

Regent University

The Holy Trinity:
How Can God Be One and Three?

A Report

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RELS 201 Principles of Theology

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most highly debatable topics within Christian denominations is in reference to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity – the nature of God in three persons. The Holy Trinity consists of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; these three separate beings all are fully God yet fully distinct. God, being all three of these beings, is one being and there is no other God! The major question we face is: How can this be? While the term “trinity” is never actually mentioned in Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental teaching of Christianity and gives a proper explanation of how the three members of the Godhead relate to one another, doing so by careful exegesis, examining the consistency among Scriptures. In this paper, I intend to answer this question, explaining how God is able to be both three and one, as well as how each of these beings can be separate and distinct, yet equal and of one accord, one mind, one Spirit... one existence.

THE HOLY TRINITY: HOW?

God is Limitless!

The nature of God is not limited whatsoever by human measures such as time or human logic or reason; nor is He limited by the barriers of flesh and bone as we are. It is

difficult for us to fully understand the concept of the Trinity because we cannot relate it to anything applicable to our own lives or any concrete knowledge that we have about physical existence. There is nothing else to which the elements of this doctrine can be equated. However, we can allow ourselves to examine Scriptures which tell us specifically that the Father is distinct, yet the Father is the Son and the Holy Spirit. We can examine those Scriptures which tell us specifically that the Son is distinct, yet the Son is the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. We can also examine the Scriptures which tell us that the Holy Spirit is distinct, yet the Holy Spirit is the Father and the Holy Spirit is the Son. Our capability to understand this depends on the level of Spiritual maturity at which we have arrived in our natural selves as well as the extent to which we are willing to study and pray, asking for revelation and comprehension.

God is not a physical being, but a metaphysical being. He is the creator of the rules and limitations of physical science; therefore He cannot be limited by them. God is one. His “self” was with Him in the beginning. His “Word” was His “Word” even before the beginning of time. How can it be that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were with God from the beginning even before a sacrifice was required; even before an intercessory presence of His Spirit was needed? Because Jesus Christ is God the Father. God sent Himself; His Word... born in the flesh to fulfill His Word on earth... to make a change in the pattern of things... to start a new circle of “life” and a new means of coming to Him. He saw that the Law would only condemn men and because He loves us, He made a way for us to be saved despite our weaknesses – by loving Him back! The Holy Spirit is the nature of Christ, of God, which is with us, indwelling within us always... convicting us as we do wrong; compelling us to correct our ways. How is it that the Holy Spirit is God? In the

same manner as God pulled from His own being to manifest Christ Jesus in the flesh, God... being omnipresent... left with us His own Spirit once His life which was lived through Christ had fulfilled its purpose!

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – Distinct Persons

1 Corinthians 15:28 GNB *“But when all things have been placed under Christ's rule, then he himself, the Son, will place himself under God, who placed all things under him; and God will rule completely over all.”*

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul writes that even Christ Himself will place Himself under God... this completely distinguishes God as being distinct from Christ.

2 Peter 1:17 GNB *“We were there when he was given honor and glory by God the Father, when the voice came to him from the Supreme Glory, saying, “This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased!”*

2 Peter illustrates how God declared that Jesus is His Son, which further indicates that God the Father and Jesus Christ were both distinct persons.

John 14:26 GNB *“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.”*

John 15:26 GNB *“The Helper will come---the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me.”*

Here, in two places within the book of John, Jesus informs us that there will be sent unto us a helper by name of the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father, the Holy Spirit dwells among us in the name of Jesus – edifying us and speaking to us about Him! This creates a distinction between all three persons of God.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – One God

1 Corinthians 8:6 GNB “*yet there is for us only one God, the Father, who is the Creator of all things and for whom we live; and there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created and through whom we live.*”

Again writing in his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul explains that there is but one God – and that God the Father is that one God.

John 1:18 CEV “*No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is truly God and is closest to the Father, has shown us what God is like.*”

This Scripture also differentiates between God the Father and God the Son, while still pointing out that the Son is truly the one God.

Acts 5:3-4 CEV “*Peter said, "Why has Satan made you keep back some of the money from the sale of the property? Why have you lied to the Holy Spirit? -4 The property was yours before you sold it, and even after you sold it, the money was still yours. What made you do such a thing? You didn't lie to people. You lied to God!"*”

Luke includes these two verses in Acts, quoting Peter equating the Holy Spirit to God. This tells us that not only is the Holy Spirit distinct, but the Holy Spirit is also fully God.

THE HOLY TRINITY: WHY?

Responsibilities and Purposes

Many people pose the questions, “Why? What is the reason for the Holy Trinity? Isn't God complete as one?” Although this is admittedly a weak analogy, the concept of the Holy Trinity may be thought of as we would think of a Trilogy movie. The three

equal one full movie. Neither of its components are ideally any more or less powerful, impactful, or important than the others. The movie cannot be completely “one” without the other two, yet all three are equally the one movie and are not separate entities by any means. The reason that this is a weak analogy is that every claim I have made is not true in every case of every trilogy. However, it is a solid start to at least understanding the complex structure of the Trinity.

Why? In the beginning, the Word was with God; and the Word was God. What does this tell us? God, as one being, existed. Always. As He began to see that the world would need a once-and-for-all atonement for all its evil; some ultimate way to redeem the people who loved Him, he pulled Himself out of Himself and birthed Himself in the flesh in the form of a man – Jesus Christ – with the full intention of making the final blood sacrifice while at the same time leaving behind a message – the Gospel message. Once these things had been completed and the Word of God had been fulfilled, the nature of Christ – the Holy Spirit – remained with the people. The Holy Spirit is God’s presence which is always around us; indwelling within us... guiding us and interceding for us.

Does this mean God made Himself into three separate entities; three separate beings? Yes, and no. God is one. Christ is God – pulled from Himself, anointed by Himself, and sacrificed for His children. The Holy Spirit is God – pulled from Himself, anointed by Himself, and living within His children. The Father is the Father. Christ is Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit. All are God; not God-clones; not God-parts. God: completely and wholly. The purpose? To cover us all entirely; to provide for us every opportunity to know the nature of God... to provide us with a chance for redemption through faith – simply by believing in His personal sacrifice.

Benefits for Mankind

What good does it do us that God is three and one? Excellent question! Since we are imperfect and flawed and sinful, and since God loves us so very much, He decided that since we would never be called righteous through the law – that the law would only continue to condemn us to death – He took it on Himself to make the sacrifice FOR us. Why couldn't He simply do away with the law? Because His Word cannot be left unfulfilled. His Word must be true; every word. Since a blood sacrifice was a required element of atonement through the law, God purposed for Christ to do something new – not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it; to create a situation where the debt required for our sins was paid – once-and-for-all! The only requirement for this to be applicable in our lives is that we believe – have faith – in the workings of God through Himself born as Jesus of Nazareth.

The benefits we receive as we trust in Him and receive the revelation provided to us through the Holy Spirit is that as we watch God's Hand at work in our lives, our faith grows – our belief becomes more and more solid – and through our faith in Him and our love for Him, our desire becomes nothing more than to please and obey Him; nothing less than to follow and submit to Him; and through our obedience and our faith, we are redeemed... we are forgiven and we are welcomed as His children, heirs to His kingdom – in line for our inheritance which is set aside for us in a place already prepared for us!

1 Samuel 15:22 GNB *“Samuel said, “Which does the LORD prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is better to obey him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him.”*

God accepts and approves of our sacrificial offerings – tokens of our love and faith – as we submit these in the right spirit and for the right purposes. However, obedience to His Word and submission to the calling of His purpose in our lives is much more important than sacrifice. The Good News is this: even when we stumble and fall short of being obedient, there is forgiveness, which is available to us through the blood of Jesus already shed for our atonement. Without the Holy Trinity; without each person of Godhead, we would be already dead in our sins... we would have no forgiveness, no redemption, no conviction, no intercession. We would be lost and waiting for hell.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It was my intention in this paper to answer the questions of HOW and WHY in regard to the nature of God as explained through the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. I have examined various aspects of these questions and explained to the best of my ability through research and personal experience of how God is able to be both three and one, as well as how each of these beings can be separate and distinct, yet equal and of one accord, one mind, one Spirit... one existence. In conclusion, I will note that God made us a promise through sacrificing Himself as Jesus Christ and offering Himself as the Holy Spirit – a promise of second chances, deliverance, and love... a promise He has kept because He is the same God today as He was when Christ was born.