

Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament

Matthew 28:19

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

John 8:56

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”

The Trinity Defined

1. By way of definition, the doctrine of the trinity may be concisely stated. Theologian B. B. Warfield has written precisely that, “There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three co-eternal and co-equal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.”
2. The idea of one God, consisting of three co-equal and co-eternal Persons, being of the same substance but distinct in subsistence, is an idea that has fascinated civilizations for centuries, and caused no end to controversy.

Why Do Orthodox Christians Affirm the Doctrine of the Trinity?

3. Many religions reject the Doctrine of the Trinity, including Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. The cults also deny the Trinity, such as the Jehovah Witnesses’.
4. Why then, do conservative Christians insist on affirming faith in the Doctrine of the Trinity?
 - The first answer is that Christians find value in studying the Doctrine of the Trinity. One of the early church fathers said, “In no other subject is error more dangerous or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.” (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 1.3.5) The discovery of the truth. That is what the Christian wants.
 - The second answer is that Christians are convinced that the Bible teaches that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit manifest those attributes which are unique to the Eternal One. The Doctrine of the Trinity is affirmed, not because it is understandable and fully comprehensible, but because it is a part of divine revelation of the Bible.

A Foundational Belief

5. Certainly the Doctrine of the Trinity is a foundational belief within the Baptist tradition, reflected in our confessions of faith. *The London Confession of Faith of 1689*, God and the Holy Trinity, Chapter Two , Sections 1 and 3 ,states the following:

Section 1

“The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence [existence] is in and of Himself,

Who is infinite in being and perfection; Whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; Who is a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions,

Who only hath immortality,

Who dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto;

Who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute;

Who works all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will for His own glory;

Who is most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth;

Who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin;

Who is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and

Who at the same time, is most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and

who will by no means clear the guilty.”

Section 3

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences [a real being; existence], the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit. All are one in substance [that of which a thing consists, material or immaterial], power, and eternity; each having the whole divine essence [attributes], yet this essence being undivided.

The Father was not derived from any other being; He was neither brought into being by, nor did He issue, from any other being.

The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

All three are infinite, without beginning, and are, therefore, only one God, Who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties, and also their personal relations.

6. This doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and our comfortable dependence on Him.

Scriptural Basis for Summary Thoughts

7. Of course, there is a Scriptural basis for this summary statement of the Trinity in the *Baptist Confession* which can be, and should be, studied in detail. But, for now, the objective is simply to share the historic faith of the Baptist church, which in turn reflects the historic faith of the church, especially from the days of the apostle when individuals bowed before Jesus and acknowledged Him as Lord and Savior. Behold Simon Peter as he falls to his knees, saying, “*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*” (Luke 5:8).

A Reaffirmation

8. By affirming belief in the Trinity, Christians do not believe in three gods for that would be Tri-theism. However, the Scriptures are clear that there is, and always has been, an eternally, infinite, perfect existing God that is One, not just in purpose, but in essence.
9. For example, Genesis 1:1 is clear, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*”
10. The Bible reveals God as being eternal; existing before time began, literally before the beginning, and the Genesis narrative also introduces us to God, the Creator of all.
11. It is important to notice that the English translation “God” in Genesis 1:1, comes from the Hebrew word “Elohim.” Elohim is a Hebrew noun with a plural ending.
12. This is perhaps a reference to the plurality of majesty that was commonly used in reference to kings in that part of the world. However, the term “Elohim” may also be the first reference to the Trinity.
13. What is important to remember is that while Christians reaffirm their faith in the Trinity, they insist on the belief in monotheism knowing all about the Great Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4, and the declaration of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:10b.

The Great Shema

14. The call to worship for the Jews before every service (known as the Great Shema) is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, which says, “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*”
15. Isaiah 43:10b says, “*...Before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after Me.*” “This is the core tenant of Judaism and the corresponding belief in monotheism, and it is also the foundation of the Christian understanding and teaching concerning the Trinity” (Kirk Anderson).

When Did Abraham See the Lord

16. When considering the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament, the Christian concedes that the doctrine is more implicit than explicit, and yet there is evidence for the trinity based upon the words of Jesus Himself.

- *John 8:56 Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*

17. The natural inquiry is, “*When did Abraham see the Lord?*” “*When was Abraham glad?*” The Biblical answer is found in Genesis 18.