

# The Trinity

June 3, 2018

Matthew 28:19 - Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

The term 'Christianity' today embraces a diverse range of thoughts and beliefs. Although Christianity focuses on Christ, there are many views on what Christ means, on the relationship of Jesus and the Christ, of Jesus and God, of the Christ and God.

Every theological difference today is represented by a distinct denomination, and according to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there exist roughly 43,000 Christian denominations worldwide in 2012. That is up from 500 in 1800 and 39,000 in 2008 and this number is expected to grow to 55,000 by 2025.

Within those 43,000 sets of beliefs, I suspect that there are cases where the defining characteristics between these denominations is barely distinguishable.

Some differences are significant. There are denominations that assert that Jesus is God; they are one in the same. There are denominations that believe that Jesus is the Son of God, divine but lesser in equality. There are those that believe that Jesus is a Divine guide and teacher. Others believe that Jesus is not divine, but a teacher, guide, and moral and spiritual authority.

Differences exist not only in the nature of Jesus, but in the nature of Mary, her position in all of this and immaculate conception. There are differences regarding the Bible: how it was inspired and its inerrant nature. There are divergent opinions on Heaven, Purgatory and Hell. Denominations disagree in their views on predestination, atonement, free will, and church government.

Some churches are Unitarian in belief: that God is not a composite of three entities; He is one entity. These churches believe although Jesus the Christ is a savior, he is not a deity or God incarnate, but that he was inspired by God in his moral teachings and became the Christ, the Savior, as the presence and awareness of God within him grew. Many Unitarians believe that God has given Jesus functional equality with Himself, and that only with regard to the throne is God greater than Jesus.

Some, but not all, Unitarian churches believe that Jesus was designated by God to be the mediator between God and man. They believe that in his earthly ministry Jesus was granted all authority on earth by God to teach, heal, raise the dead, forgive sins, and act on behalf of his Father, whom he represented.

They believe that God is “holy” and that He is “spirit,” and that He is often referred to as the “Holy Spirit” in Scripture. God is the Giver, and the gift He gives is the “holy spirit,” His divine nature. So, the Holy Spirit is another name for God, like Lord or Creator.

In contrast, a more common theological component of Christianity is belief in the Trinity – that God is comprised in a triunal nature: The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Catholics, Anglicans,

Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, and Methodists all believe in the Trinity. This was established at the Council of Nicea in 325 as religious leaders sorted through the various beliefs of the day and tried to find a consensus to represent all of Christendom.

Even in the early church, from 100-300 AD, there were many various beliefs and disagreements regarding God, Jesus and how it all worked. For instance, a common belief at the time was offered by Arius, a priest in Alexandria. Arianism taught that although Jesus was divine, he was not quite equal to God.

Arians held that Christ did not always exist along with the Father (was not "coeternal"). Instead, Christ was begotten by God before the world, and even time itself, was created. The two divine beings were of "similar substance" but not the same; they were not "consubstantial".

In 325, Constantine, the Roman Emperor and a recently converted Christian from Paganism, thought he could bring everyone together and smooth over the differences in Christianity. By a clear majority, Arianism and all other variant beliefs were voted down by the over 300 bishops who attended the Council of Nicea.

The most important theological decision made at this Council was to adopt what would be called the Nicene Creed. It stated this:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God

of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence from the Father or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion—all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.

This established creed was a pointed rebuttal directed to the Arians and others who disagreed with the majority. The creed used today is from the First Council of Constantinople in 381. It looks a little different today than it did originally, having lost its accusatory final sentence, and adds a few more details, like the being made incarnate through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

Between 325 and 381 there was great political and theological turmoil. The Arians were still powerful, bringing in questions as to the nature of the Son, and the Holy spirit had never been given any attention at all in the Nicene Creed. Power struggles within churches ensued, and with the change in Church leadership came changes in the church structure.

Since the Nicene Creed had lost some favor the Council of Constantinople was convened in 381 to reconfirm the idea of the

Trinity and expand on the original creed, in part by declaring the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son.

Over the next 200 years as many writings as possible were destroyed that argued against the theologies established by these councils. People were condemned, excommunicated, and otherwise anathematized.

Ok, there is some history on the origins of the Trinity. All right, Patrick, so what are the components of the Trinity? The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I grew up calling it the Holy Ghost, but now it is the Holy Spirit.

The idea is that God is comprised of three “Persons”, or natures. These persons were separate but equal. There is one God, yet God has these three constituent parts: the Father nature, the Son nature, and the Spirit nature.

So are there three Gods? No; there is only one God. I can only give you my perspective on this topic. Some will disagree, because my attitude is an amalgamation of three or four denominations of the 43,000 possible denominations that exist. So, forgive me if I am not speaking your language.

I try to make sense of this philosophy by thinking in terms of how I relate to them. God the Father, is the Creator of all. God is whom I usually speak to when praying. If it is something going on ‘out there’ I speak to God.

Christ, the Son, is that individualized essence of God that exists in me. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, came to know the divine nature of himself so profoundly that he became the Christ. After being baptized, God said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased,” we are told in Matthew 3:17.

I speak with Christ Jesus when I am praying about what is going on within me: my changes, my growth, my feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. I pray to that individualized essence of God within me personally.

Is there really a difference? Does it matter to which aspect of God that we pray? I don't think it makes a difference. There is only one God, after all. Many Christians feel most comfortable praying to Jesus, praying to the Christ. Jesus demonstrated that we pray to the Father ... to our Divine Poppa. But when he left his body, it became customary to pray to Jesus, as Paul taught. Christ was so in tune with the nature of God within him and around him that I typically go to that Christ nature within me when I am praying in private. But does it make a difference? No.

Then there is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the active energy of God that gets things done. God is Spirit, so moves and acts in Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Presence of God responsible for creation; it is the creative vibrating energy of God moving in and through us. It is the Holy Spirit that moves through our bodies, cells, and all life to animate us. The Holy Spirit is God in action.

I've heard the Trinity described this way: The Father is God as the Creator existing beyond creation. The Son is God's omnipresent

intelligence existing in creation. The Holy Ghost is the vibratory power of God that manifests into creation.

The Trinity is really not Biblical, and Scripture offers little support. The most often cited being the final words of the Gospel of Matthew: “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.” (Mt. 28:19).

The early church developed the Nicene Creed and the idea of the Trinity to help define the role of Jesus and explain his relationship to the more familiar God of Jewish scripture and traditional belief.

God is all that is. There is nothing but God in existence. God is the name we give to the infinite energy of creative love out of which everything flows. At a spiritual level, we understand the trinity to represent the aspects of Divine Mind, Idea and Expression that help us define and work with the totality of God.

Sometimes it is useful to understand that spiritual Source as Divine Mind, eternally creating and expressing its energy as Divine Ideas. Christ is the Divine Idea from which all other ideas flow, the presence of God that is the truth of our own identity. Thus, we understand that the second aspect of God is not Jesus directly, but the Son, the ‘Only Begotten Son’, the Christ — the creative power which Jesus perfectly expressed, the power that also lives within us in perfect potential. This is not to lessen the importance or power or place that Jesus has, but to lift the gift that Jesus brought up. “The Father and I are one”, says Jesus, and it is the Christ nature within him to which he directs our attention. “No one can come to

the Father except through me.” No one can come to the Father except through the Son, the Christ nature within each of us. Jesus was the vessel for the Logos, the Word of God, the only begotten Son of God.

So, does it make a difference if we address Jesus or Christ? No; I don't think so. Jesus the Christ lives within each of us. Christ wants us to know that we are all a part of the “Trinity.”

The Holy Spirit is the energy of God, the activity of God, in all creation. It is an energy that embraces and supports us as we work to more perfectly express our own unique Oneness with God as we allow our Christ nature to be the source for all our choices. At times that Expression of God flows directly from Divine Mind; sometimes it expresses through us as we exercise our creative power and express the Christ into our activities and thoughts.

The Trinity is a spiritually mysterious attempt for limited human minds to describe the unlimited and indescribable. I wish it were as easy as saying: God is like H<sup>2</sup>O – it has three states: solid, liquid, and gas; ice, water, and steam – but it is still H<sup>2</sup>O. Or, God is like the sun: we receive from it heat, light, and radiation. But there really are no good descriptions for an unlimited God.

It is my prayer that no matter how you see God, or Jesus, or Christ, know that God loves you and all the other 7.626 billion souls on this globe. No matter what they believe, let us love each other. This I pray in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray....