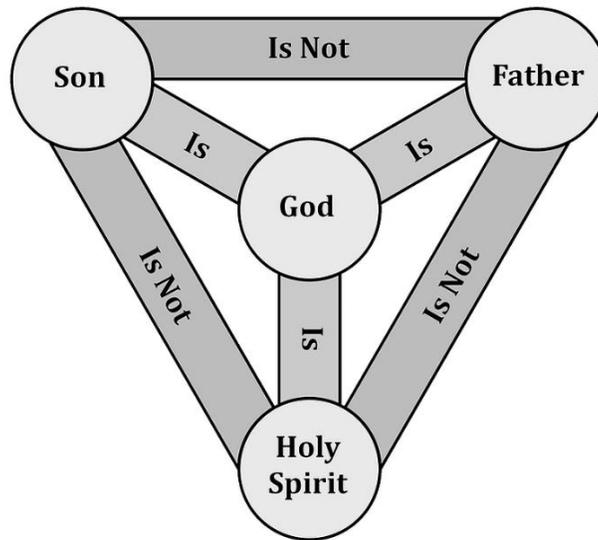**Prolegomena:** The doctrine of the Trinity is among the most important doctrines of the Christian faith. It is a central pillar of the Church, upon which all other teachings rest. It is the foundation of Christian theology, of salvation, and the very existence of creation. Yet it is also among the most misunderstood, neglected and forsaken articles of the faith. The Trinity can be defined as follows:

God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.

I. The doctrine of the Trinity is not based on a single verse or even a couple of verses. It is the summation of the entirety of scripture revealing the nature of God. It is fitting that the mystery of the nature of God's being is not confined to a handful of passages or verses but is instead an understanding brought forth from the complete study of His Word, from beginning to end.

A. The Old Testament followers of God were Jewish monotheists. They were focused on the oneness and uniqueness of Yahweh. This is expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4, the Shema, is the great declaration of this belief. This central expression of their understanding of the nature of God is reflected throughout the Hebrew scripture. This then raises the question whether or not the diversity of God, namely the threeness, is reflected in these same writings. The conclusion is that, though not fully revealed yet, the Old Testament does indeed imply a diversity within the unity of God.

1. The words used for God permit a diversity within God. Furthermore, there are occasions in the Old Testament when God appears to be distinguished from another addressed as God.

a. There are many passages that express the one God exists with a diversity of persons. The use of אֱלֹהִים (elohim) as a word for God indicates plurality. This is further reflected in several passages where God refers to Himself in the 1st person plural. Genesis 1:26 and 3:22 mark good examples of this. It is interesting to note that the use of the 1st person plural occurs at exceptional moments in Scripture: the creation of man, the fall of man, the judgment of the Tower of Babel, and the commissioning of the prophet Isaiah (which also includes the Trisagion). It seems probable that if God were to reveal important aspects of His nature, that momentous events like these would be occasions where He would choose to do so.

b. Throughout the Old Testament, including the Shema, the word used to denote "one" is אֶחָד (ehad). This word implies a composite unity, similar to the motto of the United State: E Pluribus Unum, which means "out of many, one". There is a single entity that is composed of multiple parts. The use of אֶחָד is related to the use of יָחַד (yahad), a verb that means "to be united". It stresses unity while acknowledging the diversity within the oneness. These terms stand in contrast to the term יָחִיד (yahid) which also means "one" but does so by implying a singularity, aloneness, and solitary oneness. It refers to things that are a non-composite oneness. An example of this is Genesis 22:2 and 12:16, where Isaac is referred to as Abraham's *only* son.

c. The names and titles used for God are also curiously open to a plurality within the unity of the divine being. Again, this is certainly not conclusive on its own but it conforms to the further revelation of the New Testament. The three most common words used to identify God are אלהים (elohim, "the powerful ones"), יהוה (Yahweh "I am") and אדני (adonai "masters"). The first and last are plural while Yahweh is singular. Thus, the oneness and diversity (threeness) of God is represented in the Old Testament names of God.

d. The manner in which God is addressed or described throughout the Old Testament recognizes this oneness and diversity and there are many occasions when God is seen thusly.

2. There are occasions throughout the Old Testament where the diversity within the oneness of God is apparent or it appears that a diversity within God is being addressed. A few examples are below:

- Psalm 110:1   David addresses two separate persons as Lord. One is Yahweh, the other adonai.
- Isaiah 6:8   In sending the prophet, the 1st person plural is used to describe God.
- Isaiah 9:6   Names for the Messiah are stated and include Mighty God and Eternal Father.
- Hosea 1:7   God's promise to Judah indicates that more than one person can be God.
- Job 35:10   God is referred to as "my makers", a plural term. See also Hosea 12:1, Proverbs 9:10

3. The persons of the Trinity can also be discerned within the text of the Old Testament.

a. The Spirit is present throughout the Old Testament. At times the Spirit is portrayed as a force issued by God but the Spirit is also depicted as a personal, divine agent that thinks, gives rest, guides, instructs and grieves. Examples of some of the functions we can see the Spirit performing include:

- Reflecting the nature of God: Isaiah 40:13, Psalm 139:7
- Giving life, order and beauty to creation: Genesis 1:2, 2:7, Job 33:4, Psalm 104:3
- Giving judgment or saving action: Isaiah 4:4, Haggai 2:5, Zechariah 4:6
- Empowering and giving speech to Israel's leaders: Judges 6:34, 1Samuel 11:6, Psalm 51:11, Isaiah 61:1

b. The Son is also present in the Old Testament, taking various forms, often functioning as an intermediary between God and His people.

- The Word of the Lord (the dabhar of Yahweh) is often seen as a powerful, irresistible act of speaking by God. Critical events in the Old Testament were performed by the agency of the Word of the Lord. These include creation, the flood, the covenants and speaking through the prophets. This takes on exceptional new meaning in light of the New Testament.

- The Wisdom of God is especially articulated in Proverbs 8:22-31. We see the place of Wisdom at the side of God during creation.

- The Angel of the Lord is often regarded as a Christophany, an appearance by the Son of God in the Old Testament. Though the term (literally the angel of Yahweh) is used of actual angels, there are significant times when the Angel of the Lord appears and it is distinguished by the use of the definite article. When these Christophanies occur, those who saw them are typically convinced that they have seen God. Examples include:

- Hagar visited by the angel of the Lord. (Genesis 16:7-14)
- Jacob wrestling with the angel. (Genesis 32)
- Treated as Yahweh, accepting worship and forgiving sin. (Exodus 23:20-23)

- The Commander of the Lord's Army is seen in Joshua 5:13-15 before the Lord's victory at Jericho.

c. The Holy Spirit is quite visible in the Old Testament as well. Although the Old Testament does not explicitly teach that the Holy Spirit is God or that it is a person within the Trinity. Instead, it never denies that the Spirit is God and at the same time, implies the divinity of the Spirit.

- The word that is used for the Spirit in the Old Testament is רוח (ruach, breath). The word is not simply the term for the act of breathing or the exhaling. It carries more forceful connotation, akin to heavy breathing or snorting. The implication is that the Spirit is a spirit of force and activity. The term is used 389 times in the Old Testament, but only around 100 of those uses are clearly referring to the Holy Spirit or the implied spirit of God. Other usages are referring to the mundane act of breathing or to a human person's spirit. Though this does create a margin of ambiguity in interpretation, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is being referred to in a number of these cases.

- The Spirit is seen performing a number of divine roles:

- The Spirit is seen creating and giving life (Genesis 1:2, 2:7, Job 33:4, 26:13, Psalms 104:30, Ezekiel 37:9-14).
- The Spirit endows wisdom, righteousness and special skills (Daniel 5:14, Psalm 51:11, Isaiah 32:15).
- The Spirit is observed inspiring visions and prophetic speech (Judges 13:25, Numbers 11:25-31).
- One of the most important references to the Spirit in the Old Testament is God's repeated promise of the outpouring of His Spirit on Israel. This will result in national restoration and spiritual cleansing (Isaiah 32:15, 44:3, Ezekiel 36:24-27, 39:29, Joel 2:28). Through this the way is made clear for the New Testament, where the ministry of John the Baptist points to baptizing "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).

B. While Trinitarian doctrine in the Old Testament is generally implicit, that is it speaks of the oneness of God while also creating the opportunity for diversity within the oneness, the New Testament is much more explicit about the oneness and threeness of God. The revelation of Jesus Christ, concerning Himself and the fact that He is indeed God, along with the Father and the Spirit, is a startling development. The expression of both the oneness of God, the diversity of the persons and the divinity of the individual persons of God is the concern of the breadth of the New Testament. An exhaustive examination is not feasible in the space allotted but it is possible to begin to step in that direction. It may be helpful to move through this in a sequence, addressing first the existence of all three persons as God together, then the distinctness one from the other, then the divinity of each distinct person. From there we go full circle, and affirm that there is only one God. The New Testament articulates all these things at once.

1. The three persons of the Trinity are named together and it is understood that all three are God.
It would be helpful if there was one verse or one passage from Scripture that articulated the reality of God as Trinity. Though there is not, there are many verses from the New Testament that do name the three persons together. A sample of these are:

- Matthew 3:16-17
- Matthew 28:19
- I Corinthians 12:4-6
- 2 Corinthians 13:14
- I Peter 1:2
- Jude 20-21

It is important to note that in the New Testament, θεος (theos) is typically associated with the Father while Κυριος (kurios) is usually used in association to the Son (Jesus).

2. Though all are God, each person of the Trinity is distinct from the other.
God exists as three persons and each person is distinct from the other. Although there, once again, is not a single verse that affirms this succinctly, there are many verses, when taken together, leave no other conclusion than that there is a diversity of threeness within God. Examples include:

- John 1:1-2 indicates the Son was with the Father. Being with him indicates distinction.
- John 17:24 also expresses the persons of the Father and the Son being together yet distinct.
- John 14:26 reveals that the Father and the Spirit are separate.
- John 16:7 shows that the Son and the Spirit are distinct from one another.

3. God has three distinct persons.
Despite Scripture revealing that God exists in three persons, each of those persons are fully God. They all share in the divine nature, the divine essence of God, making them all equal in divinity.

- The Father is clearly revealed to be God. The breadth of the Old Testament is testimony to this. It should be noted that the attributes of God as they are revealed in the Old Testament can generally be seen as referring to the Father.
- John 1:1-4 explicitly states that the Son, expressed as the Word, is fully God.
- Matthew 28:19 establishes the Spirit's divinity in the baptismal formula.

4. All three of God's distinct persons, Father, Son and Spirit, are all one God.
Having seen the three persons together, that all the persons are distinct from one another and that they are all fully God, it is still critical to establish that there remains only one God. This is the essential thrust of the Old Testament but it remains manifest in the New Testament. Where the old emphasizes the oneness with allusions to diversity, the new emphasizes the threeness but never at the expense of the one.

- The great Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, is the greatest, but by no means the only verse the stresses the oneness of God.
- Another great passage (among many) of oneness in the Old Testament is Isaiah 45:5-6.
- I Timothy 2:5 repeats the assertion of God's oneness.
- Echoed again in Romans 3:30.

- It is important to remember that the revelation of God's oneness is to be understood with the threeness revealed in the New Testament. At no point do they contradict. The church fathers saw no need to jettison the Old Testament in light of the revelations of the New Testament. They are both inspired Scripture.

C. The teaching that God is triune can be approached in different ways. Thus far we have looked at the testimony of the Old and New Testaments. Through that, we see that the Bible teaches that God is one and in that oneness there is a threeness. This then demands an examination of each of the three persons individually.

1. God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, is as He is identified, the Father, the source of all things.

a. Surprisingly little is revealed about the Father in the Bible. We can cautiously say that God, as revealed in the Old Testament, reflects the Father, especially in terms of holiness and sovereignty. However, these also describe the Son and Spirit so we do not want to take this too far.

b. As noted, Ephesians 4:6 declares the Father is the source of all things. Even within God, the persons of the Son and Spirit are eternally proceeding from the Father. This is not to say that the Father is "more God" than the Son and the Spirit. They are all equally and fully God. Instead, it is a reflection of role or function. This is often expressed by saying that the persons of the Trinity have "ontological equality but economic subordination." Put simply, they are equal in being and essence but willingly subordinate in roles.

c. It is through the activity of the Father that we are best able to understand who He is:
- He is the sovereign ruler. (Ephesians 1:3-11)
- He is the creator of all things through the Son and the Spirit. (Genesis 1:1-3, John 1-5)
- The Holy One, the judge. (1Peter 1:15-17)
- Compassionate Reconciler. (John 3:16)
- Him to Whom all things return. (1Corinthians 15:24-28)

2. The Son is the second person of the Trinity, fully God and the hands of the Father. There are too many affirmations of Christ's deity and His oneness with the Father to cover adequately here. However, it is necessary to draw some attention to a few particularly salient passages that are especially important for understanding the Son's divinity, oneness with the Father and Spirit and some of His attributes.

a. Proofs for Christ's divinity from the Gospels:

- John 8:58 "I am"	- John 1:1-3,	- Matthew 28:18-20
- John 10:30	- John 20:28	- Mark 1:24

b. Proofs for Christ's divinity from the Epistles:

- Romans 9:5	- Colossians 1:14-19, 2:9	- Acts 20:28
- Philippians 2:6-11	- Hebrews 1:1-14	

c. Proofs regarding Christ's attributes:

- Pre-Existence: Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2, John 17:5	- Omnipotence: Matthew 28:18, Hebrews 1:3
- Omnipresence: Matthew 18:20, 28:20	- Immutability: Hebrews 6:18, 13:8, John 14:6

d. Proofs regarding the divine works of Christ:
- Creator of all creation: Colossians 1:16-17, Hebrews 1:2,10, John 1:1-3
- Sustainer of all things: Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3, John 1:4
- Conceived by the Spirit and born of a virgin: Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:16, 23-25, Luke 1:35
- All the miracles performed by Christ

3. The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. While the Old Testament implies the divinity of the Holy Spirit and the New Testament reveal explicitly the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit.

a. This can be seen in some of the activities of the Spirit:
- Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35).
- John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15) and he announced the coming of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11-12, Luke 3:16, Mark 1:8).
- Jesus' ministry was inaugurated with the presence of the Spirit (Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:22, Mark 1:10).

b. All these things testify to the divinity and personhood of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's attributes are enumerated throughout the New Testament. Some examples include:
- Divinity (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18)
- Distinct from the Father and the Son (John 14:16)
- Intelligence (I Corinthians 2:10-14)
- Emotions (Acts 9:31, Romans 8:26, Ephesians 4:10)
- Will (John 16:13-14, which is akin to the Father's relationship to Jesus described in John 5:19,30; 6:38; 8:50)

Having shown, in cursory fashion, the expression of the oneness and threeness of God throughout scripture, it is now at last appropriate to once again articulate the doctrine of the Trinity:

God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.

II. Having established that God is Trinity, it raises the necessary question why it matters? Does the Trinity make a difference in what we believe? If so, how? What does believing that God is triune change, if anything? The short answer to this question is that it matters immensely. The doctrine of the Trinity lies at the heart of Christianity. Without it, all else collapses or rushes headlong into error. It may be helpful to observe a few cases where this is evident.

A. It may not seem revolutionary, but it is important to recognize that God is a loving God. This love is not simply a love that comes from an emotional affinity the God has. It is deeply rooted in the very heart, the being of God. Consider how John articulates this:

1. In John 1, it is established that the Son and the Father have both existed eternally before creation, that they are both God and that there is one God. The essential nature of the Father was the essential nature of the Son.

2. Jesus, in John 17:24, confesses that the Father has loved the Son since before the world was made. Furthermore, John 17:26 declares that Jesus desires that the love existing between Father and Son may be shared with humanity.

3. John expands this further, bringing the argument full circle in 1 John 4:7-8. He argues that love comes from God and God is love. Consequently, those who have been born again share in God's love.

- God is love because the fundamental nature of God is the loving relationship within Himself, between the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

4. Since God is Trinity, He is sufficient within Himself for all things. He can be good because He is able to be good within Himself, one divine person to another. Creating others to love is therefore an appropriate action for Him to take. Thus, Christ, the object of the Father's love is prototype for all those that God will make to share in His love (Colossians 1:15). What the Father wills, the Son helps create and the Spirit breathes life into the universe.

B. Although God created humanity to share in His love, their love turned towards themselves and away from Him. This is the opposite of what we were created to share in. Note that the commandments Christ gives, to love God and to love others, is an undoing of the sin of Adam. To love outwardly, rather than inwardly, to share in the loving relationship of God rather than to love ourselves. Thankfully God is gracious and has provided a way to be restored to relationship with Him.

1. 1 John 4:8-10 declares that God shows His love for us by sending His Son into the world on our behalf.

2. In His love for us, He sent His Son to die on our behalf (1 John 3:16, John 3:16).

3. In Jesus' high priestly prayer (John 17), the purpose of Christ's mission is clear. The Son comes as both high priest and sacrifice. To satisfy God's justice, and eternal sacrifice is necessary, yet it must be paid in our blood. Thus, it is only possible for the Son, through the Incarnation, make an acceptable sacrifice (Hebrews 14-17).

4. Consequently, the love shared between the persons of the Trinity is opened to us through the work of the Son and the Spirit. John 17:25-26 gives us a glimpse into what is offered: to share in the loving relationship that exists between the Father, Son and Spirit. Through the work of the cross, Jesus has made it possible for us to be cleansed of that which separates us from God and to share in the love that has existed throughout eternity.

- Our salvation is achieved by the work of all three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit.

C. Having been redeemed by the work of Christ, we have new life breathed into us by the Spirit. Just as the breath of God breathed life into Adam, just as the Spirit gave life to the Son in the tomb, now the Holy Spirit gives life to those who have been cleansed by Christ. However, it is more than just being given new life, we are indwelt by the Spirit just as the Father and the Son are in one another. By this, we are able to share in the loving relationship that is God.

1. Not only has the work of the Son redeemed us, the Spirit now makes us more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). God, through the diverse work of the Trinity is conforming us to His image so that we can participate in the loving relationship, just as He does.

2. That loving relationship is not limited to our individual relationship with God, but also to our relationship with other believers. Just as God is defined by the love the persons of the Trinity bear one another, so too is the church defined by the love we bear one another (John 13:35).

3. Through the work of the Son and the Spirit, believers are being forged into one body, that we may be united with God, both as a body, and individually (Ephesians 2:17-22)

- Just as God is one yet diverse, so is the church one and diverse and through it we share in God's love.

III. The doctrine of the Trinity lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Through the scriptures, God has revealed Himself as one God with three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. Our understanding of who God is sets Christians apart from every other religion in the world. Moreover, almost every great heresy stems from the denial of the Trinity or the human and divine natures of Christ. From the very beginning of the church, this is an issue that has defined the church, as believers have sought to defend this true and beautiful teaching of Christianity.

The following is a list of some of the historical anti-Trinitarian heresies:

Adoptionism: The belief that Jesus became son of God by exaltation to a status that was not his at birth. By being adopted by the Father, he becomes God the Son.

Apollinarianism: A teaching that Jesus had a perfect divine nature and assumed an imperfect body with the Logos taking the controlling place ordinarily held by the mind.

Arianism: A heresy stating that the Son does not possess the same nature or substance as the Father but was created as an agent for creating the world.

Docetism: An early heresy claiming that Jesus Christ appeared to men in a spiritual body and that since he had no actual human body he only appeared to suffer and die on the cross.

Ebionism: The belief that Jesus was a human who, by virtue of his righteousness, was deemed to be the Messiah. They believed his ministry was inaugurated at his baptism.

Gnosticism: While not even remotely Christian, Gnosticism dresses extreme Neoplatonism in Christian sounding terms. It is extreme dualism, regarding the physical world as bad. Jesus is considered an emanation of the monad.

Modalism: A way of understanding God that claims that the members of the Trinity are not three distinct persons but rather three modes or forms of activity in which he manifests himself.

Monarchianism: An anti-Trinitarian teaching that asserted that God is a single person as well as a single being.

Sabellianism: Another term for modalism which emphasizes the oneness of God and claims that he wore various masks (modes) to achieve his purposes.

Many modern religious movements continue in these anti-Trinitarian traditions. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and the New Age movement all reject the Trinity and redefine who Jesus is, rejecting either His divinity or His oneness with the Father and Spirit or both teachings and others. In light of this, and many other factors, it is critical for Christians to understand God as He has revealed Himself to be, which is Trinity.

IV. The following is a short list of important theological terms to help speak about God:

Aseity: God is self-existent and does not derive from or depend on anything outside of Himself.
Immutable: God and His attributes and nature do not change.
Impassible: God is above all human or other finite influences.
Omniscience: God knows all things.
Omnipotence: God is all powerful.
Omnipresent: God is everywhere always completely present.
Transcendence: God is distinct from and above all earthly and heavenly creation.
Immanence: God is everywhere present within creation.