

WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW II: WHO GOD IS.

All scriptures are taken from The New American Standard Bible (NASB). Further, Biblical references are examples and are in no way exhaustive. The series What Christians Should Know also is not a complete reference but is meant to provide basic beliefs, principles, and doctrines of the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.” Titus 2:1

In contemplating God, a logical first question to ask is, “Does God Exist?” Once that uncertainty is successfully addressed, the next question to ponder is, “Who is God?” The focus of this lesson will be on the second question, assuming that all of us have already taken the path in favor of theism, have been illuminated in support of the truth, and now would like to learn more about whom we serve. In order to address the first question, I will direct you to “For Further Study” at the end of this lesson.

The first place to start when talking about what Christians should know is God. After all, that’s where the Bible starts. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God ...”

What Christians should know is that in order to live an obedient life and enter into a relationship with God, one must have a comprehensive understanding of who God is.

Thus, all Christians should be able to answer the question, “Who is my God?”

As with any other relationship, the closer two people become, the more each gets to know about the other. It is important to realize, however, that God can be known, but this feat is not accomplished strictly by human means, but is part of the revelation of God *to us*. So, a person sitting alone in a room in deep thought won’t be able to “know” God—He *cannot* be known through human wisdom alone.¹ The first requirement is an earnest desire to know, and then comes engagement with the Scriptures, where true knowledge of God is to be found. Any attempt, then, to understand God without referencing the Scriptures will lead to suppression of the truth, futile thinking, and darkened hearts.²

Hence, in Matthew 11:27 Jesus says, “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*.” Romans 1:19 says,

¹ I Corinthians 1:21

² Romans 1:18-21

“Because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them.” (In both verses the italics are mine.)

With this idea also comes the recognition that we, as temporal human beings, cannot ever *fully* grasp God, because He is greater than us and eternal. This makes sense because we are the creation, so of course there will be concepts and attributes about Him that are beyond comprehension. This is why in Isaiah 55:9, God speaks through the prophet and says, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” The Psalmist says that God’s “greatness is unsearchable,”³ His “understanding is infinite,”⁴ and THE LORD’S “knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain it.”⁵ In I Corinthians 2:11-12, the apostle Paul says, “Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.” In spite of this, there is a tremendous wealth of information about who God is in the Bible.

The Bible teaches us that God is love,⁶ light,⁷ Spirit,⁸ just,⁹ omnipresent,¹⁰ omnipotent,¹¹ omniscient,¹² eternal,¹³ wise,¹⁴ timeless,¹⁵ merciful,¹⁶ holy,¹⁷ blameless,¹⁸ self-existent¹⁹ (meaning God is un-causable, or in reference to His *aseity*), righteous,²⁰ infinite,²¹ personal (Jesus Christ), invisible²² (but God did assume visible form, or theophany, as in Genesis 18), knowledgeable,²³ truthful,²⁴ faithful,²⁵ good,²⁶ peaceful,²⁷ slow to anger and

³ Psalm 145:3

⁴ Psalm 147:5

⁵ Psalm 139:6

⁶ I John 4:8, John 3:16, 17:24

⁷ I John 1:5

⁸ John 4:24

⁹ Romans 3:26

¹⁰ Jeremiah 23:24, Psalm 139:7-10

¹¹ Matthew 19:26, Luke 1:37, Psalm 24:8, 115:3

¹² I John 3:20, Jeremiah 1:5

¹³ Psalm 90:2

¹⁴ Romans 16:27

¹⁵ Revelation 1:8

¹⁶ Psalm 145:9

¹⁷ Leviticus 19:2, Isaiah 6:3

¹⁸ Psalm 18:30

¹⁹ John 1:3, Revelation 4:11, I Corinthians 8:6

²⁰ Psalm 145:17

²¹ Revelation 4:8

²² Exodus 33:20, John 1:18, 6:46, I Tim 1:17, I John 4:12

²³ Job 37:16

²⁴ John 17:3

²⁵ I Peter 4:19, II Samuel 7:28

²⁶ Acts 14:17, Romans 12:2, James 1:17, Psalm 107:1

patient,²⁸ the Creator,²⁹ graceful,³⁰ jealous,³¹ wrathful,³² willful,³³ blessed,³⁴ beautiful,³⁵ sovereign,³⁶ and unchangeable.³⁷ God's whole being is inclusive of all these attributes, and He is simultaneously and equally all of these things.

In particular, God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience all reveal that He exists in a different way than we exist, and that very existence surpasses what we can deduce from the rules of the natural world. He is qualitatively different from us.

The word "unchangeable" means that God's character, promises, being, and purposes were, are, and *always will be* the same. This is the reason why and how we can trust in Him always—He will be good, truthful, perfect, and just eternally. He may, however, change *His response* dependent on particular circumstances. For example, in the beginning of the Book of Jonah, God intended to destroy the evil city of Nineveh because of the extreme wickedness of its people, and He sent Jonah to tell the people that judgment was coming. In response to Jonah's prophecy, in chapter 3, the text says the people of Nineveh believed God, fasted, and turned from their evil ways. In response, Jonah 3:10 says that God *relented* (in Hebrew *naham*, meaning to be moved to pity, to have compassion, or to suffer grief) and subsequently did not harm the city or the people. So, God did not change in being both just and merciful, but He did change what He intended to do based on the situation and also consistent with His unchanging character. Other examples of God changing His mind include the successful intervention of Moses on behalf Israel's apostasy (Exodus 32:7-14) and adding 15 years to the life of Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:1-6).

Many of God's attributes are not shared (e.g., omnipresence), but others are shared with humankind in a limited way simply because we are finite creations whereas He is infinite. These shared characteristics include truthfulness, love, holiness, being just, and being merciful. So while at best, I may be somewhat merciful some of the time, God is perfectly merciful all of the time.

What Christians should know is that one of the exclusive truth claims of Christianity is that God is *both* an unlimited deity *and* a personal deity.³⁸

²⁷ II Thessalonians 3:16, Philippians 4:6, I Corinthians 14:33, Galatians 5:22

²⁸ Romans 2:4, Nahum 1:3, Jonah 4:2, Numbers 14:18, Colossians 3:12

²⁹ Genesis 1:1, I John 2:15-17

³⁰ Romans 3:23-24, I Corinthians 15:10

³¹ Exodus 34:14

³² Exodus 32:9-10, Romans 1:18

³³ Jeremiah 29:11, I Thessalonians 5:16-18, Psalm 40:8, Ephesians 1:11, I Peter 3:17

³⁴ I Timothy 1:11, 6:15

³⁵ Psalm 27:4

³⁶ II Samuel 7:28, I Chronicles 29:10-13, Genesis 50:20

³⁷ Psalm 102:25-27, Malachi 3:6, James 1:17

³⁸ Isaiah 45:21

Meaning, not only is He “that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought,” but He is also intimate with reality, most perfectly embodied in the Incarnation of God as Man in Jesus Christ (more on that later and in the future). Other religions may construct a god who is unlimited but not personal, and others may construct one who is personal but not boundless.

God also is independent of humanity and doesn’t need us for anything.³⁹ Yet, in view of all of God’s marvelous attributes, people are often confused because there are some things God cannot do. For example, God cannot lie,⁴⁰ He can’t go back on his covenantal promises,⁴¹ He can’t deny Himself,⁴² He can’t be tempted, nor does He tempt anyone.⁴³

When I say that God doesn’t need us, it’s not meant to depress anyone. What that does mean, then, is that because He lacks nothing, the creation of our world and humankind came out of God’s abundance. He didn’t make us to fill a void, and after we have all passed away, *God will still be*. And He had meaning and purpose in creating us, so our existence was not a roll of the dice or a mishap one day in a heavenly lab. God delights in His creation,⁴⁴ created us for His glory,⁴⁵ and did so in a totally free and voluntary act, which had been predestined according to His purposes.⁴⁶

God is a Spirit, and is therefore *sexless* and without human form. Hence, when I repeatedly refer to God as “He,” that doesn’t mean God is male (although Christ was a man); rather, it is a human word and concept used to denote a relationship. In fact, a myriad of anthropomorphic⁴⁷ terms are used throughout the Bible to describe God so as to use our own language to illustrate a point. God is referred to as a shepherd (Psalm 23:1), father (32:6), and physician (Exodus 15:26), while also seeing (Genesis 1:10), walking (Leviticus 26:12), remembering (Genesis 8:1), and wiping away tears (Isaiah 25:8). Examples of different emotional states include grief (Psalm 78:40), love (John 3:16), wrath (Psalm 2:5), and pity (Psalm 103:13). The Bible also refers to God’s face (Exodus 33:20) and His finger (Exodus 8:19) and ears (Psalm 55:1). In a similar light, God is compared to a tower (Proverbs 18:10), a lion (Isaiah 31:4), a rock (Deuteronomy 32:4), and the sun (Psalm 84:11). With all of these things in mind, the way in which God chose to reveal Himself to us is by the name Father. This is why when asked about how to pray, Jesus says in Matthew 6:9-13 to address God as “Our Father who is in Heaven.”

Essential Doctrine #1: What Christians should know is that the principle of the Holy Trinity is one of the most important doctrines of

³⁹ Acts 17:24-25, Job 41:11

⁴⁰ Hebrews 6:18, Titus 1:2

⁴¹ Psalm 89:34

⁴² II Timothy 2:13

⁴³ James 1:13

⁴⁴ Isaiah 62:4-5

⁴⁵ Isaiah 43:7

⁴⁶ Ephesians 1:11-12

⁴⁷ In other words, describing God in human terms.

the Christian faith, and it is one of the exclusive truth claims of Christianity.

What Christians should know is that there is one God, yet God is three distinct persons, each of whom is fully God: Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit.

Keep in mind that the word “Trinity” is never, ever, mentioned in the Bible. The word was applied by humanity in order to describe a principle pervasive in the Scriptures that is located in *both* the Old Testament and the New Testament.

This does not mean that God is a person in the same way that I have four limbs, get up, drink tea, and then drive to work. Rather it means that *God is personal* and is therefore not a remote, impersonal power. Also, because each member of the Trinity is fully and equally God, then one is no better than the other.

A more academic and formal definition is that God is an infinite spirit that is One with an undivided *ousia*, or essence. The Father, Son, and Spirit are all of the same *ousia* (*homoousia*) but God has distinct instances of a given essence. Each person (*hypostasis*) of God is *relationally distinct*, but they have a mutually interpenetrating unity, or what is often referred to as *perichoresis*, a type of divine dance with interlocking partners.

So, the Trinity is One God. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” Also, Deuteronomy 4:35 says, “To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.” Isaiah 43:10 says, “You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me.” I Timothy 2:5 says, “For there is one God.”

But aren't there other gods? Jesus says in John 17:3, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Deuteronomy 32:17 says, “They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread.” For millennia, people have been worshipping and sacrificing to false deities that are *not* supreme, that are *not* the One True God, that are *not* the Trinitarian God of the Bible. They are imposters.

So, what this means in practice is that Jesus is not the Father. The Holy Spirit is not the Son, and the Father is not the Holy Spirit (you get the idea). Yet all three are God!

The Father is God. John 6:27 says, “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the

Father, God, has set His seal.” I Corinthians 8:6 says, “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.”

Jesus is God. In John 1 it says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” The Word becoming flesh was Jesus, so “in the beginning” with the Father was Jesus (the Word), who is also God. In John 8:58 Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Referring to Himself as God, or “I am,” is exactly the same way the Father referred to Himself as God in Exodus 3:14 when God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Titus 2:13 says, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” Hebrews 1:1-3 says that Jesus is the exact representation of God the Father: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.” In John 14:9-11, Jesus said, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.”

The Holy Spirit is God. II Corinthians 3:17-18 says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. 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.” Acts 5:3-4 reads, “But 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? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’” In Psalm 139:7, David equates God’s omnipresence with the Holy Spirit: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to Heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.”

Notably, the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal “It.” For example, in Ephesians 4:30 it says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” The Spirit can be resisted: “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). Hebrews 10:29 says, “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”

The Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of truth,⁴⁸ but also the teacher of that truth to believers,⁴⁹ and dwells within those believers.⁵⁰ In other words, true awareness, knowledge, and understanding of God comes directly from God, and thus, God will never reveal non-truth about Himself to anyone. By implication then, anyone who proclaims something as truth that is contradictory to the Word of God in the Scriptures is not revealing truth at all, but false doctrine. The Holy Spirit, being God with full and complete understanding of the truth, *is incapable* of lying and teaching false doctrine. So, a person who believes that they can live a Christian life filled with what the Bible calls sin does not derive that belief from God.⁵¹ Truth comes directly from God by the Holy Spirit and is therefore never derived from us or what we “feel” on the inside, but is external, objective, changeless, and timeless. We conform to the truth; the truth never, ever conforms to us.

I John 4:8 says, “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Understanding the Trinity of God, then, means understanding love. Within the Trinity, there is relationship, friendship, harmony, unity, and happiness. The essence of the Trinity is love. John 3:35 says, “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.” In John 14:31, Jesus says, “I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me.” Hence, you and I and everyone, all made in the image of God,⁵² were made *from love with love to love and to be loved*, but in order to properly understand and execute this, we need God, which is where our conception of love started.

What Christians should know is that the distinction of God’s persons is important because there is *an imminent and an economic* Trinity.

The imminent Trinity refers to how God relates to Himself. The economic Trinity refers to how God works in history in order to accomplish various tasks. So, the different persons of the Trinity are distinct as a function of their *relation to each other and the world*. It follows, then, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the same, and they are made distinct by their relations. So, to Himself God is all the same and imminently works in perfect harmony and unison, but in regard to the salvation of humanity, for example, each person of the Trinity plays a different role to accomplish a task. For example, I Peter 1:2 says, “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.” In other words, God the Father knew beforehand whom He would save. God the Son came into this world in order to live, die, and be resurrected, and God the Spirit works in and through us to empower us in the Christian path, so that we can be reconciled back to the Father through Christ. Our whole salvation is Trinitarian.⁵³

⁴⁸ John 14:17, 1 John 4:6

⁴⁹ John 14:26, 15:26, 16:12-15; 1 John 2:20, 26-27

⁵⁰ Romans 5:5, 8:9; 14-16; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 John 4:13

⁵¹ Titus 1:16; 1 John 1:8, 10; 2:3-6, 9-11; 3:6-11; 4:20-21

⁵² Genesis 1:27

⁵³ Ephesians 1:3-14

Here's another way of looking at it. God the Father speaks a word in Heaven. Jesus, the Son, is the Word of God⁵⁴ that became flesh⁵⁵ and lived with us for a few decades on Earth. After His death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to Heaven⁵⁶ after paying the ultimate price for sin,⁵⁷ thus creating a new spiritual bridge between the Father and us. (This is why Jesus is so critically important, because without the divine sacrifice salvation would be impossible). Soon after Jesus went up to Heaven, the Holy Spirit came down (Pentecost), subsequently empowering us to manifest the fruits of an obedient life,⁵⁸ so that we may one day cross the bridge back to the Father.

Here are some more examples of the economic Trinity.

God the Father spoke the universe into existence in Genesis 1, but in John 1:3 it says the Father acted *through* Jesus: “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

The Father is the One who sent Jesus into the world⁵⁹ and planned for the redemption of humankind.⁶⁰ It is the foreknowledge of the Father that allows only Him to predestine those who will believe and follow Christ.⁶¹

The Father does not advocate for us before Himself—only Jesus does. This is why I John 2:1 says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Christ is the perfect divine mediator. Hence, Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Notably, *only Jesus*, Incarnated as Man, was rejected by many, suffered and died on a cross, and then was resurrected three days later. Neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit died on a cross.

The Holy Spirit is called a Helper, a distinction apart from the Father and Jesus: “But the Helper,⁶² the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”⁶³ Romans 8:27 says, “He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” In John 16:7, Jesus says, “But I tell you the truth,

⁵⁴ John 1:1

⁵⁵ John 1:14

⁵⁶ Luke 24:51

⁵⁷ Romans 6:23, I John 4:10

⁵⁸ Galatians 5:22-23

⁵⁹ John 3:16

⁶⁰ Galatians 4:4, Ephesians 1:9-10

⁶¹ Romans 8:29, 1 Peter 1:2

⁶² In Greek *parakletos*, a term meaning one who pleads a case before a judge, a comforter, advocate, intercessor, or legal assistant.

⁶³ John 14:26

it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.”

The Holy Spirit is also described as distributing gifts,⁶⁴ gifting speech,⁶⁵ and interceding.⁶⁶ It is a unique attribute of the Spirit that regenerates us to give us new, invigorated, spiritual lives,⁶⁷ and to empower us.⁶⁸

A fancy way of describing the Trinitarian dynamic is “ontological equality but economic subordination.” Or put more simply, “of the same stuff, but willingly submitting in order to do a job.” To be clear, no member of the Trinity is subordinate, inferior, or non-equal to the other two, but there is deference or voluntary *subordination of will* without ontological subordination. Accordingly, as Grudem says, “If we do not have ontological equality, not all the persons are fully God. But if we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another.”⁶⁹

Without question, there is explicit reference to Trinitarianism in the New Testament, and there are also many implications of it in the Old. For example, in Genesis 1:1 it says, “In the beginning God ...” Here, the word God (*lohiym* in Hebrew) is plural, yet words conjoined to this verb in Hebrew grammar are singular so God (plural) *is* and not are. There is a form of speech in Hebrew grammar called “plural of majesty” where referring to a single person in the plural denotes respect, but this method is not used in any other place in the Old Testament. Verse 1 goes on to say, “... and *the Spirit of God* was moving over the surface of the waters” (italics are mine). In verse 2, God famously says, “Let there be light,” and light is often used in reference to Jesus, the Son, when he refers to Himself, as in, “I am the light of the world”⁷⁰ and “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.”⁷¹ So, within the first few verses of the Bible, we are introduced to Trinitarianism at work before the world as we know it was born.

Furthermore, Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness’” (italics mine). Genesis 3:22 says, “Behold, the man has become like one of *Us*.” The Psalmist refers to more than one person as God in two places: Psalm 45:6-7, “Therefore God, Your God ...”; and Psalm 110:1, where David says, “THE LORD says to my Lord; ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’” The first passage is referred to in Hebrews (1:8) but is specifically applied to Christ. The implication of the second passage is that: (A) David is

⁶⁴ I Corinthians 12:11

⁶⁵ Acts 8:29

⁶⁶ Romans 8:26-27

⁶⁷ John 3:5-8

⁶⁸ Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

⁶⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 251.

⁷⁰ John 8:12

⁷¹ John 8:5

calling two distinct persons Lord; and (B) THE LORD could only make another God sit at His right hand.

Isaiah 61:1 says, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me.” The implication is that the Spirit and the Lord God are distinct. Isaiah 63:10 says, “But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.” All three members of the Trinity are mentioned in Isaiah 48:16, where the speaker says, “And now the LORD GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit.” The speaker, presumably the Son, mentions being sent as well as the Spirit. In Luke 4, Jesus reads a scroll that has Isaiah 61 written on it, and then in 4:21 says, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The clearest representation of all three persons of the Trinity at once occurs at the baptism of Jesus. Matthew 3:16-17 says, “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” Here, simultaneously, all three members of the Trinity perform a different function: the Father speaks, the Son is baptized, and the Spirit descends to anoint for ministry.

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

Jude 1:20-21 says, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”

A proper understanding of the Trinity changes the very way a Christian thinks about life itself, because the Trinity is a relational dynamic, and we, as Christians, are in a relationship with God. The Trinitarian God of the Bible is One already in a relationship with Himself before the creation of the world. As a result, love, which is other-dependent, existed *before* God exerted His power. This distinguishes God as One already in love and fellowship with another before creation from other impersonal unitarian gods who needed to create in order to enter into a relationship. The entire doctrine of salvation is based solely on the Trinity, without which we could not be saved, and through these relationships, we are reconciled back to God—that is, *by* the Holy Spirit working in us, *through* Jesus Christ, back *to* the Father in Heaven.

This reveals that the human experience is intended to be loving and communal; hence, it is not good for individuals to be alone⁷² because our lives are meant to be community-oriented, simply because that’s who God is, and we are all made in His image. Furthermore, all three persons of the Trinity are fully transparent, honest, good, and truthful, and this provides a blueprint of how we should live. God is One all the time, without variance and without change, which means His character never changes based on circumstances. He pours out His love and shares His eternal attributes freely and openly,

⁷² Genesis 2:18

without bounds. There is giving without ceasing and also humility because Jesus, being fully God, voluntarily subjugated Himself for our sake. He redefined power, then, not by using it against us but by emptying Himself for us. Hence, not “My will be done, but your will”⁷³ and “When you lose your life is when you really find it.”⁷⁴ Truly, Jesus, being fully God, submitted to the Father out of love. As a result, there is love without argument, lying, poor communication, disrespect, criticism, or covetousness. In the context of relationship, Jesus knew the Father was equal, but He submitted and obeyed. This reorganizes any misconceptions or pollution from American ideology about how a Christian ought to act in marriages, institutions, friendships, churches, and communities, and honoring one’s mother and father. An ideology that says otherwise, that uses power *for the sake of self*, as in “I am right,” “I will not respect those in authority because I am better,” or “They’re beneath me” is inconsistent with the Trinity and consistent with the world. This is especially important when contemplating how people of the faith approach non-believers and people outside the church.

What Christians should know is that there have been many heresies regarding the doctrine of the Trinity.

Even small deviations put you on a path where you end up way off course. There are three main false doctrines.

- (1) God is not One, but many. This is essentially polytheism. Another fallacy is Tritheism, which says that God is three and not One.
- (2) God is not three persons, or He’s *one* actor with three different masks—modalism, for example, says that God remains the same person but changes his face mask depending on what scene of the play is happening on stage. The obvious problem with this ideology can be found in passages like Matthew 3 that show God simultaneously being Father, Spirit (dove), and Son *at the same time*. In the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46), Jesus prays to the Father in Heaven, making the modalism hypothesis impossible.
- (3) Claiming that any member of the Trinity is not equally God. Arianism was a heretical doctrine that was resolved at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Arius, a bishop in the Alexandrian Church, said that Jesus was not God, and was at some point in history created by God the Father. Adoptionism, or the idea that God “adopted” Jesus at some point, thereby making a fully human male His son, is also heretical. For clarity on this matter, please refer to the paragraphs above.

What Christians should know is that God has multiple names, and each pertains to a specific aspect of His deity.

⁷³ Luke 22:42

⁷⁴ Matthew 10:39

Yahweh is the proper name for God and is what God chose as a label for Himself in Exodus 3:14 when he said, “I AM WHO I AM.” This name emphasizes the covenantal relationship that God has with His people. Jehovah can also be used to express the same meaning, or “the existing One.”

Elohim is first used in Genesis 1:1, and this name emphasizes God as supreme over everything, including other false gods.

Adonai means “the Lord God” or “Lord of the whole Earth.”

The name of God incarnate, Jesus, means “the Savior of Mankind.” The English word Christ comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which means Messiah or anointed. Thus, when someone says “Jesus Christ,” they are literally saying, “The Savior of Mankind, the Messiah.”

Compound names are also used to describe specific characteristics. For example, Jehovah Jirah means, “the Lord will provide,” as used in Genesis 22:13-14. El-Shaddai (“El,” the root from “Elohim”) means “God Almighty” and emphasizes THE LORD’S power.

Names in our world are usually easily explicable: typically, our parents gave them to us, often for specific reasons. There is, however, only one explanation for the name of God in the Hebrew Bible, and it comes from Exodus 3:14-15. There it says, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM,’” and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Furthermore, God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘THE LORD, 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 to all generations.” The Hebrew root of “I AM” is *’ehyeh* (Yahweh). Furthermore, in this statement, God connects His name to the Elohim of Israel’s fathers. In other words, “Yahweh, the Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you.”⁷⁵ Gottwald says, “Exodus 3:14 regards the divine name as formed from the Hebrew verb *hyh*, ‘to be.’” If this verb is understood in this simple stem, *’ehyeh* means ‘I will be’ or ‘I am,’ and Yahweh is understood to mean ‘he will be’ or ‘he (always) is.’” The Greek translation of the Old Testament renders *’ehyeh* into “I am the one who (eternally) is.”⁷⁶

What Christians should know and now realize is that the Trinitarian God of the Bible is a complex, thought-provoking phenomenon that is in no way “simple,” or “easily mastered.” So, the many people in the world who dismiss Christianity as a refuge for the ignorant or a consolation to the intellectually challenged truly reveal that they have no idea of who God is, nor have they ever taken the time to understand sound doctrine. Getting a firm grasp on the Trinity requires earnest effort and discipline on the part of the

⁷⁵ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Brief Socio-Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 120.

⁷⁶ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Brief Socio-Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 120.

believer. So if you feel as if you haven't gotten it yet, do not be discouraged, that's the normal response! It took one of the greatest theologians in history (Augustine) more than a decade to complete his analysis of the Trinity.

God Bless and on to Part III ...

Dr. C. H. E. Sadaphal

For Further Study:

<http://www.OpenBible.info/topics>. You can enter any word or search by topic to find a plethora of Bible verses related to your search term!

www.apologetics.org

Mark Driscoll, *On Who is God?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013). A wonderful and very short (less than 100 pages) booklet on the basic concepts of God. In particular, the first two sections include a synopsis of the different types of arguments in favor of God, and all the different types of theism, intelligently and succinctly answering "Does God exist?" from the Christian standpoint.

Saint Augustine and Edmond Hill, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2012). Augustine's theological work on the Trinity has stood the test of time even though it was written more than 1,500 years ago. If you want a good place to start, start here.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). A sound guide to Biblical doctrine that will assist any diligent Bible student in their search to know and understand.