records of the creed (written in Latin rather than Greek) don't appear until the fifth century.

(catholic (Miriam webster): of, relating to, or forming the ancient undivided Christian church or a church claiming historical continuity from it)

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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."

Augustine's logical explanation goes like this: (1) The Father is God. (2) The Son is God. (3) The Holy Spirit is God. (4) The Father is not the Son. (5) The Son is not the Holy Spirit. (6) The Holy Spirit is not the Father. (7) There is only one God.

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."

The Persons are not three gods; we are not polytheists (as the Muslims accuse us).

Here's what we don't believe.

- Orthodox Trinitarianism rejects Monarchianism (intertwined with Gnosticism) 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.
- 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 "water, vapor, ice" analogy).
- rejects Arianism which denies the full deity of Christ.
- rejects all forms of tri-theism, which teach that the three members of the Godhead are, three distinct Beings, three separate Gods.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are persons. **The Trinity** – (not Oneness. Not modalism.)

The Bible indicates that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons. For example, since the Father sent the Son into the world (**John 3:16**), He cannot be the same person as the Son. Likewise, after the Son returned to the Father (**John 16:10**), the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit into the world (**John 14:26; Acts 2:33**). Therefore, the Holy Spirit must be distinct from the Father and the Son.

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The ontological trinity (ontology -- a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being).

God determines what reality is, so our understanding has to be aligned with God's revelation of Himself, even if we cannot grasp it by human notions of logic – which are based on human limitations.

One God in three persons. Neither the unity nor the diversity take priority, they both work together. Too much unity = modalism. Too much diversity = polytheism. -----

**John 14:16-18** - "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

**John 15:26** -- "When the Advocate 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, **27** and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

**Luke 22:39-42** -- And He came out and went as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. **40** Now when He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." **41** And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, **42** saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me, yet not My will, but Yours be done." (*Distinction of will. Father's plan prevails.*)

**John 14:8** -- Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." **9** Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all so long and have you not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **10** "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. **11** Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. **12** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do because I go to the Father. **13** Whatever you ask in My name, this will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

In the baptism of Jesus, we see the Father speaking from heaven and the Spirit descending from heaven in the form of a dove as Jesus comes out of the water  
**Mark 1:9-11** -- In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Him; <sup>11</sup> and a voice came from the heavens: "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

So, the trinity is a biblical reality, even if its very existence stretches our concept of how reality works. The metaphysics of heaven are different than the physical realities of this world. And we cannot limit Heaven by our physical limitations.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons. The Bible speaks of the Father as God (**Phil. 1:2**), Jesus as God (**Titus 2:13, John 20:28**), and the Holy Spirit as God (**Acts 5:3-4**).

In **John 1:1** it is affirmed that Jesus is God and, at the same time, that He was "with God"-thereby indicating that Jesus is a distinct Person from God the Father.

Also **John 1:18** -- No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained (exegeomai, ex-ayg-eh'-om-ahee) Him.

And in **John 16:13-15 -- 13** "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. **14** He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. **15** All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

**So** we see that although there is a close unity between them all, the Holy Spirit is also distinct from the Father and the Son.

While the three members of the Trinity are distinct, this does not mean that any is inferior to the other. Instead, they are all identical in attributes. They are equal in power, love, mercy, justice, holiness, knowledge, and all other qualities.

If there is one passage which most clearly brings all of this together, it is **Matthew 28:19** -- "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

First, notice that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished as distinct Persons. We baptize into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Second, notice that each Person must be deity because they are all placed on the same level.

(Compare: **Acts 8:14-17** -- Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. )

Jesus would obviously not have us baptize in the name of a mere creature. Therefore, each of the Persons into whose name we are to be baptized must be deity. Third, notice that although the three divine Persons are distinct, we are baptized into their name (singular), not names (plural). The three Persons are distinct, yet only constitute one name. This can only be if they share one essence.

**1Corinthians 12:4** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. **5** And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. **6** And there are varieties of workings, but the same God who works everything in everyone.