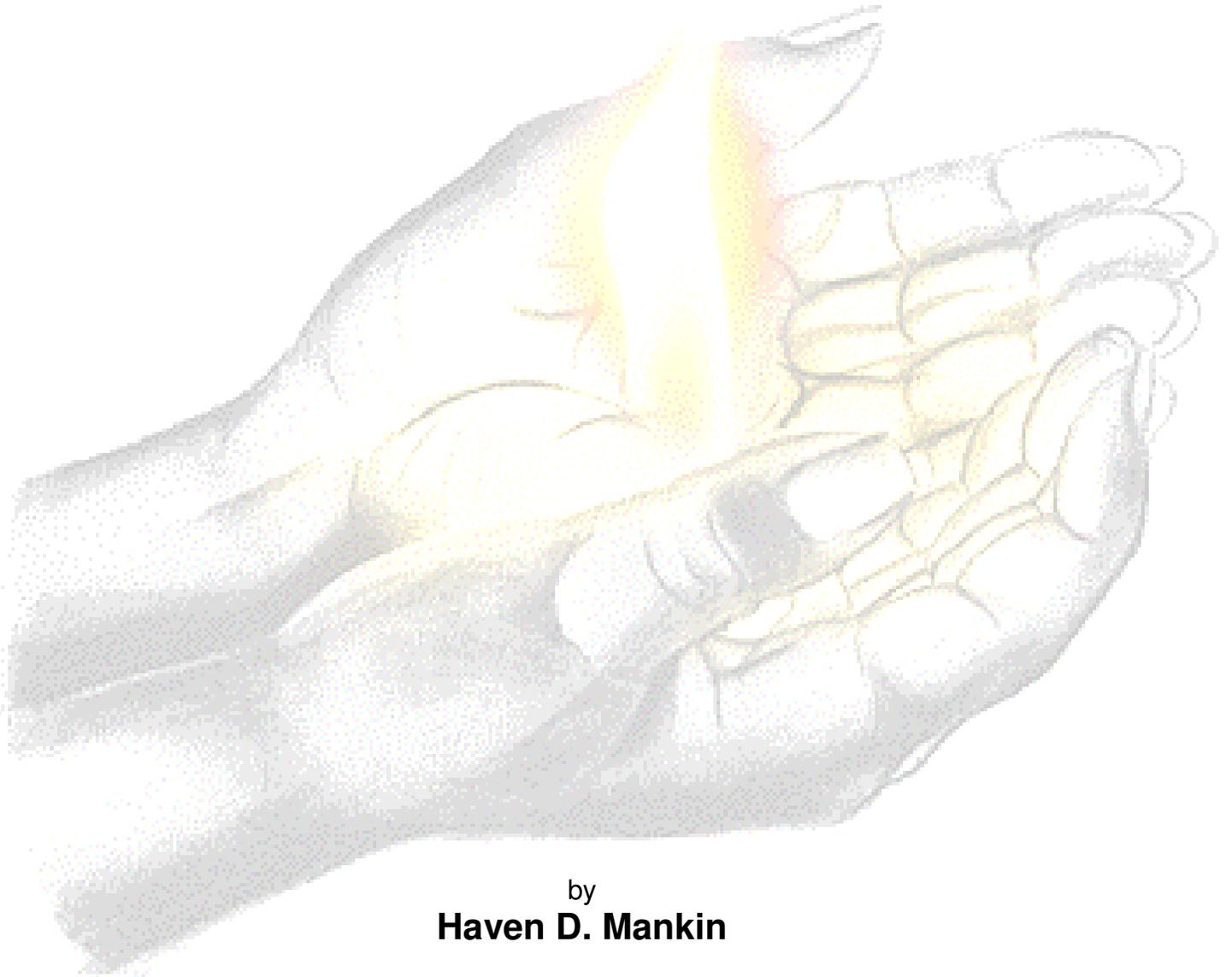


# The Trinity



by  
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## The Trinity

One day you found yourself sitting in your high school science class when your teacher told you to wrap your knuckles onto your desktop. Feels pretty solid...right? Then your teacher told you the unbelievable...the desk was made mostly of air, and it was in fact constructed of the smallest things known, atoms & molecules. Of course you could not see these particles, so the idea was hard to shallow. Your knuckles reflected a different understanding of the density of the desk.

Years go by and a later science class now comes along only to inform you that by continued discovery, those atoms are actually made up of even smaller particles called electrons, protons and neutrons. Again, you accepted this blindly as truth, only later to find out that these smaller particles are actually made up of even smaller particles, neutrinos and the like, all through continued observational discovery. It all begs the question, are we there yet? Have we now found the smallest of all particles? Probably not! Furthermore, what the heck does this have to do with my understanding of the texture and density of the desktop? After all, I don't need to understand particle physics to know about the wood desk.

The point is: the quality of the wood desk is not diminished in the slightest by your level of understanding of the quantum particle structure of the desk. You can in fact accept the molecular makeup of the desk without needing to understand it; the same is true for the Trinity.

For me, it is exciting to know more about our omnificent, omnipotent and omnipresence God; I don't pretend to understand nor do I need to. As with the desktop, any encountered mystery does not distort the reality of the desk itself. Simply put...do we really want to put our eternal souls into the trust of a God who could actually be understood by us poor mortals? I think not.

The Trinity is central to Christianity; plain and simple, it is three distinct persons at one in unity in the Godhead, God, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is but one God, not three Gods. It is not one God with three names, but one God with three separate Persons; that is, God is one and three at the same time but not in the same way.

The term is not found in The Scriptures, and generally not found in liberal Protestantism today. With the Bible not addressing the Trinity by name, theologians have worked to understand, define, and figure out how it can be so. Let me ask this question: What right do we mere mortals have know or understand God? To understand God is to put God in a box so you can control Him! God doesn't owe us any explanations, "I am who I am" He told Moses (Exodus 3:15). Besides, do we really want a God who could be understood, limited by our feeble understandings and definitions? Through all of church

history it has struggled to understand the nature of the Godhead; when will they ever learn that it is impossible to understand the un-understandable!

Due to the desire to understand God, the Trinity has been discussed for over 1800 years by church leadership and councils, often going far astray. Remaining Biblically Orthodox is critical and so our positions should be measured against the Bible often. With the culture and many other religious groups driving heresies, you must have a sound understanding of scripture to know of the proper directions to turn.

The word "trias" is found in the writing of Theophilus of Antioch, 180 AD, who speaks of the Trinity. Theologian Irenaeus, fighting against heresies in 182-188 AD, affirmed that the Son was pre-existent, that is, He coexisted with the eternal Father.

Tertullian, the Roman centurion from North Africa, wrote of the Trinity around 220 AD and taught that there was one God, one substance in three persons all part of a whole Godhead, after converting to Christianity in 197 AD and becoming a Priest. He also wrote of the natures of Christ, which was picked up in the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. The Godhead as three coherent distinct persons, one essence, unity of substance yet not singular was developing but not yet completed since the Holy Spirit was not considered coequal at this point. Tertullian, together with another major contributor, Origen (185-254 AD), struggled with the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, still dealing with the Spirit as a force, connected with the Logos. Still falling into the bottomless intellectual pits, Origen called Jesus a "second God", inferior to the Father. The ideas of coequality only dealt with the Father and the Son with the Spirit (the Logos) left out.

Starting with the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), which stated that, the Son was of the same "substance" as the Father. This became orthodox, so with the Nicene Creed (325/381 AD) and the Athanasian Creed (500 AD) which affirmed the Trinity, saying of the three Persons of God, none is before or after the other nor greater or less, but are coeternal and coequal. The Council of Constantinople in 381 AD developed the Trinitarian doctrine. St. Ignatius of Antioch said that Jesus is the eternal God made manifest in the flesh.

As the church struggled to understand the plural Godhead, we start to see the Greek teachers and philosophers stepping into quicksand and sinking fast. Justin Martyr was the first to clearly write about the plurality of the Godhead; he and his disciple, Tatian, planted the seeds for the coming Arian heresy in the next hundred years. Since the Hellenists thought Christianity was foolish, they began to see Jesus as the Logos, an impersonal force of reason existing in the realm of ideas. The Agnostics began to see Jesus (The Logos, divine reason) as first existing in the mind of God, later created by, yet not equal to and subordinate to the Father. Tatian said that Jesus was a thought, which did not

exist until spoken by the Father. This doctrine was/is far from orthodox Trinitarianism; the Hellenists explained things in terms of “triad thought” rather than Trinitarian Scripture. They did not believe in the orthodox belief that the Father and the Son are coeternal, consubstantial, and coequal.

An interesting fight broke out in 318 AD with Arius (the Arian heresy) argued that the Logos was created out of nothing before the beginning of the world and therefore was not of the same substance of the Father, and was, in fact, created by God. On the other side of the argument was Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, who claimed the Son was coeternal with the Father. The first emperor of the Roman Empire to embrace Christianity was Constantine in 324 AD, called for a council of all the bishops to settle the argument. The outcome is clearly presented by Carol Brooks ([www.inplainsite.org](http://www.inplainsite.org)) as follows within her treatise on the Trinity:

*“The final result was the belief in One God who exists in three distinct essences (Persons). The Father is unbegotten; the Son is begotten; and the Spirit is proceeding. Each Person in the trinity has a certain function in the divine Economy, although Each Person participates in the work of the other two. The Father is seen in creation, the Son in redemption, and the Spirit in sanctification. These three are coeternal, coequal, and consubstantial. The trinity is an indivisible unity, the Persons being distinct, yet not separate.”*

The Creeds were helpful and explained the current position in history at the time, but as we know, they were not the final word on the subject. The theological quicksand was still nearby, ready for all to step in; there are not three distinct Gods as Carol Brooks neatly presented above as being the outcome of the Council of Nicaea.

The Jewish great confession, “The Shema”, (Deuteronomy 6:4) says: “Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” The Jews also will say: “Adonai Eloheinu Adonai”, these three are one. They contend the Hebrew Bible is clear of the subject...there is only one God, monotheism. Many would reject the monotheistic Trinity thinking it just isn’t monotheistic enough and completely unsupported by the Hebrew Bible; again, we’re back to the limitations of our feeble understandings of our omnipotent God. But let’s get back to the text, the word for “one” is “echad” which does not absolutely mean “only one” but is actually a “compound one”, such as is found in Genesis 2:24 where the Bible says that in marriage, the man and woman shall become “one” flesh. I am not trying to pick at the Jewish scholars, how dare I be so arrogant! But I am trying to put forward the complexities that exist and that we would do much damage to force the real “Truth” into our personal fragmented agendas and categories.

Hebrew scholars will agree that “Elohim” is the plural name for God, but they will also deny a plural Godhead. The singular form of “Elohim” is also in Scripture as

“Eloah” and only used roughly 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the time “Elohim” is used. Why have both a singular and plural word for God if only a singular form is required? There are also words used that provide plural descriptions of God in the Hebrew Bible, such as: creators and makers, found in Ecclesiastes 12:1, Psalm 149:2, Joshua 24:19, and Isaiah 54:5. Many other Bible verses use the plural word for God, “Elohim”, but also some verse will actually refer to either two Persons or even three Persons within the same verse (see the legend below).

**OT references:**

Genesis 1:1 (Elohim)  
Genesis 1:2 (Elohim\*\*\*\*)  
Genesis 1:26 (Elohim)  
Genesis 3:22 (Elohim)  
Genesis 6:3 (Elohim\*\*\*\*)  
Genesis 11:7 (Elohim)  
Genesis 16:7-13 (Elohim\*\*\*)  
Genesis 19:24 (Elohim\*)  
Genesis 20:13 (Elohim)  
Genesis 22:11-12 (Elohim\*\*\*)  
Genesis 31:11-13 (Elohim\*\*\*)  
Genesis 35:7 (Elohim)  
Exodus 3:2-4 (Elohim\*\*\*)  
Exodus 20:3 (Elohim)  
Exodus 23:20-23 (Elohim\*\*\*)  
Job 33:4 (Elohim\*\*\*\*)  
Zechariah 2:8-9 (Elohim\*)  
Deuteronomy 13:2 (Elohim)  
Deuteronomy 32:15-17 (Eloah)  
Habakkuk 3:3 (Eloah)  
Judges 6:11-23 (Elohim\*\*\*)  
Judges 13:3-22 (Elohim\*\*\*)  
Isaiah 6:8 (Elohim)  
Isaiah 11:2 (Elohim\*\*\*\*)  
Isaiah 48:12-16 (Elohim\*\*)  
Isaiah 63:7-14 (Elohim\*\*)  
Isaiah 63:10-14 (Elohim\*\*\*\*)  
2 Samuel 7:23 (Elohim)  
Psalm 45:6-7 (Elohim\*)  
Psalm 51:11 (Elohim\*\*\*\*)  
Psalm 58 (Elohim)  
Psalm 139:7 (Elohim\*\*\*\*)  
Hosea 1:7 (Elohim\*)

**NT references:**

John 20:31  
John 1:1-18

John 14:10  
John 14:7 and 16:15  
John 5:19-21, 10:29 and 10:38  
Matt 28:19

### Legend

- \* Two distinct personalities used in the same verse
- \*\* Three distinct personalities used in the same verse
- \*\*\* Referring to Jesus, the YHWH (YHVH) and the Angel of YHWH (YHVH)
- \*\*\*\* Referring to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God

In dealing with all these twists and turns, getting our arms around the Trinity can make your head spin, so let's firm up a correct definition. Carol Brooks ([www.inplainsite.org](http://www.inplainsite.org)) writes a really good conclusion to a firm orthodox definition for the Trinity, so I quote her here:

*"The teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures, then is that there is a plurality of the Godhead. The first person is consistently called YHVH, while the second person is given the names of YHVH, the Angel of YHVH and the Servant of YHVH. Consistently and without fail, the second person is sent by the first person. The third person is referred to as the Spirit of YHVH or the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit. He, too, is sent by the first person but is continually related to the ministry of the second person."*

As plain as this definition is and despite my earlier warning that to understand God was the same thing as putting God in a box, many will still reject the Trinity because they just simply can't get their arms around the idea that a single entity could be both one and three at the same time. Basically, this is your fault and stems from your limited perspective and understanding. Again, God does not depend on your understanding to justify His truth, nor His reality, nor the Trinity. Try to picture the following argument which I am stealing from a great little 1952 book by Edwin A. Abbott, called "Flatland". Albert Einstein used to read it every year to break him out of normative thinking.

There is this two dimensional world where there is no height, no vertical dimension, everything is flat..."Flatland". Lines are barriers in Flatland because you can not go over one, you must go around it. People in Flatland are flat shapes of which you can only see the leading edge; no one can see the actual shape because there is no "above" or "below" in Flatland. These difficulties in recognition cause all sorts of problems for the people, for a square can look the same as a circle or a triangle...relationships are tough in Flatland. One day a three dimensional man walked into Flatland; the inhabitants of Flatland saw him as a line as he suddenly appeared one day. It was the line he formed where he touched Flatland. No one saw him come into the room, it was like he just walked through the wall (as Jesus did, read John 20:19). Was this magical person a

square, a circle, a triangle, or what? He looked that same as everybody else, but how did he get into the room? All of a sudden, the man simply took a step and to the Flatlanders, he disappeared, only to soon reappear but in a different location! Was it magic? Was this fellow an angel? Maybe he was a god?

Of course, we all know what really happened; the man simply took advantage of another dimension of the world he lived in. To the Flatlanders, it was a miracle! We live in a three-dimensional world with a very few trying to understand a known fourth dimension, space-time. Some physicists have actually calculated nearly a dozen dimensions; that being the reality, what are the possibilities for miracles to happen in our very limited three-dimensional world? Don't ever say you don't believe in miracles or you would be admitting to gross limitations in understanding how dimensions work. God created all the dimensions and is unlimited by them; now take this multi-dimensional understanding and apply it to the Trinity, a single entity both one and three at the same time...see the possibilities? Though you don't understand, certainly you can allow for the multi-dimensional reality of the Trinity! One God with three separate Persons; God is one and three at the same time but not in the same way.

Praise God! Yes, praise Elohim!

Blessings to you all,  
Haven Mankin

P.S. There is also a nice article on **Holy Communion**, if you are interested, at [www.MuskratBooks.com](http://www.MuskratBooks.com).