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**Why Belief in the Trinity is Essential in Christianity**  
***Part 3- The Biblical Basis for the Trinity***  
by Tal Davis

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"But the word 'Trinity' is not in the Bible!"  
"The Trinity is just tri-theism in disguise!"  
"The Trinity was invented by Greek philosophers hundreds of years after the Bible was written!"  
"Jesus was a god-like angelic being, but not the God!"  
"Jesus was a 'mighty god' but not 'Almighty God!'"  
"The Holy Spirit is not even a person, much less God!"  
"Yes, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all manifestations of the one God, but they existed at different times in history!"

In more than thirty-five years of interfaith evangelism ministry I think I have heard or read just about every possible criticism of the Christian faith. Some of the most notorious attacks have come not from atheists, secularists, or even pagans, but from theists who deny and, in some cases, absolutely detest the historic Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Some extant theistic religious movements that reject the orthodox historic doctrine of the Trinity include:

- \* Armstrongism (Herbert W. Armstrong [1892 - 1986])
- \* Baha'i Faith

- \* The Church of Christ Scientist (Christian Science- Mary Baker Eddy [1892 - 1986])
- \* The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism- Joseph Smith, Jr. [1805-1844])
- \* Islam
- \* The Christian Churches of God (Australia- Wade Cox)
- \* Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism
- \* Oneness Pentecostalism (i.e. The United Pentecostal Church, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and other "Apostolic Pentecostal" groups)
- \* Sikhism
- \* The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses- Charles Taze Russell [1852 -1916])
- \* The Way International (Victor Paul Wierwille [1916 -1985])
- \* Unitarian-Universalist Association
- \* The Unity School of Christianity (New Thought- Charles Fillmore [1854-1948] and Myrtle Fillmore [1845-1931])

That Trinity doctrine, which is the most basic tenet of Christianity, asserts that the Eternal and Infinite Creator God exists in three equally eternal and infinite Persons which the Bible identifies as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each Person is a separate conscious entity but together are one in essence.

In Christian history erroneous teachings about the Trinity have raised their heads at various times. The errors usually reflect one of the following four heretical perspectives (see Part 1):

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1. Tritheism- a form of polytheism asserting three separate gods.
2. Modalism- the teaching that God is essentially one but is manifest in three modes (not separate persons).
3. Subordinationism- the belief that Jesus was not created but nonetheless is subordinate and not equal to the Father.
4. Arianism- the ancient doctrine first taught by Arius in the 4th Century that says Jesus was, in his preexistence, a created being not equal to God.

Granted, the word "Trinity" does not appear in the Scriptures, but the word one uses for the doctrine is not essential so long as it is defined accurately. Though we feel Trinity is the best term to describe it, some theologians prefer the designation "Tri-unity" for the concept, which is definitely revealed in the Bible. We affirm that the Bible consists of the Old and New Testaments as translated accurately and interpreted using sound principles of hermeneutics (interpretation).

In this and the next installment, we will survey the broad biblical testimony for the historic Trinity doctrine. We will show that the consensus of Scriptural evidence will leave us with the conclusion not only that the Trinity is true, but that it is the only possible conclusion the whole Bible allows for the nature of God. We will biblically answer four basic questions that collectively lead to the unequivocal truth of the Trinity. The four questions are these:

1. How many gods are there?
2. Is the Father God?
3. Is the Son (Jesus) God?
4. Is the Holy Spirit a person, and is the Holy Spirit God?

In this installment we will examine questions one and two. In the sec-

ond part we will answer the other two and summarize our conclusions.

### 1. Question One: How Many Gods Are There?

Answer: There is only One Infinite and Eternal God.

The clear and undisputed teaching of the Bible, both the Hebrew Old Testament (OT) and the Christian New Testament (NT), is that only one true God exists.

In the OT, starting with the book of Genesis, the first verse of the Bible states that the entire universe (all time, space, matter, and energy) was created by God from nothing; "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word translated "created" is *bara* meaning made from nothing. Note that God's name in this verse in Hebrew is *Elohim*. It is a plural Hebrew form of the word for god but does not, as Mormonism asserts, in any way imply polytheism. However, it may be an early hint at the triune nature of the Godhead.

Perhaps the foundational text for OT monotheism is Deuteronomy 6:4-5, a passage known to Jews as the Shema (Listen!):

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD (YHWH) is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

The Hebrews were commanded never to forget those words and to teach them diligently to their children. In this passage and in many other OT sections God's name is YHWH, the Tetragrammaton ("four letters") revealed to Moses. It's exact pronunciation is unknown because ancient Hebrew had no vowels. It is probably best said as *Yahweh*. In any case, the Hebrews' tradition was never to pronounce that sacred name. In their public readings they substituted the Hebrew word for Lord (*Adonai*) wherever YHWH ap-

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peared in the text. Later, as the OT was translated into English, most translators used, and still substitute, LORD where YHWH is in the Hebrew text out of respect for the Jewish tradition.

The main point is that the Hebrews absolutely asserted that the LORD God was and is the one and only God who exists. Not just that He is superior to other gods that pagan nations may worship, but He is the only God there is to worship!

One of the most significant OT statements that affirms the uniqueness of the One God is the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20:1-5 (also Deuteronomy 5:6-9)

Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before Me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

Consider these other OT passages that clearly teach there is only one God:

Isaiah 44:6-8

"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:

'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.

'Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it;

Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation.

And let them declare to them the things that are coming

And the events that are going to take place.

'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none."

Isaiah 45:5-6

"I am the Lord, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other,

Psalms 90:1-2

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were born

Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,

Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

Other relevant Passages: Isa. 37:16; 43:10; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; 1 Chron. 12:20; Jer. 10: 6,7

Likewise the New Testament (NT) asserts the uniqueness of God.

Jesus Himself, for instance, reiterated the importance of the *Shema* when quizzed about which was the most important commandment.

Mark 12:29

"Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.'"

(see also Matthew 22:37-38 and Luke 10:25-28)

The Apostle Paul concurred. In his comments to the Corinthians about eating meat offered to idols, Paul clearly insists that the pagan gods represented by idols do not exist.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

Paul later says that the pagan gods are actually demons.

1 Corinthians 10:20

No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.

Perhaps Paul's strongest statement about the truth of the One Living God is his recounting how pagans abandoned the knowledge of the truth of God for lies.

Romans 1:18-25

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Taking all this Scriptural evidence into consideration (and this is by no means exhaustive), we conclude that the Bible clearly teaches that only one eternal and infinite God exists. He is one true creator of everything and there are no other gods. This, of course flies in the face of modern liberal and univer-

salist contentions that all religions, even those having multiple gods (egs. Mormonism, Hinduism, Animism), worship the same deity just with different names. The Bible does not allow that option. The Only Living God demands that we worship Him only. Any and all other deities are false and worshiping them is idolatry.

So, again we ask: How many gods are there? Again we say: There is only One Infinite and Eternal God.

That being established, some might ask, "If there is only one God, then how can the Trinity be true?" That leads to the other three questions and the Scriptural teachings that will lead us to our Trinitarian conclusions.

## **2. Question Two: Is the Father God?**

Answer: The Bible identifies God as Father and the Father as fully God.

We have already established that there is only One True God. One of Jesus' most important practices was to refer to the God of Old Testament (Yahweh - the LORD God) as His "Father." He told His disciples to do the same. Actually, the idea of God being our Father had been suggested somewhat in the OT.

1 Chronicles 29:10

So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever."

Psalms 68:4-5

Sing to God, sing praises to His name;  
Lift up a song for Him who rides through the deserts,  
Whose name is the Lord, and exult before Him.  
A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows,  
Is God in His holy habitation.

Isaiah 63: 16

For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us  
And Israel does not recognize us.  
You, O Lord, are our Father,  
Our Redeemer from of old is Your name.

Isaiah 64:8

But now, O Lord, You are our Father,  
We are the clay, and You our potter;  
And all of us are the work of Your hand.

Malachi 2:10a

Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?

It was not, however, until Jesus and the NT that the notion of God as Father became fully expressed. This is seen in three ways.

First, He is the Father of all humanity through creation. All people are created in the image of God, so to the extent that all humans are His creatures, He is their Father (see the above OT Passages). The NT declares the universality of God's creation of all men.

Acts 17:28-29 (Paul speaking to the Athenians)

For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

1 Corinthians 8:6

Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

Ephesians 4:6

One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

James 1:17

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Second, He is the Father of Jesus in an exclusive way. That is, Jesus is His "Only Begotten (i.e.: One and Only) Son" (we will analyze this phrase more in answering question three). The relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son is eternal, intimate, and not limited by time or space.

Matthew 11:25-27

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

Mark 14:36

And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."

Galatians 4:4a

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.

2 Peter 1:17-18

For when He 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"- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Romans 8:14-17

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Galatians 4:4-6

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

We will further examine the eternal relationship of the Father and Son when we examine the deity of Christ (Question 3).

Third, God is the Father of believers by adoption. This is a special relationship God has only with Christians. While all people can be regarded as God's children in creation, only believers in Christ can know Him as Father with the intimacy available in salvation.

Perhaps Jesus' most definitive statement of the Fatherhood of God was when He taught his disciples to pray:

Matthew 6:7-13 (see also Luke 11:1-4)

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that

they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

"Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

'Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

'Give us this day our daily bread.

'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Here are other instances where Jesus taught believers to regard God as their Heavenly Father.

Luke 11: 13

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Matthew 5: 43-44

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

John 1:12-13

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Paul specifically said that believers are adopted into God's family, thus God is their Father ("*Abba*").

Romans 8:15-17,23

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "*Abba!* Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

...And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "*Abba!* Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 3:26-28

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:5-8a

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have

redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

Peter and John also said God is the Father of believers.

1 Peter 1:14-17

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,

1 John 3:1-2

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

Granted, the biblical teaching of the One God as Father is the least controversial aspect of the Trinity. Even most non-Trinitarian pseudo-Christian groups regard God as Father (Islam regards it as blasphemous). It is important, however, that we recognize what that means. It does not mean, as Mormonism teaches, that God is our father in a literal sense and somehow we are his physical offspring. Nor is it correct to say that God was only the Father in Heaven before the incarnation of Christ but now is totally and only in Jesus, as Oneness Pentecostals assert. Also, we do not mean the Father created the Son who is less a deity than is the Father, as Jehovah's Witnesses contend. What God the Father means is that God is the One Infinite and Eternal Creator of all that exists. He is the Father in Heaven who is co-infinite and co-eternal with the Son and the Spirit, and has a unique eternal relationship with them both.

Having now established that the Bible teaches the Father is God, in the next installment we will look at what the Scripture says about the other key ques-

tions. In this, we will determine if it is right to say that the Son (Jesus) is God. This doctrinal issue has been the most controversial historically. We will also address whether the Holy Spirit is a person and whether or not the Holy Spirit is God. These, we will see, are the crux of the matter regarding the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

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