

The Trinity: Bible Truth or Human Fiction?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | November 6, 2009



I recently moved to Fiji and it seems that they are facing serious pulling away of the church memberships to fraction groups ...One of the points in discussion was of a retired pastor who... is now challenging or not believing in the doctrine of the Trinity.

But I too don't agree with that teaching especially as highlighted in the fundamental beliefs. In 2005 I lived in Amman Jordan in the Middle East and had the fortunate privilege to have a Muslim woman ask me to teach her English... A strange thing occurred in our last session. We somehow got chatting... about God. I'll never forget the view of Christians she held and that was that we have three Gods and the Muslim faith only had one.

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Thank you for such a timely and important question, one which Christians have struggled with throughout the centuries. I think, perhaps, the most important thing you said was, "I will do my own studying..." This is key as Paul said in Romans 14 that every person must be fully persuaded in his own mind. Therefore, what I am going to say is not designed to tell anyone what to think, but to serve as an

aide for each person to think through and study this issue out for himself.

Let's start by looking at the evidence of Scripture and see what conclusions we can draw; and, then explore church history.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him... No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. John 1:1-3, 10, 18

Who was the Word that became flesh? Jesus, and Jesus was with God from the beginning and it was through Jesus that all things were made:

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col 1:16,17

Wouldn't this mean Jesus Himself is God? Jesus did claim to be God:

- "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" John 8:58
- I and the Father are one." John 10:30

The Apostles recognized Jesus as God:

- Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:28
- We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1John 5:20

Jesus taught there was a third member of the Godhead called the Comforter, Counselor or Spirit:

- "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14:15-17
- But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26
- "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. John 15:26

The Old Testament teaches God is a plurality, not a singularity:

- Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness... Genesis 1:26
- Even the text quoted by Jews and Muslims that "God is one" teaches a plurality, not a singularity:
- Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: DT 6:4
- Notice the passage in English uses "Lord" and "God". The reading of this passage with the Hebrew names for "Lord" and "God" would go like this: "Hear, O Israel: *Yahweh* our *Elohim*, *Yahweh* is One."
- What is interesting is that the word *Elohim* in Hebrew is plural and is the same word used for God in Genesis 1:26. Thus an accurate English reading might go like this: "The One is more than One

yet is One”

- In Hebrew there are two words for one, *Yacheed* and *Echad*. The first indicates singular unity as in one and only, the second indicates compound unity, as the oneness of two or more. In this text *Echad* is used along with the plural name of God *Elohim* indicating the oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament also provides texts in which all members of the Godhead are referenced:

- And now the Sovereign Lord [Father] has sent me [Son], with his Spirit [Holy Spirit]. This is what the Lord says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: Isaiah 48:16,17
- “Here is my [Father] servant [Son], whom I [Father] uphold, my [Father] chosen one [Son] in whom I [Father] delight; I [Father] will put my Spirit [Holy Spirit] on him [Son] and he [Son] will bring justice to the nations. Isaiah 42:1

The Old Testament teaches the close love relationship between them:

- Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man *that is* my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. Zech 13:7 KJV
- The Man who is my friend NCV
- The Man who is close to me NIV
- Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind. Proverbs 8:30 NIV
- I was beside him like an architect, I was his daily source of joy, always happy in his presence- Proverbs 8:30 GN
- Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, NASB95

So, it seems the Bible gives strong evidence for the plurality of our One God, supporting the idea that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a perfect unity of three separate individualities. But, for me all the above evidence is not what is most compelling. The most compelling evidence for me that God exists in plurality rather than singularity is the nature and character of God Himself.

The Bible says, “God is love.” 1John 4:8. Further the Bible teaches that this love is “not self seeking.” 1Corinthians 13:5. Love is outward moving, other-centered. Therefore, God, being love, could not be love in isolation because love requires an object to pour itself upon. Love is other-centered! God’s nature and character of love, rightly understood, is the most powerful argument for the plurality of God and we see this in the Old Testament texts above as the Father is delighting in the Son and the Son rejoicing in the Father and the Spirit loving them both. Therefore, when God created us in His image He created “them male and female” and the “two shall become one” united in a triune relationship – husband, wife and God indwelling their hearts via His Spirit!

Those who seek to destroy the truth about the plurality of the Godhead seek to destroy the truth about God’s character of love and, in so doing, place an obstacle to the only healing remedy for sin: God’s “perfect love [that] casts out all fear.” As we see the truth about God, as revealed in Jesus, the lies about Him are removed and we are won to trust and in that trust He pours His love (Himself) into our hearts (Romans 5:5) and we are transformed to be like Him!

Now for a little history: Amongst the founders of the SDA church there was great debate regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. Some saw Christ as the offspring of God and, as such, He was not a “created” being, but was of the same “substance” as the Father, yet still not equal to the Father for the Son arose from the Father. This idea goes back millennia and is sometimes referred to as Arian theology.

But, Ellen G. White opposed this theology and came out strongly in favor of the Bible position above. Here are a few of her quotes:

Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father,—one in nature, in character, in purpose,—the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6). His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 34. {7ABC 437.2}

The Jews had never before heard such words from human lips, and a convicting influence attended them; for it seemed that divinity flashed through humanity as Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he put forth the claim that he and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes.—The Signs of the Times, Nov. 27, 1893, p. 54. {7ABC 437.3}

Yet the Son of God was the acknowledged Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father.—The Great Controversy, p. 495. {7ABC 437.4}

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). It is not physical life that is here specified, but immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God. The Word, who was with God, and who was God, had this life. Physical life is something which each individual receives. It is not eternal or immortal; for God, the Life-giver, takes it again. Man has no control over his life. But the life of Christ was unborrowed. No one can take this life from Him. “I lay it down of myself” (John 10: 18), He said. In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived. This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as His personal Saviour. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). This is the open fountain of life for the world. {1SM 296.2}

In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church. {DA 671.2}

There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.—Evangelism, p. 615. {7ABC 441.9}

So, I do not believe our church changed its position on the trinity in order to be accepted by other “mainstream” churches, but affirmed the position found in Scripture and held by some of the church

founders, including EGW. But, the beauty of our church is that while there was disagreement regarding this doctrine amongst the founders, they did not let this disagreement stop them from working together to spread the gospel to the world. Our church has always respected the individual and recognized the need for each person to come to their own conclusion on all matters of conscience, why? Because love can only exist in an atmosphere of freedom and we want our church to be filled with the love of God! Therefore, we present the truth in love and leave each person free to decide for themselves!