

Chapter 7

THE TRINITY AND HYPOSTATIC UNION

The understanding of the Trinity is foundational to our Christian faith but can be confusing. Scripture clearly states that God is one ([Mark 12:29](#); [Galatians 3:20](#); [James 2:19](#)). However, there are three manifestations of God revealed in the scriptures: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit (the godhead). They are all one essence as God, but each member of the godhead has their own distinct will and role.

Adding to the confusion, the term 'Trinity' is not in the Bible. Scripture itself does represent the unity of the three members of the godhead by a single term but only by association, actions and description.

The Nicene Creed, ratified at the First Ecumenical Council in AD325 and later modified in AD381 at Constantinople, serves as a vital summary of our understanding of God, the Trinity, and their roles in the history of the Church.

‘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. 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.’

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the three members of the godhead to provide a basis of our belief in the trinity and explain the reason it is critical to Christians. **There are three basic reasons supporting the trinity in Scripture.**

THE ESSENCE OF THE TRINITY

The Trinity's existence in Scripture is evident in various references to each member of the Godhead. Let's explore the Bible verses supporting it.

ASCRIBED AS GOD

GOD THE FATHER

God Himself, as the head of the Godhead, is mentioned over a thousand times in the Scripture.

This is by the Greek word θεός (theos), the general word for God in Greek, and by primary names for God in the Old Testament especially אֱלֹהִים ('ĕlôhîym) and יְהוָה (yehôvâh).

JESUS CHRIST

He is attested to as God Himself in the following verses:
Psalms 45:6; 110:1; Romans 9:5;
Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20;
and John 20:28.

HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is testified to as God in 2 Corinthians 3:17 and Acts 5:3-4.

BY TITLES SIGNIFYING DEITY

GOD THE FATHER

**Stated in His Name,
God (theos)**

JESUS CHRIST

**Son of God and
identifying God as
His Father (equality
with God)**

John 5:18

HOLY SPIRIT

Called Lord

2 Corinthians 3:18

BY CHARACTER

God the Father

- Righteous – John 17:25
- Omnipotent – Ephesians 3:20
- Eternal – Psalm 90:2
- Immutable – Romans 8:35-39
- Omnipresent – Jeremiah 23:23-24

Jesus Christ

- Eternal – John 1:1; Colossians 1:17
- Omnipotent, authoritative – Colossians 2:9-10
- Equal with God – Philippians 2:6-11
- Omniscient – John 5:18; 21:17
- Eternal ruler – Hebrews 1:8

Holy Spirit

- Equated with God – Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3-4
- Omnipresent – Psalm 139:7-10; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11
- Omnipotent – Luke 1:35

IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST ON EARTH, EACH MEMBER OF THE GODHEAD

- Contributed to Christ's resurrection – 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:20
- Participated in His miracles – Matthew 12:28
- Attested that Jesus is the Christ – Matthew 3:1-16; 17:1-7; 27:11; John 17:3

THEIR ASSOCIATION TOGETHER AS DISTINCT PARTS OF THE GODHEAD; THE BIBLE REFERENCES ACTIVITIES WITH EACH MEMBER OF THE GODHEAD PARTICIPATING TOGETHER SUCH AS:

Salvation

- Christ's baptism – Matthew 3:16-17
- Christ's sacrifice – Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 3:18
- Act of preaching the gospel and making disciples – Matthew 28:19
- Making believers into Christians – Romans 8:9
- Salvation – 1 Peter 1:2
- Paul's ministry – Romans 15:19
- Prayers for Paul – Romans 15:30

Eternity

- Preserving salvation – 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Christian life

- Knowledge for Christians – Ephesians 1:17
- Christian service – Philippians 3:3
- Comfort in time of trials – 1 Peter 4:14
- Recognizing Godliness in others – 1 John 4:2
- Witness of Christ on earth – 1 John 5:6-8
- Christian life – 2 Corinthians 3:3
- Believer's blessings in God – 2 Corinthians 13:14

In summary, God is one, yet there are three distinct manifestations of the one God described in scripture, have names of deity, possess characteristics as well as perform actions that only can be of God and are associated together to accomplish the Father's purposes. These three members together are known as the 'godhead' which is known as the doctrine of the 'trinity'; accepted by the ecclesiastical fathers from the earliest time the church could legally organize (313 AD).

THE ROLES OF CHRIST AND THE SPIRIT THROUGH THE BIBLE

The members of the godhead all have different roles in the church time to accomplish separate purposes. However, these roles differed in times before the epistles and the church.

This section describes the various roles of the godhead in differing sections of the Bible depending on God's administration of His people.

THE ROLES OF CHRIST AND THE SPIRIT

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- Jesus Christ
 - Creator – Colossians 1:16; John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2
 - Sustains creation – Colossians 1:17
 - Angel of Yahweh (Lord) – The Angel of Yahweh is the manifestation of the invisible God in the life of Israel. His role is clearly of deity and although controversial, is most likely the incarnate Christ.
 - Led Israel – Christ led Israel in the cloud as noted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4
 - The visible manifestation of God – Any visible appearance of God must be Christ (Exodus 3:2; 33:19)
- Holy Spirit
 - Creator – Genesis 1:2; Psalms 33:6; 104:30; Job 27:3; 33:4
 - Contended with man – Genesis 6:3
 - Gave revelation and prophecy – 2 Peter 1:20-21
 - Came upon selected saints – The Spirit empowered certain people such as kings (David and Saul), the builders of the Tabernacle, as well as the prophets, the 70 elders of Israel, several judges, and others. The Spirit's association with Old Testament saints appears limited in scope to accomplish specific works over a period of time. These actions by the Spirit contrast with the New Testament where believers are indwelt permanently from salvation and His power is not limited (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13-14).

THE ROLES OF CHRIST AND THE SPIRIT

IN THE GOSPEL

Jesus Christ

- Offered the kingdom with Himself as King – Matthew 3:2-3; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 22:70
- Offered salvation and forgiveness of sin – John 3:3-16

Holy Spirit

- Caused the birth of Christ's humanity – Luke 2:52
- Anointed Christ at His baptism – Matthew 3:1-17
- Testified of Christ at His baptism – Matthew 3:16
- Filled Christ – Matthew – 3:16
- Assisted Christ with certain miracles – Luke 4:18
- Assisted with Christ's resurrection – Romans 1:4
- Led Christ into the wilderness for His temptation Matthew 4:1
- Assisted with Christ's prophetic messages – Luke 4:18
- Came upon the disciples for certain purposes – Matthew 10:20; John 20:22
- Assisted Christ in offering Himself as a sacrifice – Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 3:18
- Revelation of the gospel writings came through the Spirit – 1 Timothy 3:16

TODAY

- **Jesus Christ**

- Prays for us – Romans 8:31; Hebrews 7:24
- Heads the church – Colossians 1:17-18
- Nourishes and cherishes the body – Ephesians 5:29
- High Priest – He acts as our great high priest offering mercy in our every time of need – Hebrews 4:14-16

- **Holy Spirit** – Please see the previous chapter for more information.

IMPORTANCE OF THE TRINITY

The existence of the trinity has profound importance in our understanding of God, our salvation and our Christian lives.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

As Christians we realized we worship a single God (monotheism). However, to accomplish His will and purpose in our lives, God manifests Himself in three ways: God the Father, Jesus Christ our Savior, and the Holy Spirit. Each manifestation is distinct and completely God, with their own will and purpose as part of the Godhead.

OUR GREAT SALVATION

The existence of the trinity is vital to our salvation. We understand for us to be justified, a man had to die in our place to take our sins (Hebrews 9:15). Therefore, a loving God sent Jesus Christ, as God, to become man. He was born of the Virgin Mary as man. Christ is one entity with two natures. This is called the hypostatic union. Jesus Christ was all God and all man. As perfect man He was a satisfactory sacrifice to take our sins and appease God's righteous judgement (Romans 3:23-26; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

The **Holy Spirit**, as a separate manifestation of God, participated in our salvation by convicting us of sin (John 16:8-11). Upon our belief in Christ, the Spirit regenerated us, sealed us onto our salvation, and placed us in the church. Each member of the Godhead is vital for **bringing us to eternal life** (Ephesians 1:13-14; Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Moreover, each member of the Godhead is active in our **Christian walk**, as described previously, with the Spirit and Christ praying for us, Christ acting as our great High Priest to mature and nurture us and as head of His body, the church, while the Spirit helps us put to death the deeds of the flesh, teaches us and provides us power.

Indeed, God has given us a great salvation and has provided for every need to attain this, from the beginning of time to eternity future.

HYPOSTATIC UNION

This important theological concept is a second term, in addition to the Trinity, that is not mentioned in scripture. However, the concept is broadly described and is based in the New Testament describing Jesus Christ as being both God and man.

Christian orthodoxy teaches that Christ is both all man and all God, joined together, being of one essence but two distinct wills. This is called the hypostatic union. The word 'hypostatic' comes from the Greek word ὑπόστασις (Hupostasis) and is defined by Thayer in part as 'substance, real being, the substantial quality, nature, of a person or thing'.

Important verses indicating the existence of the hypostatic union are the following:

- **Christ as God and man:**

- Christ is God – Psalms 45:6; Psalm 110:1; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20; John 1:1,34; John 20:28; Hebrews 1:1-3
- Christ is man – 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 1:7; Romans 5:15

- **Titles:**

- Son of God (equal to God) – John 5:18; John 19:7; Matthew 26:63-64
- Son of man (the representative man) – There are numerous references to Christ calling Himself son of man in the gospels as it was his favorite reference to Himself – Matthew 16:27-28; John 1:51; John 6:62

- **Development of the concept**

- In the first 300 years after Christ, Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire. Only after the Edict of Milan, issued in 313 by Constantine, the first Christian emperor, did Christianity was recognized by the empire. At that time Christian leaders finally were able to congregate to discuss difficult theological issues generated during the first few centuries of Christian history.
- These discussions occurred, most importantly, at the first seven ecumenical councils of the church between 325 and 787 AD. The first council was in Nicaea and confirmed Christ is God and of one with the Father; being Himself both fully God and man. This theology was stated in the Nicene Creed often repeated still, or its derivative, in churches today.
- However, following the confirmation of Christ's deity and humanity the issue arose over the manner both these natures interacted with Christ. Therefore, the 3rd, 4th, and 5th ecumenical councils dealt primarily with this issue and created statements over Christ and His deity and humanity.

- **Development of the concept (continuation)**

- The ecumenical councils examined three basic concepts of the union of Christ's deity and humanity:

- **One essence, one will** – This hypothesis was proposed by the Oriental churches represented today by Armenian, Syrian, and Egyptian Coptic fellowships. They claimed that Christ was of one essence and one will, shared between his humanity and deity.
 - **Two essences and wills** – This theory was proposed by Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431, as a reaction to the Oriental churches' theology. It indicated that Christ was of two distinct essences and possessed two disparate wills.
 - **One essence and two wills** – This was championed by the church councils and indicated that Christ's humanity and deity were composed of one essence but there were two distinct wills.

SUMMARY

In summary, it is key for a Christian to understand that Christ was both fully man and fully God. This union shows the importance of the virgin birth when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and so was born of man but also is God.

Christ had to be God to provide a perfect sacrifice to satisfy the Father's justice in demanding the payment for our sins. In contrast, Christ also had to be man, to take our deserved punishment on the cross, so that we could be forgiven and saved by faith.

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