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**The 16 Foundational Truths Series**  
**There is one true God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

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**Editor's note:** This is the second in a series of eight monthly articles on the 16 Foundational Truths of the Assemblies of God, written by faculty of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary.

*The one true God has revealed Himself as the eternally self-existent "I AM," the Creator of heaven and earth and the Redeemer of mankind. He has further revealed Himself as embodying the principles of relationship and association as Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

Christians believe there is one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is both one and three at the same time. For that reason, we speak of God as Trinity, and our belief in God as Trinitarian.

**Illustrations**

Many illustrations have been used to help understand the Trinity. The egg is one but is also composed of shell, white and yolk. Water may be present in three ways: liquid, steam or ice. A triangle is one but has three sides. Space is a unity but is three dimensional with width, length and depth. The human mind is one but has memory, understanding and will. While none of these illustrations is really adequate, they may be useful to show that the God who creates these kinds of

tri-unity in nature may himself be characterized by tri-unity. What the Bible says about God must determine our belief.

### **The biblical witness**

God revealed himself to Israel as one God, establishing monotheism (belief in one God) in sharp contrast to the polytheism (belief in many gods) of Israel's pagan neighbors. The ancient creed that God gave to His people to express their faith is called the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4, NIV). The Israelites were to recite it regularly and faithfully teach it to their children (Deuteronomy 6:7). Centuries later, Jesus, as a boy, learned that lesson and himself taught, as did the Jews of His day, that God is one (Mark 12:29; John 5:44). Likewise, the New Testament letters show that early Christians believed and taught "there is no God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4; see James 2:19).

However, biblical belief in one God differs from that of other religions. The Old Testament hints in many ways that while God is one, His being is far more complex than might at first appear. For example, in addition to the activity of God in the creation story, the Spirit of God is also at work (Genesis 1:2) and often appears thereafter in the Old Testament. We also read about the Angel of the Lord (Exodus 23:23) who seems to be a divine Person. God's visit to Abraham shows Him in the company of others (Genesis 18:2). One of the Hebrew names for God, *Elohim*, that appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament, is plural in form. The Old Testament uses plural pronouns of God: "Let *us* make man in *our* image ... " (Genesis 1:26; see also 3:22; 11:6,7). More than one divine Person is found in the conversation of Psalm 45:6,7: "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever ... therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions" (see also Isaiah 48:12-16). None of these texts and narratives alone proves that God is triune. Taken

together, they do suggest that the one God is some way also plural.

In the New Testament, we are immediately confronted with a threefold manifestation of God. At the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit of God descended upon Him and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17; see also Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22). The baptismal narratives apparently intend to show that three divine Persons were simultaneously present and acting – the Father who spoke from heaven, the Holy Spirit who descended in the form of a dove, and Jesus, the Son of God, who, after His baptism in water received the Spirit. The baptismal formula lists Father, Son and Spirit as distinct Persons (Matthew 28:19), as do many other New Testament texts (Romans 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14, et al).

Moreover, the New Testament regularly identifies the Father as God (John 6:27); Jesus, also called the Word, as God (John 1:1); and the Holy Spirit as God (Acts 5:3,4). Each of the three is shown throughout the New Testament to have the attributes, or qualities, of deity such as omnipotence (all power), omniscience (all knowledge), and omnipresence (everywhere and always present).

Each of the divine Persons often has a distinct role and is more prominent in one aspect of our redemption. The Father is associated with the plan of salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6). The Son assumed a human body in the incarnation (John 1:14) in order to reveal God to us and die on the cross as a substitute for our sins (Ephesians 1:7,8). The Holy Spirit applies the work of salvation in the new birth (John 3:5,6; Titus 3:5,6) and is our faithful witness and guide (Romans 8:14-16). In carrying out the work of redemption, the Son submits to the Father's will (Mark 14:35,36; John 17:4) and both Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 16:7) to believers.

Though indeed three Persons, they yet reflect a deep unity. Jesus frequently said such things as, "I and

the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "I am in my Father" (John 14:20). He promised to send the Holy Spirit to live in His disciples and yet affirmed that He, too, would be in them (John 14:16-21). The regular linkage of their three names throughout the New Testament shows that they cannot be separated. If separated, they would be three gods, which is certainly not biblical.

### **The uniqueness of Jesus**

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme manifestation of the Triune God to humankind. Always present with Father and Spirit in eternity, the divine Son became fully human as Jesus of Nazareth for that purpose (Matthew 1:23; John 1:1,2,14; Hebrews 2:14). "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father," Jesus said (John 14:9). "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets ... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. ... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15). Our Lord, fully human and fully divine, "appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

### **Our statement**

Though it says much about our Triune God, the Bible does not give a full explanation of His nature and inner relationships. Therefore, it took the Early Church several centuries to compare all the biblical texts, weigh their meanings, and agree on a statement. By the fourth century, the creeds (statements of belief) stated that God eternally is one divine essence manifested in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three are not to be confused but

neither can they be separated or divided. They are eternally equal in their divine nature but in their redemptive work the Son is subordinate to the Father and the Spirit subordinate to the Father and the Son. We in the Assemblies of God affirm historic Trinitarian doctrine in our Statement of Foundational Truths.

### **Importance**

The doctrine of the Trinity is important because: (1) It best explains what the Bible teaches about God. (2) It shows how God's nature can be love (1 John 4:16) since long before there were angels or human beings to love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed in perfect fellowship and love for each other. (3) It best explains how God brings to pass our salvation since one Person of the Trinity, Jesus the divine Son, became human to reveal God, die an atoning death, and be resurrected on our behalf. (4) It sharply distinguishes Christianity from other faiths – both those who believe in one God and those who believe in many gods.

The Trinity is, and always has been, a mystery. If we were capable of fully understanding God, we would be His equal. Therefore, we take what the Bible says by faith and follow the wisdom of the historic church as it has been illuminated and guided by the Holy Spirit.