

I Believe in God

(The Essential Christian Truth About the Trinitarian Nature of God)



Does It Make Sense?

As a non-believer, one of the things that I had difficulty accepting was the notion that there could be a single God ruling the universe. As a naturalist, I could find NO example of singularity anywhere in the cosmos. Nothing exists as a singular example of its kind. For this reason, I couldn't begin to imagine that life at a higher level (the level of deity) could be singular in nature. I thought, "Hey, if there IS life at a higher level, it too would be multiple and diverse in nature." Monotheism made no sense to me at all.

I also observed the inherently relational nature of animals here on planet earth. All beings seem to cling to each other and thrive on the interaction between members of the same species. I recognized this quality of living beings and reasoned that life at another level would also reflect this relational nature. As I examined the multiplicity and relational nature of life in our world, I decided that if I were ever to believe in anything supernatural or divine, it would take the form of polytheism before it ever took the form of monotheism. For me, this was a very sensible conclusion about the nature of a Divine Order. I came to expect that supernatural life would be relational and require a multitude of beings. I became convinced that POLYTHEISM was the best explanation. But to be honest, I wasn't really thinking clearly about it. There are many reasons why polytheism just doesn't work:

None Powerful Enough

If there are multiple gods, then none of these gods, by definition, could have more power than any other. If one DID have more power, this 'most powerful' god would reign over the rest and be the TRUE GOD. As a result, the divine order would be monotheistic (or at least 'henotheistic') under the headship of this one true God. True polytheism proposes that none of the plural gods is truly all-powerful. An all-powerful God has ALL the power, and only one god of this kind can exist by definition. If another God existed with EQUAL power, than neither of these gods could be said to have ALL the power! Does that make sense? And our caused, finite universe requires an all-powerful God (omnipotent and omnipresent) with enough power to act as the eternal 'first cause', creating all that we see.

None Able to Act As A Standard

In addition, as C.S. Lewis points out in his description of Dualism in "Mere Christianity", if there were only TWO independent, equally strong, equally eternal powers that existed in the universe, each power would assert that it was the most powerful or authoritative. This point of contention would require the existence of yet a third being in the Universe: an outside standard that decides between the first two. And if this outside standard exists, IT is actually supreme over the two other powers and this third being is the true God of the Universe. It must "stand

on its own” without dependence on any other additional standard. The same situation exists if there are MULTIPLE gods. One must exist that has more power than the rest and can decide (act as a standard) relative to the others. This Being would, therefore, be the most powerful force in the universe and the TRUE God.

None Able to Provide A Singular Source of Unity

Finally, we must recognize that there is a unity present in the universe related to the natural laws and forces that we observe and experience. If this unity is a reflection of the divine nature, then we have no reason to believe that there are MULTIPLE divine beings unless they all have the exact same divine nature. And if this is true, then we really have ONE divine being and multiple ‘persons’ within this unified divine nature. Once again, we would be within a monotheistic system.

You see, no matter how you cut it, monotheism is still the best and most reasonable theory about the nature of God, even before you or I ever open a Bible. My own disbelief for 35 years, however, was connected largely to the issue of God’s nature. As I observed all of creation around me, I struggled with the fact that no species of ANYTHING seemed to exist in singularity and all animals seemed intensely and inherently interdependent and relational. Why would a single, self sufficient God create something that was so clearly out of His nature?



The Essential Christian Belief of the Trinity

I think I was actually asking a couple of good questions here, and because I was completely illiterate from a Biblical perspective, I did not believe that Christianity could account for God’s nature in a way that matched the world I was seeing. Of course, I was completely wrong. Early Christians struggled to understand exactly what the scriptures taught about the nature of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and eventually, based on the teaching of the Bible, developed the doctrine of the Trinity. As I too examined the Bible and came to the same conclusion, my questions were answered. The Christian God is a God that is intensely and innately relational, and the created order reflects this nature.

The more I read the Bible, the more I discovered that the Bible taught two principles in a clear fashion. First, it is clear from the scripture that there is only one God. Second, it is clear from the scripture that God the Father, Jesus AND the Holy Spirit are ALL THAT SAME GOD. Sound like a contradiction? Well, first let’s make the case from the scripture:



There Is Only One God

Both the New and Old Testament declare that there is only ONE God. Not just one God for this universe, or many gods united in one purpose, but ONE GOD! Both Judaism and Christianity are clearly monotheistic.



Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

might.



Isaiah 43:10

“You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, In order that you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me.”



James 2:19

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.



1 Corinthians 8:4, 6

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one...yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.



1 Timothy 2:5-6

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.

From these few verses, it is clear that there is only ONE God according to Jewish and Christian theology. This is our starting point; this is where we begin. God is ONE.



Yet the Father, Son and Holy Ghost Are All God!

But there is something else that we see in the Scripture. The Bible teaches that God the Father, Jesus Christ AND the Holy Spirit are all God. In fact, the Bible teaches that all three of these divine ‘persons’ are God in the very same way. Let’s look at some of the ways that the three ‘persons’ are described as having the exact same nature:

All Three Are the All-Powerful Creator (Omnipotent)

The first characteristic of deity (omnipotence) just happens to be possessed by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three are described in the Bible as being the all-powerful creator:



Father:

But now, O LORD, Thou art our Father, We are the clay, and Thou our potter; And all of us are the work of Thy hand. (Isaiah 64:8)



Son:

All things came into being by Him (Jesus, the Word), and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:3)



Holy Spirit:

"The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (Job 33:4)

All Three Are All-Knowing (Omniscient)

In addition to possessing the power to create, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all observed to be all-knowing according to the words of the Bible:



Father:

...in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. (1 John 3:20)



Son:

"Now we know that You (Jesus) know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God." (John 16:30)



Holy Spirit:

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10)

All Three Are All-Present (Omnipresent)

While we assume this of the Father and the Holy Spirit, most people don't realize that the Scripture also describes the Son as having the ability to be everywhere at the same time (omnipresence):



Father:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27)



Son:

"...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthews 28:20)



Holy Spirit:

Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me. (Psalm 139:7-10)

All Three Are All-Loving (Omnibenevolent)

Another aspect of Godhood, the all-encompassing love of God, is also demonstrated equally by the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit:



Father:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)



Son:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25)



Holy Spirit:

Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me... (Romans 15:30-31)

All Three Are Called "God"

Now you are starting to see why we simply must conclude that God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are ALL GOD. In fact, the Bible explicitly calls all three of them God:



Father:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:2)



Son:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)



Holy Spirit:

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God." (Acts 5:3-4)



To Deny the Trinity is to Deny Christianity

Even the earliest believers understood the importance of this discovery and apparent 'tension' in the nature of God. There is ONE God, and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God. This is something that is clear in the scripture, and while it may be mysterious to us, it is the objective claim of the Bible. The first Christians understood that God had to be described in a very specific way if they are to retain the TRUE identity of Jesus. When early Christians tried to maintain the ONENESS of God WITHOUT regard to the Divine description of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as seen above, they usually re-described (and mischaracterized) Jesus as a human, limited, or finite creature. But, if Jesus is NOT God in every sense of the word (as the Bible claims), then He does not have the power to save us on the Cross. If

Jesus is NOT God Incarnate, then he simply CANNOT take our place and bestow upon us the righteousness of God. For this reason, the earliest leaders were very careful to describe the triune nature of God as seen in the Bible. They eventually proposed that God is one in 'substance', 'essence' or 'nature', while being distinctly but undividedly three in 'person'. This was reflected in the early creeds, including the Athanasian Creed of the 4th Century:

"...we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal... And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity."

It's interesting that this creed (widely accepted and used in Western Christianity) tells us that without a proper understanding of the nature of the Trinity, one cannot even be saved! Augustine (the incredibly well respected and influential philosopher and theologian who became bishop of the North African City of Hippo Regius) agreed that a proper understanding of the Trinity was critical to understanding Christianity and grasping the power and Salvation of God:

*"And I would make this pious and safe agreement, in the presence of our Lord God, with all who read my writings, as well in all other cases as, above all, in the case of those which inquire into the unity of the Trinity, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; because in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable."(Augustine, *On the Trinity* 1:3:5)*

Why is a proper understanding of the Trinity so important? Because all deviations from historical Trinitarianism have compromised the eternal divine nature of Jesus. It's that simple. Over the course of history, several groups have mischaracterized the Trinity and, therefore, mischaracterized the TRUE nature of Jesus. The Early Church Councils corrected the errors of Adoptionism (2nd Century), Docetism (2nd Century), Monarchianism (2nd and 3rd Century), Sabellianism (3rd Century), Arianism (4th Century), and Socinianism (16th and 17th Century); and we discuss this in more detail [HERE](#). In addition to these historic mischaracterizations of the triune nature of God, there are several current mischaracterizations, including the polytheism of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the denial of the Trinity present in many Unitarian groups, including the Christadelphians.

Christianity emphatically claims that God is TRIUNE in nature. Not polytheistic, but TRIUNE. It's not about three gods ($1+1+1=3$); it's about three distinct persons within the Godhead ($1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$). Once someone moves from this description of God (one in substance but three in person, distinct but undivided), he or she has simply moved

away from Orthodox Christianity. That believer now holds a belief that may find a home in some other worldview, but is no longer a reflection of the Christian Worldview.



Is The Triune Nature of God Reflected In His Creation?

The concept of the Trinity is incredibly difficult to grasp. In large part, it is completely mysterious and impossible for us to understand or communicate thoroughly. But would you really expect anything less? Would you really think that God could be so easily grasped or described? Is it reasonable to expect limited creatures such as humans to be able to completely understand and render the nature of an incredibly vast and powerful Being? Perhaps this is why the triune nature of God is difficult to understand and a challenge to communicate to others. Many metaphors have been attempted over the years, but most are simply a poor reflection of the truth of God's nature.

But there is some evidence for the triune nature of God in the world around us. If we look at the nature of our universe and our own bodies, we do see the fingerprints of a triune God. And that really should come as no surprise to us, given the fact that God is the creator of everything, and His creation reflects His Nature:



Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.



Genesis 1:27

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

If God's creation reflects His nature, we might expect to see this in the nature of the universe and the nature of human beings.

The Triune Nature of the Universe

Science tells us that the universe in which we live is finite and had a single point of origin. Science continues to confirm the fact that there was a point of Cosmological Singularity (often called the "Big Bang" – more on that [HERE](#)). Scientists will describe this event as the beginning of all SPACE, TIME and MATTER. It's interesting to see that science has divided and described the physical universe in this triune manner. Is it possible that this is simply evidence of the triune nature of the Creator? It's interesting to note that each of these three properties of the universe are also triune within their own natures:

Space

Dimensions in space are typically measured in degrees of height, width and depth (spacially three dimensional)

Time

Time is typically understood as it relates to the past, present or the future (temporally three dimensional)

Matter

Matter is typically measured and divided into categories of solid, liquid and gas (categorically three dimensional)

The Triune Nature of Human Beings

In addition to God's creation of space, time and manner, we need look no further than our own lives to see that the nature of the Triune God is evident within us. We too are created as a reflection of His Triune nature, according to the teaching of the Bible. Each of us is a being that is comprised of a BODY, SPIRIT and SOUL:



1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Even though the concept of the Trinity is difficult to grasp in relationship to the Divine Nature of God, it appears to be clearly evident in the nature of God's creation.



Looking for a Metaphor

So, is there a way to describe the triune nature of God using some kind of analogy or metaphor? The best Christian thinkers and philosophers have struggled with this through history and used a variety of analogies to try to describe the triune nature of God, with limited success. Unfortunately, all descriptions of the Trinity fail to communicate the fullness of the triune relationship, or eventually mischaracterize some aspect of the Godhead. But that doesn't stop us from searching for some way to explain the concept to the world around us. Augustine developed perhaps the best analogy and metaphor in this regard. While it is still inadequate to completely describe the reality that is presented to us in the Scripture, it does help us to understand the connected nature of the Godhead, while respecting the distinctive identity of the three persons within that Godhead.

Augustine pointed out that the Bible declares, "God is Love" (1 John 4:16). He also noted that love involves a lover, a beloved, and a spirit of love that exists between the two. Love, described in this way, is a personal unified relationship that requires all three of these elements to co-exist distinctly and simultaneously. In essence, love is triune. Applied to the nature of God, the Father might be seen as the lover, Jesus as the beloved, and the spirit of love as the Spirit of God. If we are careful not to take this analogy too literally, we can use it in a limited way to describe the nature of the Triune

God; one in substance or essence, three in distinct, co-equal persons.



Inside or Outside of the Camp of Christianity

All worldviews have distinctive beliefs that characterize and distinguish them from other ways of viewing the world. Christianity is no different. When it comes to the nature of God. Trinitarianism is a Christian distinctive. It has been affirmed by believers over the centuries, not as a random construct, but as a true reflection of the Biblical teaching. The best and most reasonable way to interpret what the Bible teaches about the nature of God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is to conclude that God is ONE in essence and three in persons. As mysterious as this may be, it is the claim of Scripture. As exclusive as this claim may seem, it is the defining and distinctive teaching of the Bible. To reject the Trinity is to reject the clear teaching of the Scriptures. To deny the triune nature of God is to deny the claim of Christianity and to redefine oneself as something other than Christian.