

Why Christians Believe in the Trinity

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So that we know what we are talking about, let's begin with a definition. A basic formulation of the Trinity doctrine is, God is a Trinity of three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Many who teach against the Trinity misunderstand this formula. They make a wrong assumption about what is meant by God being a Trinity of three Persons. They assume this to be tritheism, a belief in three gods. What is meant by "Person" in speaking of the Trinity is that which has the attributes of personality. It comes from the Latin word *persona*. In the ancient world, actors wore masks. The actor's mask was his *persona*. It showed the role he was playing. In the discussion of the Trinity, "Person" never means "person" as we commonly use it today; that is, it never means a free and independent consciousness with his own will. Nevertheless, it does mean that the Persons have an I-you relationship: as I will point out in the Scriptures cited in this article, they communicate with each other.

What is meant by the word "substance" (sometimes it is referred to as "essence") in the Trinity formula is God's Godness. It is what makes the three Persons one God. They all have the same substance. That is, they are all the same God.

What Scriptural evidence is there for the Trinity? Many sects say there is none because the word Trinity is not found in the Bible. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the Trinity is unscriptural. Oneness churches, such as the United Pentecostal Church, teach that God is one, there are not really three Persons in the Godhead, and that God merely manifests Himself in three ways. Another example of those who deny the Trinity are the Armstrongites. Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God (and, by extension, its many splinter groups), wrote, "The Trinity doctrine *limits* God to a supposed three Persons. It DESTROYS the very gospel of Jesus Christ!"¹ Armstrong believed the Trinity doctrine destroyed that Gospel by limiting the Godhead to three Persons. In Armstrong's words, "The sole value of human life lies in the human spirit and the potential of being begotten of God, later to be born VERY GOD, a child in the GOD FAMILY."² And, "The false Trinity teaching does limit God to three Persons. But God is not limited. As God repeatedly reveals, his purpose is to reproduce himself into what well may become billions of

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God persons. It is the false Trinity teaching that limits God, denies God's purpose and has palpably deceived the whole Christian world."³

The purpose of this short article is not to debate Armstrong's teaching that man can become God (we plan to address that in another article), or to address the Jehovah's Witnesses claims that the Trinity is of pagan origins or is a fourth-century invention (a good starting article exposing the lies of these assertions is found at <http://www.watchman.org/jw/trinity1.htm>). Instead, this article is going to prove that the Bible definitely teaches that God is a Trinity.

The Scripture most often cited as proof of the Trinity is Matthew 28:19–20. It is the Great Commission Jesus gave to His apostles: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Notice that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all three mentioned in the baptismal formula, yet all three have one name. That is, "in the name of" is singular, not plural.

Passages where one Person of the Trinity is spoken of or to by another Person of the Trinity show the distinctness of the three Persons. Jesus often speaks of and prays to the Father (as a small example, see Matthew 10:32–33; 11:25–27; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:29, 42; 23:34, 46; John 5:17–23, 26, 30, 36–37, 45; 6:27, 32, 37, 44–46, 57, 65). The Father speaks of Jesus as His Son (Psalm 2:7; Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7). Jesus and the Holy Spirit are seen as not identical in that the Holy Spirit descends on Him (Luke 3:22), and He is filled with the Holy Spirit and led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). Jesus also speaks in a way that distinguishes the Holy Spirit from Himself and tells His disciples of the coming of the Comforter, or Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:32; John 15:26; 16:7–16).

Scriptures that show that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God support the one, indivisible essence of the Trinity. In John 6:27, Jesus calls the Father, "God the Father." In John 17, Jesus is praying to the Father, whom He describes as "the only true God" (verse 3). This establishes the Father as God, but might leave some doubt as to whether the Son and Holy Spirit are also God. But in Hebrews 1:8, God says to the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." In Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23, Jesus is called Emmanuel (or Immanuel), which the Bible itself interprets as meaning "God with us."

In Colossians 2:8–9, Paul says that in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

The Bible also calls the Holy Spirit God. In Acts 5:3–4, Peter says to Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?... thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." By lying to the Holy Spirit, Ananias was lying to God. In Isaiah 6:8–10, we read that Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord (see verse 5 where the Lord is called the "King, the Lord of hosts"—obviously God) speak to him. In Acts 28:25–27, Paul quotes what the Lord spoke to Isaiah, but says it was the Holy Spirit who spoke. So the Bible says the Holy Spirit is God. Those who claim that the Holy Spirit is not a Person should see "The Personality of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament."

Why do Christians believe in the Trinity? Even this short article presents ample evidence to answer, Because the Bible teaches that God is a Trinity of three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

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1. Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1985), 42.
 2. *Ibid.*, 92.
 3. *Ibid.*, 37.