

Our Cornerstone **Ephesians 2:17-22**

Jesus is *Yahweh Saves*. The name *Jesus* means “Yahweh Saves.” It is such a glorious name for it identifies both His nature and His mission. The means by which God saves us is through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification. By placing faith in Jesus—by believing in His deity, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection, by submitting to His Lordship, and subsequently by worshipping Him though our lives—we are filled with the Holy Spirit and we have access to the Heavenly Father. This is good news, indeed! This is peace for those who are far away and those who are near. Forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life is ours, and not just ours, but also for those with whom we disagree, for those of the other side, for any who will place faith in Jesus. This transformed life makes us a part of the kingdom of God, a part of the family of God, and a part of the sanctuary of God. This sanctuary—the innermost section of the Temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwells—is like a building, a spiritual building built upon the foundation of the teaching of the New Testament. The cornerstone of this spiritual building, of which we are part, is Jesus Himself. He is the stone that frames and aligns all the other stones. He is the most important.

Topic: Consider Ephesians 2:17-22. Now hone in on verse 18. “For through Him [Christ] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father.” Access to the Father is through Jesus in the Spirit. This is one of the most trinitarian verses in all the Bible.

-How familiar are you with the doctrine of the Trinity? How confident is your understanding of the Trinity? How confident is your explanation of the Trinity?

-Are you willing to go deeper on the Trinity? If so, see the pages below.

-The Jew/Gentile divide was deeper than even our political divide. How deeply does the modern American divide weigh on you? What is the answer to this divide? The Gospel is the answer.

-How familiar are you with the Gospel? How confident is your understanding of the Gospel? How confident is your explanation of the Gospel? Share the Gospel with your partner.

Association: How easy is it for you to feel a part of kingdom of God? How easy is it for you to feel a part of the family of God? How easy is it for you to feel a part of the sanctuary of God?

-What does the realization that we are the sanctuary (innermost part of the Temple, where the Spirit dwells) of God do your drive to grow in holiness or boldness?

Guidance: The Spiritual stakes are too high to stand idly by. We get to preach the good news of peace, too. Talk about how and where you can share the Gospel. Talk about where and how you can learn more about the Trinity, which helps strengthen the foundation of any Gospel presentation. Pray for and with each other about being a peace-bringer.

Conceptual Understanding of the Trinity

The Trinity is one of the Essential Christian Doctrines. As such, we must understand what this doctrine is, why this doctrine is important, how it is attacked, and how to defend it if we are going to truly appreciate the overall coherence of Christianity. The word Trinity means 'threefold' or 'triad.' The central claim of the Trinity is that God is one being and yet three persons. This monumental claim insists that God is necessarily three (divine persons) in one (divine being). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the three coequal, coeternal, and co-powerful persons that are the one God whose name is Yahweh.

The importance of this doctrine cannot be overstated. God must be three in one if he is to be the Greatest Conceivable Being. A mere singularity cannot exhibit all the properties that make beings great. A mere singularity could never commune with or love anything until it created something else. Any being that must create in order to experience all of what love is or to share is not essentially and necessarily loving or sharing, but a being that is three-in-one can commune and experience all of what love is since the three persons can love and share with one another. The importance extends beyond God's nature, however. If God is not triune, then our salvation was not achieved by Jesus. If Jesus is merely a man, then He did not die for us. As a mere human, He could only have died for one other human person if He is not God.

The Trinity is a vast and complex doctrine that is required by the nature of love and by the fact that the Bible asserts that there is only one God, that the Father is God, that the Son is God, that the Spirit is God, and that neither the Father, the Son, nor the Spirit are the same person. The only way to make sense of this is to affirm that God is one being, three persons. No matter how we go about explaining this doctrine we must make very sure to avoid three heretical positions.

We must avoid tritheism, which states that there are three Gods. Any explanation of the Trinity that affirms more than one God is not orthodox. We must also avoid modalism, which states that God is one being who is one person who wears three different masks. This view claims that the Father is the same person as the Son and the Spirit. Any view that denies that God is one being and three persons is not orthodox. We must also avoid subordinationism, which claims that the Father is the one who is really in charge and that the Son and the Spirit are somehow lesser than the Father. Any view that denies the full coequality of the persons is not orthodox.

This monumental truth has been under attack for thousands of years. Jews and Muslims cannot see how God can be a tri-personal being. Atheists claim that the doctrine is incoherent and illogical. After all, how can God be three and one? While there is confusion concerning the cardinality of God, assigning multiple numbers to God is not illogical when those numbers are rightly assigned. It is only a contradiction if God is one of something and also three of that same thing. God is not. God is one divine being and three divine persons. Multiple cardinality applies to the same thing in many instances. Four quarters is the same as one dollar. If I say that I have a dollar and point to my four quarters it means the same thing as when I say that I have four quarters and point to them. "Four quarters" and "one dollar" in this case pick out the same portion of reality. Similarly, when referring to "one pair of shoes" I can pick out the exact same portion of reality when referring to "two shoes."

Similarly with the Trinity, God is one divine being, three divine persons. "One divine being" and "three divine persons" both point to the exact same portion of reality. After demonstrating that multiple cardinality can appropriately apply to the Trinity, the best way to start defending the Trinity is to present the Love Argument. What follows are two forms of Love Arguments.

The Generic Love Argument

- A. God is love (1 John 4:8, or GCB Theology, or common view)
- B. To exemplify love, one requires an object—something outside of itself to love.
- C. Therefore, God must exist in at least a duality, for in order to be loving, he must have something to love other than the person of himself, otherwise he would first have to create. If God must create in order to love, then He is not love, He would only be potentially loving.
- D. But, if God is love, it stands to reason that God is perfectly loving—i.e. unconditionally loving.
- E. Unconditional love requires choice/options.
- F. Therefore, if God exists as a merely duality, He cannot be unconditionally loving, but only conditionally loving, since because he is love, He must exemplify love, which means that He must love the other person of the dual Godhead—His love for the other is conditioned upon there only being one other person of the Godhead to love.
- G. Therefore, God must exist as a Trinity, so that one person can love the second person, and the second person can love the third person, and the third person can love the first, or they can all love the other two. Of course, all three will love the others (since God is love), but now that love is unconditional and perfect.
- H. What about a quaternity? Could the Godhead be four or more? No. Why not? First, the Bible says that it is the full revelation of God and only a Trinity is mentioned. Second, God is necessarily simple in His complexity. The Trinity preserves the unconditionally loving nature of God, whereas a quaternity unnecessarily complicates things.

Kirschner's Version of the Love Argument

- 1. God is the Greatest Conceivable Being (GCB).
- 2. Any great-making property God/GCB possesses must be possessed to a maximal degree essentially.
- 3. Love/benevolence is a great-making property God/GCB possesses.
- 4. Maximal love/benevolence includes self-love, love-given, love-received, and love-shared (cooperative love of a third).
- 5. A singularly personal being cannot possess love-given, love-received, or love-shared essentially.
- 6. A dually personal being cannot possess love-shared essentially.
- 7. Therefore, God/GCB must be at least a tri-personal being.
- 8. Simplicity is a great-making property.
- 9. Being tri-personal is the simplest way to possess maximal love/benevolence.
- 10. No other great-making property requires the GCB be multi-personal.
- 11. Therefore, God/GCB is a tri-personal being.

Kirschner's Love Argument importantly distinguishes between the four qualitatively unique aspects of love. Self-love is the only option for a single-self if that single self is all that exists. But love is more vast than self-love. Love-given (which is the aspect of love in the first Love Argument) requires another person, but the other person does not need to be a different being (see distinctions below). Love-received is the inverse of love-given, but still requires another person. Love-shared is unique because it forms a community. When two persons both give and receive love to and from the other and then they both jointly love a third, a wholly unique aspect of love emerges. The love-given and love-received for the other is enhanced by cooperatively loving a third (like when parents' love for each other intensifies when their baby is born).

These arguments take advantage of the understanding that God is love and explains how God must be triune in order to exemplify love in his essence. After presenting the Love Argument, it is best to present a possible model of understanding the Trinity that utilizes important distinctions and explanations. It should look something like this:

God is necessarily triune. While the persons of the Trinity are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole that is properly God. It is a necessary property of God that He is triune. It is the Trinity that is God. The Trinity alone is God. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, while all divine, are not Gods. There is only one God—the Trinity. Only the Trinity instantiates everything the divine nature is. The Father is not the Trinity, the Son is not the Trinity, the Spirit is not the Trinity. The three persons of the Trinity are not divine in virtue of instantiating the divine nature since none of them exemplifies the entirety of the divine nature. After all, God doesn't just happen to be triune. The doctrine of the Trinity explains that God is necessarily triune. The three persons are not three instances of the divine nature, which is why there are not three Gods. The Trinity is the sole instance of the divine nature, which is why there is only one God.

A critical distinction helps. There is a difference between identity statements and ascribing statements. Statements like, "The Trinity is God" is an identity statement. Identity statements indicate the nature of the thing in question. Identity statements serve as an equal sign. The things on either side of the equal sign must be identical. The Trinity = God. Since being triune is a necessary property of being God, saying that the Trinity is God is an identity statement.

Statements like, "The Father is God" or "The Son (Jesus) is God" or "The Holy Spirit is God" are not identity statements. They are very legitimate and appropriate statements of ascription. Ascribing statements assign a title or an office to someone. The statement, "Andrew is intense" is not incompatible with other people also being intense. Ascribing statements are not like equal signs since one side of the ascription is far larger than the other. Ascribing statements are more like circles within circles. Andrew is a circle that exists inside the much larger circle "Intense." These statements ascribe a certain property to someone. Statements like, "The Father (or Son, or Spirit) is God" ascribe the property of being divine to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

It is fine to continue to say that Jesus is God, but realize that such a statement is an ascribing statement assigning the property of being divine to Jesus. It is not an identity statement equating Jesus with the entire instance of the divine nature, since Jesus is not the Trinity. It is more precise to say, "The Father (or Son, or Spirit) is divine." Such statements say that the persons have the property of being divine, which is indicative of being God. The Father by Himself or the Son by Himself or the Spirit by Himself each is a circle within the larger circle "God." The Father, Son, and Spirit together, however, fully exhaust the circle "God."

If the persons are not divine in virtue of being instances of the divine nature (which necessarily includes being triune and none of the persons is triune), in virtue of what are they divine? An analogy helps. One way to be feline is to instantiate the nature of cat. But there are other ways to be feline as well. A cat's DNA or skeleton is feline even if neither is a cat. Nor is this a downgrade of felinity. A cat's skeleton is a feline skeleton. Now if the cat is feline in virtue of being an instance of the cat nature, how is the cat's skeleton feline? Simple. It is a part of the cat. Thus, the persons of the Trinity are divine because they are parts of the Trinity. They are not parts in the same way that a skeleton is part of a cat, but since neither the Father, the Son, nor the Holy Spirit individually is the whole Trinity, it is undeniable that some sort of part/whole relation obtains between the persons and the Trinity.

This in no way downgrades the divinity of the persons of the Trinity. They are fully divine (which is how we often speak of indicating that someone is God—they are fully divine). Each person, while not everything God is since none of the persons on their own are the Trinity, is fully within the category “Divine” in virtue of being an essential component of the Trinity. Consider this analogy:

The Trinity is similar to Cerberus. Cerberus is the three-headed guard dog of Hades. Sure, Cerberus is a mythical beast, but he is not inconceivable. Imagine that Hercules heads into Hades to perform a mighty feat to appease Zeus. He sees Cerberus and tosses a steak toward one of the three heads. Cerberus is not swayed from his duty. So Hercules unsheathes his sword, charges the beast and stabs him in the heart. One of the heads bites Hercules before Cerberus dies. When Hercules tells the tale, he might say that Cerberus bit him, or he might say that Spike (one of the three heads, along with Bowser and Rover) bit him. Hercules would be accurate in both cases, just as we are accurate in saying that God died for me or saying that Jesus died for me.

It is easy to imagine a tri-personal mythical guard dog. What is it that makes Cerberus one dog? He has one body. What makes him tri-personal? He has three heads, three brains, and three sets of thoughts. Now that Hercules has killed Cerberus, suppose that the three persons (Spike, Bowser, and Rover) still exist as one disembodied dog. How is this possible? Simple. The three persons are all still one mythical doggy soul. The Trinity is like this. God is a tri-personal being. God is one being, three persons. A being is like a soul, the overall essence of any entity. God is not physical, so we can make sense of His essence by thinking of him as a soul. Think of “person” like personality. One is a person if one has personality traits (thoughts, will, volition, sense of humor, memory, etc.). So a person is a center of consciousness. The claim of Christianity—that God is triune—is the claim that God is a singular being/soul that supports three persons/centers of consciousness. Each person (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) is His own center of consciousness, with distinct thoughts, etc. but is not His own being because each person shares the same soul and is thus just one being.

This may be a lot of information, and it may be confusing, but it all adds up to a coherent picture of the Trinity, which means that the doctrine is possible and the attacks on it are defeated. Since the Bible shows that God is a tri-personal being and because the Holy Spirit testifies to that truth, we can both show that the Trinity is possible and we can know that God is the Trinity!

The Bible teaches the Trinity. All the elements of the doctrine are taught in Scripture:

1. **One God.** (Deut. 4:35; 39; 32:39; 2 Sam. 22:32; Isa. 37:20; 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5; 14; 21-22; 46:9; John 5:44; Rom. 3:30; 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5; James 2:19; Jude 25)
2. **The Father is God.** (John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6)
3. **The Son is God.** (Isa. 9:6; John 1:1; John 1:18; John 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 5:20)
4. **The Holy Spirit is God.** (Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17-18) Eternal: (Heb. 9:14) Omnipresent: (Psa. 139:7) (Omniscient: 1 Cor. 2:10-11)
5. **The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons** (i.e., they are not each other, nor are they impersonal; they relate to one another personally). John 14:15; John 14:16 Luke 3:22 John 14:6-11; Matthew 28:19.

The Scriptural Evidence for the Trinity (in greater detail)

The doctrine of the Trinity is at the very heart of Christianity for it is the essence of the doctrine of God. God is triune. That is to say, the one God is a tri-personal being. God is one unified being, or soul, yet is three distinct divine persons, or centers of consciousness. Those three divine persons which compose the one being who is God are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is necessarily so.

Two of the great gifts which the triune God has given humanity are reason and Scripture. And these are the two lines of approach which produce a belief the triune nature of God. How is it that God can exist as three divine persons? For a philosophical explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity, including reasoning through the logical consistency of God as one divine being and also as three divine persons, and the necessity of God's triune nature based on the attribute of love, click the link. Today's video will explore the scriptural evidence for the Trinity.

The Bible is very clear that there is only one true God. This God has revealed His personal name as Yahweh in Exodus 3:15—"God furthermore said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name from generation to generation." The biblical evidence is also clear that Yahweh, the one true God, is not a singularly personal being, but a tri-personal being.

To arrive at the biblical picture of the triune God, we will look at five scriptural elements, that when added together, necessitate understanding that God is triune. Those five teachings of Scripture are:

1. There is only one God
2. The Father is God
3. The Son is God
4. The Spirit is God
5. The Father, Son, and Spirit, are distinct divine persons

What is the scriptural evidence that there is only one God? Consider the following texts from the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 4:35 "To you it was shown that you might know that Yahweh, He is God; there is no other besides Him."

Deuteronomy 4:39 "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that Yahweh, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other."

Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says Yahweh, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, Yahweh of hosts: 'I am the first, and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.'"

Isaiah 45:5 "I am Yahweh, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God."

Isaiah 46:9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me."

Consider also the following texts from the New Testament:

John 5:44 "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the only God?"

1 Corinthians 8:4-6 "Therefore, concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one."

1 Timothy 1:17 "Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

Also note Yahweh uses the first person plural pronoun of himself in Scripture:

Genesis 1:26 “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...”

Genesis 3:22 “Then Yahweh God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us to know good and evil; and now, lest he send forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever.”

Genesis 11:6-7 “And Yahweh said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they have begun to do. So now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s language.”

Next consider the following texts which demonstrate that the Father is God:

Colossians 3:17 “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Titus 1:4 “...Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”

2 Peter 1:17 “For when Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased—”

The Bible also teaches that the Son is God:

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 20:28 “Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Rom. 9:5 “[Jesus is] Christ according to the flesh, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”

Colossians 1:15-17 “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

Titus 2:13 “...while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

2 Peter 1:1 “...to those who have received the same kind of faith as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Next consider the following texts which demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is God:

Acts 5:3-4 “Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?...You have not lied to men but to God.”

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

The Spirit also has the attributes which are exclusively God’s:

Eternal: **Hebrews 9:14** “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Omnipresent: **Psalms 139:7** “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?”

Omniscient: **1 Corinthians 2:10-11** “But to us God revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the depths of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the depths of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”

Lastly, consider the following texts which indicate that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct divine persons. These passages indicate that the Father is not the Son nor the Spirit and that the Son is not the Spirit.

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

Luke 3:21-22 “Now it happened that when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

John 14:16-17 “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him. You know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

Because of the scriptural evidence indicating clearly that there is only one God who uses the plural personal pronoun, that the Father is God, that the Son is God, that the Spirit is God, and that the Father, Son, and Spirit are not identical persons, the only reasonable conclusion to draw is the Yahweh, the one true God is triune. God is the Trinity.

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