

Where do we find the doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture?

The doctrine of the Trinity, that God is one God in 3 divine persons, is one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity and has been a constant teaching of the Church from the time of the Apostles.

While to some extent, this is a mystery [we can never fully understand all there is to know about the infinite God with our finite human minds], perhaps it helps to consider a human family, which is, in a sense, an earthly mirror of the Trinity. A husband and wife love each other and from their love can come a third person, a child. *Who* are they? They are each individual persons. But *what* are they? They are collectively human. Similarly, within the Trinity, there is the Father and the Son and the divine love between them, which has always existed, is a third person, the Holy Spirit. *Who* are they? Individually, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *What* are they, what is their essence? Collectively they are God.

But in recent times, groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's) have come to deny both the Trinity and Jesus' divinity, often producing and distributing literature that denies these basic Christian truths, such as the JW pamphlet, "Should You Believe In The Trinity?" **How do we respond to such doubts?**

Sadly, this particular publication is fraught with errors and misinterpretations. For example, they claim that no "Christian writers for three centuries after the birth of Christ", supported the Trinity, and then go on to list several specific Church Fathers as holding this view, including St Justin Martyr, St Irenaeus, St Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, St Hippolytus, and Origen. They give no specific references to their writings so we can look them up to verify them, and for good reason!

Every one of them clearly taught that Jesus was God, some even giving detailed descriptions of the Trinity!

For example, St. Justin Martyr would refer to Jesus as *“both God and Lord of Hosts”* (Dialogue With Trypho the Jew, 36). Around 180 AD, **St Irenaeus** would write that Jesus is *“Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, and Lord, and King Eternal, and the Incarnate Word, proclaimed by all the prophets, the apostles, and by the Spirit Himself, may be seen by all who have attained to even a small portion of the truth... that He (Jesus) was the Mighty God”*, adding that *“the Virgin Mary... would bear God”* (Against Heresies, 1:10:1 and 5:19:1).

Similarly, **St Clement** would write, *“in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ This Word, then, the Christ... has now appeared as man, He alone being both, both God and man... the Word, who in the beginning bestowed on us life as Creator when He formed us, taught us to live well when He appeared as our Teacher; that as God He might afterwards conduct us to the life which never ends.”* (Exhortation to the Heathen 1).

Tertullian would also summarize the Trinity nicely in his letter “Against Praxeas” (Chapter 2), saying: *“We... believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation... that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. Him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her— **being both Man and God**, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ... the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three Persons— the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”*

And in AD 228, **St Hippolytus** would add that: *"Only [God's] Word is from himself and is therefore also God, becoming the substance of God... For Christ is the God over all, who has arranged to wash away sin from mankind, rendering the old man new"* (Refutation of All Heresies 10:33-34)

In fact, as early as 110 AD, **St Ignatius of Antioch**, disciple of St. John and martyred for the Faith, would write: *"Ignatius... to the Church at Ephesus... chosen through true suffering by the will of the Father in Jesus Christ our God... For our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived by Mary in accord with God's plan: of the seed of David, it is true, but also of the Holy Spirit"* (Letter to the Ephesians 1). It can't get much clearer.

For a Jehovah's Witness publication to so seriously misrepresent the Early Church Fathers and try and have them appear to support their views on the Trinity and Jesus' divinity when they clearly do not is, at best, totally irresponsible, and at worst... I couldn't say. But what it certainly does is shatter any sense of credibility they could have as an organization that would try to present God's truths –in any form.

But turning now to the Bible to see what it has to say about the Trinity, we can start with some of the very first lines of the Old Testament. In **Gen 1:26**, God clearly reveals a more-than-oneness to his divine being: *"Then God (Elohim) said, 'Let **us** make man in **our image**, after our likeness...'"*. The plurality of *"our image"* is unmistakable. But not only that, the Hebrew word used here for "God" is Elohim, and it's used in its plural form -interesting! Similarly, in **Gen 3:22**, *"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like **one of us**, knowing good and evil'"* and again in **Gen 11:7**, God says, *"Come, let **us** go down, and there, confuse their language"*. And when God appeared to Abraham in **Gen 18:1-3**, Abraham *"lifted up his*

eyes... and behold, **three men stood in front of him.**" The sense that God is both one and yet more than one is very clearly foreshadowed in the Old Testament, as God slowly revealed the fullness of the truth about Himself and His teachings, a fullness that would culminate in His final revelation to us through His Son, Jesus, in the New Testament.

Even in the great declaration of God's "one-ness" in the Jewish Shema' of **Deut 6:4-5**, "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one (echad) Lord*", the Hebrew word used for "one" here is *echad*, which can suggest a unity of parts, instead of "*yachid*", which means only one. Again, this suggests that the one-ness of God may in some way involve more than one "part".

Stay Tuned for Trinity Part 2!

But turning to the New Testament, the doctrine of the Trinity becomes indisputably clear. In **John 1:1**, St John also takes us back to Genesis, writing: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God***". Reading on a little further in **John 1**, there is no question that "**the Word**" is **Jesus** and that **Jesus is also "God"**.

This should settle things right off the bat. But Jehovah's Witnesses in particular argue that in the original Greek text, because the phrase, "*the Word was God*" does not read "*the word was **THE** God*", then "the Word" must be some **other** God. As a result, their New World Translation (NWT) of the Bible reads, "the Word was **a** God". But of course this causes more problems than it solves, because they have just introduced the concept of polytheism, or the existence of more than one God! And even they don't want to suggest that, because the Bible is very clear that there is only one God, and no others.

Returning to **Genesis 1**, we read that “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” But carrying on in **John 1**, we read that “*He (Jesus) was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and **without him nothing came to be.***” **Genesis 1** claims that God created everything in the beginning, but **John 1:2-3** clearly indicates that **EVERYTHING** came to be through Jesus.

These 2 verses can only make sense and not contradict each other unless Jesus is also God! And not only that, but it also indicates that Jesus is not “created” [i.e. just a man], because it is Jesus Himself that has created **EVERYTHING**, and **NOTHING** has come into being without Him. Obviously, He could not create Himself. No, just as the verse indicates, Jesus was with the Father from “*the beginning*”. In other words, He is the UNCREATED God of the universe!

But Jesus Himself also gives clear testimony to his own divinity. In **Jn 10:30, 33**, “*Jesus answered them, “...I and the Father are one“... The Jews answered him, “... we stone you... for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God.”* And again, in **Jn 5:17-18** “*the Jews sought... to kill him... because he called God his Father, making himself **equal with God.***” Similarly, in **John 14:9**, Jesus “*says again, ‘To have seen me is to have seen the Father’*”.

And in **Ex 3:14**, where God reveals His name to Moses, He says, “*I AM WHO I AM... Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me (Moses) to you.’*” Similarly, in **John 8:28** and **58**, Jesus uses God’s name of “**I AM**” as His own, proclaiming, “*When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that **I AM**... Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM.***” If Jesus were only a man, how could He have existed before Abraham some 2000 years ago?

St Thomas gives us even more irrefutable evidence that Jesus is God in **John 20:28**. Putting his hand in Jesus' side he exclaims, *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus does not correct him, as Paul and Barnabas immediately and vigorously do when the people of Lystra start to worship them as gods in **Acts 14**, or as the angel does when St John starts to worship him in **Rev 22:8-9**. Instead, Jesus accepts and confirms Thomas' declaration – *"blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe"* -because it is true!

In the book of Revelation, Jesus and the Father again share names. In **Isaiah 44:6** (cf **Is: 41:4, 48:12**), Isaiah quotes God describing Himself directly: *"I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no god"*. In both **Rev 1:17 and Rev 22:13**, Jesus similarly says that *"I am the first and the last."* Additionally, in **Rev 1:8**, it reads, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty"*. And again, the same title is given to Jesus in **Rev 22:12-13, 16**: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the beginning and the end... I, Jesus, sent my angel to give you this testimony"*.

In other places Jesus himself performs miracles, heals people and forgives their sins. He claims to do these things by his own power, and the Bible is very clear that only God alone can forgive sins or perform miracles. Similarly, in the **Book of Acts**, we will read of miracles and healings by the Apostles, but these miracles were always done in Jesus' name.

In **Col 1:19 and 2:9**, St Paul also testifies that Jesus is clearly God, writing that *"For in him (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell... For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells"*

bodily". Similarly in Titus 2:13, St Paul writes that we are "Awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our **great God and Savior Jesus Christ**".

And in **Rom 10:13**, JW's find a particularly problematic verse. St Paul writes "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" The NWT translation yields this as, "For 'everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved'". But a close inspection of the context of **Romans 10:13** shows very clearly that this "Jehovah" or "Lord" is without question Jesus. So even within their own translation, JW's have identified Jehovah (God) as Jesus!

The JW's also deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit, considering Him more of a "force", but certainly not a person. There are multiple references in Scripture that clearly point out the personhood of the Holy Spirit, so I will just give one crystal clear example here **in the interest of space**. Jesus, speaking to the Apostles at the Last Supper, repeatedly refers to the Holy Spirit as a person, also giving him the characteristics and actions of a person, and not some impersonal force. For example, in **John 14:26** and **15:26** Jesus clearly declares: "But the Counselor, **the Holy Spirit... he** will teach you all things, and... **he** will bear witness to me."

And finally, Saint Matthew literally summarizes the Trinity in **Mat 28:19** where he writes, "Go, **therefore, and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in **THE name (SINGULAR, "name" and NOT "names")** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Note here that "the Father... the Son, and... the Holy Spirit" are referred to here as having **one** name for all 3 of them -because they are 3 persons in one being, and that being is God.

*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in **THE name (SINGULAR, “name” and NOT “names”)** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* Note here that it is **THE** one name, NOT “names” that Jesus’ disciples are to baptize people in, and that one name encompasses “*the Father... the Son, and... the Holy Spirit*”.

So with Scripture so clearly testifying that Jesus is God, what do we make of places where it appears that “*the Father is greater*” than Jesus (**John 14:28**), or that the Father knows things that Jesus doesn’t? The argument goes that if Jesus were truly God, he would be “equal” to the Father and have all the knowledge that God would have.

Certainly, to some extent, this is part of the mystery of God, and I cannot possibly do an adequate job in revealing the great depths of the Trinity and it’s effect on Jesus’ humanity in such a limited space. But let’s start with **Phil 2:6-8** to gain some insight into this mystery. We read that Jesus, “*who, though he was in **the form of God**, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied himself, taking the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form **he humbled himself** and became obedient unto death*”.

Clearly, while remaining God, Jesus has also “*emptied*” and “*humbled*” Himself in taking on a human form, with it’s associated and finite human intellect and limitations. “*We see Jesus... for **a little while... made lower than the angels***” (**Heb 2:7-9**). This is exactly why it can be said that Jesus also “*increased in wisdom and in stature*” as His human body grew.

He has willingly submitted to these limitations, and in this sense, there are places in Scripture where He allows these limitations to show forth. But this in no way diminishes the fact that He is God.

But let us take a look at one final novel concept regarding Jesus' divinity that we often hear about from JW's and similar groups. They claim that Jesus is actually an "angel" -more specifically, the Archangel Michael. This is based on some very sketchy interpretations of verses like **1 Thessalonians 4:16** where it says that "*the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven*". This verse isn't calling Jesus an Archangel, it's just simply describing how He will come to Earth at the Last Coming.

But **Hebrews 1:4-5, 8-9** puts this Archangel notion quickly to rest for us: "[Jesus] *took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as far superior to the angels, as the name he has inherited (i.e. the name of 'Son')* is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say: 'You are my son; this day I have begotten you'?... but of the Son: 'Your throne, O God, stands forever and ever'". Here, God the Father Himself is clearly calling His Son, Jesus, "God"! Need we say more?

But let me leave you with two final resources, **as I have only scratched the JW surface here**. "Answering Jehovah's Witnesses", by Jason Evert (published by Catholic Answers), is perhaps the best book out there when it comes to questions regarding JW's. And Catholic Answers' website itself, **www.Catholic.com**, is also an invaluable resource for answering further questions on the Trinity -and just about **any** other questions you would want to ask about the Catholic Faith!

