

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## God in Three Persons: The Trinity

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*How can God be three persons yet one God?*

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It is important to remember the doctrine of the Trinity in connection with the study of God's attributes. When we think of God as eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, and so forth, we may have a tendency to think only of God the Father in connection with these attributes. But the biblical teaching on the Trinity tells us that all of God's attributes are true of all three persons, for each is fully God. God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are also eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely loving, omniscient, and so forth.



The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian faith. To study the Bible's teachings on the Trinity gives us great insight into the question that is at the center of all of our seeking after God: What is God like in himself? Here we learn that in himself, in his very being, God exists in the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet he is one God.

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### **A. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY IS PROGRESSIVELY REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE**

#### **1. Partial Revelation in the Old Testament**

The word *trinity* is never found in the Bible, though the idea represented by the word is taught in many places. The word *trinity* means "tri-unity" or "three-in-oneness." It is used to summarize the teaching of Scripture that God is three persons yet one God.

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Sometimes people think the doctrine of the Trinity is found only in the New Testament, not in the Old. If God has eternally existed as three persons, it would be surprising to find no indications of that in the Old Testament. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly found in the Old Testament, several passages suggest or even imply that God exists as more than one person.

For instance, according to Genesis 1:26, God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.” What do the plural verb (“let us”) and the plural pronoun (“our”) mean? Some have suggested they are plurals of majesty, a form of speech a king would use in saying, for example, “We are pleased to grant your request.”<sup>1</sup> However, in Old Testament Hebrew there are no other examples of a monarch using plural verbs or plural pronouns of himself in such a “plural of majesty,” so this suggestion has no evidence to support it.<sup>2</sup> Another suggestion is that God is here speaking to angels. But angels did not participate in the creation of man, nor was man created in the image and likeness of angels, so this suggestion is not convincing. The best explanation is that already in the first chapter of Genesis we have an indication of a plurality of persons in God himself.<sup>3</sup> We are not told how many persons, and we have nothing approaching a complete doctrine of the Trinity, but it is implied that more than one person is involved. The same can be said of Genesis 3:22 (“Behold, the man has become like one of *us* in knowing good and evil”), Genesis 11:7 (“Come, let *us* go down and there confuse their language”), and Isaiah 6:8 (“Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*?”). (Note the combination of singular and plural in the same sentence in the last passage.)

Moreover, there are passages where one person is called “God” or “the Lord” and is distinguished from another person who is also said to be God. In Psalm 45:6–7, the psalmist says,

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever....

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<sup>1</sup> Both Alexander the Great (in 152 BC) and King Demetrius (about 145 BC) refer to themselves in this way, for example, in the Septuagint text of 1 Macc. 10:19 and 11:31, but this is in Greek, not Hebrew, and it was written long after Genesis 1.

<sup>2</sup> See E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), Section 124g, n2, with reference to the suggestion of a plural of majesty: “The plural used by God in Genesis 1:26; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8 has been incorrectly explained in this way.” They understand Gen. 1:26 as “a plural of self-deliberation.” My own extensive search of subsequent Jewish interpretation in the Babylonian Talmud, the targumim, and the midrashim showed only that later Rabbinic interpreters were unable to reach agreement on any satisfactory interpretation of this passage, although the “plural of majesty” and “God speaking to angels” interpretations were commonly suggested.

<sup>3</sup> “The plural ‘We’ was regarded by the fathers and earlier theologians almost unanimously as indicative of the Trinity” (Keil and Delitzsch, *Old Testament Commentaries* [Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d.], 1:48, with objections to other positions and an affirmation that Gen. 1:26 contains “the truth that lies at the foundation of the Trinitarian view”).

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You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.  
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

Here the psalm passes beyond describing anything that could be true of an earthly king and calls the king "God" (v. 6), whose throne will last "forever and ever." But then, still speaking to the person called "God," the author says that "God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness" (v. 7). So two separate persons are called "God" (Heb. *'Elôhîm*). In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews quotes this passage and applies it to Christ: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Heb. 1:8).

Similarly, in Psalm 110:1, David says, "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Jesus rightly understands that David is referring to two separate persons as "Lord" (Matt. 22:41–46), but who is David's "Lord" if not God himself? And who could be saying to God, "Sit at my right hand" except someone else who is also fully God? From a New Testament perspective, we can paraphrase this verse: "God the Father said to God the Son, 'Sit at my right hand.'" But even without the New Testament teaching on the Trinity, it seems clear that David was aware of a plurality of persons in one God. Jesus, of course, understood this, but when he asked the Pharisees for an explanation of this passage, "no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions" (Matt. 22:46). Unless they are willing to admit a plurality of persons in one God, Jewish interpreters of Scripture to this day will have no more satisfactory explanation of Psalm 110:1 (or of Gen. 1:26, or of the other passages just discussed) than they did in Jesus' day.

Isaiah 63:10 says that God's people "rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit," apparently suggesting both that the Holy Spirit is distinct from God himself (it is "his Holy Spirit"), and that this Holy Spirit can be "grieved," thus suggesting emotional capabilities characteristic of a distinct person. (Isa. 61:1 also distinguishes "The Spirit of the Lord GOD" from "the Lord," even though no personal qualities are attributed to the Spirit of the Lord in that verse.)

Similar evidence is found in Malachi, when the Lord says, "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?" (Mal. 3:1–2). Here again the one speaking ("the Lord of hosts") distinguishes himself from "the Lord whom you seek," suggesting two separate persons, both of whom can be called "Lord."

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In Hosea 1:7, the Lord says of the house of Judah, "I will save them by the Lord their God," once again suggesting that more than one person can be called "Lord" (Heb. *Yahweh*) and "God" (*'Elōhîm*).

And in Isaiah 48:16, the speaker (apparently the servant of the Lord) says, "Now the Lord God has sent me and his Spirit."<sup>4</sup> Here the Spirit of the Lord, like the servant of the Lord, has been "sent" by the Lord God on a particular mission. The parallel between the two objects of sending ("me" and "his Spirit") would be consistent with seeing them both as distinct persons: it seems to mean more than simply "the Lord has sent me and his power."<sup>5</sup> In fact, from a full New Testament perspective (which recognizes Jesus the Messiah to be the true servant of the Lord predicted in Isaiah's prophecies), Isaiah 48:16 has Trinitarian implications: "Now the Lord God has sent me and his Spirit," if spoken by Jesus the Son of God, refers to all three persons of the Trinity.

Furthermore, several Old Testament passages about "the angel of the Lord" suggest a plurality of persons in God. The word translated "angel" (Heb. *mal'āk*) means simply "messenger." If this angel of the Lord is a "messenger" of the Lord, he is then distinct from the Lord himself. Yet at some points the angel of the Lord is called "God" or "the Lord" (see Gen. 16:13; Ex. 3:2–6; 23:20–22 [note "my name is in him" in v. 21]; Num. 22:35 with 38; Judg. 2:1–2; 6:11 with 14). At other points in the Old Testament "the angel of the Lord" simply refers to a created angel, but at least in these texts the special angel (or "messenger") of the Lord seems to be a distinct person who is fully divine.

## 2. More Complete Revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament

When the New Testament opens, we enter into the history of the coming of the Son of God to earth. It is to be expected that this great event would be accompanied by more explicit teaching about the Trinitarian nature of God, and that is in fact what we find. Before looking at this in detail, we can simply list several passages where all three persons of the Trinity are named together.

When Jesus was baptized, "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' " (Matt. 3:16–17). Here at

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<sup>4</sup> This ESV translation of Isa. 48:16 accurately reproduces both the literal sense of the Hebrew words and the word order in the Hebrew text.

<sup>5</sup> The NIV translation, "endowed with his Spirit," is not required by the Hebrew text and tends to obscure the parallel thoughts of the Lord sending "me" and "his Spirit." The expression "endowed with" in the NIV is the translators' interpretation of the Hebrew conjunction *wə* which most commonly means simply "and." The common Hebrew word for "with" (*'im*) is not in the text, and there is no separate word in the Hebrew text that means "endowed."

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one moment we have three members of the Trinity performing three distinct activities. God the Father is speaking from heaven, God the Son is being baptized and is then spoken to from heaven by God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit is descending from heaven to rest upon and empower Jesus for his ministry.

At the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, he tells the disciples that they should go "and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). The very names "Father" and "Son," drawn as they are from the family, the most familiar of human institutions, indicate very strongly the distinct personhood of both the Father and the Son. When the "Holy Spirit" is put in the same expression and on the same level as the other two persons, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is also viewed as a person and of equal standing with the Father and the Son.

When we realize that the New Testament authors generally use the name "God" (Gk. *theos*) to refer to God the Father and the name "Lord" (Gk. *kyrios*) to refer to God the Son, then it is clear that there is another Trinitarian expression in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same *Spirit*; and there are varieties of service, but the same *Lord*; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same *God* who empowers them all in everyone."

Similarly, the last verse of 2 Corinthians is Trinitarian in its expression: "The grace of the *Lord Jesus Christ* and the love of *God* and the fellowship of the *Holy Spirit* be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). We see the three persons mentioned separately in Ephesians 4:4–6 as well: "There is one body and one *Spirit*—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one *Lord*, one faith, one baptism, one *God and Father* of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned together in the opening sentence of 1 Peter: "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1 Peter 1:2). And in Jude 20–21, we read: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life."

However, the KJV translation of 1 John 5:7 should not be used in this connection. It reads, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." The problem with this translation is that it is based on a very small number of unreliable Greek manuscripts, the earliest of which comes from the fourteenth century AD. No modern translation (except the NKJV) includes this KJV reading, but all omit it, as do the vast majority of Greek manuscripts from all major text

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traditions, including several very reliable manuscripts from the fourth and fifth century AD, and also including quotations by church fathers such as Irenaeus (d. ca. AD 202), Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. AD 212), Tertullian (d. after AD 220), and the great defender of the Trinity, Athanasius (d. AD 373).

## B. THREE STATEMENTS SUMMARIZE THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

In one sense the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we will never be able to understand fully. However, we can understand something of its truth by summarizing the teaching of Scripture in three statements:

1. God is three persons.
2. Each person is fully God.
3. There is one God.

The following section will develop each of these statements in more detail.

### 1. God Is Three Persons

The fact that God is three persons means that the Father is not the Son; they are distinct persons. It also means that the Father is not the Holy Spirit, but that they are distinct persons. And it means that the Son is not the Holy Spirit. These distinctions are seen in a number of the passages quoted in the earlier section as well as in many additional New Testament passages.

John 1:1–2 tells us: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” The fact that the Word (who is seen to be Christ in vv. 9–18) is “with” God shows distinction from God the Father. In John 17:24, Jesus speaks to God the Father about “my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world,” thus showing distinction of persons, sharing of glory, and a relationship of love between the Father and the Son before the world was created.

We are told that Jesus continues as our High Priest and Advocate before God the Father: “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Christ is the one who “is able to save to the utmost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Yet in order to intercede for us before God the Father, it is necessary that Christ be a person distinct from the Father.

Moreover, the Father is not the Holy Spirit, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. They are distinguished in several verses. Jesus says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the

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Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit also prays or "intercedes" for us (Rom. 8:27), indicating a distinction between the Holy Spirit and God the Father to whom the intercession is made.

Finally, the fact that the Son is not the Holy Spirit is also indicated in the several Trinitarian passages mentioned earlier, such as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19), and in passages that indicate that Christ went back to heaven and then sent the Holy Spirit to the church. Jesus said, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

Some have questioned whether the Holy Spirit is indeed a distinct person rather than just the "power" or "force" of God at work in the world. But the New Testament evidence is quite clear and strong.<sup>6</sup> First are the several verses mentioned earlier where the Holy Spirit is put in a coordinate relationship with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4–6; 1 Peter 1:2): since the Father and Son are both persons, the coordinate expression strongly intimates that the Holy Spirit is a person also. Moreover, the names *helper*, *counselor*, and *comforter* (Gk. *paraklētos*) are terms commonly used to speak of a person who helps or gives comfort or counsel to another person or persons and are used of the Holy Spirit in John's gospel (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).<sup>7</sup>

Other personal activities are ascribed to the Holy Spirit, such as teaching (John 14:26), bearing witness (John 15:26; Rom. 8:16), interceding or praying on behalf of others (Rom. 8:26–27), searching the depths of God (1 Cor. 2:10), knowing the thoughts of God (1 Cor. 2:11), willing to distribute some gifts to some and other gifts to others (1 Cor. 12:11), forbidding or not allowing certain activities (Acts 16:6–7), speaking (Acts 8:29; 13:2; and many times in both Old and New Testaments), evaluating and approving a wise course of action (Acts 15:28), and being grieved by sin in the lives of Christians (Eph. 4:30).

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<sup>6</sup> The following section on the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit follows quite closely the excellent material in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 96.

<sup>7</sup> Some writers (including me in the previous edition of *Systematic Theology*) have argued that the masculine pronoun *he* (Gk. *ekeinos*) in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:13–14 also argues for the personhood of the Holy Spirit, since one would not expect a masculine pronoun from the rules of Greek grammar, for the word *spirit* (Gk. *pneuma*) is neuter, not masculine. But this is not a correct argument, for a closer examination of those verses shows that the antecedent for *ekeinos* ("he") in those verses is the masculine noun *paraklētos* ("Helper"), not *pneuma* ("Spirit"). This is true even in John 16:13, where the order of phrases in the Greek text shows that *ekeinos* restates the *ekeinos* in v. 8, which has *paraklētos* in v. 7 as its antecedent. See the careful discussion in Andrew Naselli and Philip Gons, "Proof-texting the Personality of the Holy Spirit: An Analysis of the Masculine Demonstrative Pronouns in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:13–14," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 16 (2011): 65–89. (The noun *paraklētos* still refers to a masculine *person*, so the verses still refer to the Holy Spirit as a person.)

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Finally, if the Holy Spirit is understood simply to be the power of God rather than a distinct person, then a number of passages would simply not make sense, because in them the Holy Spirit and his power or the power of God are both mentioned. For example, Luke 4:14, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee," would have to mean, "Jesus returned in the power of the power of God to Galilee." In Acts 10:38, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power," would mean, "God anointed Jesus with the power of God and with power" (see also Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 2:4).

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Although so many passages clearly distinguish the Holy Spirit from the other members of the Trinity, one puzzling verse has been 2 Corinthians 3:17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Interpreters often assume that "the Lord" here must mean Christ because Paul frequently uses "the Lord" to refer to Christ. But that is probably not the case here, for a good argument can be made from grammar and context to say that this verse is better translated with the Holy Spirit as subject, "Now the Spirit is the Lord."<sup>8</sup> In this case, Paul would be saying that the Holy Spirit is also "Yahweh" (or "Jehovah"), the Lord of the Old Testament (note the clear Old Testament background of this context, beginning at v. 7). Theologically this would be quite acceptable, for it could truly be said that just as God the Father is "Lord" and God the Son is "Lord" (in the full Old Testament sense of "Lord" as a name for God), so also the Holy Spirit is the one called "Lord" in the Old Testament—and it is the Holy Spirit who especially manifests the presence of the Lord to us in the new covenant age.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Each Person Is Fully God

In addition to the fact that all three persons are distinct, the abundant testimony of Scripture is that each person is fully God as well.

First, *God the Father is clearly God*. This is evident from the first verse of the Bible, where God created the heaven and the earth. It is evident through the Old and New Testaments,

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<sup>8</sup> Grammatically both "the Spirit" (*to pneuma*) and "the Lord" (*ho kyrios*) are in the nominative case, which is the case taken both by the subject and by the predicate noun in a sentence with the verb "to be." And word order does not indicate the subject in Greek as it does in English. The definite article (*ho*, "the") before "Lord" here is probably anaphoric (that is, it refers back to the previous mention of "Lord" in v. 16 and says that the Spirit is "the Lord" who was just mentioned in the previous sentence). (See Murray Harris, "2 Corinthians," *EBC*, 10:338–39.)

<sup>9</sup> Another possible interpretation is to say that this is speaking of the function of Christ and the function of the Holy Spirit as so closely related in the New Testament age that they can be spoken of as one in purpose. The verse would then mean something like "The Lord Jesus is in this age seen and known through the activity of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit's function is to glorify Christ." But this is a less persuasive interpretation, since it seems unlikely that Paul would speak of an identity of function in such an obscure way, or even that Paul would want to say that the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit are identical.



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where God the Father is clearly viewed as sovereign Lord over all and where Jesus prays to his Father in heaven.

Next, *the Son is fully God*. Although this point will be developed in greater detail in chapter 26, "The Person of Christ," we can briefly note several explicit passages at this point. John 1:1–4 clearly affirms the full deity of Christ:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Here Christ is referred to as "the Word," and John says both that he was "with God" and that he "was God." The Greek text echoes the opening words of Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning") and reminds us that John is talking about something that was true before the world was made. God the Son was always fully God.

The translation "the Word was God" has been challenged by the Jehovah's Witnesses, who translate it "the Word was a god," implying that the Word was simply a heavenly being but not fully divine. They justify this translation by pointing to the fact that the definite article (Gk. *ho*, "the") does not occur before the Greek word *theos* ("God"). They say therefore that *theos* should be translated "a god." However, their interpretation has been followed by no recognized Greek scholar anywhere, for it is commonly known that the sentence follows a regular rule of Greek grammar, and the absence of the definite article merely indicates that "God" is the predicate rather than the subject of the sentence.<sup>10</sup> (A recent publication by the Jehovah's Witnesses now acknowledges the

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<sup>10</sup> This rule (called "Colwell's rule") is covered as early as chapter 6 of a standard introductory Greek grammar. See John Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 35; also, *BDF*, 273. The rule is simply that in sentences with the linking verb "to be" (such as Gk. *eimi*), a definite predicate noun will usually drop the definite article when it precedes the verb, but the subject of the sentence, if definite, will retain the definite article. So if John had wanted to say, "The Word was God," John 1:1 is exactly the way he would have said it. (Recent grammatical study has confirmed and even strengthened Colwell's original rule; see Lane C. McGaughey, *Toward a Descriptive Analysis of EINAI as a Linking Verb in the New Testament*, SBLDS 6 [Missoula, MT: SBL, 1972], esp. pp. 49–53, 73–77; and the important review of this book by E. V. N. Goetchius in *JBL* 95 [1976]: 147–49.)

Of course, if John had wanted to say, "The Word was a god" (with an indefinite predicate, "a god"), it would also have been written this way, since there would have been no definite article to drop in the first place. But if that were the case, there would have to be some clues in the context that John was using the word *theos* to speak of a heavenly being that was not fully divine. So the question becomes, what kind of God (or "god") is John talking about in this context? Is he speaking of the one true God who created the heavens and the earth? In that case, *theos* was definite and dropped the definite article to show that it

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relevant grammatical rule but continues to affirm their position on John 1:1 nonetheless.)<sup>11</sup>

The inconsistency of the Jehovah's Witnesses' position can further be seen in their translation of the rest of the chapter. For various other grammatical reasons the word *theos* also lacks the definite article at other places in this chapter, such as verse 6 ("There was a man sent from God"), verse 12 ("the right to become children of God"), verse 13 ("but of God"), and verse 18 ("No one has ever seen God"). If the Jehovah's Witnesses were consistent with their argument about the absence of the definite article, they would have to translate all of these with the phrase "a god," but they translate "God" in every case.

John 20:28 in its context is also a strong proof for the deity of Christ. Thomas had doubted the reports of the other disciples that they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, and he said he would not believe unless he could see the nail prints in Jesus' hands and place his hand in his wounded side (John 20:25). Then Jesus appeared to the disciples when

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was the predicate noun. Or is he speaking about some other kind of heavenly being ("a god") who is not the one true God? In that case, *theos* was indefinite and never had a definite article in the first place.

The context decides this question clearly. From the other uses of the word *theos* to mean "God" in vv. 1, 2, 6, 12, 13, et al., and from the opening words that recall Gen. 1:1 ("In the beginning"), it is clear that John is speaking of the one true God who created the heavens and the earth. That means that *theos* in v. 2 must be understood to refer to that same God as well.

<sup>11</sup> The argument is found in a detailed, rather extensive attack on the doctrine of the Trinity: *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, by anonymous (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989). This group apparently deems this booklet a significant statement of their position, for page 2 states, "First printing in English: 5,000,000 copies." The booklet first advances the traditional argument that John 1:1 should be translated "a god" because of the absence of the definite article (p. 27). But then it later acknowledges that Colwell's rule is relevant for John 1:1 (p. 28) and there admits that the context, not the absence of the definite article, determines whether we should translate "the Word was God" (definite) or "the Word was a god" (indefinite). Then it argues as follows: "when the context requires it, translators may insert an indefinite article in front of the noun in this type of sentence structure. Does the context require an indefinite article at John 1:1? Yes, for the testimony of the entire Bible is that Jesus is not Almighty God" (p. 28).

We should note carefully the weakness of this argument: They admit that context is decisive, but then they quote not one shred of evidence from the context of John 1:1. Rather, they simply assert again their conclusion about "the entire Bible." If they agree that this context is decisive, but they can find nothing in this context that supports their view, they have simply lost the argument. Therefore, having acknowledged Colwell's rule, they still hold their view on John 1:1, but with no supporting evidence. To hold a view with no evidence to support it is simply irrationality.

The booklet as a whole will give an appearance of scholarly work to laypersons, since it quotes dozens of theologians and academic reference works (always without adequate documentation). However, many quotations are taken out of context and made to say something the authors never intended, and others are from liberal Catholic or Protestant scholars who themselves are questioning both the doctrine of the Trinity and the truthfulness of the Bible.

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Thomas was with them. He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:27). In response to this, we read, “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ” (John 20:28). Here Thomas calls Jesus “my God.” The narrative shows that both John in writing his gospel and Jesus himself approve of what Thomas has said and encourage everyone who hears about Thomas to believe the same things that Thomas did. Jesus immediately responds to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). As far as John is concerned, this is the dramatic high point of the gospel, for he immediately tells the reader—in the very next verse—that this was the reason he wrote it:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

Jesus speaks of those who will not see him and will yet believe, and John immediately tells the reader that he recorded the events written in his gospel in order that they may believe in just this way, imitating Thomas in his confession of faith. In other words, the entire gospel is written to persuade people to imitate Thomas, who sincerely called Jesus “My Lord and my God.” Because this is set out by John as the purpose of his gospel, the sentence takes on added force.<sup>12</sup>

Other passages speaking of Jesus as fully divine include Hebrews 1:3, where the author says that Christ is the “exact imprint” (Gk. *charaktēr*, “exact duplicate”) of the nature or being (Gk. *hypostasis*) of God—meaning that God the Son exactly duplicates the being or nature of God the Father in every way: whatever attributes or power God the Father has,

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<sup>12</sup> The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ booklet *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* offers two explanations for John 20:28: (1) “To Thomas, Jesus was like ‘a god,’ especially in the miraculous circumstances that prompted his exclamation” (p. 29). But this explanation is unconvincing, because Thomas did not say, “You are like a god,” but rather called Jesus “my God.” The Greek text has the definite article (it cannot be translated “a god”) and is explicit: *ho theos mou* is not “a god of mine” but “my God.”

(2) The second explanation offered is that “Thomas may simply have made an emotional exclamation of astonishment, spoken to Jesus but directed to God” (ibid.). The second part of this sentence, “spoken to Jesus but directed to God,” is simply incoherent: it seems to mean, “spoken to Jesus but not spoken to Jesus,” which is not only self-contradictory, but also impossible: if Thomas is speaking to Jesus he is also directing his words to Jesus. The first part of this sentence, the claim that Thomas is really not calling Jesus “God,” but is merely swearing or uttering some involuntary words of exclamation, is without merit, for the verse makes it clear that Thomas was not speaking into the blue but was speaking directly to Jesus: “Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ” (John 20:28 NASB). And immediately both Jesus and John in his writing commend Thomas, certainly not for swearing but for believing in Jesus as his Lord and his God.

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God the Son has them as well. The author goes on to refer to the Son as “God” in verse 8 (“But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’”), and he attributes the creation of the heavens to Christ when he says of him, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Heb. 1:10, quoting Ps. 102:25). Titus 2:13 refers to “our great *God* and Savior Jesus Christ,” and 2 Peter 1:1 speaks of “the righteousness of our *God* and Savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Romans 9:5, speaking of the Jewish people, says, “To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”<sup>14</sup>

In the Old Testament, Isaiah 9:6 predicts,

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called

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<sup>13</sup> Both Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 have marginal readings in the RSV whereby Jesus is referred to as a different person than “God” and therefore is not called God: “the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13 mg.) and “our God and the Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1 mg.). These alternative translations are possible grammatically but are unlikely. Both verses have the same Greek construction, in which one definite article governs two nouns joined by the Greek word for *and* (*kai*). In all cases where this construction is found the two nouns are viewed as unified in some way, and often they are two separate names for the same person or thing. Especially significant is 2 Peter 1:1, for exactly the same construction is used by Peter three other times in this book to speak of “Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18). In these three other verses, the Greek wording is exactly the same in every detail except that the word *Lord* (*kyrios*) is used instead of the word *God* (*theos*). If these other three instances are all translated “Our *Lord* and Savior Jesus Christ,” as they are in all major translations, then consistency in translation would seem to require the translation of 2 Peter 1:1 as “Our *God* and Savior Jesus Christ,” again referring to Christ as God. In Titus 2:13 Paul is writing about the hope of Christ’s second coming, which the New Testament writers consistently speak of in terms that emphasize the manifestation of Jesus Christ in his glory, not in terms that emphasize the glory of the Father.

<sup>14</sup> The marginal reading in the NIV is similar to the reading in the main text of the RSV, which is, “and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. 9:5 RSV). But this translation is far less likely on grammatical and contextual grounds and is justified primarily by arguing that Paul would not have referred to Christ as “God.” The NIV translation, which refers to Christ as “God over all,” is preferable because (1) Paul’s normal pattern is to declare a word of blessing concerning the person about whom he has just been speaking, who in this case is Christ; (2) the Greek participle *ōn*, “being,” which makes the phrase say literally, “who, being God over all is blessed forever,” would be redundant if Paul were starting a new sentence as the RSV has it; (3) when Paul elsewhere begins a new sentence with a word of blessing to God, the word “blessed” comes first in the Greek sentence (see 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; cf. Peter’s pattern in 1 Peter 1:3), but here the expression does not follow that pattern, making the RSV translation unlikely. See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 339–40. For a definitive treatment of all the New Testament texts that refer to Jesus as “God,” see Murray Harris, *Jesus as God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

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“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God.”

As this prophecy is applied to Christ, it refers to him as “Mighty God.” Note the similar application of the titles “Lord” and “God” in the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah in Isaiah 40:3, “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God,” quoted by John the Baptist in preparation for the coming of Christ in Matthew 3:3.

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Many other passages will be discussed in chapter 26 below, but these should be sufficient to demonstrate that the New Testament clearly refers to Christ as fully God. As Paul says in Colossians 2:9, “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

Next, *the Holy Spirit is also fully God*. Once we understand God the Father and God the Son to be fully God, then the Trinitarian expressions in verses like Matthew 28:19 (“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”) assume significance for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit because they show that the Holy Spirit is classified on an equal level with the Father and the Son. This can be seen if we recognize how unthinkable it would have been for Jesus to say something like, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the archangel Michael” — this would give to a created being a status entirely inappropriate even to an archangel. Believers throughout all ages can only be baptized into the name (and thus into a taking on of the character) of God himself.<sup>15</sup> (Note also the other Trinitarian passages mentioned above: 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4–6; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20–21.)

In Acts 5:3–4, Peter asks Ananias, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ...? You have not lied to man but *to God*.” According to Peter’s words, to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” God’s temple is the place where God himself dwells, which Paul explains by the fact that “God’s Spirit” dwells in it, thus apparently equating God’s Spirit with God himself.

David asks in Psalm 139:7–8, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there!” This passage attributes the divine characteristic of omnipresence to the Holy Spirit, something that is not true of any

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Tim. 5:21 should not be seen as a counterexample to this claim, for there Paul is simply warning Timothy in the presence of a host of heavenly witnesses, both divine and angelic, who he knows are watching Timothy’s conduct. This is similar to the mention of God and Christ and the angels of heaven and the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” in Heb. 12:22–24, where a great heavenly assembly is mentioned. 1 Tim. 5:21 should therefore be seen as significantly different from the Trinitarian passages mentioned above, since those passages speak of uniquely divine activities, such as distributing gifts to every Christian (1 Cor. 12:4–6) or having the name into which all believers are baptized (Matt. 28:19).

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of God's creatures. It seems that David is equating God's Spirit with God's presence. To go from God's Spirit is to go from his presence, but if there is nowhere that David can flee from God's Spirit, then he knows that wherever he goes he will have to say, "You are there."

Paul attributes the divine characteristic of omniscience to the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:10–11: "For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God [Gk. literally 'the things of God'] except the Spirit of God."

Moreover, the activity of giving new birth to everyone who is born again is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again' " (John 3:5–7). But the work of giving new spiritual life to people when they become Christians is something that only God can do (cf. 1 John 3:9, "born of God"). This passage therefore gives another indication that the Holy Spirit is fully God.

Up to this point we have two conclusions, both abundantly taught throughout Scripture:

1. God is three persons.
2. Each person is fully God.

If the Bible taught only these two facts, there would be no logical problem at all in fitting them together, for the obvious solution would be that there are three Gods. The Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God. We would have a system where there are three equally divine beings. Such a system of belief would be called "polytheism" — or more specifically "tritheism," belief in three Gods. But that is far from what the Bible teaches.

### 3. There Is One God

Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God. Not only are the three different persons of the Trinity one in purpose and in agreement on what they think, but they are also one in essence, one in their essential nature. In other words, God is only one being. There are not three Gods. There is only one God.

One of the most familiar passages of the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4–5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

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When Moses sings,

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
Awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Ex. 15:11)

the answer obviously is “No one.” God is unique. There is no one like him and there can be no one like him. In fact, Solomon prays “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other” (1 Kings 8:60).

When God speaks, he repeatedly makes it clear that he is the only true God; the idea that there are three Gods to be worshiped rather than one would be unthinkable in the light of these extremely strong statements. God alone is the one true God and there is no one like him. When he speaks, he alone is speaking—he is not speaking as one God among three who are to be worshiped. He says,

I am the Lord, and there is no other,  
besides me there is no God;  
I equip you, though you do not know me,  
that people may know, from the rising of the sun  
and from the west, that there is none besides me;  
I am the Lord, and there is no other. (Isa. 45:5–6)

Similarly, he calls everyone on earth to turn to him:

And there is no other god besides me,  
a righteous God and a Savior;  
there is none besides me.  
Turn to me and be saved,  
all the ends of the earth!  
For I am God, and there is no other. (Isa. 45:21–22; cf. 44:6–8)

The New Testament also affirms that there is one God. Paul writes, “For *there is one God*, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Paul affirms that “God is one” (Rom. 3:30) and that “there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6).<sup>16</sup> Finally, James acknowledges that

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 8:6 does not deny that God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are also “God,” but here Paul says that God the Father is identified as this “one God.” Elsewhere, as we have seen, he can speak of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as also “God.” Moreover, in this same verse, he goes on to speak of “one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” He is here using the word *Lord* in its full Old Testament sense of “Yahweh” as a name for God, and saying that this is the person

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even demons recognize that there is one God, even though their intellectual assent to that fact is not enough to save them: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19). But clearly James affirms that one “does well” to believe that “God is one.”

## 4. All Analogies Have Shortcomings

Sometimes people have used several analogies drawn from nature or human experience to attempt to explain this doctrine. Although these analogies are helpful at an elementary level of understanding, they all turn out to be inadequate or misleading on further reflection. To say, for example, that God is like a three-leaf clover, which has three parts yet remains one clover, fails because each leaf is only part of the clover, and any one leaf cannot be said to be the whole clover. But in the Trinity, each of the persons is not just a separate part of God, each person is fully God. Moreover, the leaf of a clover is impersonal and does not have distinct and complex personality in the way each person of the Trinity does.

Others have used the analogy of a tree with three parts: the roots, trunk, and branches all constitute one tree. But a similar problem arises, for these are only parts of a tree, and none of the parts can be said to be the whole tree. Moreover, in this analogy the parts have different properties, unlike the persons of the Trinity, all of whom possess all of the attributes of God in equal measure. And the lack of personality in each part is a deficiency as well.

The analogy of the three forms of water (steam, water, and ice) is also inadequate because (a) no single molecule of water is ever all three of these at the same time,<sup>17</sup> (b) they have different properties or characteristics, (c) the analogy has nothing that corresponds to the fact that there is only one God (there is no such thing as “one water” or “all the water in the universe”), and (d) the element of intelligent personality is lacking.

Other analogies have been drawn from human experience. It might be said that the Trinity is something like a man who is both a farmer, the mayor of his town, and an elder in his church. He functions in different roles at different times, but he is one man. However, this analogy is very deficient because there is only one person doing these three activities at different times, and the analogy cannot deal with the personal interaction

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through whom all things were created, thus affirming the full deity of Christ as well, but with a different name. Thus this verse affirms both the unity of God and the diversity of persons in God.

<sup>17</sup> There is a certain atmospheric condition (called the “triple point” by chemists) at which steam, liquid water, and ice can all exist simultaneously, but even then the molecules of water that are steam are not ice or liquid; the molecules that are liquid are not steam or ice, etc.



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among the members of the Trinity. (In fact, this analogy simply teaches the heresy called modalism, discussed below.)

Another analogy taken from human life is the union of the intellect, the emotions, and the will in one human person. While these are parts of a personality, however, no one factor constitutes the entire person. And the parts are not identical in characteristics but have different abilities.

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So what analogy shall we use to teach the Trinity? Although the Bible uses many analogies from nature and life to teach us various aspects of God's character (God is like a rock in his faithfulness, he is like a shepherd in his care, etc.), it is interesting that Scripture nowhere uses any analogies to teach the doctrine of the Trinity. The closest we come to an analogy is found in the titles "Father" and "Son" themselves, titles that clearly speak of distinct persons and of the close relationship that exists between them in a human family. But on the human level, of course, we have two entirely separate human beings, not one being comprised of three distinct persons. It is best to conclude that no analogy adequately teaches about the Trinity, and, on deeper reflection, we see that all are ultimately misleading in significant ways.

## 5. God Eternally and Necessarily Exists as the Trinity

When the universe was created God the Father spoke the powerful creative words that brought it into being, God the Son was the divine agent who carried out these words (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and God the Holy Spirit was active "hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). So it is as we would expect: if all three members of the Trinity are equally and fully divine, then they have all three existed for all eternity, and God has eternally existed as a Trinity (cf. also John 17:5, 24). Moreover, God cannot be other than he is, for he is unchanging (see chapter 11 above). Therefore, it seems right to conclude that God necessarily exists as a Trinity—he cannot be other than he is.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Grudem, W. (2020). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Second Edition, pp. 269–283). Zondervan Academic.