

## Relationships within the Trinity

Since all three Persons have exactly the same attributes, they differ only in their relationships with each other. The Bible indicates that there is some kind of order within the Trinity.

- 1) The Father sent His Son into the world (John 3:16; 4:34; 5:37-38; 1 John 4:9, 14). This is an eternal relationship, for how could He always be the Father if He did not eternally have the Son.
- 2) The Father is the Speaker. The Son is the Word whom the Father speaks (John 1:1-2). If God is eternally the Speaker, then the Word spoken is also eternal.
- 3) The Father is like a bright star. The Son is the Light streaming forth from Him (Hebrews 1:3). The star and its light must exist together. If one is eternal, so is the other.
- 4) The earthly submission of Christ to the Father seems to be an extension of an eternal relationship between them (John 5:19-23, 30; 6:38; 8:28).

The divine nature of the Son does not submit to the divine nature of the Father, because there is only one divine nature. However, the Person of the Son submits to the Person of the Father. Similarly, the Person of the Holy Spirit is dependent on the other two Persons for Scripture calls Him both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. The Father sent the Spirit through the Son (John 14:16; 26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:32-33).

## Our Relationship to the Triune God

All three Persons of the Godhead work together in every divine activity, but each Person performs His own peculiar function. We see this in several ways--

### 1) In Creation

- ◆ The Father created through the Son (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-16).

- ◆ The Son will restore creation to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:23-28).
- ◆ The Holy Spirit is close to creation (Genesis 1:2; 2:7; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:29-30; Psalm 139:7-12).

### 2) In Redemption

- ◆ The Father planned our salvation (Ephesians 1:3-4).
- ◆ The Son purchased our salvation by His blood (Ephesians 1:7).
- ◆ The Holy Spirit is the chief gift purchased for us by Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Father and the Son dwell in us through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17, 23).

### 3) In Worship

- ◆ Normally we pray to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit (John 16:23-24; Ephesians 2:18). The Holy Spirit helps us to pray, while the Son's intercession makes our prayers acceptable to the Father (Romans 8:26-27, 34).
- ◆ We may also pray directly to the Son (John 14:13-14).
- ◆ We have fellowship with all three members of the Trinity (2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 1:3), so we may also pray to the Holy Spirit.

The Father is God high above us. The Son is the divine Mediator between the Father and us. The Spirit is God up close.

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# IS THE TRINITY TRINITY TRINITY NONSENSE?

**Many of the problems people have with the doctrine of the Trinity arise from an inadequate definition of the doctrine.**

The word "Trinity" was made up in the third century after Christ. Even though the word does not occur in the Bible, the doctrine that the word describes certainly does. Finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite majesty of the Lord, but God expects us to learn what He has revealed about Himself in the Bible. Thus, the triune God is incomprehensible as He is in Himself, but the basic doctrine of the Trinity may be stated rather simply. Three short sentences suffice.

- 1) *There is only one God.* (Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6, 8; 45:5)
- 2) *The one God exists eternally as three persons.* (Matthew 28:19; Isaiah 48:11 with Revelation 5:12-13; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18)
- 3) *These three persons are distinct.* (Matthew 3:16-17)

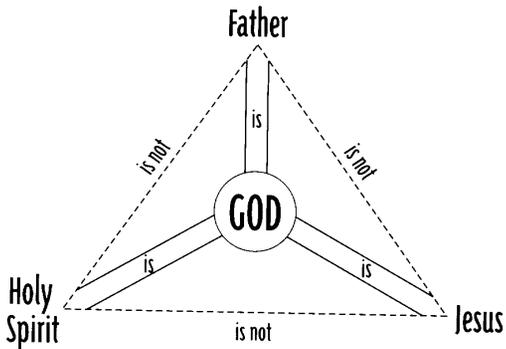
Naturally, Scripture has a great deal more to teach about the Trinity, but the fundamentals come first.

## Avoiding Contradictions

Although the Trinity is a mystery, the doctrine itself is not contradictory. A mystery is a truth beyond our comprehension. (Einstein's *General Theory of Relativity* is a mystery to most people.) A contradiction consists of two or more statements, which cannot all be true. It is a contradiction to say that in the Trinity there are three Gods, and yet one God. It is also a contradiction to say that God is one Person and also three Persons. It is not contradictory to say that the Trinity is one God who exists as three Persons.

## A Visual Summary

The Trinitarian triangle, drawn below is a visual summary of the defining statements given above.



Read the Trinitarian triangle this way:

- 1) There is only one God.
- 2) The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God.
- 3) The Son is not the Father; the Father is not the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Son.

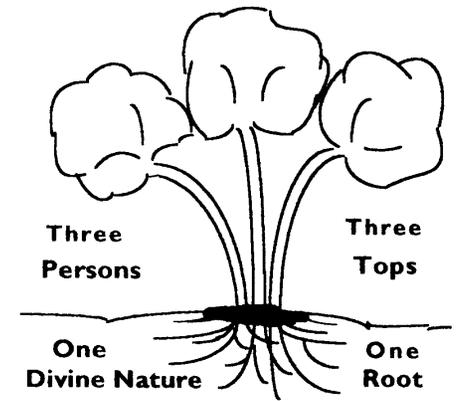
## Illustrating the Trinity

There are no perfect illustrations of the Trinity, but some are so inadequate that they should not be used at all. Some popular ones actually illustrate ancient heresies regarding the Trinity:

1) An egg is one object with three parts, the egg shell, the egg white, and the egg yolk. However, the egg illustration obscures the fact that there is only one divine nature, one God. The shell, the white and the yolk do not have the same nature--try eating the shell. But the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all have the same divine nature. The denial that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have the same nature is called Arianism (*Arius, c. 250 - c. 336 A.D.*).

2) Another heretical illustration is the man who may be at the same time a father, a son and a husband. However, the father is not a distinct person from the son and the husband, whereas God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are distinct persons. The denial that the divine persons are distinct is called Sabellianism (*Sabellius, in Rome c. 198 - 220 A.D.*). The three states of water (solid, liquid, gas) also illustrate Sabellianism because a given quantity of water does not exist in all three states at the same time.

The following illustration is imperfect, but, in spite of its failures, it has advantages over those already mentioned. Some kinds of trees can produce more than one top out of the same root or sometimes from an old stump. The root represents the one divine nature; the three tops stand for the three persons who share that nature. Like all illustrations of the Trinity, however, this one has flaws. We could cut down one top without affecting the others, but the three persons of the Trinity cannot be cut off from one another. Nevertheless, this picture does have the advantage of illustrating the two major aspects of the Trinity--the three divine persons and the one divine nature.



## The Meaning of Person

According to common usage, a person is a self-conscious individual who is able to reason, to feel emotions and to perform actions. There are difficulties in applying this understanding to the Trinity because each human person has a separate mind, a separate emotional make-up, and makes separate choices. God the Father does not, however, have a separate reason, emotion and will from that of the Son or the Holy Spirit. All three Persons know the same things; they love or hate the same things; and they will the same things. Originally, the word "person" referred to an actor in a play or the role he played. Imagine a play that involves three characters: a father who built a factory, his son who runs it, and the floor supervisor.

- 1) Arianism says, "This play requires three separate individuals to act out the roles."
- 2) Sabellianism says, "One individual can play all three parts, but he will have to run off stage to change costumes. He can only play one part at a time."
- 3) Trinitarianism says, "God is a great enough being to play all three parts—to actually be three Persons on the stage at the same time." God, of course, is not just acting in a play. He has always been three Persons, living out three roles, though He is one God.