

## **Belief in the Trinity - optional extra, or fundamental truth?**

Many Christians are unsure of this belief. Jehovah's Witnesses will try to sow seeds of doubt in your mind when they knock on your door. The greatest asset of the cults is the ignorance of many Christians. Not to be bothered with doctrine is a lazy attitude that will lead to a shallow faith - easily shipwrecked. (1Tim 1:19)

In the Bible, "Trinity" is never mentioned, yet the various writers seem to pass from Father, to Son and Holy Spirit quite naturally. To each is attributed the characteristics, actions and worship due to God. Each is attributed with personality yet neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit is in any way shown as being less than God.

A study of the whole New Testament, rather than odd isolated verses, will illuminate the truth that both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine.

Is the Trinity one God expressed in three different and changing forms?

No. The evidence of the Scripture is :

a) Jesus was distinct and separate from the Father - e.g. 1 Tim 1:1-2 Jesus prayed to the Father - Luke 23:34 -46, John 11:41 The Father knew and kept things from the Son - Mark 13:32, Acts 1:7 Jesus loved the Father - John 14:31

b) The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father. To the first disciples the Holy Spirit was not a power or a force but a dynamic and living personality filling individual lives and enabling people to offer worship. See Acts 5:31-32, Acts 7:55

c) Jesus Christ is distinct from the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament they are always treated separately. See Acts 5:31-32, 7:55 The Holy Spirit descended on Christ at his baptism (Mark 1:10) and gave Jesus power for his work (Luke 4:18). Through the power and intervention of the Holy Spirit the resurrection took place (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples - John 16:7. The continuing work of the Holy Spirit is to point people to Jesus - John 16:14.

No wonder the evil one raises doubts as to the power and personality of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't want people to come to faith!

Why did it take 300 years to work out the doctrine of the Trinity?

As the age of the apostles passed and Jesus did not immediately return, problems emerged in the churches. The broad outline of revealed truth was respected as an inheritance from the apostles but "official" interpretation was needed if everyone wasn't to give an individual interpretation.

The books of the New Testament, many of which started life as letters, survived partly because they agreed with what had already been passed on by word of mouth.

The idea grew up that church leaders were the guardians of doctrinal purity. Those writing immediately after the Apostolic age became known as the "Church Fathers".

The earliest written Creed is thought to have been in use at Ephesus by 130AD and is Trinitarian in content.

Irenaus (pronounced Eye-ren-ayus) born around 125 - 130 said that Jesus was truly God and truly man.

Tertullian, who lived between 160AD and 220, was the first to specifically use the term "Trinity". He put it like this, "the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are of one substance. The Son or Logos is eternal since the logos is the reason or word of God. The Father projected

the Son as the root the tree, the river, the fountain and the sun the ray. But there is no separation."

Modern day Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was the first created being second to, and inferior to, Jehovah God, the Father. This is the heresy for which Arius and his followers were expelled from the church in AD 326.

Do Christians worship three gods?

Definitely not. Christianity is rooted in the Jewish belief of one God. Christians believe that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in "Substance" (difficult idea - because we do not know the "substance" from which spirit is made). Christians believe that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-equal, co-existent, and co-eternal. Neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit are considered on any way inferior to the Father. Each is fully God - yet none divide God. Members of Baptist Churches affirm that "Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in matters of faith and practise as revealed in the Scriptures".

Is it all a big argument over words?

Slogans such as "Three in One" or "One God in trinity" are not easily explained in two or three sentences. Doctrinal statements and creeds are attempts to put into words truth about an invisible and eternal being. An experience of God and belief in Christ's death as being the only way sin can be removed are more important than arguing over doctrine.

Why should we be surprised if God in all his mystery cannot easily be understood by the minds He created? God is larger than human experience. It is foolish to try and pretend that God has given all the information and answers we would like. Great security comes from holding to the ancient and universally accepted Christian truths of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ. They are firm anchors preventing a drift to error in the swirling sea of human opinions.

Doctrine from experience

The written down and worked out doctrine of both the trinity and the Divinity of Christ arose gradually and painfully as Christians strove to express adequately the mystery that is God. Christians of each century have faced a succession of challenges aimed at undermining their faith in a Trinitarian God and in a Divine Son. The teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists and Mormons are little more than old heresies recycled.

It is a testimony to the God who works in history and through controversy that, although today there are 28,000 different Christian denominations, the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Divinity of Christ are beliefs which we all hold in common.

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