The Trinity: God is Three in One

By Mark E. Larson

Many critics of Christianity point to what they believe to be a fundamental flaw - *the belief that God is three persons, yet one God* (i.e., the doctrine of the Trinity). To the Jews and Muslims, this Christian doctrine appears to be a contradiction and a blasphemy against the one, true God. Christians have even been accused of believing in polytheism or three separate gods!

If the doctrine of the Trinity is true, then we could expect to find this teaching in the Scriptures. If the doctrine of the Trinity is false, then the Scriptures would only speak of God in such a way as to indicate that God is *only one* person. What do we find when we examine the Scriptures?

Is God *Absolutely* Alone or Only One Person? There are nine different Hebrew words in the Scriptures that can be translated as "one" (See the Englishman's Concordance). Sometimes words such as man or woman are translated "one," but such words are *never* applied to God in the Bible. This is understandable since God is not a man or a woman (**Num. 23:19**).

Now *if* God is only one person, as Jews and Muslims claim, which word for oneness could they apply to God? Only one of the nine Hebrews words that can be translated as "one" can refer to "complete solitary" or being absolutely alone. That word is YACHIYD (e.g., **Ps. 68:6; Gen. 22:2; Judges 11:34**). If this word was applied to God anywhere in the Scriptures, it would be devastating to the doctrine of the Trinity. *However, no where* in Scripture can this word be found **ever** applying to God! That is because God is not absolutely alone as only one person.

God Has a Unified Oneness About Him: We learn much about God by studying the Hebrew word ECHAD. Sometimes the word is used with reference to the number one or quantity of one (e.g., **Gen. 2:21**), but

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when it does it is **never** in reference to God. Frequently, the word ECHAD is translated "one" to denote **a unified or compound oneness**: *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be **one** flesh"* (**Gen. 2:24**). Many other examples could be given (e.g., **Gen. 3:22; 11:6; 34:16; 2 Chron. 30:12; Ezra 2:64; Jer. 32:39**). Jews and Muslims would not want to find this Hebrew word applying to God, lest they lose their argument that God is only one person.

The word ECHAD does in fact apply to God! *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is **one** [ECHAD] LORD"* (**Deut. 6:4**; Compare to **Mark 12:29**). God is "one" in the sense of a unified or compound oneness. All three persons united -- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, constitute or comprise the one true God.

God Is Referred to in the Singular As Well As in the Plural: Those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity will never refer to God in the plural or quote God speaking in the plural (e.g., "They," "Them," "Theirs," "We," "Us," "Ours"), but only in the singular (e.g., "I," "Myself," "Me," ""My," He," "Him," "His"). We may use singular nouns and verbs to refer to God because God is described in this way in Scripture. This is often done to emphasize that the Lord is the one and only God (e.g. **Deut 32:39**).

However, we may also use plural nouns and verbs to refer to God because God is also described in this way in Scripture! **The Bible commonly uses plural words for God, the most common one being the Hebrew word ELOHIYM** (i.e., a plural form of deity or god): *"In the beginning God [ELOHIYM] created the Heaven and the earth"* (**Gen. 1:1**). It may surprise some to know that ELOHIYM is translated more than 400 times in the Bible as "god**s**" – plural! For example, *"And the people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other **gods**"* (**Josh. 24:16**, NASB; See also **Gen. 31:30; Exod. 12:12**). God spoke in the first person plural when creating us! *"And God said, Let **us** make man in our image, after **our** likeness…"* (**Gen. 1:26a**). Some have suggested that the "us" or "our" in this verse refers to angels, yet man was not created in *both* the image of God and the angels! Other examples of plural pronouns for God can be found in Scripture (e.g., **Gen. 3:22; 11:7-8; Isa. 6:8**). Further evidence that God comprises of more than one person can be seen in the Scriptures where *two* divine persons are *both* called God *in the very same passage* (e.g. **Ps. 45:6-7; Heb. 1:8-9; Isa. 48:12-17; Hos. 1:6-7; Gen. 19:24**).

God Being Three Persons, Yet One God Is Due to His *Unified Nature*: God is One, yet composed of three persons: *The Father, the Son, and*

the Holy Spirit. All three persons are referred to as God in the Scriptures because each one is God by nature or the divine essence (**John 6:27; Col. 2:8-9; Acts 5:3-4**). **God would not be God to exclude any one of the three persons that make up the divine nature.** For example, Jesus, even while on earth, was God in the flesh or the "I AM" (**John 8:24, 58**). Yet, Jesus always was accompanied by both the Father and the Holy Spirit (e.g., **John 10:37-38; Luke 4:1**).

Equality Among All Three Persons: Jesus, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit are *just as much God* as the Father is! *"I and my Father are one"* (**John 10:30**). Jesus *"thought it not robbery to be* **equal** *with God"* (**Phil. 2:6**). The equality of the Father and Son is seen in the salutations of most New Testament epistles (e.g., **Rom. 1:7; Gal. 1:3; 2 John 3**).Each person of the triune God is emphasized equally in prayer in **2 Corinthians 13:14**.

Equal, Yet of Different Rank by the Divine Order: Jesus submitted to the Father's will and obeyed His commands (**John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29; 14:31**). How then could they be equal? Both are equally God, yet according to **the divine order**, each has a different rank or position in the hierarchy of God (See **1 Cor. 11:3**). Just as man and woman are equal (**Gal. 3:28**), so are the Father and the Son (**John 10:30**). The different rank a woman has does not make her any less of a Christian (or human for that matter). Neither does the different rank of Christ make Him any less Deity. The different rank that each person holds simply means that there are different roles and responsibilities that each one fulfills (e.g., **Eph. 5:22-33; Phil. 2:8**). All three persons (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) represent Deity, though each person of the Godhead is distinguishable from the other. Each person of God is distinct in the sense that each one has a different role that each one fulfills (e.g., **Heb. 12:9; Eph. 5:23; John 16:13**).

The Unified Work of the Trinity: All three persons of God are one also in the sense of functioning together as a team to accomplish the work of God. **The work of Creation:** "[God] *in these last days has spoken to us* **in His Son,** *whom He appointed heir of all things,* **through whom also He made the world**" (**Heb. 1:2**; cf. **Gen. 1:2, 26-27**). *"***The Spirit of God** *has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life"* (**Job 33:4**). **The work of salvation:** *"'Come near to* **Me** *[Christ - ML], listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now* **the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit.***' Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, Who leads you in the way you should go'"* (**Isa 48:16-17**; cf. **Eph. 1:2-14**).

The Trinity Provides Our Salvation: Fellowship with God is achieved through the Trinity (**Eph. 2:17-19**). Salvation has been made possible by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To become a child of God and receive the

spiritual and eternal blessings that the Trinity provides, each person must be baptized in the name (i.e., authority) of the Triune God (**Mat. 28:18-20**; cf. **Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21**). Once we are baptized in Their name, we must continue to abide in God's word for the Triune God to continue to abide in us (**1 John 4:12-16; 2 John 9; Gal. 3:2 / Rom. 10:17; Gal. 5:16**).

Could the Church Be Wrong?

By Robert F. Turner

Could "the church" be wrong? Is it possible that a portion---or even all of the members of a congregation (including their elders) could be in error with respect to doctrine and/or practice? Could several congregations be wrong? Could a majority of congregations be wrong?

One of the most basic fallacies of Roman Catholicism is its conception of the "infallible" church. But someone says, "The church of the New Testament could not be wrong!" WHICH ONE will you use as your example? The one at Corinth? Ephesus? Laodicea? But you say "I'm referring to the 'whole' church, the body of Christ." And I remind you that this organism, this relation of individuals to Christ, does not exist as a functional organization. The characteristics of the perfect church must be gleaned piece by piece from the divine records. By command, example, and necessary inference we learn what Christ would have us be and do as a local church. The divine purpose and intent alone is without fault. In all functional churches---and here the N.T. allows us to speak only of individual congregations---the human element is present, and we are forbidden to use such a church as a pattern (**2 Cor.10:12**).

The New Testament, the covenant or law of Christ, is that which was set up on the first Pentecost after the resurrection (**Isa. 2:1-2; Joel 2; Acts 2**) and the body of people who accepted this law, and by a practice of its instructions brought into being the Jerusalem congregation, were the product---not the makers of a divine standard. The same principle continues to this good day, and both the First and Twentieth Century churches could and do err. (**See Rev. 2-3**).

In every century, in every generation, each church must prove its right to the name "church of Christ" by showing identity with the divinely approved church characteristics found in the New Testament. We must pay more

 than lip-service to this principle. When we begin to think a thing is right because a "Church of Christ"---or a majority of the "Churches of Christ"---or ALL of the "Churches of Christ" do or teach it, we have become sectarian in our conception of the church, and need to revise our thinking. God's word is the pattern by which a true church must be cut. Did you ever cut 2x4s to frame a wall, or pickets for a fence? If you obtained a pattern, cut the first by that pattern, then threw the pattern aside and cut the second by the first---and so on---you learned the fallacy of identity by succession. Any slight difference in the second was passed to the third---and the slight difference of the third was added to the error of the first, and passed on. To cut a true wall, or fence, we must measure each cut by the original pattern. This is no less true with reference to the church.

A crying need of our time is a firm resolve to determine right by an appeal to God's truth, rather than to "a well defined and clear-shown majority of the Churches of Christ in Texas." Cancellations will be received with as much grace as we can muster.

Would You Be Missed?

Golfer, 89, Stuck Overnight In Swamp

An elderly golfer searching for lost balls in swampy woods bordering a golf course got stuck in the muck and spent the night there before being rescued by a search party.

More than 30 Pasco County sheriffs deputies and firefighters and a helicopter began searching for him Sunday afternoon, about 24 hours after he'd last been seen arriving at the Forest Hills Golf and Country Club. The search was organized after friends missed him at Sunday church services.

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