

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

FOOTNOTES: TEST THIS STUDY WITH SCRIPTURE

I once read somewhere that “Jesus loves footnotes, and so should you.”¹ It made me laugh, but it also rang true. In many ways, Jesus would do or say something, but by referencing the Law or the Prophets He would essentially be saying, as LeVar Burton famously used to say at the end of “Reading Rainbow,” “but don’t take my word for it.”

If Jesus insisted to the Jews that they should search the Scriptures for the claims of Christ, then I ask you as well to do your own homework and check the Scriptures for yourself. I want to read, study, meditate, and apply the Scriptures to my life and then share that with others, and this is why I did my best in including the various Scriptures (as well as other resources) that helped me understand my own faith and show me who Jesus is.

PRACTICAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

As often as I could, I added in a small section with tools and resources. As a Christian, we have the three key things for knowing God: our own brains, our bibles, and the Holy Spirit. But as the body of Christ, we add a fourth key resource that is not only helpful, but is even instructed for use by God: the resource of *each other*.

As a body, we are here to sharpen each other, guide each other, correct each other, and hold each other accountable. This isn’t just in areas of sin or weakness, but also in our study of the Word. And yet it is not just in the actual *action* of studying, but we should be holding each other accountable to *what we are finding*.

For this reason, we have scores and scores of books, resources, sermons, blogs, friends, pastors, churches, creeds, etc. that can be of incredible use for us. Seek out wisdom, first and foremost from the Holy Spirit leading you in His Word, but also from the body of Christ.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

I also wanted to have a practical place at the end of each chapter that gives a definition of terms used in each chapter. I wanted to have them both in each pertinent chapter and all in one spot at the end, because as a student, I like seeing things grouped together in their relative subject. Personally, it helps me grasp them more.

Throughout the study, I have marked each special term with a little clover (♣). When you see this clover, though the definition will be there in that section, you can know that it will be included in the glossary at the end of the chapter and the study itself.

BIBLE TRANSLATION

I have chosen to use, unless noted, the English Standard Version of the bible. It is an incredibly readable yet accurate translation of the Old and New Testament. If you are unfamiliar with it, I highly encourage you to pick up a copy and use it as part of your study.

Additionally, many translations differ on which words they capitalize. When quoting from particular translations, I have left the capitalization the way the particular bible translates it. When writing my own thoughts, I have chosen to capitalize many particular words, such as He, Us, They, Trinity, Word, Scripture, and Name when speaking of God, as well as a few other important words that I chose to have stand out due to their particular importance or at times “official” nature (such as Covenant of Redemption).

¹ I figured just by default this quote deserves a footnote, and the first one, no less!

I. INTRODUCTION TO DOCTRINE

DEFINING DOCTRINE AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

You are a theologian.

Say that to yourself real quick. “I am a theologian.” Is that a strange concept to you? Whether you have thought of yourself as one or not, the fact of the matter is that you are one. As a matter of fact, everyone is. After all, the basic definition of theology is “the study of God,” so a theologian is someone who has studied God. Now, I didn’t say how *good* of a theologian you are, but even the atheist is a theologian, as his “study of God” has come to the conclusion that “there is no god.” That is a theological statement, regardless of whether it is right or wrong.

We live in a day and age of Christianity where there is a lot of fluff, a lot of feel-good ideas, concepts, and writings that appeal to our emotions. Sadly, many believe “theology” or “doctrine” to be something divisive or something of “old fashioned religion,” and that the popular phrase that “Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship” throws doctrine and theology into the category of empty religion, making a relationship with Christ the only thing of importance. A general view is that as long as the person believes in Jesus, prays, and reads their bible (or in many cases, just Christian literature), then we are good to go. Though this may be sufficient for initial salvation, this is by far a false view of being a passionate disciple of Christ. And, ironically enough, that is in fact their theology, so inasmuch as they would purport that theology is for the empty religious folks, having a theology is actually inescapable, even for the most “free spirited.”

So now that we have at least seen that we all have at least *some* type of theological slant, now the task is on us to find out if we have the *right* theology. Because here’s the thing, knowing right doctrine and theology will point you towards a *healthier, richer, balanced, passionate* relationship with Jesus Christ. For those who are married or have children, you know that the more that you *know* the person you love, the more you love them. This is true with God. The more we know Him – His Word, His ways, His faithfulness, His truth, His character, His methods, His plan, His heart, His “history”, and His grace – the more we fall in love with this wonderful, beautiful God.

Even further, the only way to *have* a right relationship with Christ is by *intimately knowing who He is*. This comes by knowing the Word, will, and ways of God. When we know good theology, theology that teaches us that God exists, is personal, can be known, loves us, saves us, and changes us, this theology and doctrine impassions us to pursue Him with all that we have as a lover of God.

There can be no spiritual health without doctrinal knowledge.

— J.I. Packer²

Before moving on, let’s more or less “officially” define both doctrine and theology. The words, admittedly, are very close in relationship, and are often used very interchangeably, so don’t get too hung up on it. But for the sake of clarity, let’s look at these two words.

Theology: In general, as stated before, theology is the study of God. It is the formulation of thoughts and beliefs that one has that is related to the topic of “God.” It is basically your beliefs about God.

Doctrine: Again, this is very close to the definition of theology, but what doctrine simply means is “teaching.” To understand it simply, whatever your theology is on a certain aspect of God will dictate what doctrines you teach and believe.

So the question for us all is this: what is our theology, where do we get it from, and what doctrines are we living by and teaching others?

²Knowing God, pg. 22

WHERE WE ASCERTAIN THEOLOGY AND DOCTRINE

Revelation is a word used to describe something that has been *revealed*. Thomas Oden says that “the word *revelation* unites the two biblical ideas of an unveiling (*apokalypsis*, disclosure, appearing, coming) of God and a making known (*phanerōsis*, exhibition, manifestation, expression) of divine mysteries previously concealed.”³ In our faith, God has revealed Himself through various ways.

General Revelation: General Revelation is the act of God revealing Himself to all people throughout history. This is done through nature and creation,⁴ through human experience,⁵ and our own conscience.⁶ All of these give us *some* indication of the fact that God exists (e.g., wonder and intricacy of nature), what some of His attributes are (e.g., experiencing love and other emotions), and what His standard of living is (e.g., our conscience).

Special Revelation: Though general revelation gives people the general knowledge of certain aspects of God and thusly makes them responsible to further seek out who this God is, on its own it does not do much for our faith. This is why we need “special revelation.” This is found in the specific revealing of particular truths and realities. We see this happen through certain biblical stories,⁷ in the specifics of His Word,⁸ and most definitively through Jesus Christ.⁹

VARIOUS STUDIES WE WILL BE LOOKING AT

Some of the phrases you will be hearing over the course of this class will be important for your understanding of how the Word of God works together in harmony. To understand them to the best of our ability and in taking in the whole counsel of the Word, there are a few approaches to studying doctrine and theology. Let’s look at a few of these.

Hermeneutics: This is the theological viewpoint of interpretation. Determining this determines how you study and view the bible. For instance, whether you view the Word as either perfect or imperfect determines how you read it. Also, how you approach certain texts to be either literal or symbolic also changes how you study. Most evangelicals¹⁰ follow what is called a *historical grammatical* method. This method believes that there is a “literal” and historical purpose and interpretation for each book of the bible. It approaches the Word by asking “what did the author of this book intend to communicate to their listener?” With that, it takes into consideration grammatical understanding of symbolism, idioms, and other cultural and linguistic elements.

Exegesis: Once you understand your hermeneutics, you can now apply it by doing what is called “exegesis.” This is the process of seeking to determine the correct meaning out of a particular passage of the Scripture. It is the method and practice by which you study to determine what the bible is really saying, which in our case is by employing the historical grammatical hermeneutic. So, hermeneutics is the “how to” understand the Word, and exegesis is the action of actually doing the “how to.”

Once you have these down, you start formulating your “theology,” or your “study of God.” There are various subdivisions of theology.

Biblical Theology: This is the most general, it is the study of Scriptural revelation based on the historical framework represented in the bible.

Philosophical Theology: This uses various tools of God’s general revelation (nature, reason, etc.) to study various topics. You use these tools to help you understand biblical theology.

We will use some of these methods when we approach particular topics and issues in the Word. These specific focused studies we affectionately call the “ologies.”

³ Systematic Theology: Volume 1, the Living God by Thomas Oden, page 17. He also cross references Ephesians 3.3, Job 12.22 and Daniel 2.22-29

⁴ Romans 1.18-23 // Psalm 8.1-9, 19.1-6, 50.1-6, 97.1-6

⁵ Genesis 1.27 // John 13.35 // Luke 11.13

⁶ 1 Timothy 4.2 // Hebrews 9.6-14, 10.22

⁷ Such as miraculous events in the Word, e.g. 1 Kings 18 when God devoured Elijah’s sacrifice by fire from the sky in the presence of the priests of Baal.

⁸ Romans 16.25-27 // 2 Timothy 3.16

⁹ John 3.16 // Hebrews 9.23-26 // Romans 3.21, 22 // Ephesians 3.10-12

¹⁰ To roughly and loosely define an “evangelical” Christian, the basis of it is a Christian who believes in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the main, fundamental teachings of the bible. It usually denotes theologically conservative Christians who believe in things such as the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the fact that Jesus is Lord, and salvation by grace through faith alone (as opposed to works-based salvation).

The suffix “-ology” comes from the Latin word for “word.” We translate it as “study.” Therefore, “bio-”, meaning “life,” and “-ology,” meaning “study,” means “the study of life,” or “biology.”

Bibliology: The Study of the Bible: (“Bible” = “Bible”):

Theology: The Study of God: (“Theo” = “God”): Theology is specifically studying God. Who He is, what He does, His patterns, ways, and interactions. It is the most general term we use for studying His Word.

Anthropology: The Study of Man: (“anthropos” = “human”): Origin, physical make up, behaviors, and such.

Hamartiology: The Study of Sin: (“hamartia” = “sin” or “missing the mark”): How it affects us, where it comes from, the residual effects of it, how it is fixed, etc.

Christology: The Study of Jesus Christ: (“Christos” = “Christ”): Who He is, what He accomplished, how He affects our life, His relationship within the Trinity, His deity, His humanity.

Pneumatology: The Study of the Holy Spirit: (“pneuma” = “breath”): “Breath” is a metaphor for a non-material being (ghost or spirit) or influence. It is the study of where the Holy Spirit came from, what His role is in our life, His relationship within the Trinity, etc.

Soteriology: The Study of Salvation: (“soterion” = “salvation”): How do we receive salvation, who can be saved, what is the process, how is it carried out?

Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church: (“ekklesia” = “assembly”): What is the church, who leads the church, who is part of the church, what is the church’s role, how does it function and carry out God’s will?

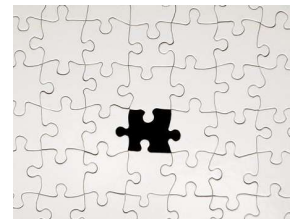
Eschatology: The Study of the Last Things (End Times): (“eschatos” = “last”): What will happen at the end of days, what is the order of the last days (rapture, second coming of Christ, etc.)?

The way I see it in an overly simplified way, as people we typically have three varying views of theology. We can have what I call a “make believe theology,” where we just have vague ideas of who we think God is, how He works, and what He wants us to do. We make a lot of our decisions based on impressions, feelings, open doors, and waiting for signs.



The second one I call “buffet theology.” This is where we just pick and choose the various theologies we like and disagree with ones that don’t sit well with us. These decisions aren’t based, however, on the biblical truth of the theologies we are discarding or liking, but just their appeal. This is, more or less, “make believe theology” taking on some type of more structured form. Or maybe better said, like a buffet, they are compartmentalized and kept separate from the rest, and they have non-existent, make believe connections to the other theologies.

The third theology is called “systematic theology.” Once we have a decent grasp on our biblical theology from our “buffet,” especially the many major subdivision “ologies,” we see how they fit together, like a jigsaw puzzle. They complement each other, they illuminate each other, and they don’t contradict each other. We realize that everything we believe is intimately tied to other doctrines; they are not isolated. For this reason, it is of paramount importance that we *truly know* what we believe and *why* we believe it.



Systematic Theology: The study that answers the question “what does the whole bible say about this particular topic or issue.” It shows how various Scriptures throughout the bible work in harmony together to form a well-rounded, connected, agreeing view of a particular topic. It also then connects them to other “ologies,” forming a completed jigsaw puzzle. This isn’t to say that every single last question in the bible is answered, this simply can’t be, as God cannot be *completely* known in totality. But we do understand, with confidence, how God has chosen to reveal Himself and work and act among our world.

Practical Theology: An important byproduct of knowing our various “ologies” is the result of practical theology. This is when we are studying and we examine how to best apply truths to the life of the church and the world around us (missions, preaching, evangelism, counseling, etc.). No “ology” is very useful unless it changes us.

The ironic thing of these “ologies,” in particular biblical, systematic, and practical theology, is that they can’t really exist without each other. When titling this class, I was hard pressed to decide what to name it. I wanted it to be biblical, of course, but I realized I was showing how the various “ologies” intertwine, so it became a bit of a systematic theology class. But I didn’t want it to just be knowledge, and I wanted it to be super practical.

In the end, a good systematic theology must be biblical and practical. Good, practical theology will be both systematic and biblical, and good biblical theology will always be systematic and practical. The difference is really just looking at good ol’ fashioned theology from a different angle.

The goal of theology is to worship God.

—Philip Ryken

Apologetics: Lastly, a proper understanding of all of these will give us confidence in our life and we will be able to recognize, oppose, and defend against false teaching. Apologetics is the studying of theology in order to defend truth against criticism and distortion and giving evidence to its credibility.

When all is said and done, good theology will change us from the inside out and in every area of our life. Even just since the beginning of working on this study, I have fallen more in love with my wife, my two boys, and my church. My personal evangelism has grown greatly, I see my life and the plan of God in this world so much differently, and it causes me to live and think differently. Knowing God changes you. Good theology causes you to worship, because the more you know Him, the more you love Him.

**At the end of the day, Jesus said that “all the Law and Prophets
hang on [the] two commands” to love God and love each other.
All study of the Word of God should cause us to love God and love people more.
If it doesn’t, we’re doing something wrong.**

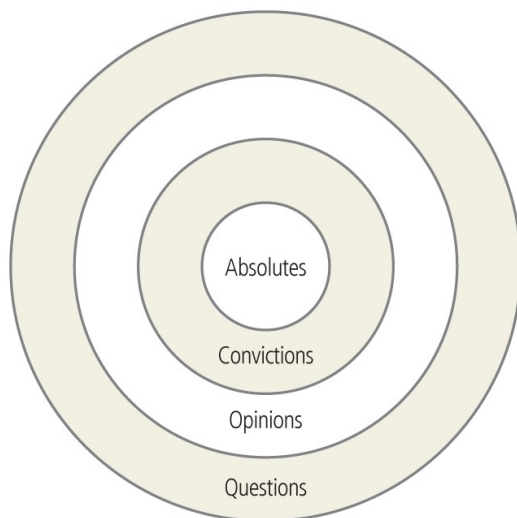
❧ DIFFERENTIATING ESSENTIAL VS. PERIPHERAL DOCTRINE ❧

The bible certainly covers a *lot* of topical ground. What it says about various topics and subjects, the importance Scripture puts on them, and the ramifications they have in our life and faith greatly dictate what we do with them and how we walk them out. Generally speaking, you will often hear them spoken of as “**closed hand**” issues or doctrines (beliefs we in no way compromise, e.g., the deity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith alone, the existence of only one true God, etc.), as well as “**open hand**” issues or doctrines (beliefs that are not essential for salvation or being a Christian, e.g., church structure, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Christian liberty, etc.).

More specifically, we can break down the various doctrinal findings in the following four categories:

In the chart below, the center circle contains **Absolutes**, doctrines that would be the “closed hand” essentials. These, as we will define in this class, are those that we WILL NOT compromise in any shape or form, as they are essential to the Christian faith. The second circle, **Convictions**, is for beliefs that we hold strongly to as they facilitate much of the way we live out our life. They are often times essential to the walking out of our faith, but not essential to having faith. We more often than not don’t ever compromise these, however we are constantly open to those convictions changing as God does various works within us. The next circle, **Opinions**, is quite simply that: opinions. These are things that we have typically given thought to, are generally important to us, but in no way do we hold on tight to, often times because the Word doesn’t say much about them and we therefore don’t become dogmatic about them. These opinions will oftentimes greatly change throughout the course of our life, depending on the stage of life we are, our experience, wisdom, and continual revelation of truth in the Word. Lastly, **Questions** are the parts in the Word that are not quite as clear or definitive. These are the least mentioned (or often times unmentioned) issues in the bible that don’t have much dogmatic education, but we know are there for a reason and so we ask questions about their place in our life.

What various issues or doctrines would fall under the following categories?



Absolutes: _____

Convictions: _____

Opinions: _____

Questions: _____

Three main approaches to these doctrines will place us in a particular journey of theology.

What happens when we push any of the three outlying types into the **Absolutes** inner circle?

What happens when we push any of the **Absolutes** (or even **Convictions**) into any one of the outlying circles?

What happens when we are mindful of these issues and rightly aim to place them in their proper category?

DISCERNING Which is Which

Of course, the natural and correct next question would be “how do we know which are ‘open’ and which are ‘closed’?” This, of course, is the source of all the debates over the years. Some groups think that one issue is essential, and the other group thinks that it is not.

In chapter three of his book *Deep Church*, Jim Belcher suggests compartmentalizing our various doctrines into two tiers, an upper tier and a lower tier. The upper tier, of course has those things that would be essential to faith. The lower tier are those “debatable” or “non-essential” beliefs. One recommendation he makes is that it is made up of the various doctrines covered in the oldest of the ancient creeds, particularly the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. These ancient creeds were formulated statements of faith that the general church would construct as a guide for belief and as a safeguard against heresy. These creeds cover the “basics” that focus on the doctrines that, as John Stott is quoted by Belcher saying, form the “unity of the gospel.”

The Apostle’s Creed dates near 180 AD. The ‘legend’ is that it was Jesus’ apostles who passed it down.

The Apostles’ Creed (from the Book of Common Prayer, 1662)¹¹

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried:

He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The more thorough Nicene Creed was created in 325 AD and then revamped a little bit in 381 AD.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Now, these would be the doctrines that we would be able to agree with each other as a basis for salvation and brotherhood. What these agreements do *not* do is tell us how much specific and particular partnership we should have when other doctrines, particularly deep convictions, are disagreed upon. For instance, should a woman marry a man who has no conviction about being faithfully committed to a church body? That isn’t an “essential for salvation” issue, but it will dramatically change the way in which they live out their faith.

¹¹ I made minor alterations to this 1662 version. Namely some capitalization and spellings, changing it from old English style to modern English. The word “catholic” was de-capitalized, as it is understood as “universal,” not “Roman Catholic.”

Having disagreements on these deep convictions shouldn't shirk our commitment to receiving others with genuine love as brothers and sisters in Christ, but they should play a major role as we commit to particular areas of life where we unify ourselves with others in deeper, more intimate ways.

On the same token, we also do know and believe that within a circle of friends and especially within a church, core convictions will be widely disagreed on. So in all this, we must be loving, discerning, and humble before God and toward each other. This is no easy task, to be sure, but knowing our theology and doctrine should help us discern these things.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

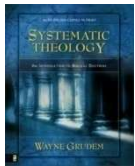
As we go throughout this study, I will always break down the final part of each section with some practical tools. I will share resources, a glossary of terms we learned, and some study questions and word studies.

♣Definition of Terms♣

Since this whole section was nothing but defining terms, I won't be repeating the terms here. But as the class continues, make sure to try to memorize what these terms are. Some will be technical words you may never use, but even knowing what they are will be good as you read and study other books and resources. You may not use the terms, but others will, and instead of assuming you don't know what they are talking about, having the knowledge will enhance your study time.

Theology and Doctrinal Books

Books that specifically tackle particular doctrines or theology differ from commentaries in that they go after a concise understanding of how theology and doctrine work as weaved throughout the whole bible, not just a specific look at a book of the bible. One method of study is called "systematic theology," where you build a "system" by which theology is connected to each other. This is a very important part of study that helps us get an overall view of particular doctrines using the whole counsel of God.



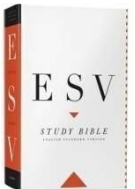
****Systematic Theology** by Wayne Grudem.

One of the most thorough, well written books on doctrine and theology, Grudem's work is a staple in most bible teachers' and pastors' libraries. Intimidating at first, it is surprisingly readable and understandable, and it is easy to find the particular aspects of theology with his thorough index and footnotes.

1291 Pages.

\$45 MSRP

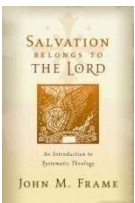
A smaller, 528 page, \$19.79 abridged version is also available.



****The English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible**(Crossway)

This bible has lots of great commentary, graphs, charts, full color maps, a great appendix full of sections on doctrinal overviews, how we got the Scriptures, biblical ethics, how to read and interpret the bible, and more. It also comes with a free online resource that includes the bible itself, all the maps, a concordance, and all the resources, all searchable.

\$49.99 MSRP

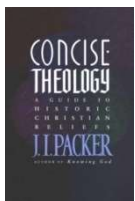


****Salvation Belongs to the Lord**by John Frame.

Frame's "Introduction to Systematic Theology" is a very conversational, pastoral approach to explaining theology.

382 Pages.

\$24.99 MSRP



****Concise Theology** by J.I. Packer.

Packer is another theologian whose commentaries and writings have inspired and helped teach thousands. He is one of the most influential modern day theologians and authors and has authored or contributed to dozens of books about the supremacy of God, His glory, holiness, and worship. This more compact book on theology is a great start at understanding the essentials.

267 Pages.

There are a *number* of other great books out there to read. If you are interested in a particular topic, go to the **Practical Tools** at the end of each section to see recommended reading and web resources. Additionally, check the Appendices to see a complete list of recommended reading.

A Few Tools for Good Bible Study

1. **Read the entire text thoroughly a few times.** Use multiple translations to help you (NIV, ESV, NASB, etc.).
2. **Then, focus on a particular paragraph or section**
 - a. **Think in context!** It is important to remember that “Context is king!” Read a whole section before studying a single verse.
3. **Next, go one by one, studying each verse.**
 - a. **Do a word search** (this is called cross reference). This helps you see how certain words or phrases were used elsewhere in the bible, giving you a broader, more balance context. Remember to use multiple translations.
 - b. **Look up the word in its original language.** Though this sounds difficult, it is not. Also see the “**Word Study**” for more direction on this. This tool helps you see the exact meaning for the words. It gives you more context. Try blueletterbible.com or purchase software like **Logos**.
4. **Once you have read and studied on your own, it is time to meditate on the verses.** Pray as you read them again. Ask God to reveal to you what He intended for us to know and walk in. Thank Him for the truths that He is showing you, and ask Him to reveal more as you study.
5. **Now, it’s a good time to check your findings.** You can do this in many ways; it is always good to hold yourself accountable with your studies and check with others.
 - a. **Open a commentary.** Commentaries are writings based on the studies of other theologians. While incredibly helpful, it is important to remember that only God’s Word is perfect. Try bestcommentaries.com for solid reviews and direction. Also, a good Study Bible will have good commentary in it.
 - b. **Read other sources.** There are many great books (and bad ones) out there. But remember, make reading/studying the bible your number one goal, time wise and priority wise. Check out thevillagechurch.net, thegospelcoalition.org or desiringgod.org, and use their search engine for good articles, sermons, and writings on biblical principles and doctrine.
 - c. **Ask a pastor or solid mentor if what you feel like you found is solid.** Having a good conversation to walk and talk through questions is always a good thing. Be humble and teachable.
6. **Invest time.**
7. **Be patient, be deliberate, and work hard.** Don’t rush, don’t get frustrated, keep going and work hard at it.

See the Appendix for more thorough notes on how to not just read, but study, your bible.

Also, go to www.lifemissionchurch.com/resources/classes, then scroll down to the “How to Study the Bible Class.” Watch “How to Study the Bible: Part 1 and 2,” which is a two part class on understanding how to study the Word more effectively.

II. THE TRINITARIAN GOD

The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit: the One, True and Living God

God is the single most controversial topic in all of human history. From the great stories of the Scriptures and the miracles witnessed, to the accusations of His “cold hearted” allowance of natural disasters and claims that He is a “mean” God because He allows sufferings, God has been on both the forefront and backburner of every human mind in history. To even begin to “explain” Him in a little study such as this seems at first futile and daunting, if not even pointless. J.I. Packer perfectly summed up this sentiment when he opened up the first line of the preface of his incredible book, *Knowing God* by saying “As clowns yearn to play Hamlet, so I have wanted to write a treatise on God.”¹²

✠ God Reveals Himself ✠

Now if we were to be completely honest and objective, we should come to the conclusion that there is some truth in this. The first thing we must come to understand before we jump in to trying to “study” God, is to recognize *how* exactly we can do that. The thing that sets the study of God apart from other studies is, quite simply, the subject matter. Let’s think about this for a second. If you or I had nothing as a guide for faith, no bible, no artifacts, no stories, etc., but just our own brains and creation, how would we “find” God as a subject of study? I propose that we simply cannot.

In science, man has studied and discovered some amazing things. But all of these things *were already there* for the taking. We just had to figure out which rock to look under. Whether it was gravity, supernovas, DNA, or the speed of light, they were just a few calculations and tests away from being discovered. But this is not so with God. No researcher on earth could go on a quest for God and find Him. They couldn’t even figure out what His Name is, let alone what He is all about.

To put in relatable terms, sometimes I used to play hide and go seek with my boys when they were little. I hid wherever I wanted, and the two boys then *attempted* to find me. However, the only way that my boys, limited in their discernment or “discovery” skills, could find me is if I chose to go easy on them and *allowed myself to be revealed*, even if partially, such as peeking from behind a door with a smile or choosing an obvious spot, like under a blanket on the floor. This is the same with God. We don’t just *find* Him, but He *lets us* find Him.

The only true God is a God who pursues.

If God was indeed “findable” by us and our own smarts, He would be a terrible god. Indeed, He would be a “little g” god. If God is really God, He must be a God who pursues us. He cannot simply be “found” unless by His own choice. Imagine, God sitting out in some random other dimension, minding His own business doing stuff that God does, and all of a sudden one of us sneaks around the corner and exclaims, “Ha! Found you!”

No, that’s just not how it works. Imagine you are dropped off in the middle of nowhere and someone tells you, “okay, go find God. And when you find Him, I want you to tell me all about Him, starting with His Name.” How could you accomplish this task? Where would you start? Would you pray? That sounds good, but getting an answer in prayer requires a response, therefore showing that God must reveal. Do you observe nature? As we saw in the first section, nature is a part of “general revelation,” and is surely something that does tell us something about God. Sure, you can ascertain that God is a Creator, and that’s a good start, but guess what? The very fact that God created in the first place was yet another act of His own accord to make something about Himself *known*.

And so we are back at square one. The only way we can “find” God is if He allows us to find Him, like I do with my boys playing hide and go seek.

This is how it is with us and God. We can’t “find” Him, but rather He allows Himself to be revealed.¹³ We see this in **Deuteronomy 29.29** when the Word says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” Our knowledge of Him is based solely on *His* mercy, *His* grace, and *His* desire to be known. It is a truly incredible thing when you think of the greatness of God

¹²From the 1973 Preface on page 11.

¹³Genesis 35.7 // Deuteronomy 29.29

and the fact that He *wants* us to know Him! In fact, as we see the story of salvation unfold throughout both the Old and New Testament, we will see the recurring theme of God's plan and desire is always this:

God wants to be our God and He wants us to be His people.¹⁴

Therefore, even as we feel this task may indeed be futile, we see that this however is not the case, because this infinite, unknowable-in-totality, and eternally holy and powerful God has indeed *chosen to be known*.¹⁵ We call this God's *self-disclosure*. ♣ He has chosen to interact with His creation,¹⁶ especially His very specially created image bearers who have sadly been shattered by sin. So no, it is neither pointless nor futile (though still very much daunting!) to, maybe "explain" isn't the perfect word, but "explore" the truths that we do know about Him. He has indeed allowed us, mainly through the divine gift of His Word, to know, search out, and explore the many, many glorious attributes of Him.

Knowing these attributes engage us further and further into His love, grace, and fellowship. We are drawn to His beauty as we seek to know His character and His ways. When we give ourselves to the task of knowing God as much as we humanly can, we are indeed transformed from glory to glory¹⁷ into the image of Him through His sanctifying work in our submission to Him.

⌘ The Knowable Name of God ⌘

The first thing you do when you want to get to know someone personally is find out their name. We may not think of a name as something all that important to know about the character of someone, because in today's day and age, we've largely taken for granted the importance of a name as it speaks of who we are. Yet, it is often the very first word we hear after we are born, and the word that we will hear on practically an everyday basis for all the years of our life. Our name becomes synonymous to friends and family with anything and everything that reminds them of us. When you hear the name of your mom, for instance, memories, feelings, emotions, and character traits flood in your mind and heart. When I hear the name of my two boys, I picture their faces and personality and it makes me want to smile. Our name represents who we are.

This was even truer going back into more ancient times. We see this evidenced all throughout the Word,¹⁸ and so it comes as no surprise that the revealing of God's Name was one of the most pivotal events in the history of God's people, the Hebrews, in the book of **Exodus**.

In the story, unsuspecting Moses (notice, Moses wasn't "looking" for God, but God revealed Himself to Moses on God's dime!), just a fugitive shepherd at the time, encounters a mysteriously burning, yet unconsumed bush. He engages what the Word describes as "the Angel of the LORD"¹⁹ in a conversation that went like this:

Exodus 3.13-15

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?" ¹⁴ 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.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

¹⁴ Genesis 17.8 // Leviticus 26.12 // Ruth 1.16 // Jeremiah 7.23, 11.4, 24.7, 30.22, 31.33, 32.38 // Ezekiel 11.20, 14.11, 37.23, 27 // Zechariah 8.8 // 2 Corinthians 6.16 // Hebrews 8.10 // Revelation 21.3

¹⁵ Exodus 6.7, 7.5, 17, 8.22, 9.14, 10.2, 14.4, 16.12, Deuteronomy 4.35, Psalm 46.10, 83.18, 100.3, Jeremiah 16.21, Ezekiel 6.10. Do a cross reference on the phrase "know that I am" and read the verses that show up.

¹⁶ Psalm 8.1, 113.1-3

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 3.18

¹⁸ Genesis 17.5, 35.10 // 1 Samuel 25.25 // 1 Chronicles 22.9 // Acts 13.8

¹⁹ Many, if not most, scholars believe this "Angel of the LORD" to be what is called a theophany. A theophany is an "appearance of God." In other words, they believe that God appeared as an Angel in order to talk with Moses, as God could not meet with him face to face in His full glory and be in the midst of sin. Furthermore, many, myself included, believe it to even be a "Christophany," which is more specifically a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ Himself in the Old Testament. Some theophanies and/or Christophanies include Genesis 12.7, 18.1, 26.2, 24, 35.1, 9, 48.3, Exodus 6.3, Leviticus 9.4, 6.2, Deuteronomy 31.15, 1 Samuel 3.21, 1 Kings 3.5, 9.2, and 11.9, and 2 Chronicles 1.

The phrase “I AM WHO I AM” is unique. ♣ In Hebrew, it’s an absolute statement of being. It is both the present “I am” as well as future “I will be,” essentially declaring that “I” do not change, and “I” have always been. If you remember the cartoon Popeye, he memorably used to state “I am what I am” with his gravelly voice. But saying “I am what I am” is far different than the concept of what saying “I AM WHO I AM” conveys.



For Popeye, he is *what* he is. He has become a product of his upbringing, experiences, circumstances, and of course, spinach. He is also a product of family history, DNA, and sinful nature (yes, I realize we are talking about a cartoon character here, but you get the picture). He has *become* what he is. This is true for every human being: we *become* what we are. By upbringing, choices, external influences, DNA, and sin.

With God, however, by saying “I AM WHO I AM,” He is saying that He just simply “is.” He didn’t *become* this way, nor did He *grow into* the way He is; He isn’t constantly changing into something else or evolving, for better or for worse. He is not influenced by anything. He is not becoming more holy or more loving. He just simply already is who He is, and is who He always has been and will be, as we see explicitly in **Revelation 1.4**, where Christ declares “I am the Alpha and the Omega,”²⁰ says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Even more specifically, “I AM” in Hebrew is where we get the Name “Yahweh” (Yahweh is pronounced the same way “I AM” is pronounced. When you see “LORD” in all capital letters, that is the word “Yahweh,” or “I AM”). God here, especially in context of **Exodus, John**, and the **Revelation** statements (and all the other “I am the Lord” statements), is showing that He (Yahweh) is not whatever we need Him to be (comfort, love, merciful), but that *He is everything* we need *always*. He doesn’t change per our needs; He simple “is and always will be.” It’s a huge truth to wrap our brain around, but it shows at least a few truths about God.

- **I AM unchanging.** There is no such thing as the “Old Testament God” and the “New Testament God.” God does not change. He also does not have split personalities. He is whole, total, and all complete, all the time. In other words, He doesn’t set aside His love for humanity when He unleashes His wrath. He doesn’t put on love when He done being angry. Rather, all the eternal attributes of God’s character never contradict each other nor overpower another.
 - His ways do not change
 - His thoughts do not change
 - His purposes do not change
 - His Word does not change
 - His truth does not change
 - His mind does not change

Hebrews 13.8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Hebrews 6.17-19

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain...

Malachi 3.6

"For I the LORD do not change."

²⁰ Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last. This is Christ stating that He is the first and the last of all things, that He spoke the first Word and will have the last Word, essentially.

Numbers 23.19

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

James 1.16, 17

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

- **I AM eternal.** God is self-existent, has created all things, and is the Lord of all; all powerful.²¹

Isaiah 26.4

Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD God is an everlasting rock.

Isaiah 40.28

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

John 8.58

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Revelation 1.8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Revelation 1.17, 18

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Psalms 135.13

Your name, O LORD, endures forever, your renown, O LORD, through all ages.

- **I AM self-sufficient and all-powerful.** God is sovereign, able to do everything, and He needs no help (but yet He *chooses* to use us!)

Isaiah 46.8-13

"Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' ¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. ¹² "Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: ¹³ I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory."

Isaiah 55.10, 11

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Matthew 19.26

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

²¹ 1 Timothy 6.16 // Romans 1.23 // Psalm 93.2

But these three declarations have further implication and point to further attributes of His Name. Specifically, the Word mentions more attributes of His Name; it says that His Name:

- Is mighty in power. Jeremiah 10.6 // John 17.11
- Gives wisdom to those who fear it. Micah 6.9
- Is good. Psalm 52.9
- Is what we should place our hope in. Psalm 52.9 // Matthew 12.21
- Is what we should place our trust in. Zephaniah 3.12 // Psalm 20.7
- Is to be revered and feared. Nehemiah 1.11 // Psalm 86.11, 61.5 // Revelation 11.18
- Is to be loved. Psalm 5.11, 69.36
- Is majestic in all the earth. Psalm 8.1, 9
- Saves us. Psalm 54.1 // Acts 2.21 // Romans 10.13
- Is to be glorified. Psalm 29.2, 66.2, 79.9, 86.9, 12 // John 12.28 // Revelation 15.4 // 1 Chronicles 16.29
- Is to be sought. Psalm 83.16
- Is to be rejoiced in. Psalm 89.16
- Is eternal. Psalm 72.17, 113.2, 135.13 // Exodus 3.15
- Should be our desire. Isaiah 26.8
- Should be the sole thing we honor. Isaiah 26.13
- Is holy. Matthew 6.9 // Psalm 111.9 // Luke 1.49
- Is to be sung to. Psalm 7.17, 135.3 // Romans 15.9
- Dwells. Deuteronomy 12.5, 11, 14.23, 24, 16.2-11 // Ezra 6.12
- Is awesome. Psalm 111.9
- Is almighty. Jeremiah 31.35, 10.16, 50.34, 51.19 // Amos 4.13
- Is the Name above all names. Zechariah 14.9 // Philippians 2.9, 10
- Is to be honored and exalted. Malachi 3.16 // Isaiah 24.15
- Is to be believed in. John 1.12, 2.23 // 1 John 3.23, 5.13
- Gives life. John 20.31
- Forgives sins. Acts 10.43
- Is a strong tower and is our help. Proverbs 18.10 // Psalm 124.8
- It is to be called upon. Psalm 105.1, 116.13 // Isaiah 12.4 // Zephaniah 3.9, 13.9 // 1 Corinthians 1.2

We also see that it is to be declared, that those who come in the Name of the LORD are blessed,²² that we are to be baptized in it,²³ that the temple was built for it,²⁴ that it heals,²⁵ and that we should suffer and die for it.²⁶

It's very interesting as we look at this extensive list, because when added up, the sum total of all of these attributes and commands is a description only given to God Himself. This shows us that the Name of God is not just simply a label or ID tag so we know it's Him, but that His Name is synonymously connected to every part of who He is. This is somewhat hard for us to comprehend, because we call His Name an "it," and we speak of it as "His," something He possesses.

This isn't wrong, but we should *also see it* as something *more* than that. We should see His Name as being the absolute encapsulation of God Himself. Realizing this gives us a clear picture on why the Word also tells us that we are to worship and praise His Name, not as a separate entity or possession of God, but as the very culmination and essence of God Himself. This is the last in our list of attributes and commands for the Name of the LORD:

- His Name is to be praised. Psalm 9.2, 18.49, 44.8, 54.6, 61.8, 66.3, 4, 74.21, 96.2, 100.4, 113.1, 2, 135.1, 2, 148.5, 13, 138.2, 140.13, 142.7, 145.1 // Isaiah 25.1 // Daniel 2.20 // Job 1.21

So where do we begin a study about a holy, eternal, self-existing, all-powerful God who has no beginning or end? Since there is no "shallow water" when it comes to the beautiful things of God, it would be just as well to dive right into one of the greatest mystery-truths that the Word speaks of concerning who God is: the *Trinity*.♣

²² Matthew 23.39 // Luke 19.38

²³ Acts 8.16, 19.5

²⁴ 1 Kings 3.2, 5.3-5, 8.20, 1 Chronicles 22.19, 2 Chronicles 2.1, 4,

²⁵ James 5.14 // Acts 3.16, 4.10, 30 // Malachi 4.2

²⁶ Acts 21.13 // James 5.10

☪ ONE TRUE GOD, YET THREE DISTINCT PERSONS ☪

One of the most intriguing attributes of the God that the bible affirms that there is only one true and living God, but that He is also existent in three distinct Persons, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is both "I AM," and "Us."²⁷ This poses some very interesting questions.

First and foremost, it should be noted that never in doubt in the early church was the doctrine of *monotheism*.♣ Monotheism is the absolute essential belief that there is only one true God. This belief is affirmed in both the Old and New Testaments:

Isaiah 45.5, 6

"I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ 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."

Isaiah 45.21, 22

"Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. ²² Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

Isaiah 46.9

"...remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me..."

Acts 4.12

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Mark 12.29

Jesus answered [quoting Deuteronomy 6.4], "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'"

In addition to these, what is incredible is that even **Genesis 1.26** refers to God as an "Us." So if we believe that there is only one true God, what do we do with this whole "three Persons" business? If He isn't three gods, are they all 1/3 god, like a co-op sharing the throne?

While this is no light doctrine to understand, it must be said that, first of all, He is not a schizophrenic god with multiple personalities, and nor is He three separate "divisions" that operate as one unit or force. He is/They are three distinct Persons who are God, yet they are co-equal in attribute, deity and essence.

Confused yet? Don't worry, though it is impossible to fully explain or comprehend the eternal depth of the Trinity, we will, as stated before, seek to explore and understand as much as we can according to as much as the bible tells us about this greatly important truth. God has in fact chosen to reveal many aspects of this mysterious truth, and it is for that reason that we know that it is important for us to seek it out.

²⁷ Exodus 3.14 // Genesis 1.26

In a great little book by Bruce A. Ware called *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*, Ware states ten reasons why we should study this doctrine. I recommend reading the whole book, but I'd like to give a few of his reasons that I have paraphrased and blended with my own reasons.

- It is central and necessary for the Christian faith. Remove the Trinity, and the whole Christian faith disintegrates. (We will see much of this in the coming chapters)
- It affects the way we worship and pray.
- It affects how we see our faith, our salvation, and our relationship with the Lord. We “walk differently” in our faith the more we understand the Trinity.
- It changes how we see relationships, authority, submission, and varying roles in our life.
- It changes the way we see true love, selflessness, care, servanthood, and devotion to one another.
- It teaches us how to relate to other people.
- It teaches us how to walk in humility, yet at the same time teaches us how to walk in confidence.

The bottom line when it comes to the Trinity is this:

How you view the Trinity will dictate how you view every aspect of your life.

Whether it's parenting, church life, marriage, friendships, co-workers, strangers, how you learn and grow, accountability, sanctification, dealing with sin, worship, prayer, or decision making, your understanding of the Trinity will in fact affect every detail of your life. Everything in life flows from our understanding of the Trinity.

✠ The TRINITY Throughout Church History ✠

With all that said, it's important to remember again that this isn't incredibly easy to understand, and to help us wrap our brains around it, it would be helpful to get a brief overview of how the historic church developed their understanding of the Trinity. As stated before, the question of monotheism was never an issue in the early church, but the question, rather, was “how exactly does this work?”

Though the apostles who authored the New Testament clearly saw the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as equally God, the first few hundred years of the church strived to grasp exactly what this means. The fact of the matter is that the word “trinity” is not in Scriptures, but the concept most certainly is. The first use of the word “trinity” was by a fellow named Theophilus of Antioch in 170 AD,²⁸ but it was Tertullian, whose ministry spanned from his conversion around 200 AD until his death in 220 AD, who contextually used the phrase to specifically describe the Persons and substance of God, that they are “one in essence - not one in Person.”²⁹

But amidst this time of defining many other teachings were undermining this mysterious and critical truth. A theologian from the third century named Sabellius saw God as being one God who had three “faces” or “masks.” Essentially, he believed in the one true God, but believed that the Son and Holy Spirit were different manifestations or “modes” of God in which He relates to His people. This is now called *Sabellianism*, or *modalism*. ♣

Also in the same time span, in the late 200's, another teacher named Arius claimed that the Son was a created being, not eternal, and therefore not of equal essence as God the Father (though a perfect creation). This has become known as *Arianism*. ♣

Eventually, church leaders around the world became concerned that these heresies would spread, and so the First Council of Nicaea was called by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in 325 AD in order to attain an agreed consensus on these important tenants of the Christian faith. With around 300 bishops from all over the modern world as well as, according to church historian Eusebius who was present at the

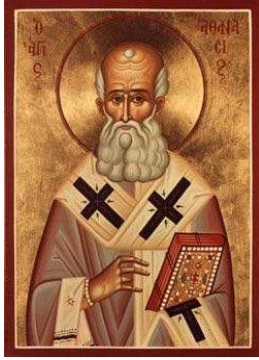


Depiction of the Council of Nicaea

²⁸ There are also some earlier hints at the usage of the word from the *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 1.58)

²⁹ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 3.621; c. 213 AD

Council, the allowed “two priests and three deacons” per bishop for accompaniment, the number of attendees could have been around 1800.



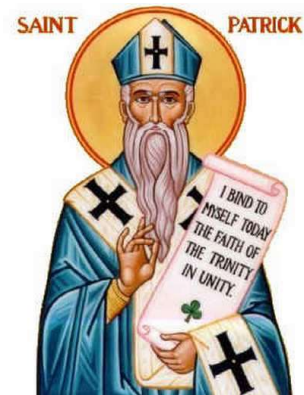
Athanasius of Alexandria

One of the biggest opponents of these heresies was Athanasius, whose biblical arguments for the deity of Christ were foundational for the formation of the Council’s final verdict, that Christ indeed was of the same essence of God, yet a distinct Person. The result of this decision created the Nicene Creed, an incredible writing that succinctly spells out the main and critical articles of orthodox, biblical, and essential-for-faith doctrines.³⁰

In the soon following years, church leaders continued in their developing and understanding of this most critical doctrine. In the 4th century, Augustine of Hippo wrote 15 books on the Trinity, and around that same time, Patrick, the first great missionary who converted nearly the whole island of Ireland, wrote these opening (and closing) lines of his now famous poem/song “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”:

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness,
Of the Creator of Creation

With this little background as a precursor giving us a backdrop on the complexity of this doctrine, let’s try to define what we *do* know, from Scripture, about the Trinity.



☪ COMMON MISTAKES MADE WITH THE TRINITY ☪

Let’s first define a few common *untruths* about the Trinity according to Their substance:

Mistakes Made About the Trinity as a Unified and Singular God:

- As stated above, God is not a schizophrenic god with multiple personalities. The Trinity is not three different *personalities* of one god. Though this does in a way affirm the monotheistic truth of God, it denies the Trinity itself. This, again, is what we call *Sabellianism* or *modalism*. This is a common viewpoint of the Pentecostal Church (they call it “Oneness Theology”), and many folks among the Emergent Church community.³¹
- He is also not three separate gods who work together as one. This would be called *polytheism*,♣ the belief of multiple gods.

Mistakes Made Concerning the Father:

- The Father neither created the Son, nor the Holy Spirit, as a natural father “creates” his natural children.³² That is called *Arianism*.♣³³ This is the belief of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Rather, all three Persons of the Trinity are, have always been, and will always be one.³⁴ He is neither “more God” than the Son nor the Holy Spirit.
- The Father is not a physical being. His “hands” and “eyes”³⁵ as spoken of in the Word speak of His sovereign works and omniscient vision in human terms to relate to us. He is eternal, He is a spirit, and He is omnipresent.³⁶ To make Him into any image or reduce who He is breaks the second commandment.

³⁰ See Appendix and Chapter 1 for more on this.

³¹ Such as in the popular book *The Shack*, by William P. Young

³² John 1.1-5, 14

³³ Philippians 2.6 // John 5.18

³⁴ John 17.11, 22 // John 10.30 // 1 John 5.6, 7

³⁵ Genesis 6.8 // Judges 6.1 // 2 Kings 12.2 // Psalm 33.18 // 1 Peter 3.12 // Exodus 9.3 // Job 12.9 // Isaiah 25.10, 41.20 // Acts 13.11

³⁶ John 4.24 // Psalm 90.1-4 // Isaiah 40.28 // Revelation 2.8, 22.13 // Isaiah 66.1 // 1 Kings 8.27

Mistakes Made Concerning the Son:

- The Son was “begotten, not made.”³⁷ Though a tough concept to understand, it is important to recognize that Christ is not a created Being, but rather He always has existed eternally as God.³⁸
- The Son is not God, Jr. He is God, period. He is not lesser than, but co-equally God. See **Chapter VII** for more on Jesus.

John 5.18

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

The Holy Spirit:

- The Holy Spirit is not an “It.” He is a “He,”³⁹ and He is part of the “Us” as He, too, is 100% God.⁴⁰ He is not a force, such as wind or a power (though He is *described* using both those words⁴¹), but He is a Person, and He has been sent by the Father and the Son to help us,⁴² guide us,⁴³ testify of the Word to us,⁴⁴ seal us,⁴⁵ empower us,⁴⁶ and replace our old, sinful soul.⁴⁷ See **Chapter X** for more on the Holy Spirit.

EXPLORING THE TRINITY

Now, let’s explore what we do know about who the Trinity is. Before we do this, keep in mind that there is “nothing like God.”⁴⁸ This great truth won’t be something we can perfectly explain away, yet the things that we *do* learn about it will thoroughly enhance our relationship with Him, our worship, our prayers, our service, and our discipleship.

That said, there are a few common analogies that have been given to explain the Trinity, but as stated before, they all fall short as there is nothing “like” God. Some of these analogies include H₂O being either water, ice, or steam, or a man being both a father, husband, and employee, or a clover having three leaves but being a single plant.

Though these analogies may be somewhat helpful for us to understand certain dynamics of the Trinity, they can just as easily even be more damaging to the truth of the Trinity. Particular with the father/husband/employee analogy, this really points to the split-personality schizophrenic “modal” god. The H₂O analogy is most popular, but H₂O is never water, ice, and steam all at once (though there is a scientific state of H₂O that accomplishes this,⁴⁹ but that wasn’t ever intended for consideration when ascribing this analogy). Neither are the three leaves of a clover ever the whole clover, but are always just 1/3 of the clover.

So, what do we know about the Trinity?

³⁷ John 1.1-5, 14. Also see both the Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed. See the Appendix

³⁸ John 1.1-14 // Revelation 2.8, 22.13

³⁹ John 14.15-17, 16.13 // 1 Corinthians 12.11 // Hebrews 10.15-17

⁴⁰ Acts 5.3, 4

⁴¹ John 3.8 // 2 Timothy 1.7

⁴² John 14.16, 17 // John 14.26 // John 15.26

⁴³ John 16.13

⁴⁴ 1 John 5.6 // John 15.26 // Romans 8.16

⁴⁵ Ephesians 1.13 // 2 Corinthians 1.22

⁴⁶ 2 Timothy 1.7 // Acts 1.8, 10.38 // Romans 15.13, 19 // Galatians 4.29 // Ephesians 3.16

⁴⁷ Ezekiel 36.26, 27 // Galatians 2.20, 21, 4.6

⁴⁸ Psalm 113.5 // Isaiah 46.9

⁴⁹ Known as “triple point,” when solid, liquid, and gaseous water coexist in equilibrium.

The Trinity as a Unified and Singular God:

- There is only one God. Somehow, in the mystery of the Trinity, the three distinct Persons, all equally God, make up the Triune God. It is not a co-op, but they are the one God. Several passages depict this Tri-unity.⁵⁰

The Father:

- The truth of the matter is that the Father is distinct; He is neither Jesus nor is He the Holy Spirit, but yet He is one with Them and He is all God all the time, not 1/3 God.
- Nor is He “God, Sr.” with more holiness and deity than the Son and Holy Spirit.⁵¹

The Son:

- Jesus also is distinct, and He is neither the Father nor the Spirit, even though They are one and “in”⁵² each other. He is neither 1/3 God.
- Nor is He “God, Jr.” He is equal in essence and substance with the Father and Holy Spirit.⁵³

Colossians 2.9

For in him [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...

Hebrews 1.8

But of the Son he [God the Father] says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom."

The Holy Spirit:

- Likewise, the Holy Spirit is neither the Son nor the Father, but He is also all God all the time and is also not 1/3 God.
- Nor is He the “Holy It.” He is a Person, and He is equally God with the Son and the Father.⁵⁴

2 Corinthians 3.17

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Considering all of this, we see a very unique mystery unfolding. That yes, there is one true God, but that there are three distinct Persons. These aren't personalities, manifestations, or mere roles or “masks,” but three completely distinct Persons. Three Persons that are each 100%, but in this case, 100 + 100 + 100 = 100.

About the *only* thing I can really compare this to that *might* make *some* sense out of this is marriage. We often hear the truth that “the two become one.”⁵⁵ There is a divine truth that we don't just become “one couple” or “one unit,” but that there is something spiritual that happens as we become one, even though we are distinct. The problem, of course, like all the other analogies, is that it falls short. Though the husband and wife are one yet distinct, the husband is never the entire essence of the marriage on his own, nor is the wife ever the entire essence of the marriage on her own. It's at this point we must exercise faith; a faith that believes the Scriptures and trusts that the Holy Spirit, the third distinct Member of the Trinity, is testifying of this truth within our hearts.

⁵⁰ Matthew 3.13-17, 28.19 // John 14.15-23 // Ephesians 1.1-14

⁵¹ Galatians 1.1 // Matthew 7.21

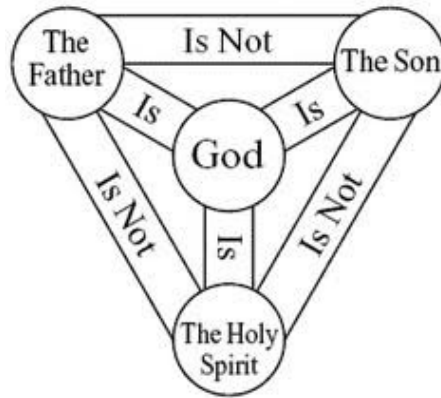
⁵² John 14.10, 11, 20, 17.21. Compare John 9.5.

⁵³ Philippians 2.5-11 // John 1.1-4, 14 // Romans 9.5 // Colossians 2.9

⁵⁴ John 15.26 // Mark 3.29

⁵⁵ Genesis 2.24 // Matthew 19.5 // 1 Corinthians 6.16 // Ephesians 5.31

Look at this illustration to try to get some more understanding of the “design” of the Trinity:



Put into words, we can make the simplest definition with these three statements:⁵⁶

1). God is three distinct Persons 2). Each Person is fully God 3). There is only one God

Quite beautifully, the Athanasian Creed (8th century AD) states “We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.”

Because of this distinction, we also see that the Word often (but not always) distinctively ascribes particular titles to each of the three Persons of the Trinity. In general, particularly in the New Testament, it is *often* like this:

- **Lord:** The word “lord” is a title, like “president” or “mister.” This is why we address Him as “*the* Lord,” as a title, not His Name. In the New Testament, “Lord” is most often used to describe Jesus. Not that God the Father or Spirit aren’t the Lord, but that Jesus most functions in this role. Hence, we don’t often say “Father the Lord.” So in some ways, this term describes *how* God interacts with us and His creation. He Lords over us.
- **God:** The word “god” describes an object of worship. “God” can be used to describe *the* God, or it can describe false gods. The word “God” describes, in some ways, *what* God is in His role and interaction with us and His creation. He is God.
- **LORD:** Again, when you see “LORD” in all capital letters, that is the word “Yahweh,” or “I AM.” This is the actual Name of God. It appears 6,828 times in the bible. However, the Hebrews so revered the Name of God that they don’t pronounce it, and the actual pronunciation is not known (the Name is spelled YHWH, as many Hebrew words were spelled without vowels, and the vowels were assumed by the consonants, but usually only learned by actual speech). Because of this, they use the Hebrew word “adonai,” which simply means “the Lord” as a title, and most bibles translate it as LORD in English (showing differentiation between His Name (LORD) and His title (the Lord)), though some will use either Jehovah, Yahweh, Yehovah, Jahveh, Yahveh, as well as both Yah, or Jah for a shortened version. All are acceptable since the true pronunciation isn’t known.
- Therefore, we will see other combination phrases, such as “Oh LORD, our Lord,” which is saying His Name and then calling Him our Lord, such as saying “oh Obama, our President,” not “oh President, our President.” Also, we see “the Lord our God,” which is not using His Name, but rather saying something similar to “the President, our leader.”

⁵⁶ Assessment taken from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, pg 231

How are They Distinct if They are One?

This is truly where the rich truth of the Trinity gets fun. It is here where we start uncovering some of the glory of God, His wisdom, His mercy and grace, His complexity, and even His creativity. It was stated that all three Persons of the Trinity are each fully God and one with each other, yet still distinct. What does this mean, and how is it possible?

It is important to understand that there is solidarity within the Trinity. This solidarity encompasses Their divine God-attributes, such as Their co-equal holiness, eternity, and deity. We would call this their “substance” or “essence.”

There is also unity within the Trinity. There is perfect love for and from each of the three Persons, and there is eternal community with each other. They are unified in thought, desire, plan, and purpose. They are and have perfect love for each other, and there is no jealousy, strife, or conflict in Their inter-relationship. They are truly one.

And yet lastly, there is diversity and distinction within the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, though solidified and unified with each other, are diversified in Their role as They relate to creation, specifically with mankind, and even more specifically with the role They play in our salvation⁵⁷ (we will look more at this specifically later on). It is a divine cooperation of solidarity, unity, and diversity of epic proportion. We see this great partnership amidst the Triune God.

Throughout Scripture, it is often shown that the Father is the “head” of the Trinity. **1 Corinthians 11.3** specifically even says that the “head of Christ is God.” What this does *not* mean is that there is a *hierarchy* of deity when it comes to essence or substance. As stated, there is complete solidarity and unity from within the Trinity, yet also amidst this solidarity and unity, there is a distinction of role and even difference in submissive roles and responsibilities, specifically even in the way they each interact amidst Their creation.

To understand this a little better, let’s look at what the Word says about the distinct roles and responsibilities of each Person of the Trinity:

The Distinct Trinitarian Roles and Responsibilities of the Father:

- He is the hider and revealer of all things.⁵⁸
- Every gift comes from Him.⁵⁹
- It is God the Father who exalts Christ.⁶⁰
- It is God the Father who raised Christ from the dead.⁶¹
- It is God who is the architect of the plan of salvation.⁶²
- It is God the Father who sent the Son (the Son did not send Himself).⁶³
- The Father grants all things to the Son.⁶⁴
- The Father grants authority to the Son.⁶⁵
- The Father places all things under Christ’s feet, *except* for God Himself.⁶⁶
- The Father has given the Son His Name.⁶⁷
- It is the Father who blesses us with *every* spiritual blessing.⁶⁸
- It is the Father who chooses those for salvation to give to the Son as His body and bride.⁶⁹

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 11.3, 15.27, 28

⁵⁸ Matthew 11.25, 26

⁵⁹ James 1.17, 18

⁶⁰ Philippians 2.9-11 // 1 Corinthians 15.28 // John 17.1, 5 // 1 Peter 1.18-21

⁶¹ 1 Peter 1.18-21

⁶² Ephesians 1.9-12 // Genesis 1.1, 2

⁶³ John 5.23, 30, 38, 6.44, 7.16, 28, 29, 33, 17.3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25

⁶⁴ John 5.26, 17.7

⁶⁵ John 5.27 // 1 Corinthians 15.28

⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 15.27, 28

⁶⁷ John 17.11 // Philippians 2.9-11

⁶⁸ Ephesians 1.3

⁶⁹ John 17.6

The Distinct Trinitarian Roles and Responsibilities of the Son:

- He has come *only* to do His Father's will.⁷⁰
- He has come to testify of the Father.⁷¹
- He can do nothing apart from His Father.⁷²
- His mission is ultimately to give glory to His Father.⁷³
- His authority is only His because the Father gave it to Him.⁷⁴
- Jesus *is* one of the "good and perfect gift[s]" that we are given *from the Father*.⁷⁵
- He has come to build His church (the believers whom the Father gives Him).⁷⁶

The Distinct Trinitarian Roles and Responsibilities of the Spirit:

- He is also a "good and perfect gift" from the Father.⁷⁷
- He is also simultaneously sent from the Son.⁷⁸
- His mission is to glorify the Son.⁷⁹
- He does not speak of His own authority.⁸⁰
- He is sent to be our Helper.⁸¹
- He is sent to teach us about Jesus.⁸²

Pretty phenomenal, don't you think? The fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be *completely and totally* one in essence, holiness, and deity, yet have a marvelously selfless, submissive relationship with each other is just simply incredible.

As we look at this incredibly beautiful picture of divine authority/submission-yet-equality within the Trinity, it is incredibly important for us to see, at least in part, *how* this all works together.

The Divine Order of the Trinity is that everything comes "from" the Father, "through" the Son, "by" the Holy Spirit.

If you read through all of the verses referenced in the previous lists, you will notice some incredible truths about "how" the Trinity interacts.

The Father gives all things through the Son. Though the Father gives all things, these are given "in Christ." Remember that the only way to the Father is through the Son, so for us to receive *any* gifts (which all come from the Father), we must do so by being "in Christ." This is why we say "in Jesus' Name." When we pray and ask God to hear our prayers, those prayers can only be heard if they are through the Son.

The Father enjoys sharing the glory and tasks with the Son and Spirit. As a good Father does, God enjoys sharing the glory of creation, the giving of salvation, and the ruling all things. He doesn't keep it for Himself, but even though all things are for His glory, He shares the glory and even exalts the Son.

The Son enjoys doing the will of His Father. The Son does the will of the Father because He *loves* the Father, not because He is obligated to. It is a joy to be free from sin and bondage and be able to joyfully pursue living for the glory of God.

⁷⁰ John 4.34, 6.38, 15.9, 10

⁷¹ John 5.30, 31, 43, 7.16-18, 17.26

⁷² John 5.30

⁷³ Philippians 2.11

⁷⁴ John 5.27, 8.28, 29, 17.2

⁷⁵ John 3.16 // 1 John 4.10 // Romans 8.3, 32

⁷⁶ Matthew 16.18 // John 17.2

⁷⁷ Acts 1.4, 2.33 // John 14.25, 26

⁷⁸ John 15.26

⁷⁹ John 14. 25, 26, 16.14

⁸⁰ John 16.13

⁸¹ John 14.16, 26, 15.26, 16.7

⁸² John 16.12-14

Jesus, though He never sinned, did encounter temptation, and yet chose the great joy of submitting to His Father's will rather than the desires of temptation.

The Spirit enjoys glorifying the Son and the Father. The Holy Spirit's aim is to glorify the Son and ultimately, the Father. On top of that, even, He "submits" Himself to us, not in the sense of authority, but in service to us, being our Helper and our Teacher.

The Spirit upholds all the things that the Father planned. When the Father chose us for the Son, it was the Holy Spirit who came into our lives to uphold and secure our salvation to be the gift given to the Son by the Father. It is by His power that we are sanctified and will eventually be glorified to the praise and glory of God the Father.

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL SUBMISSION

These are incredible and beautifully important things to take note of. Now, keep in mind, as humans we tend to equate submission as synonymous with "lesser than" or "inferior," but true, Trinity modeled submission is far from that. In our day and age, to submit to someone, be it a boss, husband, friend, pastor, or parent, has a perceived stigma of weakness upon it.

But again, this is not biblical Trinitarian submission, for if it were, what would this say about Jesus? Is He weaker than the Father? Absolutely not. Yet His choice to submit Himself to His Father's will ⁸³ was not a showing of being "less than," nor was His choice to submit Himself to His church a picture of inferiority to us (when I say He was submitted to us, I am not saying that He came under our authority or as our slave or subject, but in the sense that He served us, washed our feet, and put our eternal future before His earthly suffering).⁸⁴

On top of that, even, the Holy Spirit is called "the Helper."⁸⁵ The Helper of whom? Of us. Does that mean that He is below us in authority? No. Though He is "submitting" His service to us, it doesn't make Him "less than" us or inferior to us. Even though His aim is to glorify the Son, that doesn't degrade who He is. Submission does not necessitate inferiority or a "lesser than" place in life or relationship.

Subordination is not inferiority, and it is Godlike.

-P.T. Forsyth

Over the years, as a dad of two boys, I often have been their helper. I helped them tie their shoes, helped them in and out of the car, and helped them learn to read and write. Later on I helped them with conflicts, their own sin, liking a girl for the first time, going through puberty, and even dealing with the deaths of loved ones. Am I, therefore, "less than" or "inferior" to them because I served them and submitted myself to their needs? No. We are all created in the image of God equally, yet we play different roles in each other's lives. Conversely, though I am their helper, they also are to obey me as their dad. Not because I am "better than" or "above" them in "essence or substance," but because it is my role to lead them and for them to be submitted to and obedient to me, even though we are equally made in God's image.

That said, with this equality we are also not talking about *egalitarianism*♣, which says that they are co-equal in *all* ways. Rather, we see that the Members of the Trinity are equally God in glory, substance, and attribute, yet varying in their authority/subordination.⁸⁶ As stated earlier, the Father "sent" the Son, the Son "obeys" the Father, and the Spirit "testifies" of the Son.⁸⁷

This is what we would call a *complementarian*♣ approach to understanding the Trinity's essence and distinctions. Even the word "subordinate" seems to sound as if one Member is "more God" than the other (such as in the view called *hierarchical*♣), but in the context of Their oneness, distinction, solidarity, unity, and eternally shared attributes, this unbelievable relationship reveals so much of the great complexity, love, creativity, and humility that our Trinitarian God possesses. We will see this truth unfold as we go in later chapters.

⁸³ Matthew 26.42 // Hebrews 10.5-7

⁸⁴ John 13.2-17 // Mark 10.45

⁸⁵ John 14.16, 26, 15.26, 16.7

⁸⁶ Ephesians 1.1-14 // 2 Thessalonians 2.13, 14 // 1 Peter 1.1, 2

⁸⁷ John 3.16, 5.23-27, 6.57, 8.16, 12.49, 15.26, 17.21, 20.21 // Matthew 26.42 // Galatians 4.6

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

How Studying the Trinity Changes Your Life

Some will write off the Doctrine of the Trinity as being something for the scholarly, religious, or old school stuffy types. But this important doctrine has many practical implications throughout the life of every Christian.

How you view the Trinity dramatically shapes your life with God and His people.

There are quite a few ways a proper, healthy view of the Trinity shapes our lives in practical ways.

Result #1: It is a pattern for all life.

As we have seen that the Trinity gives us a beautiful model of what a godly authority/submission relationship should look like, we see an even deeper foundational truth that sets the stage for this modeled submission. Within the Trinity, we get not just *an* example, but *the* example of love.

God is love. And His love is no more incredibly expressed and displayed than within the Trinity itself. The Father has an intense and holy love for His Son and for the Holy Spirit. Likewise for the Son. His passion and love for His Father is something we could never possibly begin to understand. And His love for the Spirit is equal as intense. The Spirit's love for the Father and the Son is neither greater nor weaker than the Father and Son's love for the other Persons of the Trinity. Trinity life is love. Pure, holy love.

So what does this mean? This is *exactly* why and *how* these three distinct Persons are able to defer to one another, submit to one another, and serve one another with no jealousy, no envy, and no selfishness. The Spirit has no desire to be the Father or have His authority, and the Father doesn't revel in His authority and look down upon the Son or the Spirit. There is love, peace, joy and harmony. The fruit of the Spirit, naturally (or rather, supernaturally).

Many times in the Christian life, we focus a lot on personal sanctification, our own inner character. We aim to "be like Jesus" and be "led by the Holy Spirit." This is good, and we should desire for our hearts to be sanctified so we can walk in integrity. But for as much as we model our own private life after the Members of the Trinity, we should recognize that our *public* and *relational* life should also be modeled after the Trinity.

A pure Christian life is a Trinitarian life.

Think about it. Within the Trinity there is no hiding, no deceit, no stealing, no gossip, no looking down upon, no insecurity, no competition, no comparison game, no jockeying for position, no trying to impress the others, no need for validation, no usurping authority, no coveting, no drama, no complaining about toilet seats being up, no complaining about dinner not being ready, no snapping at the kids, and no swearing in traffic. Trinitarian life is this:

1 Corinthians 13.4-8

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing [not applicable within the Trinity!], but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁸ Love never ends.

Galatians 5.22, 23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

I want you to notice something in **1 Corinthians 13.4-8**. You could replace the word "love" with "Trinity," or to make it more personal, replace it with "a Trinitarian life." If we pattern our relationships after the Trinity, we live out this Scripture, walking in step with the fruits of the Spirit.

Imagine a church where we lived within a Trinitarian model. We would have a church that is selfless, joyful, peaceful, patient, faithful, serves others incessantly, gives generously, takes care of the poor and needy, and seeks to be a blessing rather than be blessed (which in turn blesses them). If we followed the pattern and example of the Trinity, think of how every relationship within the church would change:

- **Husbands** would be leading their wives the way they are supposed to be: lovingly, selflessly, sacrificially, and with integrity, as Christ leads the church and is the head of the church. Like Christ, they would do as they say, being men of their word, washing their wives in the Word and teaching them the ways of Christ. As part of that, they would joyfully and excitedly be submitted to their church, because they would know that being an active part of the body of Christ and being submitted to spiritual leadership is vital to the health of the family.
- **Wives** wouldn't be pining to control their husbands or usurp their authority. Why? Because the Trinity models security, humility, confidence, and equality regardless of Their role in context with each other. Wives would be joyfully and excitedly submitted to their husbands because they get joy out of honoring and modeling the Trinity. Even if the husband isn't living a very Trinitarian modeled life, she would joyfully still submit herself to him as to pattern her life after the submission of Christ as He laid His life down for a not-so-savory group of sinners.
- **Dads** would teach their boys to be godly men and teach their girls to be godly women. They would instruct them in the ways of the Lord by teaching them, serving them, loving them, and disciplining them, and wouldn't consider the job of raising the kids to be "the mom's job." Even as the Father sought to glorify the Son, fathers should seek to build up, encourage, and help their children succeed, most importantly in their spiritual lives.
- **Moms** would find joy in being moms. They wouldn't be on the lookout for a "way out" due to frustration or stress or complain about the kids, but they would see their God-given task as an honor and joy to have such an incredible opportunity to train up godly men and women.
- **Employees** would work joyfully, regardless of their job, because they find joy in serving and being selfless. Can we just all agree right now that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have had three of the *worst* job descriptions ever! Far worse, even, than the jobs featured on the TV show "Dirty Jobs!" Just think, the Father had to sacrifice His own Son for the very people who murdered His Son, the Son had to be betrayed by almost all of His friends and then killed by His enemies (whose life He was saving despite their lack of gratitude), and the Holy Spirit may have the worst deal yet. His job is to live inside of us! Seriously, if God the Son can leave His throne of glory and dwell among us and be killed by us, we can leave our throne of cozy bed and go into our jobs and workplaces with joy.
- **Bosses** would treat all of their employees like family. They would be generous, honest, and rewarding.
- **Christians** would get over themselves and resign their membership at Me Church. They would stop going to church to be entertained or merely encouraged and patted on the back. They wouldn't complain when the pastor asks them to give a little more when it is needed or when he asks them to join a small group or become a member or serve in the kids' ministry. Rather, they would be excited for the opportunity to give more generously and partner with the gospel, they would be itching for the opportunity to be in community and be a blessing to others, they would be honored to serve the church and community, and they would be humbled to serve the future of the church, our kids. Ultimately, they would see that being submitted to the body of Christ, and as a gift to the body of Christ, is of utmost importance to their faith. They would joyfully and excitedly submit themselves to the mentoring and challenge of the spiritual leaders that God has given them.
- Likewise, the **pastors** would lead with godly integrity. They would be the proper model of what elders should be by modeling the gospel and the design of God's church. They would, by example, put God first, family second, and ministry third. They would lead with love, compassion, and grace. They would not be afraid to discipline, because they love every member of the body of Christ equally. They would not be afraid to speak against false teaching because they are confident, as they would be devoted to the Word of God and prayer for the sake of the health of the body of Christ (which is only really possible when the church is selflessly giving and serving within the church).



Isn't it amazing? I could go on and on with more and more benefits that we as a people would have if we aimed to be Trinitarian. But just think about it. Marriages in unity and camaraderie, true partnership and oneness; kids who obey and respect their parents because they know their parents love them and their parents are willing to go the extra mile all the time; harder working employees; Christians will grow twenty times stronger and faster if they can truly submit to each other, especially the pastors and teachers that the Holy Spirit has appointed over them; and pastors who won't burn out due to sin or fatigue. It all sounds a bit like...heaven on earth?

And yet, if each day we rose up and quoted Patrick by pronouncing his words that I quoted earlier, this all becomes possible:

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness,
Of the Creator of Creation

It is by the power of the Triune God, the Father who chose us, the Son who died for us, and the Spirit who sanctifies us, that we can walk this way, as a Trinity modeled church, the body of Christ that God foresaw. This is the picture of the people that He will be God over.

Result #2: We will walk in confidence within our special place in the body.

When we see and understand the relationships within the Trinity as a co-equal, co-powerful God whose separate three Persons have unique, diverse, varying submissive (yet not hierarchal) roles, it empowers us to walk in confidence as unified fellow image bearers of God, but with humility, submission, and total security in our unique and diverse role within the body of Christ.

With a poor understanding of the Trinity's interactions, we fall into a slippery slope of unhealthy (and unbiblical) relationship dynamics. Those who have an egalitarian view of the Trinity (that they are equal in all ways, even in their various roles) tend to view every other relationship as thus. And rightly they should, since, in fact the Trinity is our ultimate model! Unfortunately, it is an unbiblical view of the Trinity, and will cause unbiblical, though well meaning, interactions with others (more on this in coming chapters).

One common example of this is marriage. As stated before, the word 'submission' in our day and age has become a nasty word and is considered chauvinistic, old fashioned and narrow minded. However, biblical submission is a choice one makes to submit in an act of respect, not out of dominance. It is an act of meekness, humility, and selflessness. With a wrong view of the Trinity will come an unbalanced marital relationship.

Another example is within the church. Egalitarian viewpoints see the Trinity's interactions as perfect and therefore with no need of any type of submission (other than an equally reciprocated mutual submission). This lends itself to what is billed as an open, free-spirited, and "organic" church, and launches itself against anything remotely "institutional," like the pastoral office or any type of spiritual authority or "hierarchy." This is an increasingly growing population of Christians, largely due to the disinformation of biblical doctrine, but also given by the unfortunate misuse of the "institutional" aspects of biblical doctrine. Again, like with the irony that "no theology is still a theology,"⁸⁸ we should quickly see that even our best efforts of "non-institution" become an institution of themselves we become bound to.

All this leads to struggle. This was prophesied within the context of marriage in **Genesis**,⁸⁹ and it is evident in our flesh. At the onset, complete egalitarianism, particularly within the church, seems wonderful. It has a nice ring to it. Yet it really has the feel of the 60's hippie vibe. A free spirited, no authority, "don't judge me, man" type of an air to it. As people, whether you are a man, woman, husband, wife, child, pastor, church member, boss or employee, our flesh would simply *much rather* not be accountable to someone else.

I've always found it to be such an inspiring thing that the Holy Spirit is known as the Helper, which does not whatsoever denigrate His unity and equality with God, even though He takes on the eternal mode of Servant. In marriage, church, work, and other relationships, it should be a joy for us to serve one another, submit to one another, and be accountable to one another.

⁸⁸ See page 2

⁸⁹ Genesis 3.16

Philippians 2.1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Result #3: We will change the way we pray and worship.

When we understand the varying roles that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit play in our lives (more on that in their respective chapters, plus the chapter on Salvation), we will begin to pray differently, ask for requests in our prayers differently, and worship differently. It enriches, deepens, and causes us to become worshippers who are worshipping in a more realized truth. It is intelligent worship. It's one aspect of worshipping "in Spirit and in truth."⁹⁰ We start to understand more and more how God interacts with us and how each Person of the Trinity has a unique role in our salvation.

It seems that most of us would address our prayers to "God," as sort of a "catch-all" when we pray. Then, as we pray, we will interchangeably throw in the Name of Jesus, and very rarely will the Holy Spirit get a whole lot of directed prayer. Now, of course we know that God is one within the Trinity, and so He will indeed hear our prayers, but He is also distinct as three Persons. The more we understand this, the more we pray very specifically to each the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Think about it. How much do you specifically pray to the Holy Spirit and worship Him in your prayers? Probably not as much as you pray to "God," "Father," "Lord," or "Jesus." And why is that? Chances are, it's because you may not know exactly what He does or who He is or what His "job description" is. Knowing the difference of role that each Person of the Trinity has will dramatically change the way you approach God.

Allow me to give you a quick "for instance."

When you are going through a tough time or facing a temptation, it is a good prayer to say, "God, help me avoid this temptation, give me the strength to walk away." But when we change the prayer to "Holy Spirit, help me avoid this temptation, give me the strength to walk away," it changes something. Either way, the prayer will get to God, no doubt. But what does it do to our recognition and perspective? All of a sudden, our prayer isn't just shot up into the sky for "God," but we acknowledge in that instance that God has descended in the Holy Spirit and is indwelling within us! He is our Helper, and He is in us to help us! Now, when we pray, we consciously are already praying in a unique faith that doesn't just say "God I hope you can help me," but "Holy Spirit, I *know* you can help me because You were put in me to do so! You are in me to be my Helper!"

Additionally, it becomes incredibly important that we recognize that all things come from the Father, that all these things are procured for us through the Son, and they are given to us and sustained for us by the Holy Spirit. This, too, changes the way we pray!

Did you know that the cross of Christ purchased for you the gift of answered prayer? It's true! Your prayers could not be heard nor answered if Christ didn't make a way to the Father on your behalf! That, again, is why we pray *in Jesus' Name*. Because all things are from the Father, and they are given through the Son!

It is an amazing change in our prayer lives when we pray "biblically," rather than randomly. It isn't so much for God's sake, He knows who He is; it is more for us. It increases faith, devotion, and worship. It truly is an amazing thing that happens in our time of devotion and prayer.

⁹⁰ John 4.24

PRACTICAL TOOLS

♣ Definition of Terms ♣

Self-disclosure: This is the idea that we can only know about an infinite God because He has chosen to make Himself known. Without His self-disclosure, we would not be able to get to know or “find” such an eternal and infinite God, since we are finite people.

I AM WHO I AM: This is the Name of God. It is a statement of eternity, meaning that He has existed for all time past, present, and future. It is also a statement of His “never-changingness” (new word). In the Scriptures, when you see the word “LORD” in all capital letters, that is His Name, which in English we often write out as “Yahweh.” The phrase “I AM WHO I AM” spoken in Hebrew phonetically sounds like the Name “Yahweh.”

Additionally, it should be noted that when we see “God” it is describing *what* He is. He is God. The word for God is not unique to Him, however, as it can also describe *what* other things are: gods. Also, the word “Lord” when it is not capitalized, is a title, in some ways, for what He *does*: He “lords” over the universe. He is the Lord. But this is also not unique to Him, as others in the bible are called by their servants “my lord,” because those people “lord” over their servants. The LORD, however, capitalized, is unique to God Himself. It is His Name, Yahweh, “I AM WHO I AM.” There is no one else that can be called by that Name.

Last, we see combinations, such as “the LORD our God,” or statements such as “oh LORD, our Lord.” This is using His Name and personalizing *what* He is and what He *does*. It would be like my two boys saying “Jobey, our dad.”

Trinity: Though not a term found in the bible, it is a term used to describe the mysterious solidarity/unity/diversity of the three distinct Persons of the Trinity and their unique relationship with each other and Their creation. In brief summary, we believe that the Trinity helps define the one true God by saying that, 1). God is three Persons, 2). each Person is fully God, and 3). there is only one God.

Modalism or Sabellianism: This is the unbiblical belief that God is one God with three personalities or manifestations. It would see God as more or less as putting on different “hats” or playing different “roles” depending on His interaction with His creation, specifically with mankind. Though this has been historically declared a heresy, it still remains popular in the modern day Emergent church movement, and is a staple belief of the Pentecostal Church. See the section on the Church for more on how this affects our lifestyle as believers.

Arianism: This is the unbiblical belief that God the Father created Jesus and that Jesus is not eternal, but rather a perfectly created being. This belief was rejected as a heresy at the First Council at Nicaea, but still remains, particularly amidst the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Polytheism: This is the belief that there are multiple gods. In the context of the Trinity, it sees the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three separate gods, independent from each other in nature. This is not what the Scripture teaches, which is the belief of only one true God.

Egalitarianism: This is the view of the Trinity that comes from the modalist view above. The prefix “egal-” means “equal.” Of course, as noted in the study, there is for sure equality among the three Persons of the Trinity, but there are also distinctive differences, hence the following term, *complementarian*. See the section on the Church for more on how this affects our lifestyle as believers.

Complementarian: This term, in context of the Trinity, helps explain the dynamic relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see that they are equal in essence, holiness, attribute, eternity, and power, yet they are distinct in their role and interaction with each other and Their creation, all the while maintaining their complete God-ness and God qualities. It simply means that in their equality *and* their difference, they *complement* each other. See the section on the Church for more on how this affects our lifestyle as believers.

Hierarchal: This is also a false view of the Trinity as being complete subordinate in *all ways* in their relationship. Though as we saw in the study, Jesus does the will of the Father and is submitted to Him, there is also equality in substance among them. See the section on the Church for more on how this affects our lifestyle as believers.

Recommended Resources

Theology Books

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem. Chapter 14

Salvation Belongs to the Lord by John M. Frame. Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Books

Knowing God by J.I. Packer. An incredible book by an incredible theologian. Well worth the read. A truly masterful work. This one should definitely be on your list of books to read.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance by Bruce A. Ware. Highly recommended. It is succinct, an easy read, clear, but thorough. It would do you well to pick this one up.

On the Trinity, by Augustine. Fifteen books written by one of the greatest church fathers that we've had in all of church history.

Sermons

www.waynegrudem.com/category/audio/systematic-theology: Go to the sermons on Chapter 14, from July 30, August 20, 27, and September 3, 2006.

Web Articles

www.gty.org John MacArthur's ministry. Type "Trinity" in the search engine and read:

- Q&A: "Do you need to believe in the Trinity to be a Christian." A 2 ½ minute clip from a sermon.
- Q&A: "Can you be a Christian and Deny the Trinity?" The same message but typed out.
- Article: "Our Triune God." You'll even see the little graphic from this class. Looks like John and I borrow from the same resource.

www.desiringgod.org John Piper's ministry. Type "Trinity" in the search field and click on a few articles:

- "Trinity 101." There is an article, a couple of mp3s to listen to, and some PDF files to view.
- "What is the Doctrine of the Trinity?" A great article with other further recommended resources.