

The one true God

Pastor Tim Melton

Recently we had a gentlemen speak to our youth about his journey from Hinduism to Christianity. He had been born into a Brahmin family, into the highest caste of the Hindu religion. In his teenage years he had been exposed to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and after several years he chose to follow Jesus Christ. Listening to his testimony and spiritual journey it served as a reminder that our world is filled with many religions and beliefs. Some worship one God, others worship multiple Gods, some have no God, and others promise ways for you to become a God.

In today's spiritual climate, where many beliefs are taking hold and where many believe that all religions lead to the same God, it is essential for us as followers of Jesus Christ to go back to the basics and be reminded of the teachings of scripture, of our sin, of our lostness, and why *"Salvation can be found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

The belief in one God is referred to as *"mono-theism."* "Mono" in Greek means one and "theo" in Greek means God. The belief that there is more than one God is known as "polytheism". "Poly" in Greek means many and once again "theo" means God. The Christian faith is "monotheistic". There is only one God. Some have mistaken Christianity as being polytheistic and claimed that we have three gods, known as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but that shows that they do not have a true understanding of our beliefs and of the scriptures.

Today we are going to be studying the one true God and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The word "trinity" means three-in-one. The Trinity is the truth about God that explains how He is one God, but is made up of three persons. We will consider scriptures that speak of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. At the same time we will rely on scriptures such as Deuteronomy 6:4, which clearly define God as one God: *"Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One!"*

I will admit that when talking about this subject of “three being one”, it will have a tendency to confuse or confound our minds, but we must be committed to observing what the Bible teaches about the subject. At the same time we must submit ourselves to the truth found in Isaiah 55:8-9, where God reminds us that, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”*

Our academic study of a passage is helpful, but is not sufficient to understand the full revelations of God. While God has shown us much about Himself, there will be some characteristics of our infinite God that our finite minds will never be able to grasp. In those moments when we cannot wrap the varied truths about God into a neat package and tie up all the loose ends, we will need to be content with that and trust our truly unfathomable God, who at times is beyond our understanding. The apostle Paul states it in these words in Romans 11:34, *“For who has known the mind of the Lord?”* The prophet Isaiah agrees when he says, *“No one can fathom His understanding”* (Isaiah 40:28).

Let us first turn our attention to the “one true God.” As mentioned earlier, Deuteronomy 6:4 clearly defines God as one God: *“Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One!”* This declaration was spoken daily as part of the Shema, the most important prayer in the Jewish tradition. The following scriptures add more credence to the truth of there being only One True God:

- 1 Corinthians 8:4 says, *“Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’”*
- Deuteronomy 4:39 supports this understanding of One God when it says, *“Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.”*
- Isaiah 43:10 says, *“‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.’”*

When we look back again to Deuteronomy 6:4, *“Hear O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is One!”* we find this interesting fact:

In Deuteronomy 6:4 the word for LORD, in all capital letters, in the original language is YHWH, or as we pronounce it, Yahweh. He is not just any God, or whichever you choose to call Him. He is not Allah of the Muslims, He is not the Sikh’s Waheguru. It is the name that God gave Himself when talking with Moses from the burning bush. In Exodus 3:13-14 it says, *“Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* The phrase “I am” in the original language is Yahweh. He is the Creator God who judged the world with the flood and saved Noah and his family. He is the God who called Abraham and promised descendants that would number more than stars in the sky and sand on the seashore. He is the God of Moses, of David, of Elijah and of John the Baptist.

In John 8:58 we see Jesus even use this name of God to refer to Himself. Jesus, talking to the Jewish leaders, said, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”* So the Jews said to him, *“You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”* *“Jesus told them, “Truly, I tell all of you emphatically, before there was an Abraham, I AM!”* It was a direct claim that Jesus and Yahweh God were the same. The religious leaders responded by picking up stones wanting to kill Jesus.

In Deuteronomy 6:4, *“Hear O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is One”*, the word for “one” comes from the Hebrew word *“echad”*, which many times was used to refer to a unity of more than one person. In Genesis 2:24 we find this same word: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* In Ezra 3:1 this same word was also used: *“. . . the people gathered as one man.”* It is interesting that the word meant “one”, but in a plural sense.

We see evidence of this “plural one” when referring to God in scripture:

- Genesis 1:1 – *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* In this verse the word for God is the Hebrew plural noun for God, *“Elohim”*.
- In Genesis 1:26 the writer uses plural pronouns to refer to God: *“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”*
- Genesis 11:7 does the same: *“Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”*
- Once again we find a plural pronoun referring to God in Isaiah 6:8 – *“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’”*

Plural pronouns are clearly used in Genesis 1:26; Genesis 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8. Some could rightfully argue that the use of plural pronouns alone is not enough to ensure the existence of a “Plural One”, triune God, but when brought together with the full counsel of scripture it does build a strong case for the Trinity of God.

We must realize that the actual word “trinity” is not found in scripture, but the proof of this truth is. It is a term that can be summarized as One God made up of three persons, three-in-one. The three persons are distinct, but yet made up of one “essence or nature.”

The word trinity comes from “tri”, meaning three, and “unity”, meaning one. In one **being**, that is our God, there are three coexisting and coeternal distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are distinguishable, but exist in perfect communion and fellowship with each other. It seems to be a contradiction in terms, how can there be one and three at the same time, but in scripture we find various descriptions of the one true God described as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Through these verses we will see that the three “persons” together are not just different representations of the One True God. They are not just three different “faces” or masks God wears

depending on the situation (modalism). They are also not three distinct gods (tritheism). They are truly three distinct divine persons who are One God.

The apostle Peter, for example, had personally experienced the Trinity, for he had heard the Father speak from heaven, had walked with the Son, and was then indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

- In Matthew 3:16-17 we see the three persons of God all at one time: *“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”*
- The three persons of the Trinity are listed in Matthew 28:19, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*
- Again we find this in Paul’s writings in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.”*

We continue to see this pattern in the passages of scripture that follow:

- 2 Corinthians 1:21–22, *“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”*
- Romans 15:16, *“ . . . To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest of the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”*
- In John 14:16-17, Jesus said, *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”*
- In 2 Corinthians 13:14 we see another example of all three “persons” of the Trinity being set apart: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*

This is problematic for groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who see Jesus as Michael the Archangel and the Holy Spirit as nothing more than an impersonal force of God. If this were true, the previous verse, 2 Corinthians 13:14, would have to be translated, *“the grace of the Archangel Michael, the love of God and the fellowship of the impersonal force of God be with you all.”* We don’t see this type of grouping of names and designation anywhere in scripture. Scripture drives us towards the belief of a triune God.

While there are various verses that group together the three persons of the Trinity, there are verses that treat them as distinct divine persons as well. That is the reason for the mystery of the Trinity.

Jesus clearly did not consider Himself to be the Father or the Holy Spirit. Also, take note of all the other times in scripture that Jesus talked with, submitted to, and prayed to God the Father.

In the following verses, God is clearly presented as God the Father:

- 1 Corinthians 8:6, *“Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”*

In the following verses the Holy Spirit is presented as God:

- Hebrews 9:14, *“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*
- Romans 8:9 – *“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”*
- Acts 5:3-4, *“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’”*

In the above verses the Holy Spirit and God are used interchangeably. This same pattern is seen below in the following verses:

- 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, *“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”*
- But in 1 Corinthians 6:19 it refers to the temple of the Holy Spirit, *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?”*

Without the Trinity, you have no gospel. Because of our sin against an infinite God, the wage of sin had to be paid by an infinite sacrificial lamb. To strip Christ of His divinity leaves us with a Savior that is not sufficient. It is not possible that we trust our salvation to another created being who is bound by time and space. It is not in agreement with God's command *“to have no other God's before me”* (Exodus 20:3) and then discover that every knee will bow before Jesus of Nazareth, another created being, whose name will somehow be above all other names (Phil. 2:8-11). Scripture commands, *“that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father”* (John 5:23). Without the doctrine of the Trinity, the Gospel and its claims begin to unravel.

As we seek to understand and live in the midst of the truths of the Trinity, we benefit in two ways. First of all the object of our worship becomes much clearer. Because there is only one true God, *“we should have no other gods before Him.”* We should worship no one or nothing else (Exodus 20:3). Because there is only one true God then *“We should love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength”* (Mark 12:30). We should worship God and Him alone with an undistracted, full-devoted love.

Secondly, because He is in three persons, we receive all the blessings that a Father brings to their children. In Christ we are forgiven and invited to draw near to a God who loves us unconditionally. In the Spirit we are empowered to live the Christian life and to never again be separated from God.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).