



# THE GODHEAD – Part 2

## Bethel Discipleship Series

### I. WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY?

A. The trinity is one of man's many attempts to explain the nature of God. Essentially, the trinitarian doctrine asserts that God consists of three separate and distinct "persons" (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). Each of the three is an independent person or personality and is co-equal, co-existent, and co-eternal with the other two.

- God, the Father – the first person in the Trinity
  - God, the Son – the second person in the Trinity
  - God, the Holy Spirit – the third person in the Trinity
1. The trinitarian concept of God has been compared to "one law firm with three partners," "one senate with three senators," or "one club with three members."
  2. The word "trinity" never appears in the Bible, and the original church of the apostolic era did not believe or teach the idea of a "trinity." The official doctrine of the trinity is formally expressed in the following terms, none of which are found in the Bible.
    - "Triune God"
    - "Separate and distinct Persons"
    - "Co-equal, co-eternal, co-existent"
    - "God, the Son"
    - "God, the Holy Ghost"
  3. The trinitarian perception of God is "three separate persons" who work together to form "one God." In other words, the trinitarian view of God is a committee of three persons or individuals who make up one authority, and that authority is known as "God."
  4. The trinitarian dogma was not developed until approximately three hundred years after the apostles died. For the first three centuries after Pentecost, Christianity adhered to the strict monotheism that it had inherited from the Hebrews.

B. The most foundational doctrine of the Bible is "monotheism" – the belief that there is only one God. This doctrine is reiterated over and over again in both the Old and New Testaments. It is God's declaration of His unchanging being and essence.

- **Deuteronomy 6:4** – *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord."*
1. Note that Jesus also reaffirmed this essential truth in the New Testament.
    - **Mark 12:28-29** – *"And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord."*
  2. To the Jewish people, Deuteronomy 6:4 is known as "The Shema":

**"Shema Yisroel Adonai Elochenu Adonai Echad"**  
(Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord)

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3. To the children of Abraham, there has only been and can only be one God!

## *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, J. H. Hertz*

*"This sublime pronouncement of absolute monotheism was a declaration of war against all polytheism ... in the same way, the Shema excludes the trinity of the Christian creed as a violation of the Unity of God." (The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, J. H. Hertz, 1941, Vol. 1, p. 215)*

4. In regard to the Old Testament disclosure of the Godhead, noted Jewish theologian and rabbi, Stanley Greenberg, of the Temple Sinai of Philadelphia writes:

*"[Trinitarian] Christians are, of course, entitled to believe in a Trinitarian conception of God, but their effort to base this conception on the Hebrew Bible must fly in the face of the overwhelming testimony of that Bible. Hebrew Scriptures are clear and unequivocal on the oneness of God. The Hebrew Bible affirms the one God with unmistakable clarity. Monotheism, an uncompromising belief in one God, is the hallmark of the Hebrew Bible, the unwavering affirmation of Judaism and the unshakable faith of the Jew. Under no circumstances can a concept of a plurality of the Godhead or a trinity of the Godhead ever be based upon the Hebrew Bible [Old Testament]."*

5. The Bible speaks loudly on the subject of the Godhead – there is only one God. It is unthinkable to imagine that God proclaimed this foundational truth time and time again in the Old Testament only to change His essence or nature in the New Testament.

- *Malachi 3:5-6* – "...I am the Lord, I change not ..."

- C. To attempt to divide the one, Almighty God into three "persons" is "tritheism," the belief in three gods. This is also known as polytheism (the belief in multiple gods).
- D. The New Testament speaks in harmony with the Old Testament on the subject of the Godhead.
  - *Ephesians 4:4-6* – "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."
- E. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, proclaims that there is only one God. He has revealed Himself in three different, unique manifestations (or modes) to mankind, but each manifestation is the One True and Living God. God is not a committee of three persons; God is ONE.
- F. Just as water (H<sub>2</sub>O) can display itself as liquid, ice or vapor, so God reveals Himself to mankind through three specific modes or manifestations:
  - He is the Father in Creation – the invisible Spirit, omniscient, omnipotent and omni-present.
  - He is the Son in Redemption – the visible, tangible expression of God, willingly subject to the limitations of human flesh.
  - He is the Holy Ghost in regeneration – the renewing quantity of the Spirit that indwells humankind.

## II. THE TRINITY DOGMA VERSUS THE BIBLE

- A. When we examine the trinitarian doctrine in comparison with the scriptural record, numerous inaccuracies become apparent. We will examine a few of these.

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- B. The trinity doctrine teaches that the Father and the Son are two separate, distinct persons. The following scripture is used to support this concept.
- **1 Corinthians 8:5-6** – “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”
1. At first glance, this verse could cause confusion. But, as with most scriptures, the true meaning is clearly revealed when we examine it more closely.
  2. First, this scripture is actually an argument *against* polytheism (the belief in multiple gods), not an argument *for* it. Paul is writing against “gods many” and is reasserting the doctrine of one God.
  3. Secondly, Paul is telling us that there is one God (*One Elohim*) and One Lord Jesus (*One Jehovah who has become salvation*). He is speaking of two manifestations of the One God. One God and one mediator – two manifestations of the same Lord.
    - **Jude 1:4** – “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”
    - **Ephesians 4:5** – “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.”
  4. Thirdly, if this scripture were teaching the concept of multiple persons in the Godhead, it would be inconsistent to leave out the supposed third person, the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned here at all.
  5. The true purpose of this verse is to teach us not to overlook the deity of Jesus Christ. Paul wants us to remember that Jesus Christ is the flesh of God, the very “person” of God Himself, made visible.
    - **Hebrews 1:1-3** – “God ... hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ...who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person...”
    - **1 Timothy 3:16** – “...God was manifest in the flesh, ...received up into glory.”
    - **John 1:18** – “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [manifest, shown] him.”
  6. The physical manifestation of God is Jesus Christ. The only image that we can see of God is His express image, His flesh, Jesus Christ. (*John 8:58; 2 Corinthians 4:6; John 14:9*)
  7. The Bible never uses the term, “God, the Son.” Thus, the concept of two separate persons or individuals, ‘God, the Father’ and “God, the Son,” is not substantiated by scripture.
  8. The trinity doctrine states that Jesus is the “second person in the Godhead,” but Jesus claims to be the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end! (*Revelation 22:13*) Jesus is not a separate person from God; He is God, manifest in the flesh!
- C. The trinity doctrine teaches that the Father and the Son, as two separate persons, are co-equal to each other.
1. The scriptures, on the other hand, teach us that the flesh of God (the Son) was not equal to the Spirit of God (the Father). The flesh was limited; the Spirit was unlimited.
    - **John 14:28** – “[Jesus said] ... My Father is greater than I.” (not co-equal)

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2. Jesus, as a man, hungered, thirsted, grew weary, and slept – as flesh, He voluntarily took these limitations upon Himself. As Everlasting Father (*Isaiah 9:6*), He experienced none of these frailties.
  - a. Jesus was called The Son of God (deity) – (*Mark 1:1; Luke 1:35; John 1:34; John 11:27; 19:7*)
  - b. Jesus was called The Son of Man (humanity) – (*Matthew 8:20; Mark 9:31; Luke 19:10; John 6:53*)
3. Jesus Christ was both God and man, Spirit and flesh. His dual nature is repeatedly revealed throughout His earthly ministry. As flesh, Jesus was certainly not co-equal to the Father.
4. However, the Apostle Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ was more than mortal flesh only; He is also God incarnate (dual nature).
  - **Philippians. 2:5-6** – “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form [image] of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*”
5. Since it would be inconsistent for John 14:28 and Philippians 2:5-6 to contradict each other, it becomes apparent that they are both referring to the different aspects of the dual nature of Jesus Christ.
  - a. As flesh, Jesus Christ was not “co-equal” with God because the flesh placed limitations upon Him. (*John 14:28*)
  - b. As Spirit, Jesus Christ was God. (*Philippians 2:5-6*)
    - **2 Corinthians 5:19** – “*...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself...*”

<p><b>THE FATHER RAISED UP CHRIST'S BODY</b></p> <p><i>Galatians 1:1</i> – “<i>Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and <u>God the Father, who raised him from the dead.</u></i>”</p>	<p><b>JESUS RAISED UP HIS OWN BODY</b></p> <p><i>John 2:19-21</i> – “<i>Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days <u>I will raise it up.</u> Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.</i>”</p>
<p><b>THE FATHER GIVES US THE HOLY GHOST</b></p> <p><i>Luke 11:13</i> – “<i>If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly <u>Father</u> give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?</i>”</p>	<p><b>JESUS GIVES US THE HOLY GHOST</b></p> <p><i>John 16:7</i> – “[<i>Jesus said</i>] Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, <u>I will send him unto you.</u>”</p>
<p><b>THE FATHER WILL RAISE UP OUR BODIES IN THE RESURRECTION</b></p> <p><i>1 Corinthians 6:14</i> – “<i>And <u>God</u> hath both raised up the Lord, and <u>will also raise up us by his own power.</u></i>”</p>	<p><b>JESUS WILL RAISE UP OUR BODIES IN THE RESURRECTION</b></p> <p><i>John 6:44</i> – “<i>No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and <u>I will raise him up at the last day.</u></i>”</p>

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6. In the previous lesson, we looked at a lengthy chart showing that the Father (Jehovah) and Jesus Christ (the Son) are one, not separate persons.
  7. In reviewing the complete scriptural record, it becomes abundantly clear that there is but one God, revealed in the flesh as Jesus Christ.
- D. The trinity doctrine teaches that the Father and Son, as separate persons, are “co-eternal,” each having no beginning and no ending.
1. The scriptures, however, teach that the Son of God, Jesus Christ (the flesh) had a definite beginning. The flesh began when it was begotten of the Father.
    - **Hebrews 1:5** – “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.”
    - **John 1:14** – “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”
    - **Luke 2:11** – “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”
    - **Galatians 4:4** – “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,”
  2. Jesus Christ had an exact definite birth. Before that time, the flesh of God did not exist.
- E. The trinity doctrine teaches that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from God, the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ.
1. However, the Biblical record reveals that the terms “Holy Spirit,” “Holy Ghost” or “Spirit” are often used interchangeably with both Father and Son.
  2. The apostle Paul states that the Old Testament prophets revealed the principles of God to mankind when they were inspired by the Spirit of Christ, but later on he says they were inspired by the Holy Ghost.
    - **1 Peter 1:10-11** – “Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”
    - **2 Peter 1:20-21** – “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”
      - a. Either there are at least two Spirits, or only one Spirit inspired the prophets.
  3. Jesus Christ was begotten of the Father (*John 1:15; John 3:18*); yet scripture reveals that it was the Holy Ghost that conceived Jesus Christ.
    - **Matthew 1:20-21** – “...the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS...”
    - **Luke 1:35** – “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”
      - a. Either Jesus has two fathers, or the Father and the Holy Ghost are the same.

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- *Malachi 2:10* – “Have we not one father? hath not one God created us? ...”
  - *Ephesians 4:6* – “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”
- b. These scriptures repeatedly proclaim one God revealed in different manifestations.
4. Jesus said that another Comforter would come, and that Comforter would be the Holy Ghost. Then in the same discourse Jesus revealed that He, Himself, was that Comforter.
- *John 14:16-18* – “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”
- a. Jesus said that this other Comforter would come in the form of a Spirit, but then He goes on to say, the disciples knew this Comforter already, this Comforter dwelt with them already, and finally He makes it completely clear by saying that He (Jesus Christ) is this coming Comforter. The only difference is in mode or manifestation – while He now dwelt with them, He would return to dwell in them.
- b. This reveals not two separate persons, but one person in different manifestations.
5. The scriptures reveal that as Christians, we are to be filled with the Holy Ghost. But is this Holy Ghost a “third person” of a triune Godhead?
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US:**  
*Acts 2:38* – “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”  
*Acts 2:4* – “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”  
*Acts 13:52* – “And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.”
  - **THE SPIRIT OF GOD WITHIN US:**  
*1 Corinthians 3:16* – “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”  
*Romans 8:9* – “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you...”
  - **THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST WITHIN US:**  
*Colossians 1:27* – “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”  
*Romans 8:10* – “And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”
6. If the Father, Son and Spirit are three different persons, then we are filled with three different Spirits. But if we are filled with only one Spirit, then they must all be one and the same.
- *Ephesians 4:4-6* – “There is one body, and one Spirit...”
  - *1 Corinthians 12:13* – “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

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7. We see, once again, that the Bible reveals no division in the Godhead.

## III. COMMON ARGUMENTS USED IN SUPPORT OF THE TRINITY DOCTRINE

A. Proponents of the trinity doctrine claim that the word “one” (Hebrew: *echad*) in the “Shema” (*Deuteronomy 6:4*) means unity or harmony and not necessarily one, single entity.

### “Shema Yisroel Adonai Elochenu Adonai Echad”

(*Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord*)

1. To understand this word, “one” (*echad*), we need to examine how it is used elsewhere in scripture.

- *Genesis 2:21-22* – The Lord took one (*echad*) rib from Adam.
- *Genesis 22:2* – Abraham was to offer Isaac upon one (*echad*) mountain.
- *Leviticus 16:5* – Israel was instructed to offer one (*echad*) ram as a sacrifice.

2. In the Old Testament, the word, *echad* is used 901 times to designate one, single character. Obviously, *echad* means one!

B Proponents of the trinity doctrine claim that more than one God was present at the creation.

- ***Genesis 1:26-27*** – “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*”

1. The trinitarian concept of this scripture is that “God, the Father “ is talking to “God, the Son” and “God, the Holy Spirit.”

2. However, the verses conclude by saying “his own image,” “created he him,” and “created he them.” Scripture is adamant that there is but one creator.

- ***Isaiah 44:24*** – “*...I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself”*

3. There are two commonly accepted explanations for the use of the plural pronouns “us” and “our” in Genesis 1:26.

- a. God is using the “majestic plural” as was common with ancient monarchs.
- b. God is speaking to His angels.

### Liberty Annotated Study Bible

*“The plural pronoun us is most likely a majestic plural from the standpoint of Hebrew grammar and syntax.” (Jerry Falwell [Executive Editor], Liberty Annotated Study Bible, Lynchburg: Liberty University, 1988, p. 8)*

### Rabbi David Rubin, Director of the Institute of Torah Studies, Jerusalem

*“In Genesis 1:26, when God says ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,’ He is talking to His Angels.”*

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## Word Biblical Commentary On Genesis, Gordan J. Wenham

*“[Trinitarian] Christians have traditionally seen [Genesis 1:26] as adumbrating [foreshadowing] the Trinity. It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural meant to the original author.” (Gordon J. Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary on Genesis, Word Books, 1987, p. 27)*

4. The scriptural record is clear – there is only one creator. (*Matthew 19:4; Revelation 4:11; Colossians 3:10*)
- C. Proponents of the trinity doctrine claim that the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim* is uni-plural and denotes a plurality of persons or gods, much like the word “sheep” can denote one or many animals.
1. Again, to understand this word, we need to see how it used elsewhere in scripture.
- **Genesis 32:30** – *Jacob wrestled with Elohim face to face – Jacob wrestled with only one.*
  - **Exodus 32:4** – *the golden calf is referred to as Elohim – there was only one calf.*
  - **Judges 6:31** – *Baal is referred to as Elohim – there was only one deity known as Baal.*

## The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, J. H. Hertz

*“Elohim is a Uni-plural form which is often used in Hebrew to denote a plenitude of might and majesty ... Here it is indicated that God unifies all the forces of eternity and infinity. The Hebrew word Elohim is Uni-plural, but is interpreted as singular thus precluding the idea that its subject is to be understood in a plural sense. This term is used exclusively of divine activity.” (The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, J. H. Hertz, p. 5)*

2. The word, *Elohim* refers to God’s greatness, majesty, and multiple attributes – it does not imply a plurality of persons or personalities.

## A Dictionary Of The Bible, William Smith

*“The fanciful idea that Elohim referred to the trinity of persons in the Godhead hardly finds now no supporter among scholars. It is either what grammarians call the plural of majesty, or it denotes the fullness of divine strength, the sum of powers displayed by God.” (William Smith: A Dictionary Of The Bible, p220).*

## IV. THE HISTORICAL RECORD

- A. We have examined the scriptural record and discovered that it teaches definitively that God is one. What does the historical record say concerning the beliefs and practices of the early church?

### Christian Doctrine, Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr.

*“The Bible does not teach the doctrine of the trinity. Neither the word trinity itself, nor such language as one in three, three in one, one essence or substance or three persons, is biblical language. The language of the [trinity] doctrine is the language of the ancient Church, taken not from the Bible but from classical Greek philosophy.” (Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., Christian Doctrine, page 92)*

### New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, Volume 13, page 1021

*“The Trinitarian dogma is in the last analysis a late 4th century invention.”*

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## Encyclopedia Britannica

*“Neither the word trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament.”*

## **“Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,” by John Henry Newman**

*“Let us allow that the whole circle of doctrines, of which our Lord is the subject, was consistently and uniformly confessed by the Primitive Church ...but it surely is otherwise with the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity.” (“Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,” John Henry Newman, cardinal under Pope Leo III; 1878, page 40)*

## **The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1912, Volume 15, Trinity, page 47**

*“In Scripture there is as yet no single term by which the Three Divine Persons are denoted together. The word [tri'as] (of which the Latin trinitas is a translation) is first found in Theophilus of Antioch about A. D. 180 ... Shortly afterwards it appears in its Latin form of trinitas in Tertullian.”*

## **The Triune God, by Edmund Fortman**

*“The Old Testament tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a triune God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is no evidence that any sacred writer even suspected the existence of a trinity within the Godhead. Even to see in the Old Testament, suggestions or fore-shadowings or veiled signs of the trinity of persons, is to go beyond the words and intent of the sacred writers. The New Testament writers give us no formal or formulated doctrine of the trinity, no explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal, divine persons. Nowhere do we find any trinitarian doctrine of three distinct subjects of divine life and activity in the same Godhead.” (The Triune God, by Edmund Fortman, Jesuit Priest)*

*“...Paul has no formal trinitarian doctrine and no clear-cut realization of a trinitarian problem ...there is no trinitarian doctrine in the Gospels or Acts ... nowhere do we find any trinitarian doctrine of three distinct subjects of divine life and activity in the same Godhead.” (The Triune God, Edmund Fortman, pp. 22-23).*

## **A Short History of Christian Doctrine, by Bernhard Lohse**

*“As Far as the New Testament is concerned, one does not find in it an actual doctrine of the trinity.”*

## **For Christ's Sake, by Tom Harpur**

*“What is most embarrassing for the [trinitarian] church is the difficulty of proving any of these statements of dogma [of the trinity] from the New Testament documents. You simply cannot find the doctrine of the Trinity set out anywhere in the Bible. ...This research has led me to believe that the great majority of regular churchgoers are, for all practical purposes, tritheists. That is, they profess to believe in one God, but in reality they worship three...”*

## **Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics**

*“At first the Christian Faith was not trinitarian. It was not so in the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic ages, as reflected in the New Testament and of the early Christian writings.”*

## **The Three-Personed God, by William J. Hill**

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*“The New Testament itself is far from any doctrine of the Trinity or of a triune God who is three co-equal Persons of One Nature.” (William J. Hill, The Three-Personed God, Washington DC; The Catholic University of America Press, 1982, p. 27)*

## **Encyclopedia International**

*“The doctrine of the Trinity did not form a part of the Apostles’ preaching, as this would have been reported in the New Testament. The trinity in its final form is a product of many factors.” (Encyclopedia International, Ian Henderson, University of Glasgow, 1969, page 226).*

## **The Christian Doctrine of God, by Emil Brunner**

*“... We must honestly admit that the doctrine of the Trinity did not form part of the early Christian-New Testament message. Certainly, it cannot be denied that not only the word ‘Trinity,’ but even the explicit idea of the Trinity is absent from the apostolic witness of the faith... The doctrine of the Trinity itself, however, is not a Biblical Doctrine.” (Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949, pp. 205 & 236)*

## **Origin and Evolution of Religion, by E. Washburn Hopkins**

*“To Jesus and Paul the doctrine of the trinity was apparently never known. They say nothing about it.” (Origin and Evolution of Religion, by Yale University Professor E. Washburn Hopkins)*

## V. THE ORIGINS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

- A. If both the biblical and historical records reveal that the doctrine of the trinity was not the original doctrine of the first church, how and when did this doctrine come into existence?
- B. Jesus and the apostles warned that there were deceiving spirits and ungodly men who were trying to subvert and pollute the truth of God’s Word even during their own lifetimes.
  - **Matthew 7:15** – *“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”*
  - 1. The apostle Paul specifically warns us concerning attempts to distort or pervert the doctrine of the Godhead, the understanding of the essence and nature of God.
    - **Colossians 2:8-9** – *“Beware lest any man spoil you [lead you astray] through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments [thinking] of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”*
  - 2. Paul explicitly warns, “Don’t be led astray in your understanding of the one God – all the fullness of deity (the godhead) dwells in the body or flesh of Jesus Christ.”
- C. During and after the time of the New Testament, Greek thought and philosophy was accepted and popular among the nations of the Middle East. The Greek culture of the time was noted for its grandiose philosophies and never-ending search for truth.
  - **1 Corinthians 1:22-24** – *“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”*

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- D. According to the historical record, the doctrine of the trinity had its roots in the Greek philosophy that was prevalent during the time of the first church, most notably, the philosophies that had been originated by Plato, one of Greece's most famous philosophers.

## The Church of the First Three Centuries

*“The doctrine of the trinity was of gradual and comparatively late formation. It had its origin in a source entirely foreign from that of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. It grew up, and was engrafted on Christianity, through the hands of the Platonizing Fathers.”*

## Christianity's Debt To The Heretics

*“The doctrine of the Trinity was not a first century argument but a 4<sup>th</sup> century argument ...trinitarianism did not proceed from orthodox Christianity, but from un-believers ...The trinity philosophy came from a struggle that predated Christianity in Alexandria Egypt between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. These two philosophies speculated on the nature of divine beings.”*

- E. Plato was one of the most creative and influential thinkers in Western philosophy. Born in Athens, Greece in 428 or 427 BC, he was a student of Socrates for eight years. Plato's influence on western philosophy has been called “unmatched and monumental.”
1. One of Plato's most celebrated writings was his infamous “Timeaus,” in which he postulated the idea that there were “three entities” that existed in the intelligible world.
  2. To demonstrate his philosophy, Plato created an equilateral triangle to represent these three entities. At the points of the triangle he placed the names, Nous, Meno and Phaedo.
- F. Approximately 800 years later, in 205 AD, another philosopher, Plotinus, was born in Lykopolis in Upper Egypt. Plotinus became the founder of “Neoplatonism,” which expanded and propagated the ideas of Plato, especially those philosophies found in the “Timeaus.”
1. In short, the Neoplatonist philosophy stated that there were three entities in the world: a *divine mind* or “god” which was the creator of the universe; a *demiurge*, or smaller god which came out of the bigger god; which in turn generated the “world soul” or *spirit*.
  2. It is important to remember that this philosophy had nothing to do with inspired scripture. Neoplatonism was based solely on paganistic, human thinking. It was a mixture of Platonic philosophy and Egyptian mysticism.
  3. Plotinus, having been born in Egypt, was well versed in Egyptian mysticism and his philosophy of Neoplatonism was influenced by the Egyptian idea of a trinity of gods (father, mother, and son, Osiris, Isis, and Horus).

## The French Nouveau Dictionnaire Universel (New Universal Dictionary)

*“The Platonic trinity, itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity of attributes that gave birth to the three hypostases or divine persons taught by the Christian churches ...This Greek philosopher's conception of the divine trinity ...can be found in all the ancient [pagan] religions.” (French Nouveau Dictionnaire Universel [New Universal Dictionary], Vol. 2, p. 1467)*

## A History of Egypt, by Joseph Crafton Milne

*“It is not improbable that the development of the doctrine of the trinity, which formed no part of the original Jewish Christianity, may be traced to Egyptian influence. As a whole,*

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*the older Egyptian theology was permeated with the idea of triple divinity, as seen both in the triads of gods which the various cities worshipped, and the three fold names, representing three differing aspects of the same personality, under which each god might be addressed.” (A History of Egypt, Joseph Crafton Milne, Vol. 5, page 155)*

## **A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge, Lyman Abbott**

*“The trinity is a corruption borrowed from the heathen religions, and engrafted on the Christian faith.” (A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge, Lyman Abbott, 1875, p944).*

## **The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ, by Will Durant**

*“From Egypt came the idea of a divine trinity...Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it...” (The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ, by Will Durant, Part III, 1944, p. 595)*

- G. Unfortunately, when Neoplatonism became prominent, Christianity was almost three hundred years old and stagnation and apostasy had begun to take place within it. The popularity of Neoplatonism exerted a profound influence on the leaders of the church. They began to be “spoiled though philosophy and vain deceit” (*Colossians 2:8*) and started replacing biblical doctrines with pagan ideas.

## **The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge**

*“The doctrines of the Logos and the Trinity received their shape from Greek Fathers, who ...were much influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Platonic philosophy ... That errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this source cannot be denied.” (The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson, 1957, Vol. IX, p. 91)*

- H. Tertullian (c. 150 – c. 225 AD) was one of the first Roman Church fathers to use the word *trinitas* (Latin for “trinity”).

## **The New International Encyclopedia**

*“The term Trinity was originated by Tertullian, a Roman Catholic church father.” (The New International Encyclopedia, Vol. 22 page 477)*

1. According to Tertullian’s own writings, he adopted the triangle of Plato’s “Timeaus” and changed the names to read “God, the Father,” “God, the Son,” and “God, the Holy Ghost.”
  2. By his own admission, most Christians of Tertullian’s time rejected his idea of a trinity on two grounds: (1) Tertullian’s doctrine was polytheism, and (2) Tertullian’s doctrine divided the unity of God.
- I. Tertullian’s doctrine of the trinity was taken up and further developed by other men such as Origen and Saint Augustine, causing a fierce disagreement among Christian believers.
1. Men such as Praxeus, Sebellius, Noetus, Epigonus, Cleomenes, and Menay, along with others, contended for the original doctrine of the oneness of God.
  2. In a manuscript still in existence today, Tertullian wrote of Praxeus, “He [Praxeus] maintains that there is only one Lord ... he says that the Father Himself came down and was Himself born in Jesus Christ.”
  3. Tertullian later became a follower of Montanus, who claimed to be the “Comforter” foretold by Jesus in John 14 and the last prophet before the end of the world. Tertullian was

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eventually excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church but his pagan doctrine survived.

- J. To complicate matters further, the Roman Emperor, Constantine, who had earlier hated and killed Christians, decided to convert to Christianity because of a vision he claimed to have seen. In order to unify the Roman Empire, Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the empire.
  1. Constantine did not practice true Christianity. After professing to be a Christian, he killed his son, nephew, and wife (326 AD). He purposely delayed being baptized in water until shortly before death, so that he could continue to sin and then be cleansed of all his wrongdoings at the end of his lifetime.
  2. Constantine became aware of the great dissension within the church and in 325 AD, he called for a church council (*the Nicene Council*) to officially adopt the new trinitarian doctrine. At that time, the trinitarian doctrine became the official dogma of the Roman Church.

## **History of the Christian Church by Philip Schaff (1882)**

*“At the beginning Christianity inherited the Monotheism of Israel, but gradually developed the elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity. Around the 4<sup>th</sup> century an elaborate theory of a threefoldness in God appeared. In this Nicene or Athanasian form of thought God is said to consist of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost separate and distinct from each of the other divine personages.”*

3. However, even after its adoption by the Roman church, most believers would not accept the new doctrine. Constantine called a second church council in 381 AD and added a “death clause” to the new doctrine, condemning to death anyone who did not accept the concept of a “Triune God.”

## **The Rise of Christianity, W.H.C. Frend**

*“Why Constantine put forth the trinity without inquiring further into the meaning of the terms we do not know. However, the Emperor had spoken, and no one dared touch the creed during his lifetime. The great majority of the Eastern bishops found themselves in a false position.” (The Rise of Christianity, 1985, W.H.C. Frend, p. 140-141)*

4. It is not surprising that under the weight of this penalty, most of the apostate church adopted the doctrine of the trinity at this time. This erroneous doctrine has remained the foundational dogma of the Roman Catholic Church from the fourth century until now.

## **The Encyclopedia Britannica**

*“Neither the word Trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament... The Council of Nicea in 325 stated the crucial formula for that doctrine in its confession that the Son is 'of the same substance [homousios] as the Father', even though it said very little about the Holy Spirit. Over the next half century, Athanasius defended and refined the Nicene formula, and, by the end of the 4th century, under the leadership of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus (the Cappadocian Fathers), the doctrine of the Trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since.” (The Encyclopedia Britannica; heading, 'Trinity')*

## **New Catholic Encyclopedia, R. L. Richard**

*“...when one does speak of an unqualified Trinitarianism, one has moved from the period of Christian origins to, say, the last quadrant of the 4th century.” (R.L.Richard, “Trinity, Holy,” in New Catholic Encyclopedia, 15 vols.).*

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5. Thus, we see that the doctrine of the trinity was not the doctrine of the first church, but rather an evolution of paganistic philosophy that gradually replaced biblical doctrine in the fourth century AD.
- K. However, champions of the original doctrine of the “oneness” of God have existed throughout history. Braving persecution and even death itself, brave men and women held firm to the biblical doctrine, “*Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.*”
- Megetius was condemned to death for his oneness beliefs around 782 AD.
  - Peter Abelard of France was condemned in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Almaric of Bena in 1400
  - Michael Servetus, the brilliant Spaniard who was the first to discover the pulmonary circulation of blood, was burned at the stake in 1553 with acid poured on the top of his head for denying the trinity. In his book, *The Restitution of Christianity*, Servetus wrote:  
  
*“I find no separation in the one God. There is no separation between Christ and God. He and the father are one as the ray and the sun are one light. For He who was of one time the hidden God of Israel, now is made manifest. And this is the appearance of our Savior Jesus Christ and God and it His spirit that fills all men.”*
  - Julius Trevisannus, was drowned for professing oneness beliefs.  
  
*History records that as Trevisannus was pushed into the water with a millstone around his leg, he cried out “Jesus is my God!”*
  - Sir Isaac Newton, inventor of the theory of gravity and acclaimed as the greatest scientist of all time, wrote a manuscript entitled, “*A Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture*” in which he was hostile to the idea of a trinity.
  - William Penn, the founder of the state of Pennsylvania, was imprisoned in England in 1668 for writing a tract entitled *The Sandy Foundation Shaken*, which was a treatise against the doctrine of the Trinity. He later fled to America to escape religious persecution.
- L. There have always been those who have stood for truth in every generation. Often in the minority, sometimes persecuted even unto death, the believers of truth have prevailed through every era of time – and the fight for truth continues today.
- **Jude 1:3-4** – “*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once [originally] delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

## VI. CONCLUSION:

- A. In conclusion, we see that the doctrine of the trinity is non-biblical both in terminology and in historical origin. It has its roots in polytheism, pagan religion, and pagan philosophy. The doctrine itself did not exist in church history before the third century.
- B. We must hold fast to the truth of God’s Word, not philosophy, vain deceit, the tradition of men, or the rudiments of the world. (*Colossians 2:8*) God’s Word must be the final authority!
- C. There is one God, and He has revealed Himself in the flesh of Jesus Christ and dwells within us as the Holy Ghost.

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- **John 17:3** – “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*”

Additional reading material (available through the Pentecostal Publishing House):

*Essentials of Oneness Theology*, David K. Bernard  
*Ancient Champions Of Oneness (Revised)*, William Chalfant  
*Oneness And Trinity – AD 100 – 300*, David K. Bernard  
*The Oneness View of Jesus Christ*, David K. Bernard  
*The Oneness of God*, David K. Bernard  
*The Trinitarian Controversy*, David K. Bernard  
*The God of Two Testaments*, Robert Brent Graves  
*The Godhead Made Easy*, Bill Davis  
*Our God Is One*, Talmadge French  
*Oneness, The Trinity And Logic*, Robert A. Herrmann

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