

# WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH

## POSITION PAPER

### Topic: The Trinity

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#### INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

We must agree that Scripture is our final authority in settling questions of faith and practice. But when born-again, Spirit-filled Christians, following proper biblical principles, come to reasonable but differing interpretations; we do well not to become dogmatic in support of one position. We affirm the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and we desire to know for certain what God expects of us. When we come to a sure understanding of His divine Word, we are committed to declaring and obeying those clear instructions.

In the following position paper we address one of many topics that have raised a fair degree of discussion, and, at times, arguments among the brethren. It is not our intention to fuel these arguments but rather to state our position based on our earnest understanding of the Scriptures. With this said, we also exercise caution in not stirring unnecessary strife or division among the brethren, and have made every reasonable effort to base our positions on Scripture, not personal opinion or conjecture. We respect and love our brothers and sisters who hold alternative interpretations on issues that are not critical to our salvation or standing before God.

#### THE TRINITY

We believe that God has revealed Himself as three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three are fully God and each is a distinct revelation of the one God. Each person of the Trinity is eternal, equal, and omnipotent. Although the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, the three persons are revealed in different places in the Old and New Testament. Before looking at these places, we will briefly cover the history of this doctrine.

#### THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

When and how did this doctrine develop? To answer this, we must go back to the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D.

The Council of Nicea was the first church council ever called. Until this time, the church was under severe persecution from the Roman Empire. Early in the fourth century, the emperor Constantine showed an interest in Christianity and was tutored by Hosius of Cordova who held to the doctrine of the Trinity. With peace in the empire, Christianity spread all across the world. However, in Alexandria a presbyter named Arius gathered a significant following around his teaching that Jesus was not God. As his teachings spread, the controversy grew and Constantine realized it needed to be addressed. He thus called for the first universal church council at Nicea to debate the matter.

Although the doctrine of the Trinity itself was not discussed, the doctrine of the deity of Christ was confirmed. In attendance were approximately 300 bishops, many of whom were divided over the issue. After hours of debate, the council concluded the following in their creed:

*"We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father. . . ."*

While the deity of Christ--a crucial aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity--was affirmed, Arius nevertheless continued to teach his doctrine of Christ's inferiority, and Arianism came back into favor for a short time. Fifty years later, in 381 A.D., the Council of Constantinople was called by

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Emperor Theodosius. Here the Nicene Creed was reaffirmed and further clarified. It is at this council that the Holy Spirit was declared equal in divinity with the Father and the Son.

The councils of Nicea and Constantinople did not establish a new creed but rather clarified and formalized the belief in the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, views already held by the apostles and church fathers.

**OLD TESTAMENT EVIDENCE OF THE TRINITY**

Deuteronomy 6:4 says "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" It would appear, at face value, that this scripture contradicts the doctrine of the trinity. However, the word translated "one" comes from the Hebrew word *echad*, which demonstrates compound unity of oneness. Or, in other words, 'one' made up of 'multiples.' *Echad* is found in several Old Testament scriptures that carry this same meaning. For example:

- Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become **one** flesh.
- Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth had **one** language and **one** speech.
- Genesis 34:16 then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become **one** people.

These are a few of the many examples of how *echad* is used to show the unity of oneness. How would the Hebrew be different if God had wanted to express absolute oneness? There is another Hebrew word, *yachid*, that is used to express the idea of absolute oneness. Examples of it are shown below:

- Genesis 22:2 2 Then He said, "Take now your son, your **only** son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."
- Judges 11:34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his **only** child.
- Proverbs 4:3 When I was my father's son, tender and the **only one** in the sight of my mother,

In addition to the intentional use of the word *echad* to provide clear evidence of the trinity, the Hebrew word *Elohim* is used 2607 of the 2845 times the word "God" is used in the Old Testament. *Elohim* is the plural form of *El* and is often translated "Us":

- Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let **Us** make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

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- Genesis 3:22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of *Us*, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"
- Genesis 11:7 Come, let *Us* go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."
- Isaiah 6:8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for *Us*?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

**NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE OF THE TRINITY**

John opens his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." *In the beginning was the Word* shows that the Word was eternally with the Father and not a created being. The second phrase, *and the Word was with God*, shows that the Word is a distinct person from the Father. Thirdly, *and the Word was God* reveals that although separate and distinct, the Word in nature and substance is fully God.

Throughout his Gospel, John demonstrates that Jesus possesses the attributes which qualify Him to be God. Jesus displays power over nature, over disease, and even death. He has a grasp of the Law of God which He, though not formally trained, teaches with such authority as had never been seen before (7:14-16). Testimony from John the Baptist (1:29; 3:26-36) shows His authority to be God.

Jesus also makes several statements revealing His divinity. In John 5:22-23 Jesus says, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." Here, Jesus commands followers to honor Him as they honor the Father. To do this, one must acknowledge Jesus as being equal in nature to God.

John 8:58 states, "'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am.'" The term *I am* is the term God used when He spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Here is a clear statement of Christ declaring His divinity.

In John 10:30 Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." Jesus did not mean "I am one in purpose with God." He was claiming to *be* God. The verses that follow His declaration make that clear: "Again the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God' (vv. 31-33). The Jews clearly understood His statement and Jesus does not deny their accusation.

The culmination of John's testimony of Jesus' deity is in 20:28, which is the conclusion he desires all his readers to come to. "Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'" John argues throughout his entire Gospel for the purpose that all who read it might come to believe that Jesus is God incarnate.

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John continues to reveal this understanding in his first epistle ... 1 John 5:7 says "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."

**CONCLUSION**

Though often misunderstood or simply rejected, we hold to the belief that God has revealed Himself as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And all three operate as one God! The trinity is difficult to explain and even more difficult to grasp (except by faith), however, upon careful study of the scriptures, there is clear evidence and substantiation of its truthfulness.

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