

The Trinity and the Nature of Christ
VBC Adult Sunday School
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There were two main foes of the ancient church: government and societal persecution in the infant church and doctrinal attacks on orthodoxy from within in the adolescent church. The list of heresies faced by the early church is long (see Terry's notes on pages 4-5) and somewhat complicated in the fine points. However, the main two areas attacked were the doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of Christ. Today we will look at both of these doctrines.

The Trinity

The doctrine of God as Three-in-One is unique to Christianity. It is admittedly difficult to grasp the truth of God as a Triune Being, yet it should not surprise us to find aspects of God that are beyond our full and complete comprehension. The doctrine's difficulty does not diminish its importance – the issue of whom we worship is of profound significance in life.

⁸“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isa 55:8-10

The Trinity results from an understanding of God derived from a systemization of teachings from His Word. Apart from the New Testament, we could not have conceived of God in the manner He has presented Himself to us. Because the Trinity accurately reflects the being of God, if we love God we are compelled to seek to understand it and study it. Our passion for God moves us to glorify Him as we ought, giving proper adoration to His Being as revealed to us. Therefore, while difficult, the doctrine of the Trinity is far from merely academic.

The Trinity defined

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there is only one God who exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is co-equal and co-eternal in one united nature as Divine. Each person of the Godhead has the same attributes and are equally worthy of adoration, worship, and faith. Yet each person has particular works He accomplishes.

The Trinity discerned

Since the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, its truth is derived by bringing a series of truths together into a complete whole. This is what is known as systematic theology. The Trinity is deduced through an abundance of clear teaching of the Bible concerning four fundamental points:

1. God is One.
2. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct persons.
3. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are described in the Bible as God.
4. God is unchangeable.

If God is One and the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each individually God and immutable, then the Trinity is the necessary conclusion.

The oneness of God

The description of the Trinity begins with the unity of God. There is only one God. The Old Testament affirms the oneness of God:

⁴“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! Deut 6:4

¹⁰But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, And the nations cannot endure His indignation. Jer 10:10

¹⁰“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.

¹¹“I, even I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me. ¹²“It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, And there was no strange *god* among you; So you are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And I am God. ¹³“Even from eternity I am He, And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?” Isa 43:10-13

The New Testament also affirms the oneness of God:

⁴Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. ⁵For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶yet 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. 1 Cor 8:4-6

¹⁹You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. James 2:19

The oneness of God is beyond His unity. God is united in being. Unity is not only a description of God, it is His essence. God is indivisible.

The threeness of God

The one God exists eternally as three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The very first hint of the plurality of Persons within the Godhead comes as early as the first chapter of the Bible where God speaks of Himself in a plural sense:

²⁶Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Gen 1:26-27 (Cf. Genesis 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8)

In context, the plural name for God, Elohim, speaks of God's supremacy more than the Trinity. However, while the plural is for magnification it opens the door for plurality. Also, the plural sense in Hebrew is three or more, further implying the Trinity.

The threeness of God is developed in the New Testament as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as all are recognized as God. This observation of the Deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is foundation to Trinitarianism.

Importantly, the threeness of God does not contradict the oneness of God because the threeness is in respect to *persons* and oneness is in respect to *essence*. Christianity does not claim that God is one person and three people, or one nature and three natures. This would be contradictory.

The distinction of Persons

In the Old Testament, God the Father is distinguished within the Godhead in several ways.

- God is set apart from the Lord (Genesis 19:24; Hosea 1:7).
- The Lord is set apart from the Redeemer (Isaiah 59:20).
- The Lord is set apart from the Spirit (Isaiah 48:16; 59:21; 63:9-10).
- The Lord is set apart from the Angel of the Lord (Genesis 16:7-13; Malachi 3:1).

In the New Testament, God the Father is distinguished from the Son in that they relate with each other (Matthew 17:5; 27:46). Also, the Son and the Spirit are distinct from each other (John 16:13-14). The term "person" is somewhat inadequate because it connotes some things that are true of God and some things that are not. By using the term "person," Christians do not mean that God has a physical body or that there are three distinct beings. We have only known one person as equaling one being. The concept of three persons in one being is unfamiliar to us.

The relationship of Persons

Jesus Christ is uniquely described as God's "only begotten Son" (John 3:16). He is also described as "the only begotten God" in John 1:18. The Holy Spirit is uniquely described as "proceeding from the Father" in John 15:26. The Father sent the Son (John 5:36-37; 6:44; 1 John 4:14) and the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 1 Peter 1:12) in Christ's name. Due to the eternity of Jesus Christ, "begotten" must be understood in the sense of generation not creation.

From this we can deduce that the Father begat the Son and the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. The difference between "begat" and "proceed" is a fine point indeed. The more common word "sent" is perhaps the safest place to focus the relationship within the members of the Trinity.

There is clearly an initiating role that God the Father has in the Trinity. The Father sent the Son with authority (Matthew 28:20; John 5:26-27, 30) and also sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The Son clearly has the initiating role with the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

Whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son was one of the reasons for the "Great Schism" in 1054 AD, when the Eastern and Western church split, dividing the organized church. The Eastern church (Orthodox Church) taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. The Western church (Roman Catholic Church) taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. In light of John 15:26 and 16:7 saying that the Son will send the Holy Spirit, the Western Church has the weight of the Scripture on its side.

The relationship within the Trinity never describes the Father in a subordinate role and never describes the Holy Spirit in an initiating role. While there is a functional order within the Trinity, this does not lead us to conclude there is a subordinate nature. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in nature as God. We can see an analogy with mankind where all have an equal humanness but function differently in our roles. The nature of God's immutability lead us to believe, with historical Christianity, that the ordering of the relationships within the Trinity is eternal.

As there is a functional order within the roles of the Trinity, there is an order of emphasis that the Father, Son and, Holy Spirit serving in relation to creation. For example, in salvation we find the Father in the role of electing (1 Peter 1:2), the Son in the role of redeeming (1 Peter 1:18), and the Holy Spirit in the role of regenerating (Titus 3:5).

The limitations of analogies

Many analogies have been suggested to illustrate the Trinity over the past two millennia. Some of the more notable include: The analogies of time (past, present, future), matter (solid, liquid, gas), the sun (itself, its light and its heat), and space (height, width, depth) distort a fair representation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Each of these analogies lead toward the heresy of modalism – one God who acts in different roles (or modes) as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been compared to our relationship to our own self-image. The very act of thinking, it is pointed out, requires a type of plurality within a person (e.g. who is talking and who is listening?) and so with the act of loving or hating oneself (who is loving and who is being loved?). The "fellowship" of the three divine "persons" is analogous. An improved illustration is that person's intellect, heart, and will exist within the unity of the each person. Each "aspect" of a person is distinct, yet inseparable from the others, and together they constitute the single personality of that person. However, each of us is distinctly one person so this describes how one person relates to himself, not how three relate in one Being.

Analogies from mathematics have represented God as $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ or as one cubed (1^3). A very common geometric illustration is a triangle, with the Father at the top of the triangle. Several variations exist of the triangle illustration, showing all three as God but yet distinct from each other.

All illustrations necessarily fall short of communicating God. What illustration can be created to fully represent a single human, much less God Himself? It is impossible to look at what is created and see anything more than a image of certain aspects of God. To describe God in words is difficult enough without confusing Him by using flawed analogies.

The major corruptions of the Trinity

Since the early church there have always been groups that have deviated from Trinitarian doctrine. While the groups change, the deviations are similar and can be listed.

1. Arianism

Arius was a fourth century church leader from North Africa who led a large movement opposing the Deity of Jesus Christ. Arianism taught that God was One and that Christ was the first of God's created order. Arius was vigorously opposed and the focus of the Council of Nicaea in 325.

This council produced the famous Nicene Creed: "We believe in one God, the Father All Governing, creator of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father, through whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human. He suffered and the third day He rose, and ascended into the heavens. And He will come to judge both the living and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit. But, those who say, Once He was not, or He was not before His generation, or He came to be out of nothing, or who assert that He, the Son of God, is of a different hypostasis or ousia, or that He is a creature, or changeable, or mutable, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them."

Arianism survives today most notably in the Jehovah's Witnesses.

2. Modalism

Modalism taught that One God manifested Himself in three separate appearances, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while ignoring the distinction between the Persons of the Trinity.

Modalism, was also found under systems such as modalistic monarchianism, Sabellianism and Patripassianism, all teaching that God is one person who revealed Himself in three ways at points in time, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is found most commonly today in Oneness Pentecostalism, the largest organization being the United Pentecostal Church. T.D. Jakes is a well known tele-preacher who teaches modalism.

3. Adoptionism

Adoptionism, also known as dynamic monarchianism, saw Jesus as a human endowed with unusual power by the Holy Spirit. The idea of the Holy Spirit as an empowering force can be found today in the original Worldwide Church of God and in Christadelphianism.

The importance of the Trinity

Christians consider the Trinity to be an essential doctrine of the faith because it is God's being. To worship apart from Trinitarianism is to worship another God. To deny the Trinity necessarily results in grave results to essential truths.

For example, if Jesus is not fully God, then He could not justly suffer for our sins as the perfect sacrifice. Our sin is first and foremost against God Himself. It is because of the Trinity that Jesus was worthy to pay the penalty for our sin.

This impact of a distorted view of the Trinity on the gospel can be observed by the strong correlation between a flawed view of the Trinity and a flawed view of grace. Every group that distorts the Trinity has a corresponding distortion of the gospel of God's grace. The Trinity is essential to the gospel theologically and in practice.

Also, we will not worship God the Son if we do not consider Him to be Divine. Our worship of God should grow according to our understanding of Him. Those who distort God by denying the Trinity lead to robbing God of worship. They not only are failing to worship the Son for themselves, they are leading others astray in worship. These things strike at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

In addition, the imbalances we find in worship today come from wrong emphasis in our view of God. People who have exalted the role of the Spirit in worship become lost in a search for experiences with God. Yet if we diminish the truth that those who worship must do so in Spirit and truth (John 4:24), we can lose the joy and power of true worship.

Can a person become a Christian without a proper understanding of the Trinity? Yes, for several reasons. First, our salvation is not dependent upon our ability to understand God. Salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ, not through our doctrinal study. Second, how much doctrine can we expect a new Christian to understand? How many in the early church could accurately explain the Trinity?

The development of the Trinity has come as a result of its denial. Those opposing the Trinity have forced God's people to understand the Scripture more clearly in this matter. We all should expect to develop in our understanding of God over time.

While a person can believe in Jesus Christ apart from an accurate understanding of the Trinity, a person cannot deny the Trinity and believe in Christ. To reject and oppose the Trinity is a serious matter indeed. The ancient church rightfully declared these false teachers as enemies of God.

Trinitarian formulas in the New Testament

There are several places in the New Testament where the Trinity is referenced in one passage. Baptism is to be done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

- Matt 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in **the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**"

The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is the best Trinitarian text because it not only includes the three Persons in one reference but it unites them as one being. The word "name" is singular, signifying a unity of Being with authority.

Several other Trinitarian references in the New Testament show the relationship of the three Persons of the Trinity together in one passage. Unlike Matthew 28:19, these Trinitarian references do not prove the Trinity, but they nevertheless suggest that God is Three-in-One.

- Matt 3:16-17: And after being baptized, **Jesus** went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the **Spirit of God** descending as a dove, and coming upon **Him**, and behold, **a voice out of the heavens**, saying, "This is My beloved **Son**, in whom **I** am well-pleased."
- John 14:16: "**I** will ask the **Father**, and **He** will give you another **Helper**, that **He** may be with you forever"
- 1 Cor 12:4-6: Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.
- 2 Cor 13:14: The grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the love of **God**, and the fellowship of the **Holy Spirit**, be with you all.
- Eph 4:4-6: There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
- 1 Pet 1:1-2: who are chosen according to the foreknowledge **of God the Father**, by the sanctifying work of the **Spirit**, that you may **obey Jesus Christ** and be sprinkled with His blood.
- Jude 20-21: 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.

Evidence of Christ as God from Jesus Himself

The pivotal proof of the Trinity in Scripture is the Deity of Christ. While not necessarily so, in practice, once the Deity of Christ is accepted, the doctrine of the Trinity follows.

1. Jesus accepts title of God (John 20:28; Matt 16:16)

Jesus would be greatly remiss in allowing Thomas in John 20:28 to stand uncorrected in assigning Jesus the name of God. If Jesus were not God, He should have done what Peter did in Acts 10:25-26 and distinguish Himself as only a man. Rather, Jesus confirms Thomas' exaltation of Him.

2. Jesus claims to do what only God can do (Mark 2:5-7; John 5:25ff.)

The scribes were correct in asking "who can forgive sins but God alone?"

3. Jesus claims attributes that only God has:

- Eternality (John 8:58; John 17:5)
- Omnipresence (Matt 18:20; 28:20)
- Omniscience (Matt 16:21; Luke 6:8; 11:17; John 4:29)
- Omnipotence (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 5:11-15; John 11:38-44)

By ascribing these attributes to Himself, Jesus equated Himself to God.

4. Jesus claims to be the "I am:" John 8:58

God declared Himself to be eternally pre-existing in the Old Testament (Ex 3:14; Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10). Jesus uses the same term to claim to be also eternally existing. By doing so, Jesus does more than ascribes eternity to Himself, He assumes a name of God for Himself.

5. Jesus identifies Himself with God: John 10:30; 17:5

Jesus is one with God in more than simply a sense of cooperation, such as believers in Christ are one. Jesus is one with God in essence. Thus He is glorified with God (John 17:5) and this is why the Jews, understanding this claim, attempted to stone Him for making Himself out to be God (John 10:32).

Jesus' words, "I and the Father are one" brings together the distinction of persons with the unity of being. One does not mean one in person for the word "one" is in the neuter form, not in the masculine. It speaks of essence.

6. Jesus accepts worship: John 5:23; John 9:38; Matt 28:9

Worship of any created thing is condemned in the Scripture (Rom 1:25). By accepting worship Jesus separated Himself as the Creator and co-equal with God.

Evidence of Christ as God from Other New Testament Passages

Many other New Testament references explicitly call Jesus "God" or describe Him as God. Each of these stand alone in the proof of the Deity of Christ, but taken together they are overwhelming evidence.

- The word [Jesus] was God: John 1:1
- Jesus is God with us: Matt 1:23 (cf. Isa 7:14)
- The church of God: Acts 20:28
- Jesus is God over all: Rom 9:5

- Jesus is the Creator: Col 1:15-18
- Jesus has the fullness of Deity: Col 2:9
- Jesus is our great God and Savior: Titus 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1
- Jesus is worshipped: Heb 1:6; Phil 2:10 (cf. Rev. 19:10)
- Jesus is called "God" by the Father: Heb 1:8
- Jesus is the True God and Eternal Life: 1 John 5:20
- Jesus is the Alpha and Omega: Rev 22:13....1:8, 1:17. 2:8; 21:8 (cf. Isa 41:4; 44:6)

Evidence that God in the Old Testament is Jesus in the New Testament

Many times the New Testament describes Christ through quotations or allusions to the Old Testament. In many cases, those references in the Old Testament are speaking of God. This is very compelling evidence that equates Jesus in the New Testament with God in the Old Testament.

- Eternal Creator: Psa 102:25-27....Heb 1:10-12
- Creator: Isa 40:28....John 1:3
- Savior: Isa 45:22; 43:11....John 4:42
- Raises the dead: 1 Sam 2:6....John 5:21
- Means of salvation: Joel 2:32....Rom 10:13
- Judge: Joel 3:12....John 5:27; cf. Matt 25:31ff.
- Light: Isa 60:19-20....John 8:12
- I AM: Ex 3:14....John 8:58; cf. John 18:5-6
- Shepherd: Psa 23:1....John 10:11
- Glory of God: Isa 42:8....John 17:1, 5
- First and Last: Isa 41:4; 44:6....Rev 1:17; 2:8
- Redeemer: Hosea 13:14....Rev 5:9
- Bridegroom: Isa 62:5; cf. Hosea 2:16....Rev 21:2
- Rock: Psa 18:2....1 Cor 10:4
- Forgiver of sins: Jer 31:34....Mark 2:7, 10
- Creator of angels: Psa 148:5....Col 1:16
- Confessed as Lord: Isa 45:23....Phil 2:10
- Jesus is the Mighty God: Isa 9:6....John 3:16

The term "Lord" in the Old Testament refers to God and it is used in the New Testament to refer to Jesus. One occurrence is Matthew 3:3, quoting Isaiah 40:3, which clearly refers to Jesus as the Lord as God in the Old Testament.

Evidence of the Holy Spirit as God

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. Once the Deity of Christ is accepted, the Deity of the Holy Spirit appeared to follow. Yet some who deny Christ's Deity have taught that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force used by God.

However, the Holy Spirit, known also as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is credited with the attributes of God in the Scripture. In more than 90 places, the Bible calls the Spirit of God the "Holy Spirit." Holiness is a basic characteristic of the Spirit. Insulting the Spirit is as sinful as trampling the Son of God under foot (Hebrews 10:29). The Spirit is inherently holy in His essence, rather than being assigned holiness as with the tabernacle or the temple.

The Spirit also has the infinite attributes of God:

- Eternality: The Spirit is "eternal" (John 14:16; Heb 9:14).
- Omnipresence: The Holy Spirit is omnipresent according to Psalm 139:7-8, being in heaven and in Sheol (139:8). God's Spirit fills many people at the same time (1 Cor 6:19).
- Omniscience: The Spirit of God is omniscient and "knows the thoughts of God" (1 Cor 2:11). The Spirit knows all things and is able to teach all things (John 14:26).
- Omnipotence: The works of God, such as creation, are ascribed to the Holy Spirit (Job 33:4; Psa 104:30). Also, the miracles of Jesus Christ were done "by the Spirit" (Matt 12:28). In Paul's ministry, the work that Christ accomplished was "through the power of the Spirit" (Rom 15:18-19).

Holiness, eternity, omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence are incommunicable attributes of God's essence, showing the Holy Spirit has the basic nature of God.

In Acts 5:3, Peter rebukes Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit. In the next verse, Peter describes the lie as being not to men but to God. This passage teaches that the Holy Spirit is both a Person and is equal to God. No one lies to a force and the Holy Spirit is more than representative of God. According to Acts 5:3-4, the Holy Spirit is God. This type of interchange of the Holy Spirit and God is also found with 1 Corinthians 3:16 (temple of the God) and 1 Corinthians 6:19 (temple of the Holy Spirit). Again, in Hebrews 10:15-17 the Spirit is described as saying what the Lord said. The equating of the Holy Spirit with God is also found in Acts 13:2 and in Hebrews 3:7-11.

That the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a force, can be found in the masculine references to Him. The Greek word for "spirit" (PNEUMA) is a neuter word, yet there are places where it is changed to a masculine word when the word is used to refer to the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). Furthermore, there are many references to the Holy Spirit involved in personal activities, such as speaking (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 21:11; 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:7), being grieved (Ephesians 4:30), teaching (John 14:26), bearing witness (15:26), convicting (16:8) and guiding (16:13).

Conclusion

Because God is uniquely three Persons in one Being, there are no analogies that can completely communicate the Trinity. Because the concept of three Persons dwelling in one Divine Being is unfamiliar to mankind, it is difficult to communicate this doctrine. The difficulty of man's understanding does not negate the importance of the Trinity. God is complex and what more important undertaking exists than to focus our attention on God's Being?

Christ's Nature

The Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus is both Divine and human. It is the melding of the Divine and human that was the primary source of doctrinal difficulty in the adolescent church.

Incarnation means “in flesh” and describes the act where the eternal Son of God was born of a virgin (as predicted in Isa 7:14 and shown by Matt 1:16) and took on sinless humanity. Jesus Christ is unblemished deity and perfect (sinless) humanity united in one Person forever (cf. John 1:14; Phil 2:7-8; 1 Tim 3:6). In His humanity Jesus had a literal physical body (Gal 4:4; Luke 2:52; 1 John 1:1; Matt 26:12) and a human soul and spirit (Matt 26:38; Luke 23:46). He grew hungry, thirsty, and tired and wept (Matt 4:2; (John 19:28; John 4:6; John 11:35).

Christ's deity is shown by:

1. the names attributed to Him – God (Heb 1:8), Son of God (Matt 16:16; 26:61-64a), Lord (Matt 22:43-45), and King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16)
2. His attributes of omnipotence (Matt 28:18), omniscience (John 1:48), omnipresence (Matt 18:20), life (John 1:4), truth (John 14:6), and immutability (Heb 13:8)
3. His works of creating (John 1:3), sustaining (Col 1:17), forgiving sin (Luke 7:48), raising the dead (John 5:25), judging (John 5:27) and sending the Holy Spirit (John 15:26)
4. being worshiped by angels (Heb 1:6), men (Matt 14:33), and one day all (Phil 2:10)
5. His equality with the Father (John 14:23; 10:30) and with the Father and the Spirit (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14)

The hypostatic (or one person) union is the doctrine that explains how Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. The concept of the Hypostatic Union (the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ) is one of the most difficult concepts to comprehend in theology.

Definition:

The Hypostatic Union is the unique combination of true humanity and undiminished deity that has existed since the incarnation. These two natures (divine and human) existed without confusion or loss of separate identity and they were inseparably united without transfer of attributes.

The Second Person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Christ came and took to Himself a human nature and remains forever undiminished deity and perfect humanity united in one person forever.

When Christ came, a Person came, not just a nature. He took on an additional nature, a human nature; He did not simply dwell in a human person. The result of the union of the two natures is the theanthropic Person (the God-man, Jesus Christ). [Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 227]

The two natures of Christ are inseparably united without mixture or loss of separate identity. He remains forever the God-man, fully God and fully man, two distinct natures in the one Person forever. Though Christ sometimes operated in the sphere of His humanity and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be attributed to His one Person. Even though it is evident that there were two natures in Christ, he is never considered a dual personality. [Enns, p. 227]

- Christ has two distinct natures: humanity and deity.
- There is no mixture or intermingling of the two natures.
- In Christ, the one person, the two natures are inseparably united without confusion.
- This unity of the two natures is permanent.
- Although He has two natures, Christ is one Person.

The False Historical Perspectives:

Docetism: In the late first century Marcion and the Gnostics taught that Christ only appeared to be a man. The apostle John referred to this false teaching in 1 John 4:1-3. This heresy undermines not only the reality of the Incarnation but also the validity of the Atonement and bodily resurrection. They denied the humanity of Christ.

Ebionism: Second century heresy that denied the deity of Christ, considering Jesus to be the natural son of Joseph and Mary but elected to be Son of God at His baptism when He was united with the eternal Christ.

Arianism: A heresy that denied the eternality of Jesus as the Logos. Arius reasoned that since Jesus was begotten, He must have had a beginning. Arians held that the divine nature of Christ was similar to God, but not the same. The Council of Nicaea condemned this teaching in A. D. 325, affirming that Jesus had the same nature as God.

Apollinarianism: Apollinarius sought to avoid undue separation of the natures of Christ. He taught that Christ had a human body and a human soul, but that He had the divine Logos instead of a human spirit. This Logos dominated the passive human body and soul. He therefore denied the integrity of the human nature of Christ. Apollinarius was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

Nestorianism: Nestorianism divided Christ into two persons. Nestorius explained that Jesus Christ was the form or appearance of the union of the two natures. The humanity had the form of Godhead bestowed on it, and the Deity took upon itself the form of a servant, the result being the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus in this view the two natures were separated, resulting in two persons. The teaching was condemned by the Synod of Ephesus in 431.

Eutychianism: Eutyches (ca. 378-454) reacted against Nestorianism and taught that there was only one nature in Christ. This error is also known as monophysitism. The divine nature was not fully divine, nor was the human nature genuinely human, and the result was a mixed single nature. This was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The definitive creedal statement with reference to the relationship of the human and divine natures in the one Person of Jesus Christ is the Creed of Chalcedon, which declares that the two natures of Christ were united without mixture, without change, without division, and without separation. Produced by the fourth ecumenical Council in AD 451, the Creed is a deliberate attempt to maintain an orthodox position in the face of a number of Christological heresies which had infected the Christian world by that time.

The Creed of Chalcedon:

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these "last days," for us and behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness. We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten -- in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" and in one reality (hypostasis). They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word (Logos) of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of Fathers (the Nicene Creed) has handed down to us.