

*A note to the teacher: We designed this manuscript as a resource for you, but you do not have to read it verbatim at delivery. You may find more lucid explanations and illustrations than seen here. If so, feel free to adapt the material as long as you communicate the truths outlined here. Furthermore, the footnotes serve as references and additional information of interest but are not necessary to the content itself. They make this document appear longer than it actually is.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRINITY

Have you ever heard, considered, or even expressed an analogy for the Trinity? Perhaps

you've used one of these:

- The Trinity is like water, which can be ice, liquid, or steam.
- The Trinity is like a three-leaf clover, one shamrock with three leaves.
- The Trinity is like an egg; it is one egg but has its yolk, white, and shell. Or,
- The Trinity is like one man with three roles: husband, father, and doctor.¹

Can you think of any others?

GOD'S INCOMPREHENSIBILITY

Effective analogies can really only illustrate a single, isolated reality of the Trinity. When viewed through the lens of Scripture, each one of these analogies has some truth and some susceptibility to error when used to describe the Trinity as a whole.² That is why Augustine said, in seeking to understand the unity of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, “nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous.”³

When we contemplate the internal and eternal nature of God, we quickly learn that our finite minds are unable to comprehend the infinite God. Ultimately, God is *incomprehensible*, and we must acknowledge “that the glorious Triune God of Scripture is in a category all by

¹ The Trinity is like three different statues made of common gold (Augustine did not like this analogy because the sum total of the objects is greater than the parts. But for Gregory of Nysa, the analogy of ‘gold’ works because pure gold *can't be* quantified. A pure gold ring is just as fully “gold” as a gold brick). The Trinity is like three relatives in one family. The Trinity is like three friends with one common human nature. The Trinity is like love. There is a lover, a beloved, and the love between them. Or, the Trinity is like one mind with memory, understanding, and a will.

² See the appendix for a sample of ancient Trinitarian heresies and creedal responses. God is beyond adequate analogy, as all possible analogies would have required creation.

³ Hill, Edmund with Saint Augustine. 2017. *The Trinity (De Trinitate)*. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Second Edition. Vol. I/5. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.

himself and that, as such, he is unfathomable in his nature, knowledge, and works.”⁴ We worship a transcendent God, meaning no one is like Him in all creation.⁵

‘Incomprehensible,’ however, does not mean ‘unknowable.’ On the contrary, God graciously reveals Himself to us, not exhaustively but truly, so that we might know, love, and enjoy Him.⁶ So, the New Covenant promises, “*they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD*” (Jeremiah 31:34). There is no higher calling and nothing more valuable than for us to know the Triune God in all of His glory.⁷ Moreover, all our worship is inescapably Trinitarian; that is to say, if it is not Trinitarian, it is not worship. As Paul states in Ephesians 2:18: *For through [the Son] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

WHY IS THIS DOCTRINE SO CRUCIAL?

While finite human minds cannot fully comprehend this doctrine, we can trust it has been revealed and that many professing Christians throughout history have agreed upon it. So, we cannot treat the truth of the Trinity casually or optionally because there is no true Christianity or knowledge of God without it.⁸

[Why is it essential to be precise about the nature of God?](#) First, the Trinity is the foundation, object, and aim of Christian faith and worship. [The doctrine of God’s Triune nature](#)

⁴ The Gospel Coalition, *Divine Incomprehensibility and the Knowledge of God*. Stephen Wellum, (Accessed on January 6, 2023).

⁵ After all, that person would have to have been created, and therefore, would not be like the eternal God.

⁶ After all, you **know** me as Michael, but you do not **comprehend** me as fearful and wonderful as I am said by God to be. We know that we are standing on a terrestrial ball suspended in space, being circumnavigated by the moon, circumnavigating the sun, merely one star in a galaxy of stars, one galaxy among innumerable galaxies of innumerable stars, but we can no more understand it than we can know it.

⁷ Ligonier Ministries, *God Is Incomprehensible*. R.C. Sproul, 2019, (Accessed on January 6, 2023).

⁸ Note [The Nicene Creed’s](#) Trinitarian structure: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of *one substance* with the Father, by whom all things were made... And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets ...

is essential to the gospel because it is the Trinity who saves us, and the Trinity is how God saves. The Father sends His only-begotten Son to redeem the lost, and the Father and Son send the Spirit to reveal the truth of all things declared by the Son. Second, one cannot correctly understand or properly believe either the Old or New Testament without also understanding the reality of the Triune God. Third, God forbids idolatry. Those who identify God in a manner other than how the Bible reveals Him engage in idolatrous worship, false worship which God explicitly rejects (Exodus 32). This truth of the Trinity distinguishes the Biblical God from all false gods, which enables us to love Him with our whole hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

TRINITARIAN BASICS

Any true church of any denomination which faithfully teaches the Word of God confesses three basic assertions of Trinitarian doctrine: (1) God is one in Being. (2) God is Three in Person: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (3) Each Person is truly and fully God, possessing the whole divine essence. We will also cover fourth foundational truth in lesson two. (4) The eternal distinctions between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are found in their personal relations with one another (Unbegotten, Only-Begotten, and Proceeding).

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH 1: GOD IS ONE

The adjective, Triune, describes both God's three-ness ("tri") and His oneness ("une"). Lessons on the Trinity traditionally begin by focusing on God's oneness because that is the sequential order of Scriptural revelation.⁹ For example, the Biblical narrative opens with Genesis

⁹ The Eastern tradition charges the Western tradition's emphasis on 'Oneness' first (instead of 'Threeness') makes the Trinity subordinate to a 'fourth thing,' God's essence, or that it turns the essence into an additional, fourth Person. The doctrine of simplicity is one way to respond to this charge.

1:1, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" Genesis' detailed creation account differs radically from all other ancient creation myths. [Other ancient creation myths taught that matter is eternal and that the world originated from a cosmic conflict, typically between a good god and an evil god.](#) However, the Bible teaches that everything came into being by the agency of God's explicit Word without any opposition, whatsoever. [God, as the Supreme Being, is without peer and without equal!](#)¹⁰

The ancient Jewish confession of faith (Shema), in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, declares God's oneness, "*Hear, O Israel: **The Lord our God, the Lord is one.** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" To say that God is one is to say that [He is one of a kind, the only Being with that unique nature.](#) There is only one God, and if we intend to reciprocate with that God, we must love Him with our whole selves and serve Him with undivided devotion.¹¹

God's acts of redemption also reveal His uniqueness. For example, in Deuteronomy 4:32-39, God rehearses His Mighty acts in Egypt and says, "*To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him... ³⁹know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.*"¹²

¹⁰ Only *after the fall*, man's descent into sin, does God go to war with Satan, and even that Satan cannot withstand.

¹¹ John M. Frame. *The Doctrine of the Word of God. A Theology of Lordship.* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub, 2010), 622-623.

¹² The Lord is God, alone, entirely in control over all things because He purposefully created them all. Isaiah.43:10 "*You are my witnesses,*" declares the Lord, "*and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.* Isaiah 44:6 states: *Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."*

The New Testament reflects the fact that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles [non-Jews] and the one and only Savior of all men. Romans 3:29-30 states: “*Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one.*”¹³

Sometimes, people think that the doctrine of the Trinity is a new doctrine, either revealed in or created to accommodate the New Testament. [Is it found only in the New Testament and not in the Old?](#) Let’s consider what the Old Testament says: For example, Genesis 1:26 uses the plural, first person, personal pronouns [us and our]; God said, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*” The angels are created beings and, therefore, could not have participated in creation; so, this plurality could not be referring to anyone but God, Himself.¹⁴ Here, we have an Old Testament indication of plurality in the Godhead.¹⁵

In Psalms 45:6–7, the psalmist says, “*Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever ... You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*” Hebrews 1:8 applies this Old Testament reference to Christ as God, and the Father, as God. In Psalms 110:1, David says, “*The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”* David is the King of Israel. So, who could be David’s “Lord” [my Lord] if not God, Himself [The

¹³ 1 Timothy 2:5 states: *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

¹⁴ Wayne Gruden. 2004. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 227.

¹⁵ The same plurality in a single God is found in Genesis 3:22, which also uses the plural, first person, personal pronoun [us], “*Behold, the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil,*” Genesis 11:7, “*Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language,*”. This is also significantly the case in Isaiah 6:8 which states: “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” We read in Genesis 2:24, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* First, notice the woman is of the same nature as the man. Second, the two come together and become “one flesh.” From the beginning, we learn there is *some sense* of plurality in “oneness” in the mind of God.

Lord”]? David, the Old Testament King of Israel, whose throne shall last forever, seems to understand some sort of plurality in the oneness of God.¹⁶

Therefore, the New Covenant era apostles did not change, correct, embellish, or invent a new understanding of God different from the version explicitly transmitted by the Old Testament Scripture. Theologian B.B. Warfield helpfully wrote,

The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lit; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus, the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation that follows it, but only perfected, extended, and enlarged.¹⁷

God’s oneness is a central concern for revering God and loving His character. True Christianity does not, in any way, support belief in three gods, and to hold such a belief is idolatry. The true and living God alone deserves our exclusive loyalty and total fidelity.¹⁸

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH 2: THE ONE GOD ETERNALLY EXISTS IN THREE DISTINCT PERSONS: THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

The Triune God is the God of the gospel, and in the New Covenant, God reveals Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christ commands baptism “*in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19) because of the Trinitarian nature of God and of our salvation.

¹⁶ In this “my Lord” is understood to be Christ, the Only-begotten Son and heir, and “The Lord” is understood to be His Eternal Father. For more examples, see John Frame’s “*The Doctrine of God*” pages 631-643.

¹⁷ Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical Doctrines*, The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 141-42.

¹⁸ As He states in Isaiah 42:8: *I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.*

The Trinity is eternally three persons (*hypostasis*), yet one being (*ousia*). So, God is NOT one person who took on three different modes of existence, [like how one man may hold multiple titles of a husband, father, and doctor at the same time](#).¹⁹ Instead, all three Persons are simultaneously and distinctly present at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13-17).²⁰

In 1 Corinthians 8:4, Paul quotes the Deuteronomy 4:35 passage referenced earlier: *Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one."* He then says, *"For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."* Note the contrast: the pagans believe in "many gods" and "many lords." But Christians believe in "one God" and "one Lord." Deuteronomy 4:35 refers to Israel's God as *both* Lord and God.²¹ Here, Paul names the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord along with the Father *in the same breath* that He quotes the central Judaic confession of faith concerning God's oneness. Jesus is no rival deity or a second god. [According to Paul, the proper interpretation of God's oneness is Trinitarian!](#)²²

Paul applies the same Lordship language in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 to the Holy Spirit: *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"* This Spirit brings our transformation, *"For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* [The Holy Spirit enables us to behold the glory of the Lord because He is Lord Himself.](#) Whenever the Bible

¹⁹ [Or like water that changes from solid \(ice\) to liquid \(water\) to gas \(steam\) forms \(Heresy: modalism\).](#)

²⁰ Not as apparitions, but as functional manifestations, one emerging from the waters of baptism, another speaking, asserting pleasure to be Christ's Father, and another descending in the form of a dove and resting on Him.

²¹ *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."*

²² Matthew Barrett. *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 133-134.

speaks about the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, it assumes they are coeternal and coequal with each other.²³

PERSONS²⁴

So, the Trinity is one in being, nature, and essence, and yet are three Persons. However, the word “person” can be misleading, depending on how we define it. God is not like a human person. Human persons:

1. Are separated from others by space and time (different physical bodies from each other, places, and points in history)
2. Have distinct consciousnesses from one another (self-awareness, mind, experience, and expression)
3. Have separate wills from other persons (volition)

However, the persons in and of God:

1. Cannot be separated in terms of space or time because God is eternal and “God is spirit” (John 4:24)
2. Cannot be distinguished by their “individual life” or “mind” because they do not possess three minds since each person of the Trinity equally shares in the fullness of the one mind & life of God (John 5:26; 1 Corinthians 2:11)²⁵
3. Do not have three separate wills, as the persons of God share the one and the same Divine will, from the Father to the Son by the Holy Spirit (John 5:19)²⁶

Remember, while creation depends on God, God is distinct from his creation. So, we must not impose the categories and experiences of human personhood upon our understanding of Divine personhood.²⁷ The Divine persons are distinguished as persons yet inseparable as God.²⁸

²³ Tertullian asserts, “[The] connection of the Father in the Son, and the Son in the [Spirit], produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These three are One essence, not [One] Person, as it is said, ‘I and my Father are One’ (John 10:30), in respect of unity of substance, not singularity of number.” Tertullian. 1885. “Against Praxeas.” In *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, translated by Peter Holmes, 3:621, (The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company), 621.

²⁴ Or “mode of being.” Each Person has their own way of being God.

²⁵ John 5:26 *For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself*; 1 Corinthians 2:11 *For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

²⁶ John 5:19 *So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.*

²⁷ The Gospel Coalition, *The Trinity*. Christine Thornton, (Accessed on January 9, 2023).

²⁸ All three of them together are not something more than one of them alone.

So, then, how do we distinguish between the divine persons? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are differentiated as “persons” by their internal relations (that is, how they express their relations with one another in eternity). ‘Unbegottenness’ is the unique personal property of the Father (‘Unbegotten’ implies being the Father or Begetter). ‘Begottenness’ is the unique personal property of the Son (being ‘begotten’ means being the Son; John 1:18).²⁹ ‘Procession’ is the unique personal property of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26).³⁰

In other words, the relationships *are* the persons (this is analogical language). Their relations, not attributes, differentiate the Three Persons of the Trinity from One Another, and these relationships guarantee that they share the same divine essence. The Son is eternal in ‘origin’ and shares the exact nature as God the Father because He is begotten from the Father’s nature from eternity. The Spirit is eternal in ‘origin’ because He eternally proceeds from the Father and Son, and He proceeds with the same divine nature and possesses absolute equality. The relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit arrange their being as a harmonious communion of equals.³¹

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH 3: EACH PERSON POSSESSES THE WHOLE DIVINE ESSENCE (EACH TRULY AND FULLY GOD)

The Nicene Creed asserts that Jesus is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of *one substance* with the Father...” Jesus is ‘consubstantial’

²⁹ In, *On the Trinity*, Augustine says, “When we say begotten we mean the same as when we say ‘son.’ Being son is a consequence of being begotten, and being begotten is implied by being son.”

³⁰ John 15:26 “*But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*”

³¹ Lesson two will address these personal properties in more detail.

with the Father, meaning of the same essence or being. So, likewise, the Holy Spirit “with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.”

THE DEITY OF JESUS

John 1:1 states that (1) *In the beginning was the Word*, (2) *and the Word was with God*, (3) *and the Word was God*. The Word is the preincarnate Son (1:14), and John sets the Word not as part of the creation but as its Creator, and all things were made through Him (1:3). The Word was God, and there was never a time when God was without His Word. *The Word of God comes from all eternity to reveal God to all those in history.*

In John 20:28, Thomas cries out about the risen Christ, “*My Lord and my God!*” Through his inclusion of Thomas’s declaration, the apostle John intended to supply a confession of faith for those who believe in the Resurrection.³² In Romans 9:5, Paul declares, “*Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.*” Christ is ‘*theos*,’ translated as ‘God’ in Greek. It is the same in 2 Peter 1:1, “*the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” Furthermore, Hebrews 1:8 quotes Psalms 45:6 and applies it to Christ, “*Your throne, O God [Theos], will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.*” The Bible portrays Jesus as equal and identical to God, one with the Father, the Creator, Judge, and Savior, who possesses all the divine attributes and receives divine worship.³³

THE DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

³² John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 667.

³³ References to Jesus’ deity are innumerable. Suggest reading this excellent and manageable essay by Dr. Robert Letham: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-deity-of-christ/>

In all the Trinitarian texts, the Spirit stands equal with the Father and the Son.³⁴ New Testament writers apply to the Holy Spirit Old Testament texts that reference Yahweh.³⁵ For example, Jeremiah 31:33–34 ascribes Yahweh’s words to the Spirit in Hebrews 10:15–17: “*And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds, then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’*” Furthermore, the book of Acts names the Spirit as God in Acts 5:3–4. Therefore, by lying to the Holy Spirit (v. 3), Ananias lied to God (v. 4).³⁶

DIVINE SIMPLICITY

Now, how can something that is three be one? The one true and living God is **simple**. By “simple,” I do not mean God is inherently unassuming, naïve, or ingenuous. Instead, God is not a composite or compounded being, made up of separate and discrete parts, **like all creatures are**.³⁷ Matthew Barrett says, “That means he does *not possess* attributes, as if his attributes are one thing and his essence another. Rather, His essence *is* His attributes, and His attributes *are* His essence. God *is* his attributes.”³⁸ **God is not like a pie that can be sliced and divided into pieces, with a love piece, a wrath piece, a mercy piece, a holiness piece, etc. (though God emphasizes**

³⁴ Matt. 28:19; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2:21–22; 4:4–6; Phil. 3:3; Rev. 1:4–5; 2:7. New Testament texts also mention the Son and the Spirit as equal: Acts 9:31; Rom. 15:30; 1 Cor. 6:11; Phil. 2:1; Heb. 10:29; Rev. 2:18, 29

³⁵ John Frame: Exodus 25:and Hebrews 9:8; Psalms 95:7–11 and Hebrews 3:7–11, in Isaiah 6:9–10 and Acts 28:25–28, and in Isaiah 64:4 and 1 Corinthians 2:9.

³⁶ Again, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 that believers are the temple of God because the Spirit of God dwells in them (6:19–20).

³⁷ **Our bodies are composed of parts; “so that therein one part is greater, another less, and the whole is greater than any part whatever or how great so ever.”** Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity*, 100. Nathan Allen shared another analogy: **Water is a compound substance made up of hydrogen and oxygen, and it can be separated into those elements. God, however, is not a compound. If he were, he could not be the ultimate being. His parts would all be logically prior to him.**

³⁸ The Gospel Coalition, *Divine Simplicity*. Matthew Barrett, (Accessed on January 12, 2023).

different attributes at different times). While each attribute *means* something unique, they all exist in harmony, not tension, with one another. 1689God is the “*I AM*” (Exodus 3:14), “*the Lord our God, the Lord is one*” (Deuteronomy 6:4), and cannot be divided up into parts.³⁹ Nor can God lose any of his attributes or add to them. He *is*.

According to Augustine, simplicity means there is no “difference between what [the Trinity] *is*, and what [the Trinity] *has*, as there is, for example, between a [cup] and the liquid it contains, a body and its color, the atmosphere and its light or heat. None of these *is* what it contains” because each can be divided from what it has...the cup may be emptied of the liquid, the body be discolored, the air [cooled or] darken[ed].”⁴⁰

If God were not simple and made of parts or properties, He would depend on some other beings for His existence.⁴¹ He would be like one of our children’s Christmas presents that we have to put together on Christmas eve night, someone dependent on another to be who/what He is. And whatever is dependent on another cannot be the Perfect, Infinite, Distinct and First cause of all things.⁴²

But another question arises: if God has no parts, how can we say that He exists in Three Persons? There is a massive difference between *divisions* in God and *distinctions* in God. The Persons are not *divisions* in the divine essence, like slices of a pie. The Father, Son, and Spirit do

³⁹ Is this attribute in the Bible? 1 John 4.8 - “God is love.” The text does not tell us that God is part love, rather that He is love. The “I AM” statements of Exodus 3:14 and in the gospels are a string Scriptural defense (See also: 1John 1:5, John 14:6, John 4:24, 1Cor. 1:30, 1John 4:8, Heb. 6:13 and Amos 4:13; Rom. 1:20 and Is. 44:24, Acts 17:25, Rev. 1:8; Divine Immutability: only a simple God is truly above change). Dr. Scott D Meadows explains, “An illustration may be helpful. Consider a numerical series: 1, 3, __, __, 9, 11, 13, __, 17. It is a fact to state that the numbers 5, 7, and 15 are just as legitimate a part of this series as 1, 3, 9, 11, 13, and 17, though the former numbers are not explicitly stated, and the latter are. Whatever doctrine is justifiably deduced from and truly contained in Holy Scripture is just as true and authoritative as that which it states explicitly.”

⁴⁰ Augustine, *The Confessions; The City of God; On Christian Doctrine*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler and Philip W. Goetz, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, J. F. Shaw, and Marcus Dods, Second Edition., vol. 16, Great Books of the Western World (Chicago; Auckland; Geneva; London; Madrid; Manila; Paris; Rome; Seoul; Sydney; Tokyo; Toronto: Robert P. Gwinn; Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1990), 380.

⁴¹ David Bentley Hart, *Experience of God* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 128.

⁴² The Gospel Coalition, *Divine Simplicity*. Matthew Barrett, (Accessed on January 12, 2023).

not combine and add up together to be God, [like the giant super cartoon robot Voltron](#).⁴³ Instead, as Anselm wrote, “Whatever each [Person] is singly, that the whole Trinity is altogether.”⁴⁴ Simplicity keeps us from making the three persons into three gods because all three Persons partake of the whole, singular divine essence, thus realizing Their perfect union.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

I will close with how the fifth century Athanasian creed opens, “That we worship **one God in Trinity**, and **Trinity in Unity**, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.”

⁴³ *Voltron* was an animated television show about a team that pilots a giant super robot.

⁴⁴ Anselm, *Proslogion*, chapter 23.

APPENDIX A: IS THE TRINITY A LOGICAL CONTRADICTION?

Is the Trinity a logical contradiction? God is one in essence but three in Person. This formulation can show us why there are not three gods, and why the Trinity is not a contradiction. Theologian R.C. Sproul cites as an example Dickens' famous line, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Obviously, this was a contradiction if Dickens meant that it was the best of times in the same way that it was the worst of times. But he avoided contradiction with this statement because he meant that in one sense, it was the best of times, but in another sense, it was the worst of times. Carrying this concept over to the Trinity, it is not a contradiction for God to be both three and one because He is not three and one in the same way. Instead, He is three in a different way than He is one. Thus, we are not speaking with a forked tongue — we are not saying that God is one and then denying that he is one by saying that he is three. This is very important: God is one and three at the same time, but not in the same way.⁴⁶

APPENDIX B: ANCIENT CREEDS

The Nicene Creed, also called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, is a statement of the orthodox faith of the early Christian Church in opposition to certain heresies. These heresies concerned the doctrine of the Trinity and of the person of Christ. This creed goes back partially to the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) with additions by the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). Eastern and Western traditions both affirm this Creed. However, the Eastern tradition rejects the addition of three words by the Third Council of Toledo in AD 589 regarding the procession of the Spirit also being from the Son ("and the Son").

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made,

⁴⁶ Desiring God, *What is the Doctrine of the Trinity?* Matt Perman, (Accessed on February 4, 2023).

being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men⁴⁷ and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic⁴⁸ and apostolic Church I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Possibly written in the fifth or sixth century AD, **The Athanasian Creed** is a faithful Christian statement of faith focused on the Trinity and Christology. Although Athanasius did not write this creed, it is named after him (he lived from A.D. 293-373) because he is the champion of Trinitarian orthodoxy.

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

So likewise, the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.

So, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise, the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

⁴⁷ Us men means all people.

⁴⁸ "catholic," means the whole Church throughout time and space as it confesses the apostolic Christian doctrine.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So, there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved is must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.

Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell [sometimes translated 'Hades'], rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

APPENDIX C: ANCIENT HERESIES

Modalism: Modalism, or Sabellianism, claims that there is *one person* in God who appears to humankind in the three different forms (or "modes") of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is like one person who plays various roles in their life and career. *For instance, I am a husband, a father, and a pastor. Or, the 'trinity' is like water that changes from solid (ice) to liquid (water) to gas (steam) forms.* Yet, Scripture presents the Trinity in a relationship; if there is only one person, there are no relationships. Moreover, there were Three separate divine Persons involved in Jesus' baptism, where the Father speaks from heaven, and the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove.

Partialism: The Father, Son and Spirit are together components of God, but none of them are wholly God themselves. They each "part of God" like the leaves on a three-leaf clover, and only become fully God when they are together. In the Scripture we see, in Jesus, "*the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*" (Col 1:9). The Father, Son, and the Spirit are fully God and not partially god.

Arianism: Arianism denies the absolute and eternal deity of the Son and the Spirit. In the Third Century and the beginning of the Fourth, a pastor named Arius taught that God the Father created the Son. His motto was that "There was a time when the son did not exist." Before that quasi-time of creation, the Son did not exist (Arians often appealed to Colossians 1:15 and Proverbs 8:22-26). At some point, the Father *willed* to create the Son in His *likeness* (of 'like' nature but not the 'same' nature). The Father created the Son before material creation, and then God created the heavens and the earth through the Son. Jesus preexisted the heavens and the earth and was the greatest of all creation. God the Father bestowed deity upon the Son (and the Spirit) by His grace. So, Jesus may share some divine attributes, but only God the Father is eternally divine in essence. Therefore, the Son and Spirit are not the same substance as God, but they still form a "trinity." Our ancient church fathers mounted an indissoluble Scriptural defense of the Son and the Spirit's deity. They noted that Proverbs 8:22, "*The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his way,*" was better translated as "possessed" and not "created" (Gen. 39:1; Ex. 21:2; Prov. 4:5, 7; 23:23; Eccl. 2:7; Isa. 1:3). Colossians 1:15 meant Jesus was preeminent over creation, not a created being Himself. In Hebrews 12:6, Esau rejected his *firstborn leadership rights and abandoned God's purposes*. Jesus, in this sense, is the perfect firstborn leader or ruler. Furthermore, they emphasized that Jesus was the "only begotten Son." "Only begotten" did not mean "created," but the relationship between the Father and the Son is eternal as God is eternal. Arius was condemned by the council of Nicea in AD 325.

Subordinationism: Subordinationism taught that the Son and Spirit are inferior in being and function to Father. However, Scripture speaks of Christ in two ways: it says some things of Him concerning His divine nature (Phil. 2:6 - "*in the form of God*"), and it says other things about Him referring to His human nature (Phil. 2:7 - "*taking the form of a servant*"). In the form of God, the Son is wholly equal to God. So, in the Divine Trinity, no Person is greater or lesser than another. Jesus is co-eternal and co-equal in power and glory with the Father and the Spirit "*in the form of God.*" The Son submits to the Father only "*in the form of a servant,*" pertaining to His manhood. Therefore, read Scripture in such a way that you discern these two different manners in which Scripture speaks of Christ without confusing, dividing, or diminishing Him. The Son and Spirit ARE equal in Divinity to the Father in every way WITHOUT inferiority.

Adoptionism: The view held that Jesus was only an ordinary human until His baptism, and then God the Father adopted Him as a son and shared some of his divine powers. John 1:1 affirms Jesus' preexistence and eternal deity.

Tritheism: This heresy denies that only one God exists and asserts that the Father, Son, and Spirit are separate gods with their own centers of consciousness and individual wills. In

tritheism, the Trinity is like one egg with the white, the yoke, and the shell composing one full egg (distinct and unlike parts). The Bible's explicit monotheism repudiates this teaching.

Emanation: Emanation is a principle in Greek philosophy that assumes all derived beings are 'less perfect' than their source. The 'soul' (Spirit) flows from the logos, and the logos (Son) flows from the one source, or god (Father). They flow out of each other like the emission of radiation energy waves from material uranium, steam from hot water, or the sweet scent of a blossoming flower. Each emanation represents a lessening of perfection, so they are 1. unequal, 2. progressively declining in perfection, and 3. The logos can never incarnate. However, the Son and Spirit are not "spontaneous outflows" of descending perfection from the perfect and primary essence of the Father. The Three Persons of the Trinity are each truly and fully God, the same in substance and equal in power and glory.