

# The Trinity Defined and Refuted (1)

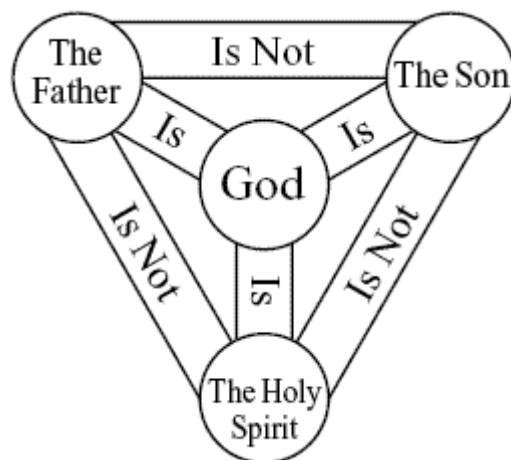
## *Three Persons in One God*

by Sean Finnegan

Sometimes when discussing the commonly held belief that Jesus is God, the person I'm speaking with will say, "If Jesus is God, then to whom does he pray? One cannot be both the Son of God and God at the same time." However, Trinitarians would have no difficulty whatsoever defending their beliefs against these claims because they do not believe the Father to be the Son. (It is more complicated than that.) Perhaps there are a number of us who have never taken the time to understand the concept of the Trinity. Therefore, I will be submitting for your consideration, edification, and education a series of several articles both defining the Trinity and refuting it, point by point. I have intentionally tried to keep previous articles "positive," that is, saying what the Bible says rather than coming against unbiblical models of understanding who/what God is. However, considering the popularity of this doctrine and the common misconceptions among unitarian believers, I thought it would be good to take on this whole subject. In order to define the Trinity in brief, I have cited below the Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia entry.

"In Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity states that God is one being who exists, simultaneously and eternally, as a mutual indwelling of three persons: the Father, the Son (incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth), and the Holy Spirit. Since the 4th century, in both Eastern and Western Christianity, this doctrine has been stated as "one God in three persons," all three of whom, as distinct and co-eternal persons, are of one indivisible Divine essence, a simple being... The doctrine of the Trinity is the result of continuous exploration by the church of the biblical data, thrashed out in debate and treatises, eventually formulated at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD in a way they believe is consistent with the biblical witness, and further refined in later councils and writings."  
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity>).

According to the Trinity, there are three separate "persons" in one divine "substance." These separate persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The belief of the Trinity is a paradox – the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God; yet, there are not three Gods, but one. In fact, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. This concept is illustrated below.



Thus, God is not believed to be a person; rather, God is believed to be an essence that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share in common. Imagine for a moment a three headed man. Each head has its own mind (emotions, intellect, and will). Although there are three minds (persons), there is only one body. At first this seems like a good analogy to represent what is being said by the definition of the Trinity. However,

this analogy breaks down at the next step because not only does each person share the same substance (God), but each is fully God. Our three headed person analogy falls short here because each head is not fully the man; rather, each is a part of him. In fact, every analogy to anything in the known universe breaks down at this point. The egg analogy, the three phases of water analogy, the three dimensions of space analogy, etc., all fail to represent what has been defined in the above diagram.

I believe that difficulties arise because we are dealing with something that is impossible—a contradiction (not merely a paradox). It is true that the Father could be fully God, and the Son fully God, and at the same time the Son is not the same as the Father. For example, I am fully human, and you are fully human, and yet, I am not you. The complications develop when we say that there is only one human. If I am human and you are human, then clearly there are two humans. The only way around this is if we say that we are parts of the same human. But again, this solution is explicitly denied by the Trinity. All members of the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) must be fully (not part of) God.

There is no logical problem with accepting that Jesus is a member of divinity (if that were what the Bible taught). Similarly, we can accept the proposition, “Sean is a member of humanity.” However, we cannot say that there are multiple members of divinity and then say that there is only one divinity, unless each of the members is a part of that one divinity. So, it would not be contradictory to say that Jesus is fully God, but then to say that the Father is fully God and yet that there are not two Gods is impossible.

Typically at this point, the Trinitarian brings forth the language of mystery in order to retreat from the imposing threat of logic. Often, it is said, “How can we possibly expect to know the deep mysteries of the triune Godhead, being that we are mere mortals?” To this question, we respond that we do not expect to know even one percent of everything that God is. Our inquiry is not into the deep mysteries of who God is and how He works; rather, we are simply trying to determine if the model of the Trinity is contradictory in and of itself. It is not God who insists we think of Him in the terms used in this Trinitarian creed. The Bible contains no such distillation of propositional boundaries. Furthermore, is it not impossible to believe genuinely in a contradiction? For example, if I honestly believe that I am both fat and thin at the same time and in the same sense, then would I go on a diet or not? The result of believing a contradiction is paralyzing. If I truly believed both that I should diet and that I should not go on a diet, then what is the result? Confusion! Thus, to have faith in God, we must not define God as a contradiction or use contradictory terminology.

However, if somehow we could accept a theory that is contradictory in the terms of its definition, we would only need to find one text that asserts that God is only one person in order to refute this model. Jesus gave us just such a verse when he said, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). Jesus is in prayer to his Father (John 17:1) and declares that his Father is “the only true God.” Can there be any more exclusive way to define God as one person? With regards to the category “true God,” the Father is the only one who qualifies. The point is further amplified because Jesus went on to say “and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Jesus could have included himself in the definition of “only true God,” but he did not. He clearly distinguished himself from the only true God. Thus, on the basis of this text, it is clear that in Jesus’ mind the Father is the only person that is God. Since the Trinity claims that there are multiple persons in the true God and Jesus claims that there is only one person in the true God, the reader is presented with a clear decision: believe Jesus or believe the theologians of the third and fourth centuries.

A second difficulty that arises from the idea that God is a substance or essence and not a person is that there are no Scriptures to support this. If “God” were interchangeable with “divine stuff,” then John 3:16 would read, “For divine stuff so loved the world that it gave its only begotten Son that whoever believes....” The simple fact is that God is a “He” in Scripture, not a what. “For God so loved the world that He....” If God is a “He,” then God is a person, not a substance. (In fact, God is one person, not two or three; because if He were three, then the pronoun “We” would have been used.)

At its foundational level, this system is evidencing major cracks. We are dealing with terminology that is completely unbiblical and concepts that are without question philosophical (metaphysics) and reek of Plato (cp. forms). There is nothing Hebraic in this entire discussion, and so we should immediately become suspicious. It is preposterous to think that Jesus or his apostles redefined the concept of God from a unipersonal, monotheistic belief of “Yahweh alone is God” to some tripartite or triune God of three persons when we see not one New Testament book, not one chapter, not one paragraph describing the change. There is no explanation of how the clear statements of radical monotheism found in the Old Testament could be reread in light of this new understanding of plurality. If the Trinity were part of what the apostles taught, then we should find at least one community in either Palestine or the Diaspora that struggled to accept this new doctrine of God. To think that the early Church debated over accepting the Gentiles, keeping the Law, how to keep communion, the role of women in the Church, yet never once had any trouble at all accepting that God is now three instead of one is absurd.

I highly recommend a study of the history of the Trinity to all who are interested in understanding the true origins of this belief system. I assure you it was not put together by Jewish Christians or in Jerusalem. It was not a natural outgrowth of the Bible; rather, it was superimposed over the text of Scripture by later Christians. The Trinity is the work of Christians who were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy living in Alexandria, Egypt (a hotbed of philosophical speculation). Anyone interested in the history of this should obtain [When Jesus Became God](#) by Richard Rubenstein. This is a very readable book that describes in detail without partiality the controversy that kicked off the decades of debate over who God is and why the Trinity ended up winning the day.

I hope that I have sufficiently expressed in an understandable way what exactly the concept of the Trinity is (three persons, one God etc.). I contend that although it is logically possible to have three persons in one essence, it is not also possible to say that they are not parts of that one essence. Furthermore, the definition of “God” as an essence rather than a person is not possible due to the personal pronouns that thousands of times refer to God. Finally, we conclude that the Father is the only person who is truly God. This flatly contradicts the primary understanding of there being three. In subsequent articles, I will be discussing several other of the defining features of the doctrine of the Trinity including that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-eternal, co-essential, and co-equal.

More Resources can be found at [kingdomready.org/topics/god.php](http://kingdomready.org/topics/god.php).