

TRINITY

John 1:1, Isaiah 9:6

By Raymond White

Perhaps the number one issue that Christians haggle over — anciently and today — is the “trinity,” a non-biblical word used by Orthodox Christians to describe the “godhead,” which *is* a Biblical word.

Not all Christians will even use the word trinity. Mormons for example will freely discuss the godhead but never the trinity as though avoiding the word automatically resolves the issue. It does not. Nothing resolves the issue.

The issue is this: What are we to make of the deity of Christ and his relationship to God? There are many opinions, orthodox trinity being the most dominate. Whichever opinion you are inclined to adopt as your own, you will find Biblical verses to defend your opinion and verses to contradict it.

The Nicean Council was convened (AD 325) for the purpose of resolving the dispute. The resulting Nicean Creed, a self-contradictory document, resolved nothing except to give Christians an excuse to burn each other at the stake. Had Athanasius and Arias shaken hands and agreed to disagree, a lot of violence might have been avoided.

When I use the word trinity I mean not just the orthodox view of the godhead, but also the ongoing conflict surrounding it. Basically, there are two camps: orthodox and all others. Orthodox Christians believe in trinity and the Nicean Creed. Non-orthodox Christians (Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc.) reject both. They generally believe that a straight forward reading of the Bible will deliver a straight forward understanding of the godhead. It does not. In reality, non-orthodox views disagree with each other and their notions of Godhead are no more comprehensible than the orthodox view.

Why is it that both the orthodox and the non-orthodox have failed to produce an explanation of godhead that makes sense? Became the heart of the discrepancy is in the Bible itself, and the dispute isn’t resolved because it can’t be resolved.

Here’s my take on the trinity. Understanding the trinity is like understanding light. Physics asks the question: Is light particles or waves? The answer is “yes.” Light is particles or waves depending on which experiments you run. Should we therefore conclude that because of the contradiction, there is no such thing as light? Well, that would be stupid, wouldn’t it? Light is light, whatever it is. The best we can do is to believe the experimental evidence regardless of how contradictory that evidence is.

The parallel theological question is this: Is Jesus Christ God or is he something else? The answer is “yes.” Jesus is God or something else depending on which verses you read. Should we therefore conclude that the Bible is wrong? No. Jesus Christ rose from the dead and we must therefore believe whatever the Bible says about him. The best we can do is list the verses that touch on the subject, regardless of their contradictory nature, and regardless of what conclusion they nudge us to, and say, “I believe *that!*”

So then, for the record, here are all the verses (that I have found anyway) that have bearing on the trinity. Make of them what you will, or don’t bother. Speaking for myself, I just believe them, I don’t claim to understand them, not taken together.

Along the right margin I have annotated which side of the dispute each particular verse supports (T:trinity, O:other) to make your arguing easier.

I do have a purpose here, which is this: Since the quarrel originates in the Bible itself, if we could just accept that, maybe we Christians would get along better.

Genesis 1:26 *And God said, Let us make man in our image...* T

The orthodox say that the plural “us” is the trinity. Of course that’s an open debate, the “us” can mean any of several different things, but trinity is plausible.

Deuteronomy 6:4 *Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God is one LORD:* O

This is the opening of the Shema, the declaration of who the Jews are supposed to believe in. Many non-orthodox will use this verse to argue that if there is one God then there can’t be three Gods. The orthodox deny that they teach three Gods. They insist that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are (is?) one God and therefore not polytheism. The non-orthodox are not convinced. Neither are Jews and Muslims.

Psalms 110:1 *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.* O

The Jehovah’s Witnesses get a lot of mileage from this verse, and they should. The text has Jehovah speaking to Adonai as though God is speaking to his son. And that squares with Jehovah’s Witness theology that the son is less than God.

Mormons believe that Jesus is Jehovah and flip the meaning of the verse. One Mormon author suggests that this is Jesus (Jehovah) speaking to his Father (Adonai) and promising to deliver the world back to him. Maybe. But if Jehovah is the only God and there is no other, how can he be addressing a superior God? See **Hebrews 1:9**.

The Orthodox claim that who is talking to who is unimportant because father and son are the same God anyway. So God is talking to the future messiah even though they are the same God. To them that makes sense, because the two are here in two capacities.

One interpretation that won’t wash is that this is just a Psalm and therefore just poetry filled with poetic license and therefore no big deal. The problem with that interpretation is that *this* Psalm also contains :4 which is the foundation verse of Christ’s priesthood and the book of Hebrews. So unless you are willing to deny Christ his priesthood, then this text is not *just* poetry.

Isaiah 9:6 *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace* T

The orthodox have a good point: How can the child be God, the Everlasting Father? Answer: He is. Deal with it.

Isaiah 43:11 *I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me, there is no savior.* O

Isaiah 44:6 ... beside me there is no God. O

Isaiah 45:21 ...and there is no God else beside me... O

Not only is there no other God, there is no other God above him, below him, or along side of him. That doesn't leave much room for a future messianic child to be born who is God, unless he is the *only* God, and that doesn't seem possible. But to remind you, Trinitarians say: yes, there are three persons who are God, but there still is only one God.

Isaiah 49:7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One... O

This does sound like Jehovah talking to the future messiah. And if it is, it doesn't sound very Trinitarian.

Matthew 28:18 ...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. T

This is not so strong a Trinitarian verse because one might argue, if he was always God, how could he become God? But the Trinitarian argument follows with, Jesus was God, then abandon his high station, then reclaimed it.

Matthew 19:16 ...Good master... :17 And he [Jesus] said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God... T

Mark 10:17 ...Good Master... :18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. T

Luke 18:18 ...Good Master... :19 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God. T

There is only one who is good and that is God. Well, if Jesus is good, and he is because he is sinless, then it follows that he must be God.

Mark 10:40 But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. O

Jesus is unable to give this privilege. If Jesus can't give this privilege, then who can? God only. So Jesus is identifying himself as someone other than God.

Mark 12:29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Here, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. O

Jesus quotes the Shema and by doing so he paints us into a theological corner. For if Jesus is God, then he is the *only* God for there is only one and none beside him. There are not two gods, father and son, and we are in a paradoxical trap. Jesus is God, and Jesus

is other than God, but there is only one God. How do we resolve all that? I can't. Maybe you can.

Luke 5:20 *And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. :21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?:24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.* T

The Pharisees make a good point: who indeed can forgive sins but God alone? If Jesus forgives sins then he must be God. Further, Jesus proves that he can forgive sins by proceeding to heal the man, which is *why* he heals the man, “that ye many know...”

So, what conclusion must we arrive at? Either that someone other than God can forgive sins or that Jesus is God.

Luke 10:2 *...pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest...* O

This implies that the Lord of the harvest is someone other than himself.

Luke 10:16 *...him that sent me.* O

If there is only one God, and Jesus is God, then who sent him? Or if God sent him, how can Jesus be God? Or if God sent Jesus who is God, how can there be only one God?

Luke 10:22 *All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.* O

Jesus makes a pretty clear distinction between himself and his father. If they are both God then that is two gods. And so the orthodox insist that they are both God and that is *one* God. Their arithmetic seems off: 1+1=1, as though saying it enough makes it so.

Luke 22:29 *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.* O

Jesus distinguishes himself apart from his father so often that I fear it will become boring to continually point out the obvious.

Luke 22:42 *Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.* O

This stunning moment not only distinguishes the two but also distinguishes their separate wills in conflict. Jesus really does not want to die, but die he must and therefore he must subjugate his own will to his Father's, which he would not have to do if they were the same being.

☛ **John 1:1** *In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. :3 All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. :14 And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* T

There is no escaping the Trinitarian theme of this verse. John opens with these words intentionally to set the key subject of his entire gospel: Jesus is God. Whatever that means, it means something.

Eusebius, in his History of the Church, claimed that John wrote his gospel very late in life (long after Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and only after the persistent urgings of his followers. They were saying something like, "John, you're all that's left. Don't you want to leave us *your* testimony? Surely you have something to write that hasn't already been written." And he did have something to write that hadn't already been written, something vitally important.

John had been there with Jesus. John heard Jesus say to Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." John heard Thomas declare, "My Lord and my God." John heard Jesus say, "I and my Father are one." John saw the miracles and the resurrection. And having witnessed all that, he came to one conclusion that was so paramount that he felt compelled to open his gospel with it. And that is this: "The word was God!" That sounds pretty Trinitarian.

John 3:34 *...for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. :35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.* O

This clearly distinguishes the father and the son as two separate persons. One gives to the other the spirit, love, and all things. A father does not give things to himself, that would be pointless. He gives things to someone else, in this case to his son.

John 5:17 *... My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.* O
John 5:18 *... said... God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*
John 5:19 *... what he seeth the Father do...these also doeth the Son...*
John 5:31 *If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.*

Jesus distinguishes himself from his father in several ways. (1) There are two men at work, the Father and Jesus. (2) Claiming to be the son of the father is claiming to be equal to God. That's different than being the father. (3) Jesus imitates the father. No one imitates themselves. (4) Jesus needs someone else's witness, and God's witness proves that God is someone else.

John 7:16 *Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but* O

his that sent me. :17 If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

This does more than merely distinguish the two persons, it also distinguishes the father's doctrine as specifically not the son's, "not mine." So it's not just two persons but two ownerships.

John 8:17 *It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. :18 I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.* O

If Jesus and his father are the same person, then this would be false testimony. The law demands two witnesses. If one person gives testimony twice claiming to be two different people (for instance a false affidavit), that would be fraud against the court. That Jesus here claims to have two witnesses (himself and God), that means that he and God are necessarily two different persons.

John 8:42 *... I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.* O

I don't know how much clearer Jesus could make it. Not only is Jesus a separate person from his father, but their actions are different: the Father sent the Son, the Son did not send himself.

John 8:58 *Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. :59 Then took they up stones to cast at him...* T

This is Jesus' claim to be Moses's God, who introduced himself to Moses and to Israel as I AM. Jesus is that being. Some non-orthodox might say that's not what Jesus meant. But try to explain that to those who tried to kill him. They knew exactly what he meant, he was claiming to be God and that was a capital crime.

☛ **John 10:30** *I and my Father are one.* T

☛ **John 17:11** *...that they may be one, as we are. :22 ...that they may be one, even as we are one:* O

This is the quintessential trinity verse, and the quintessential defense against it. Their meaning revolves around the word "one." The question is: one what? A stock answer is one in purpose, but the Greek does not support that trivial answer.

John 12:28 *Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.* O

It's impossible to believe that Jesus and his father are the same person when they both are talking at the same time engaged in a conversation. Jesus spoke to God and God spoke back. That's two people.

John 12:49 *For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.*

Jesus distinguishes himself from the father yet again. This time by pointing to the miracles and saying in essence, this is God speaking to you, not me. Pay attention.

John 14:9 *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not know me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? :10 ...the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.* T O

Finally Jesus tackles the subject straight on and gives us something like a real explanation of who he is. He understands the theological implications and approaches the issue from both sides: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" certainly means, in some sense, that Jesus is God, but in what sense is not clear. "I speak not of myself" just as certainly means that Jesus is a unique person apart from his father.

So, how are we to understand the two together? "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." This is Jesus' own explanation of trinity, that the Father is somehow incarnated in Jesus' body along with Jesus. But maybe that's not quite it either, but something like that. Or not. In any case, there you have it, Jesus explaining Jesus.

An extra note here: God being in Jesus is very different than Jesus being God. This verse, which many use to assert that Jesus is God, actually can be taken to mean that Jesus is *not* God. How so? Because you are not *in you*, you *are* you. If Jesus were God, then God wouldn't be in him. True, you can say God is in Jesus therefore Jesus is God, but you could just as well say, God is in Jesus therefore Jesus is *not* God, because if he were God, God wouldn't be *in* him, he'd *be* him. So, for Jesus to say the Father dwelleth in me, does not settle the dispute, it ignites it.

John 14:20 *At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.* O

This verse opens with a Trinitarian idea "I am in my Father" but concludes mitigating that with "and ye in me, and I in you."

This also reflects back on **:10** *the Father that dwelleth in me*. What that is literal or hyperbole or something else, whatever it means in **:10** it must also mean in **:20**. So the strict Trinitarian view seems impossible.

John 14:24 *...the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.* O

Again, Jesus distinguishes himself from the Father. This time God is the originator of the words and not Jesus.

John 14:28 ...my Father is greater than I. O

This is a challenge to Trinitarians, although Trinitarians just take it in stride claiming, “Hey, we’ve always said they are two different persons, just one God.” Whether you believe that or not, that’s your decision.

The problem is that Trinitarians want it both ways, that Jesus and his father are two different persons, yet somehow they are one God. Trinitarians reading this will say, “Yes, that’s exactly right.” But everyone else reading this will say, that’s too pat, that’s contrived, that’s rigging the game, making up the rules to guarantee a favorable outcome.

The real problem is, both are right, and both are wrong.

John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself... - -

Now we get into the third person of the Godhead. Not only is Jesus a separate person from God the Father, but the Holy Ghost is also a separate person. There really is no dispute about the Spirit being or not being God. Any such debate never entered Jesus’ mind.

☛ **John 17:5** And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the before the world was. T

Now we have some real explanation who Jesus is and who Jesus was. He was indeed a pre-existent divine living with God before the world. Now how *that* happened is another mystery, but at least we now know that much anyway, and that’s a lot.

John 20:17 ...I ascend...to my God... O

If you say that Jesus is God, that you have to be willing to talk about God’s God, the God that God submits to. This is awkward for Trinitarians but inescapable.

☛ **John 20:28** ...My LORD and my God. T

Now we have the Trinitarian verse that holds up under all attacks. Whatever else the Bible says about Jesus — separate from the father, one God one, whatever — Thomas and John do call him God, and Jesus does not correct them.

Acts 7:55 But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. :56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the son of man standing on the right hand of God. O

Stephen's open vision confirms what we've already figured out from the gospels; namely, that Jesus and his father God are two distinct and separate persons, and the father is called God, not the son.

Acts 20:21 ...repentance toward God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. O

Acts 20:28 ...feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. T

These two verses seem to be at odds with each other. :21 separates Jesus from God, but :28 connects the two. God, the verse says, purchased the church with his own blood. Just what blood could that be other than the blood Jesus spilt at the crucifixion?

☛ *1 Corinthians 8:5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many), :6 But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.* O

Let's not delve into the polytheism implied by :5, let's just deal with the divinity of Christ in :6. Paul is adamant that there is only one God which is not anti-trinitarian since Trinitarians say that the Father and Son are that one God.

The problem is that Paul here says that the Father only is that one God, and that is very anti-trinitarian because it specifically excludes the Son. The more so since it specifically lists the son as a follow-up: "our one God, the Father, and Jesus."

Now, he appends the explanations, "God, of whom are all things," and "Jesus, by whom are all things." That does give Jesus his place in the godhead, but it's too little, too late having just denied Jesus the title God.

1 Corinthians 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. T

The God of Moses, Jehovah, was Christ. This makes the orthodox point, which, by the way, Mormons agree with. Jehovah's Witnesses are at odds with this verse.

1 Corinthians 15:28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. O

Paul discusses God and the Son as two completely different people, and with a ranking order: The Son submits to the Father.

☛ *2 Corinthians 5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself...* T O

☛ *Colossians 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.* T O

This two verses, taking their cue from **John 14:10**, explain to us the relationship between God and Jesus, that God was indeed in Jesus' body. But the question lingers, does that mean that Jesus is God or not God? You can take to mean either, and whichever side of the debate you are on, these two verses will be useful to you, or baffling to you.

Philippians 2:6 *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: :7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man.* T

The verse takes its cue from **John 17:5** where Jesus begs to be restored to his privileged position that he had before the world was.

The meaning of this verse is garbled by its bad King James translation. "Thought it not robbery" has nothing to do with robbery. It should be "thought it not worth clutching" or holding onto, to remain equal with God. In other words, he let go of his high privilege to become human to save us.

This squares well with the Trinitarian idea that Jesus was God before he was born.

Colossians 1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.* T O

I don't know which side of the argument wants to claim this verse. Image means copied from a pattern. That Jesus is the image of God, does that mean that Jesus is God is not God? Is the copy of a thing the thing itself? It depends on which side you're on.

Firstborn means literally that — the first of God's creations. But most Christians balk at that and say it means station, the highest rank. It can't be chronological, they say, because Christ is uncreated. But there's a serious flaw in that thinking; namely, the verse says "of every creature," which means of all things created. That means Jesus is one of those. The firstborn of all created things to be sure, but a created thing none-the-less. That's what the verse says. I didn't write it, argue about it with Paul.

By the way, Mormons are quite comfortable with a literal chronological ordering, that God created (or pro-created) Christ first. In fact it's a major tenant of their religion.

Colossians 1:16 *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.* T

Hebrews 1:1 *God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, :2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom he also made the worlds; :3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:* T O

These two verses take their cue from *John 1:1* and make Christ not only God but specifically the creator God who creates all things. So that means it's a Trinitarian verse. But on the other hand, Christ is a copy of God (or *the* copy of God), so how is a copy and the original the same thing? And Christ sitting at God's right hand, does that make him God or something less than God? You decide.

Hebrews 1:8 But unto the Son he [God] saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever... :9 ...therefore God, even thy God... T

Here we have the Father (God) speaking to the Son (God), and so a dialog of God speaking to God, or in other words, God's God speaking to God. And the author wants to make that we understand his meanings because he says, "God, even thy God." The author is affirming himself, "Yes, I am indeed quoting God's God, don't confuse the two."

1 Timothy 3:16 ...God was manifest in the flesh... T

Definitely a Trinitarian verse. But of course, what does "manifest" mean? Does it mean that Jesus was actually God, or that God just came for a visit *in* him, or what? And so the debate goes on.

1 John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us... T

God died for us. That is what the verse is saying. Well, the only God I know of who died was Jesus.

Revelation 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father... T

Whoa! To God and his Father. Now *that* is stunning. God has a father? That's what it says. And that is very Trinitarian, although few Trinitarians would dare say it quite that way. Although Mormons would be quite happy to say it exactly that way.

CONCLUSION

My goodness. How do you summarize this patchwork of divine truth? If it weren't so very important, I might be inclined to discard it all and occupy my mind with something simpler; like for instance, black hole cosmology.

But since it is so very important, we ought to stick with it and understand it as best we can. We should at least grapple with the facts, not what they mean but what they are. I don't mean me, I mean you. I had considered listing all the facts about all of those verses right here, but if I did that, then I'd just be producing a new creed, something like the Nicene Creed, and mine wouldn't be any better. So why bother?

Anyway, you have the verses. Study them, struggle with them, try not to reject some in favor of others, but believe them all. And above all, trust Jesus. He has the power to save, and no one else does.