

# Why the “Forgotten” Trinity?

I love the Trinity. Does that sound strange to you? For most people, it *should* sound strange. Think about it: when was the last time you heard anyone say such a thing? We often hear “I love Jesus” or “I love God,” but how often does anyone say, “I love the Trinity”? You even hear “I love the cross” or “I love the Bible,” but you don’t hear “I love the Trinity.” Why not?

Someone might say, “Well, the Trinity is a doctrine, and you don’t love doctrines.” But in fact we do. “I love justification” or “I love the second coming of Christ” would make perfect sense. What’s more, the Trinity isn’t just a doctrine any more than saying “I love the deity of Christ” makes Christ just a doctrine.

So why don’t we talk about loving the Trinity? Most Christians do not understand what the term means and have only a vague idea of the reality it represents. We don’t love things that we consider very complicated, obtuse, or just downright difficult. We are more com-

fortable saying "I love the old rugged cross" because we *think* we have a firm handle on what that actually means and represents. But we confess how little we understand about the Trinity by how little we talk about it and how little emotion it evokes in our hearts.

Yet we seem rather confused at this point because most Christians take a firm stand on the Trinity and the fundamental issues that lead to it (the deity of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit). We withhold fellowship from groups like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses because they reject the Trinity and replace it with another concept. We hang a person's very salvation upon the acceptance of the doctrine, yet if we are honest with ourselves, *we really aren't sure exactly why.*

It's the topic we won't talk about: no one dares question the Trinity for fear of being branded a "heretic," yet we have all sorts of questions about it, and we aren't sure who we can ask. Many believers have asked questions of those they thought were more mature in the faith and have often been confused by the *contradictory* answers they received. Deciding it is best to remain confused rather than have one's orthodoxy questioned, many simply leave the topic for that mythical future day "when I have more time." And in the process, we have lost out on a tremendous blessing.

## **THE BLESSING OF THE TRINITY**

A true and accurate knowledge of the Trinity is a blessing in and of itself. Any revelation of God's truth is an act of grace, of course, but the Trinity brings to us a blessing far beyond the worth normally assigned by believers today. Why? Because, upon reflection, we discover that the Trinity is the highest revelation God has made of himself to His people. It is the capstone, the summit, the brightest star in the firmament of divine truths. As I will assert more than once in this work, God revealed this truth about himself most clearly, and most irrefutably, in the Incarnation itself, when Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh and walked among us. That one act revealed the Trinity to us in a way that no amount of verbal revelation could ever communicate. God has been pleased to reveal to us that He exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since God feels it is important

to know, we should likewise. And since God went through a great deal of trouble to make it clear to us, we should see the Trinity as a precious possession, at the very top of the many things God has revealed to us that we otherwise would never have known.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he indicated that he was praying for them. He did not pray that they would obtain big houses and fancy chariots. He prayed that they would be blessed by God in the spiritual realm with spiritual wealth. Note his words:

That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:2-3)

How is one "rich" spiritually? One is rich spiritually who has a "full assurance of understanding." How many people today can honestly claim to have a true understanding of God's nature so as to have "full assurance"? Or do most of us muddle along with something far less than what God would have for us? A person who has such spiritual wealth, seen in a full assurance of understanding, has a "true knowledge" of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself. The goal of the Christian life, including the goal of Christian study and scholarship, is always the same: Jesus Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Do we long for a "true knowledge" of Christ? When we sing, "Lord, I want to know you," do we really mean it, and then take advantage of the ways He has given us to attain this "true knowledge" of Him? To know Christ truly is to know the Trinity, for God has not revealed himself in such a way as to allow us to have *true* and *balanced* knowledge of the Father outside of such knowledge of the Son, all of which comes to us through the Spirit. A person who wants to "know Jesus" must, due to the nature of God's revelation, know Him as He is related to the Father and the Spirit. We must know, understand, and love the Trinity to be fully and completely Christian. This is why we say the Trinity is the greatest of God's revealed truths.

## WHY "FORGOTTEN"?

Why has the Trinity become a theological appendage that is more often misunderstood than rightly known? I believe there are many reasons. There is the utterly false idea that God does not want us to use our minds in loving and worshiping Him (anti-intellectualism), as well as the idea that "theology is for cold, unfeeling people. We want a living faith." This last reason is the most irrational because a living faith is one that is focused upon the truths of God's revelation. The deepest feelings and emotions evoked by the Spirit of God are not directed toward unclear, nebulous, fuzzy concepts, but toward the clear revealed truths of God concerning His love, the work of Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It makes no sense whatsoever in human relations to say "I love my wife" while doing our best to remain ignorant of her personality, likes, dreams, etc. And even worse, if my wife has put forth the effort to make sure that I *can* know these things about her, and I go about *ignoring* her efforts, what does that say about how much I really *love* her? The idea that there is some kind of contradiction between the in-depth study of God's Word, so as to know what God has revealed about himself, and a living, vital faith is inherently self-contradictory.

Whatever the reasons for the general ignorance of the specifics of the Trinity, the result is plain. Most Christian people, while remembering the term "Trinity," have forgotten the central place the doctrine is to hold in the Christian life. It is rarely the topic of sermons and Bible studies, rarely the object of adoration and worship—at least worship *in truth*, which is what the Lord Jesus said the Father desires (John 4:23). Instead, the doctrine is *misunderstood* as well as *ignored*. It is so misunderstood that a majority of Christians, when asked, give *incorrect* and at times downright *heretical* definitions of the Trinity. For others, it is ignored in such a way that even among those who correctly understand the doctrine, it does not hold the place it should in the proclamation of the Gospel message, nor in the life of the individual believer in prayer, worship, and service.

## THE SOLUTION

Thankfully, the solution to this problem is near at hand. The Holy Spirit of God always desires to lead God's people to a deeper knowledge of God's truth. This is the wonderful "constant" that every minister and teacher can rely upon: every true believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, and the Spirit is always going to fulfill the promise to lead us into all truth. Any believer who honestly seeks God's truth, and is willing to lay aside any preconceptions and traditions that might stand contrary to that truth, will find strength and encouragement for the *work* (yes, "work") that is required to come to that true knowledge and full assurance of which Paul spoke. We do not just sit back and expect God to zap us with some emotional surge. Instead, the Spirit drives us into His Word, enlightening our minds and filling our hearts with love for the truths we discover.

Many theological works flow from an intellectual, scholarly stance. There is nothing wrong with such works, for there is a need for them. However, this work, while incorporating necessary elements of scholarship, is written from a position of "passion." Passion, not in the sense of unordered, chaotic feelings, but passion in the sense of a burning love for something—in this case, the truth about God we call "Trinity." This book is not meant to be a handbook of all the "arguments" you can use to "prove" a point. There are plenty of such works in existence. Instead, this work is written *by* a believer *for* other believers. While I must explain and teach, illustrate and document, I do so to achieve a higher goal.

I wish to invite you, my fellow believer, to a deeper, higher, more intense love of God's truth. It is my longing that when you complete this work, you will not simply put it down and say, "I got some good ammunition to use the next time I debate the Trinity." Instead, I hope that God, in His grace, will use this to implant in your heart a deep longing to know Him even more. I pray that longing will last the rest of your life, and that it will result in your loving Him more completely, worshiping Him more fully, honoring Him with the totality of your life. I desire that you will join with me in being able to say, "I love the Trinity." A person who *loves* this truth of God will likewise be able to

explain and defend it, but the *motivation* for doing so will be so much richer, and the end result will be the edification of the believer and the church at large rather than a mere “victory” in a particular debate or argument. And one thing is for sure: a person who speaks God’s truth from *conviction* and *love* does so far more convincingly than the person who lacks such motivations.

True worship must worship God *as He exists*, not as we wish Him to be. The essence of idolatry is the making of images of God. An image is a shadow, a false representation. We may not bow before a statue or figure, but if we make an image of God in our mind *that is not in accord with God’s revelation of himself*, then we are not worshipping in truth. Since sin and rebellion are always pushing us toward false gods and away from the true God, we must seek *every day* to conform our thinking and our worship to God’s straight-edge standard of truth, revealed so wonderfully in Scripture. We must be willing to love God *as He is*, and that includes *every* aspect of His being that might, due to our fallen state, be offensive to us, or beyond our limited capacities to fully comprehend. God is not to be edited to fit our ideas and preconceptions. Instead, we must always be asking Him to graciously open our clouded mind and reveal himself to us so that we may love Him truly and worship Him aright.

## THE EXAMPLE OF EDWARDS

I have always been challenged by the example of Jonathan Edwards<sup>1</sup> when it came to this matter of loving God *as He has revealed himself* rather than loving an image I have created of Him in my mind:

Sometimes, only mentioning a single word caused my heart to burn within me; or only seeing the name of Christ, or the name of some attribute of God. And God has appeared glorious to me on account of the Trinity. It has made me have exalting thoughts of God, that he subsists in three persons; the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced, have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate, but in a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel.

Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737,

having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception—which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love Him with a holy and pure love; to trust in Him; to live upon Him; to serve and follow Him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.<sup>2</sup>

When people today talk about "spiritual experiences," I am often forced to reflect upon the fact that rarely are these experiences focused upon *God*, but rather upon what that person believes God has done for him or her, or what that person has *accomplished* "for God." How much deeper, how much more meaningful, is the experience of Edwards. The object of his reflection is unchanging, for it is nothing other than the eternal truth of God. The world, and his circumstances, cannot take away from him what is most precious: his God.

I confess that the times when my soul is so enraptured by such divine joys is far too infrequent in comparison with how often it is taken up with worldly things and distracted by much less worthy objects of consideration. It seems as though the whole world does its best to keep me from enjoying myself in my God, in contemplating His nature, His attributes, and His works. But I read of great men of God in the past and realize there are two common elements in their lives: suffering and a love of the contemplation of God's attributes and works. When I compare myself with Edwards, or any other of the great

godly men and women of the past, I quickly see how influenced I am by worldly standards and worldly priorities.

But most importantly, Edwards was drawn heavenward by the very attributes of God that turn the worldly person cold and, in fact, are often the most offensive to the natural or unsaved man. Do we love God—all of God, including the “tough” parts of His nature—or do we refuse to bow before those elements that cause us “problems”? If we love Him and worship Him as He deserves, we will not *dare* to “edit” Him to fit *our* desires. Instead, we will seek to worship Him in truth.

### **GOD IS GREAT**

The Trinity is a truth that tests our dedication to the principle that God is smarter than we are. As strange as that may sound, I truly believe that in most instances where a religious group denies the Trinity, the reason can be traced back to the founder’s unwillingness to admit the simple reality that God is bigger than we can ever imagine. That is really what Christians have always meant when they use the term “mystery” of the Trinity. The term has never meant that the Trinity is an inherently irrational thing. Instead, it simply means that we realize that God is completely unique in the way He exists, and there are elements of His being that are simply beyond our meager mental capacity to comprehend. The fact that God is eternal is another facet of His being that is beyond us. We cannot really grasp eternity, nor how God exists eternally rather than in time. Yet this truth is revealed to us in Scripture, and we believe it on the logical basis that God is trustworthy. It is a “mystery” that we accept on the basis of faith in God’s revelation.

When men approach God’s truth with a haughty attitude, they often decide that particular elements of that truth are not “suitable” to them, so they “modify” the message of the faith to fit their own notions. Since the Trinity is the highest of God’s revelations concerning himself, it is hardly surprising to discover that many groups deny it. If one denies any of the preceding truths upon which the Trinity is based, one will end up rejecting the entire doctrine *en toto*. An unwillingness to worship God *as God is and has revealed himself* lies be-



hind every denial of the Trinity that appears down through history. We want a God we can fit in a box, and the eternal, Triune God does not fit that mold.

William G. T. Shedd saw the truth when he wrote,

The doctrine of the Trinity is the most *immense* of all the doctrines of religion. It is the foundation of theology. Christianity, in the last analysis, is Trinitarianism. Take out of the New Testament the person of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and there is no God left. Take out of the Christian consciousness the thoughts and affections that relate to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and there is no Christian consciousness left. The Trinity is the constitutive idea of the evangelical theology, and the formative idea of the evangelical experience. The immensity of the doctrine makes it of necessity a mystery; but a mystery which like night enfolds in its unfathomed depths the bright stars—points of light, compared with which there is no light so keen and so glittering. Mysterious as it is, the Trinity of Divine Revelation is the doctrine that holds in it all the hope of man; for it holds within it the infinite pity of the Incarnation and the infinite mercy of the Redemption.

And it shares its mysteriousness with the doctrine of the Divine Eternity. It is difficult to say which is most baffling to human comprehension, the all-comprehending, simultaneous, successionless consciousness of the Infinite One, or his trinal personality. Yet no theist rejects the doctrine of the Divine Eternity because of its mystery. The two doctrines are antithetic and correlative. On one of the Northern rivers that flows through a narrow chasm whose depth no plummet has sounded, there stand two cliffs fronting each other, shooting their pinnacles into the blue ether, and sending their roots down to the foundations of the earth. They have named them Trinity and Eternity. So stand, antithetic and confronting, in the Christian scheme, the trinity and eternity of God.<sup>3</sup>

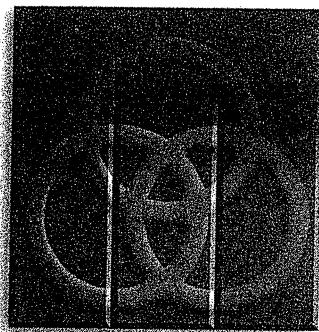
One attitude of the heart struggles against an eternal God, desiring to make Him "more like us." But a godly attitude, the attitude that is imparted by the Spirit of God, bows in humble reverence, and instead

of *struggling*, it *embraces* in love the God who is beyond all comprehension. Such an attitude cannot be forced on anyone. It takes a miracle for the naturally hostile<sup>4</sup> soul to be made willing to love God and seek His face. That miracle is the work of regeneration, of causing one to be "born from above,"<sup>5</sup> made "a new creature."<sup>6</sup> Hence, such truths as the eternality of God, and His Triune nature, are doctrines *for Christians*, in the sense that to truly love, accept, and hunger for these things, the miracle of salvation must take place.

The more exhaustive our knowledge of God's revelation, the deeper our love for Him will be. So we must delve into God's revelation, "put our waders on," so to speak, and explore the Scriptures so that we can properly understand the pinnacle of God's revelation about himself the Trinity.

### **A BRIEF WORD ABOUT THE FORMAT**

I wish to bring my love for the Trinity into the hearts of many of my fellow believers. As a result, I have done my best to avoid the temptation that comes from having defended this great truth against those who deny it: to attempt to be *exhaustive* at every point. Anyone who has spent a great deal of time "debating" with someone who denies the Trinity knows how one must, at times, get very, *very* particular in responding to certain arguments and points. But since I am not writing specifically for those who *don't* believe, but for those who *do*, I have tried to be brief, concise, and direct. There are many passages of Scripture I *could* have presented, objections I *could* have addressed, but I did not. My reason was simply to make sure that the final result was readily available to the widest possible audience.



# What Is the Trinity?

The single greatest reason people struggle with the doctrine of the Trinity is miscommunication. It is *very* rare that anyone actually argues or debates about the *real* doctrine of the Trinity. Most arguments that take place at the door, or over coffee, or at the workplace involve two or more people fighting vigorously over two or more *misrepresentations* of the doctrine itself. It is no wonder so many encounters create far more heat than they do light.

It is basic to human communication to define terms. Yet so many people have so much emotional energy invested in the Trinity that they often skip right past the “definitions” stage and charge into the “tooth and claw” stage. And this is not only true today. Historically speaking, many of the early battles over the doctrine centuries ago had to do with one side using a certain set of terms in one way, and the other the same set of terms in another way. This was made even more a difficulty by the fact that you had Greek-speaking people trying to understand what

Latin-speaking people were saying, and *vice versa*. Today we can look back and realize that early on both sides were saying the same thing, only they were saying it with different words. If someone had just sat down and defined terms clearly and forcefully, a lot of arguments could have been avoided.

When it comes to the central affirmation of the triune nature of God, most of the time we leap right past the “formalities” and directly into a tug-of-war with passages of Scripture. The result is almost always the same: both sides go away thinking the other is utterly blind. Such frustrating experiences could be minimized if we remember that we cannot *assume* that the other person shares our knowledge or understanding of the specifics of the doctrine under discussion. As tedious as it may seem at first, we must resist the temptation to bypass the necessary “groundwork” and insist that everyone define what they believe the Trinity to be, and how they are going to be using many of the key terms that come into play. Without this first step, little else will be accomplished.

### **BUT CAN YOU DEFINE THE UNDEFINABLE?**

Before we present a definition of the Trinity, it is important to point out that we face a real difficulty right at the start: language itself. Christians have struggled for centuries to express, within the limitations of human language, the unique revelation God makes of His mode of existence. We struggle because language is a finite means of communication. Finite minds are trying to express in words infinite truths. At times we simply cannot “say” what we need to say to adequately express the grandeur that is our God.

Humans communicate by means of examples. When little children start asking the endless series of questions that suggest themselves to little minds, we often find ourselves using analogies and examples in our replies. When asked what a new food tastes like, we compare it to known foods in the child’s life. We might say, “It tastes a little bit like crackers with honey on them,” knowing the child has had crackers with honey. That may not be *exactly* what it tastes like, but they get the idea. As their “database” of knowledge grows, so we can expand our anal-

ogies. We never escape this element of our language. When we encounter new thoughts, new ideas, it is natural for us to fit them into preexisting categories by comparing them with past experiences or facts.

This process works just fine for most things. But for unique things, it doesn't. If something is *truly* unique, it cannot be compared to anything else, at least not without introducing some element of error. One might be able to draw a parallel to a certain *aspect* of the truly unique thing, but if it's really unique, the analogy will be limited, and, if pressed too far, downright erroneous. But since we don't encounter too many *completely* unique things in our lives, we manage to get along.

The problem is, of course, God is *completely unique*. He is God, and there is no other. He is totally unlike anything else, and as He frequently reminds us, "To whom then will you liken Me?" (Isaiah 40:25). There is no answer to that question, because to compare God to anything in the created order is, in the final analysis, to deny His uniqueness. When we say, "God is like . . ." we are treading on dangerous ground. Yes, we might be able to illustrate a certain *aspect* of God's being in this way, but in every instance the analogy, if pushed far enough, is going to break down.

Our language fails us in two other ways as well. First, our language is based upon time. We speak of the past, the present, and the future. As we will see in the next chapter, God is not limited to time as we are. Thus, when we speak of Him with our language, we are forced to place misleading limitations upon His being. This often causes real problems for us in discussing His triune nature, for we slip into the all-too-human mode of thinking as time-based, time-limited creatures.

The second way in which our language fails us has to do with what I call "excess baggage." Words often carry with them "baggage" that has become attached to the meaning of a word. The way we use the word may cause us to conjure up particular mental images every time we hear it. The most glaring example of this is the word "person," a word that is often used when discussing the Trinity. When we use the

word “person,” we attach to it all sorts of “baggage” that comes from our own personal experiences. We think of a physical body, an individual, separate from everyone else. We think of a spatial location, physical attributes like height, weight, age—all things associated with our common use of the word “person.” When we use this word to describe a divine person (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit), we tend to drag along with it the “baggage” that comes from our common use of the term in everyday life. Many people, upon hearing the word “person” used of the Father, for example, conjure up an image of a kind old grandfatherly figure who is the “person” of the Father. He’s separate, different, limited—everything we think of when we think of the term “person.” It will be our task (and it is a difficult one!) to labor to separate such “baggage” from our thinking and use such terms in very specific, limited ways so as to avoid unneeded confusion.

## **A BASIC DEFINITION**

It is time to lay down a basic, fundamental definition of the Trinity. At the end of our study we will look a little closer at this definition, expand upon it some, and examine a few of the issues it raises.

But we need a short, succinct, accurate definition to start with. Here it is:

**Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally  
three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the  
Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

You would think that a belief that can be expressed in one sentence would be fairly simple as a result, but such would be a mistake. I have chosen my words very carefully. Each is very important, each has a specific function. More importantly, I have *avoided* certain words, too. Let’s look briefly at some of the major issues presented by this definition.

First, the doctrine rests completely upon the truth of the first clause: there is only one God. “The one Being that is God” carries within it a tremendous amount of information. It not only asserts that

there is only one God—the historic belief, shared by Christians and Jews known as *monotheism*—but it also insists that God’s “Being” (capitalized so as to contrast it with the term “persons” found in the next clause) is one, unique, undivided, indivisible. As you can see already, there is a lot packed into each phrase. We will “unpack” all of this in time. But for now, the emphasis of the first clause is *monotheism* and the assertion that there is only one true God.

Second, the definition insists that there are three divine persons. Note immediately that we are not saying there are three Beings that are one Being, or three persons that are one person. Such would be self-contradictory. I emphasize this because, *most often*, this is the misrepresentation of the doctrine that is commonly found in the literature of various religions that deny the Trinity. The second clause speaks of three divine persons, not three divine Beings. As I warned before, we must not succumb to the temptation to read the term “person” as if we are talking about finite, self-contained human beings. What “person” means when we speak of the Trinity is quite different than when we speak of creatures such as ourselves. These divine persons are identified in the last clause as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Hank Hanegraaff, president of the *Christian Research Institute* (CRI), has often expressed this point in a wonderfully simple and clear way: when speaking of the Trinity, we need to realize that we are talking about one *what* and three *who*’s. The one *what* is the Being or essence of God; the three *who*’s are the Father, Son, and Spirit. We dare not mix up the *what*’s and *who*’s regarding the Trinity.

Thirdly, we are told that the relationship among these divine persons is eternal. They have *eternally existed* in this unique relationship. Each of the persons is said to be eternal, each is said to be coequal with the others as to their divine nature. Each fully shares the one *Being* that is God. The Father is not  $\frac{1}{3}$  of God, the Son  $\frac{1}{3}$  of God, the Spirit  $\frac{1}{3}$  of God. Each is fully God, coequal with the others, and that eternally. There never was a time when the Father was not the Father; never a time when the Son was not the Son; never a time when the Spirit was not the Spirit. Their relationship is eternal, not in the sense of having

been for a *long* time, but existing, in fact, outside the realm of time itself.

The three foundations of the Trinity, then, are already clearly visible. Here they are:

Foundation One:	Monotheism: There Is Only One God
Foundation Two:	There Are Three Divine Persons
Foundation Three:	The Persons Are Coequal and Coeternal

These three foundations not only provide the grounds upon which the Trinity is based, they explain to us *why Christians who accept all of the Bible believe this doctrine*. This is very important. Often the discussions Christians have with others about the Trinity flounder and go in circles because we do not identify these three truths as *biblical teachings*. When someone says, "How can you claim to only believe the Bible, when you use terms like 'Trinity' that don't appear in the Bible?" we must be quick to point out that we are *forced* to do so by the teaching of the Bible itself on these three points. *Every error and heresy on this doctrine will find its origin in a denial of one or more of these truths.*

### THE THREE FOUNDATIONS AND THE BIBLE

This book is based upon establishing, as divine truths, plainly revealed in Scripture, the three foundations listed above. I do not approach the Trinity as a philosophical issue or a theological speculation that may interest a person for a while. I approach the Trinity as *a revealed truth*. I do not believe in the Trinity because it is "traditional" to do so. I believe in it for the same reason Athanasius<sup>1</sup> did so long ago: the Scriptures compel me to this conclusion. I cannot hold the Bible in my hand while denying the Trinity. There is a fundamental contradiction there. The Trinity is a doctrine *for Bible-believing people*.

It is quite common for those who deny the Trinity to make Christians feel as if they are somehow inconsistent in believing in a doctrine that is not "biblical." "Where do you find the word 'Trinity' in the Bible?" they ask. Yet just the opposite is the case. The only folks who



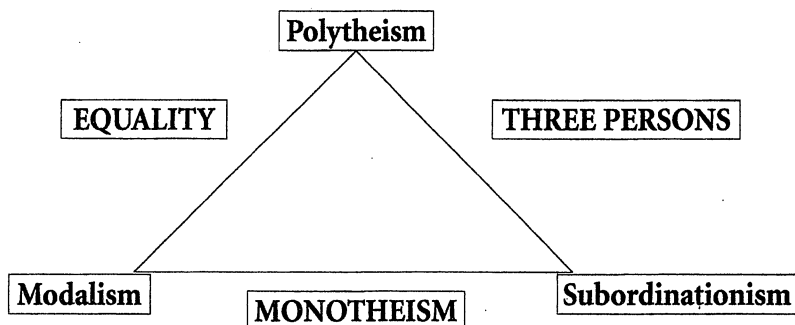
are truly *biblical* are those who believe *all* the Bible has to say on a given topic. If I believe *everything* the Bible says about topic X and use a term not found in the Bible to describe the full teaching of Scripture on that point, am I not being more truthful to the Word than someone who limits themselves to only biblical terms, but rejects some aspect of God's revelation? Christians believe in the Trinity not because the term itself is given in some creedlike form in the text of Scripture. Instead, they believe in the Trinity because the Bible, taken in its completeness, accepted as a self-consistent revelation of God, *teaches* that there is one Being of God (Foundation One) that is shared fully (Foundation Three) by three divine persons (Foundation Two), the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is, therefore, no contradiction between being a "Bible believer" and holding to the Trinity. The one leads naturally, and inevitably, to the other.

The majority of this work will demonstrate from the text of Scripture each of the three foundational truths that lead us inexorably to the historic doctrine of the Trinity. After we have established these truths, we will briefly expand upon our definition. While it is sufficient to explain the doctrine in broad terms, Christian theologians over the centuries have found it necessary to carefully explain various elements of the doctrine in greater depth. Most of this more technical discussion has been to safeguard each of the three foundations from subtle, yet destructive, erosion and redefinition. These technical definitions are generally negative; that is, they tell us more about what the Trinity *isn't* than what it *is*. This shouldn't be surprising, however. We must always remember that we are trying to define and describe something that is absolutely, universally *unique*. It is far easier to say, "I don't mean this," than it is to say, "Well, it's like this," since there is nothing in the created universe that really, fully is *like* an absolutely unique thing. That's what makes it unique in the first place! Consequently, theologians have had much more success at saying, "The Trinity *is not this*," than positively saying, "The Trinity *is this*."

### WHAT WE ARE NOT SAYING—

The errors that result from denying, or misunderstanding, any one of the foundational truths presented above can be graphically

illustrated through the use of the following triangle diagram:



Each of the three sides represents a foundational truth. When any one of these truths is denied, the other two sides form an arrow that point to the resultant error. For example, if one denies *monotheism*, the other two sides of the triangle point to “polytheism.” If one denies the *equality* of the persons, the result is “subordinationism.” And if one denies the existence of *three persons*, the result is “modalism.” This diagram also points out how *balanced* we must be in our study of this important subject. Failing to believe one fundamental element of God’s revelation will lead us into grave danger and error.

The large majority of people with whom I have spoken who insisted they did not believe in the Trinity actually did not believe in a *misrepresentation* or *misunderstanding* of the doctrine itself. Most often people confuse *modalism*, the belief that God exists in three “modes” (Father, Son, and Spirit), but is only one *person*, with the real doctrine of the Trinity. “But Jesus prayed to the Father! How could He *be* the Father?” is what I often hear. It is important to emphasize that we are *not* saying that the Father is the Son, nor that the Son is the Spirit. That is not the doctrine of the Trinity, despite how many people in honest ignorance think otherwise. No true Trinitarian believes the Father was a “ventriloquist” at the baptism of Jesus, nor that Jesus was praying to himself in the Garden of Gethsemane.

## A WORD TO APOLOGISTS

I write as a Christian theologian and *apologist*. A Christian apologist is a person who gives a defense, a reason for the Christian faith. As a Christian apologist, I have often undertaken to define, and defend, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

I do not intend this book to be an exhaustive defense of the Trinity. There are all sorts of objections I simply will not address, not for lack of desire to do so, but for another more important reason. It is my desire that this work function to introduce, explain, and make understandable a doctrine that, while at the center of our faith, is often ignored and misunderstood. I am attempting to explain and, as a result, cause Christians to love and understand the doctrine of the Trinity. I do provide some responses to the common objections raised against the truth of the Trinity, mainly through the use of endnotes, but if I allowed too much of the "debate" to enter into the work itself, I would lose the very audience I so desire to see fall in love with the Trinity. Beyond this, the very space that would be required to respond to every possible objection would remove this book from the hands of the Christian who is simply seeking to understand accurately the great God whom we worship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.