

Affirming the Essentials of Our Faith

A Study of the Apostles Creed

All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

The God I Believe In – When One Equals Three

Q – What does it mean to say, “I believe in God?”

Q – Is this statement for Christians different than Muslims, and other believers of God?

Q – When we look in Scripture, is the main problem with man that he does not believe in God (atheist), or is it that he does not believe *correctly* about God?

Psalm 10:4 In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”

Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. (c.f. Psalm 53:1)

Notice, both the **wicked** and the **foolish** say, “There is no God.”

Q – Are they (wicked and foolish) one in the same?

Romans 1:19–23 ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not **honor him as God** or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, **they became fools**, ²³ and **exchanged the glory of the immortal God** for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

The Real Problem – Do you believe this?

- God versus fake gods/idols
- Creator versus creation (physical, mental, etc.)
- Paganism!

J.I Packer stated it this way:

“...in the Bible the great divide is between those who believe in the Christian God and those who serve idols—“gods,” that is, whose images, whether metal or mental, do not square with the self-disclosure of the Creator. One wishes that some who recite “I believe in God” in church each Sunday would see that what they actually mean is ‘I do *not* believe in God—not this God, anyhow!’”

Exodus 3:13–14 ¹³ Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “*I am who I am.*” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’ ”

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The word *LORD*, when spelled with capital letters, stands for the divine name, *YHWH (I AM WHO I AM or I AM)* – related to the verb *hayah*, “to be.”

- The God Christians believe, is the God Who Exists – the God Who Lives!

Q – What is something **unique** about the God we believe versus some other theistic religions? (Trinity)

The Creed is divided into **three** paragraphs, **three** belief statements: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Trinity (Tri-Unity) – “Within the one Being Who is God, there exists eternally three co-equal and co-eternal Persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” – James R. White

- One God (Monotheistic)
- Three Persons (Not Polytheistic)
- Co-Equal (No subordination)
- Co-Eternal (Always existed as such)

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**,

- Notice – there is **one name**, but **three persons**!

“The Trinity is one God, not so that the Father be the **same Person**, who is also the Son and the Holy Ghost; but that the Father be the Father, and the Son be the Son, and the Holy Ghost be the Holy Ghost, and this Trinity **One God**.” —St. Augustine

“The original teaching of Scripture and the confession of the church is that God is *one in essence and three in persons*.” – R.C. Sproul

Q – What does it mean to be one in essence and three in persons?

- Each Person has the same “stuff” that makes Him God, but they are separate Persons and equal to One another.

Progressive Revelation – a gradual revelation of God and His plan of redemption. It may expand or further develop previous revelation, but never contradicts previous revelation.

“Skeptics have argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is a New Testament addition to biblical faith. Some scholars have suggested that the idea of a triune God is a concept completely foreign to the pages of the Old Testament. A closer examination of Scripture reveals several allusions to the Trinity in the Old Testament and a fuller explanation of the doctrine in the New Testament.” – R.C. Sproul

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Old Testament Allusions to the Trinity

- The name of God “**Elohim**” may be a reference to the triune God because it is a **plural** noun used with a **singular** verb.
 - Elohim may not necessarily indicate plurality of persons, but rather plurality of majesty.
 - Elohim may also indicate plurality of intensity wherein all glory and power is ascribed to God alone.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

- The **Spirit of God** (Holy Spirit?) is referenced in the OT and ascribed qualities of God.
- **Psalm 110** is the Old Testament passage most frequently cited in the NT.
 - “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” (Ps. 110:1)
 - There seems to be a conversation within the godhead here as the LORD (*Yahweh*) says to the Lord (*Adonai*) “sit at my right hand.”
 - Jesus refers to this passage asking how David’s son could be the Messiah yet also his Lord. (Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43)
 - Peter also cited Psalm 110 as referring to Jesus. (Acts 2:34, 35)
- God is **one**. The nature of the triune God is not clearly revealed at the beginning of Scripture. The Bible affirms monotheism over against the polytheism of the surrounding cultures. (Exo. 20:3-4, Deut. 6:4, Mark 12:29, Rom. 3:29-30, 1 Cor. 8:4-6, Gal. 3:20, Eph. 4:4-6, 1 Tim. 2:5)

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Romans 3:29–30 ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since **God is one**—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

New Testament Statements Regarding the Trinity

- Several passages refer to the **three persons** of God
 - Matt. 3:16-17 (Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22), Matt. 28:19

Matthew 3:16–17 ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately **he** (Jesus) went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the **Spirit of**

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God (Holy Spirit) descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a **voice from heaven** (Father) said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

- **Notice:** All three persons are present at Jesus’ baptism.
- Other passages referring to the **three persons of God:** (2 Corinthians 13:14, Ephesians 1:3-14, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:1-2)
2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

1 Peter 1:1–2 ¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

- Jesus prayed to God the Father (Matt. 26:36–46, Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46)
 - He is distinct from the Father!
- Jesus promised that He and the Father would send another “Comforter” to continue His ministry (John 14:15–26, John 15:26, John 16:7-11)
 - The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son!

Historically Incorrect Ways to View the Trinity:

- **Tritheism** (Polytheism) – belief in three gods who are not one.
- **Unitarianism** – belief in one God who is not three (Also called Modalism).
 - God exists in different “modes” of Himself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- **Subordinationism** – belief that all three are somehow not equal.

Definition: “Within the one Being Who is God, there exists eternally three co-equal and co-eternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” – James R. White

“And the Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is all One, the Glory Equal, the Majesty Co-Eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father Uncreate, the Son Uncreate, and the Holy Ghost Uncreate. The Father Incomprehensible, the Son Incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost Incomprehensible. The Father Eternal, the Son Eternal, and the Holy Ghost Eternal and yet they are not Three Eternals but One Eternal. As also there are not Three Uncreated, nor Three Incomprehensibles, but One Uncreated, and One Uncomprehensible. So likewise the Father is

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Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not Three Almighty but One Almighty.” – Athanasian Creed, approx. A.D. 361

Q – What can we say about the Trinity?

- Not one passage in Scripture explains the Trinity, or calls it such.
- The word *Trinity* is an extra-biblical word that is used to defend theological concepts rooted in Scripture.
- Scripture affirms or alludes to the truth of the Trinity.
- **A mystery!** – We can’t explain it, but we believe it.
 - A mystery is a concept we believe to be true but cannot explain why it is true.
 - A contradiction is a concept that is not consistently logical.

Mystery (Greek: *musterion*): the content of that which has not been known before but which has been revealed to a group —‘secret, mystery.’ In many instances μυστήριον is translated by a phrase meaning ‘that which was not known before,’ with the implication of its being revealed at least to some persons, or at some time.

Romans 16:25–27 ²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the **mystery** that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

“The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most perplexing and yet most important doctrines in Christian theology. For centuries great minds in the church have attempted to explain the triune nature of God. Ultimately no explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity can be complete. Yet no explanation must ever dilute the essence of deity or confuse the persons of the Godhead.” – R.C. Sproul

“How can plurality consist with unity, or unity with plurality? To examine the fact closely is rashness, to believe it is piety, to know it is life, and life eternal.” – St. Bernard of Clairvaux

“The divine tri-unity is a mystery, a transcendent fact which passes our understanding. (The same is true of such realities as God’s eternity, infinity, omniscience, and providential control of our free actions; indeed, all truths about God exceed our comprehension, more or less.) How the one eternal God is eternally both singular and plural, how Father, Son, and Spirit are personally distinct yet essentially one...is more than we can know, and any attempt to “explain” it—to dispel the mystery by reasoning, as distinct from confessing it from Scripture—is bound to falsify it. Here, as elsewhere, our God is too big for his creatures’ little minds.” – J.I. Packer