- Both are totally absent from the New Testament. (The Greek word σταυρος, (stauros) nearly always translated cross, actually means a stake. See Strong's definition of σταυρος.)
- Both are completely absent from early church history.
- Both came into the church several centuries after the time of Jesus.
- Both are ubiquitous throughout the "Christian" world. Women wear small crosses round their necks. Bishops have larger ones on their robes. Many churches are built in the shape of a cross and have crosses on their rooves.

I have expanded and explained all these points in a separate article The Cross in History, Scripture and Church.

Summary

Church: The Trinity has been the central doctrine of mainstream Christian churches and denominations for 1700 years or more. This doctrine states that the Godhead consists of three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost (Spirit). Each of these is God and they are all one.

Bible: Neither the word Trinity nor the word person occurs anywhere in the Bible. Nor does the number 3 occur anywhere in connection with God. The Bible gives Jesus many wonderful titles, including Son of God, but nowhere does it call him God.

History: doctrines of trinities existed in Babylonian and other ancient religions long before the time of Jesus. The doctrine occurs nowhere in the New Testament. It became official church doctrine after the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and brought many pagan practices into the church. From that time people who have not believed in the Trinity have suffered every level of persecution from mild to burning at the stake.

The Doctrine of the Trinity
in
Church Tradition,
Scripture and History

have the Son of God does not have life" (1John 5:12). These are the real tests of faith.

Human organisations need human tests for membership. What does a candidate say he believes? But the true church of God is not a human organisation. "Man (and most of the church) looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1Sam 16:7).

Outsiders

The doctrine of the Trinity is a big stumbling block for outsiders. If Jesus is God and is a separate person from God the Father, and if the Holy Spirit is another separate person, outsiders immediately conclude that Christianity teaches the existence of three separate gods.

For Jews, the doctrine of the Trinity has been the defining difference between themselves and Christians. The central prayer in Jewish liturgy is known as the Sh'ma - "Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is one" - שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהֹוָה אֶחָד - Sh'ma Yisra'el, YHWH 'Eloheinu, YHWH 'eḥad. These are the exact words of Deut 6:4. Orthodox Jews recite the Sh'ma daily. Many Jews were put to death at the hands of the church in times past and died with the words of the Sh'ma on their lips.

Muslims also place a strong emphasis on the fact that Allah (the Arabic word for God) is one. No doubt many of them believe that Christians worship three gods.

For Jehovah's Witnesses, the doctrine of the Trinity has proved an excellent starting place to try to show church members that the teachings of their church are false. (See Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Witnesses.)

The Sign of the Cross

Just as the Trinity is universally regarded as the central doctrine of the Christian religion, the cross is universally regarded as its symbol.

The Trinity and the cross have the following major points in common:

Both have long pagan origins.

This and other writings available from

www.growthingod.org.uk/trinity-in-tradition-and-scripture.htm

www.growthingod.org

bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (2Pet 2:1).

None of these writers had positive predictions for the future. They foresaw the coming apostasy of the church which finally reached its lowest point just before the time of the Reformation.

The doctrine of the Trinity gradually gained ground until the time of the Emperor Constantine. He decreed that Christianity should be the religion of the Roman Empire. He wanted a version of Christianity that would be acceptable to the pagan Roman empire. It was at this point that the church began to adopt pagan festivals, pagan buildings and many other pagan practices. Was it coincidence that this was the time when the church officially adopted the doctrine of the Trinity? It subsequently became the church's central doctrine. (For more information see website God's Plan for All - ch 26.)

Other religions had father and son and mother gods, but the church had no obvious choice for the third person of the trinity; so it appears that the Holy Spirit was co-opted for this role.

From the time of Constantine on, belief in the Trinity became the acid test of who was a genuine Christian and who wasn't. Anyone who didn't profess belief in the Trinity was labelled a heretic.

This state of affairs has continued from then till the present day. The penalty for disbelief in the Trinity has varied greatly over the centuries. At times it has been exclusion from the dominant national church. At other times it has even been burning at the stake. Today it is usually exclusion from any official position in any church or organisation that believes in the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity has a very bad history! (See Violence in Christianity and Islam.)

Here we must ask a question: what is the true test of faith? Is it verbal assent to the doctrine of the Trinity? What test did Jesus give? "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). What did Paul say? "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ is not of him" (Rom 8:9). And in John's words: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not

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This writing has many hyperlinks. If possible, read it on an electronic device where you can easily click on them and read Bible references in full and other related topics.

Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity states that God consists of three persons, namely the *Father*, the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit*. This doctrine occupies a central place in all "orthodox" Christian denominations.

Does it occupy a central place in the Bible and particularly in the New Testament?

Has it occupied that place throughout the history of the Christian church?

Church Tradition

The Nicene Creed is a formal church statement of Christian doctrine created in 325 AD. It has 3 main sections, one for each person of the Trinity. From then till the present time the Trinity has been a central doctrine of all mainstream Christian churches. It clearly states that Jesus is God: "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father Light of Light, very (true) God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;"

Every traditional Roman Catholic or Anglican church service makes mention of the Trinity, often several times. The doxology, "Glory be to the **Father** and to the **Son** and to the **Holy Ghost**" is sung at the end of every psalm. Many preachers preface their sermons with the words, "In the name of *the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*". Many traditional church services end with the words of "The Blessing": "The blessing of God Almighty, the **Father**, the **Son**, and the **Holy Ghost**, be amongst you, and remain with you always. Amen". Alternatively, services end with the grace: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (from 2Cor 13:14).

Most churches use the Trinitarian formula when baptising according to the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and

make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the **Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**".

Many traditional English hymns have a Trinitarian theme. For example, the hymn "Holy, holy, holy. Lord God Almighty" ends with the words "God in three persons, blessed Trinity". The very hymn St Patrick's Breastplate begins "I bind unto myself this day the strong name of the Trinity" and goes on with the words "three in one and one in three".

Countless churches in western countries are called Trinity Church or Holy Trinity Church.

For many denominations, belief in the Trinity is the acid test of orthodoxy. All denominations that believe in the Trinity are considered to be orthodox. That means of course Roman Catholics, Greek or Russian Orthodox, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and many, but not all, Pentecostal groups.

Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christadelphians and others who do not believe in the Trinity or deity of Christ are considered to be sects.

As we see, the traditional church has placed a huge emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity. Is this teaching firmly based on Scripture as we would imagine? Or is it based mainly on church tradition?

We will turn to the Bible to find an answer.

Scripture

The Word "Trinity"

How many times does the word "Trinity" occur in the Bible? The word occurs nowhere from Genesis to Revelation. In fact, it has no equivalent word in either Hebrew or Greek.

The number three is never associated with God in any way. By contrast we read in Deut 6:4 (as every Jewish person knows) "Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is **one**". We also have the plain words of Jesus, "I and the Father are **one**" (John 10:30). He did not say, "I and the Father are two separate persons".

the benefit of the doubt to Trinitarian translation. The translators of the highly influential English King James Version of the Bible were all Anglican bishops who would invariably have had Trinitarian bias. They'd have lost their jobs and possibly their lives if they hadn't! This translation has had a strong influence on all later translations in English and other languages. (See King James Version.)

History

The doctrine of the Trinity did not begin in New Testament times. Surprisingly, it began long before the time of Jesus. The Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Indians, the Greeks and the Egyptians all had doctrines of trinities of gods! (See the website Ancient Trinitarian Gods for more information.) Several of these religions claimed that their three gods were all one.

The Babylonian trinity consisted of Nimrod, Semiramis and Tammuz, who were father, mother and son. The Hindu trinity consisted of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Other ancient religions had similar trinities.

Neither Jesus nor his apostles taught the doctrine of the Trinity. As we have seen, it appears nowhere in either the Old Testament or the New.

What happened after the days of the early church? Did the church steadily grow to maturity and in the knowledge of the truth for the next few centuries? Or did it begin a downward slide into darkness, error and paganism? What did the New Testament writers predict?

- Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29,30).
- John wrote, "This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already" (1John 4:3).
- Peter wrote, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who

The standard form of this verse has three serious problems:

- All recorded baptisms in the book of Acts are "in the name of Jesus". See [Acts 2:38](#), [Acts 8:16](#), [Acts 10:48](#), [Acts 19:5](#); see also [1Cor 1:13](#). Can we seriously believe that Jesus had told his disciples to baptise "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and that they totally ignored his instructions?
- After the words "All power is given to me ...", *"Make disciples in **my name**"* makes perfect sense; *"baptise in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit"* makes no sense at all.
- Jesus is a name; Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not a name.

Furthermore, this verse does not match anything that Jesus had previously said. As we have seen, he uses the phrase *my name* 20 times in the 4 gospels, but nowhere does he speak about the "name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

The [Biblical Unitarian website Matthew 28:19](#) gives more details about the problems with this verse.

2. See [1John 5:7,8](#) **(KJV):** and [1John 5:7,8](#) **(ESV)**. The KJV (and the NKJV which is translated from the same Greek manuscripts) includes the words "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost". Most modern translations which are based on older Greek manuscripts omit them. These words were almost certainly added by a well-meaning scribe to support the doctrine of the Trinity. If so, it confirms the idea that scribes could have also altered the text of Matt 28:19.

3. 2Cor 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." This verse is known as *the Grace* and is very familiar to many people because it is frequently quoted in church services, but it does not in any way state the church doctrine of the Trinity.

4. Other verses like [1 Cor 12:4-5](#), [Eph 4:4-6](#), [1 Pet 1:2](#) and [Rev 1:4-5](#) are similar. They mention God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but in no way do they state that God is a Trinity consisting of three persons.

Some Bible passages are ambiguous regarding the Trinity and different translators have translated them differently. Historically, the vast majority of translators have believed in the Trinity and have given

The New Testament places a huge emphasis on the name of Jesus and almost none on the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus uses the phrase my name more than 20 times in the gospels. Here are some references: [Matt 18:20](#), [Matt 18:5](#), [Matt 24:9](#), [Mark 16:17](#), [John 14:13](#), [John 14:26](#), [John 16:23](#). The phrase name of Jesus occurs 10 times in the book of Acts. (See [Acts 2:38](#), [Acts 3:6](#), [Acts 4:18](#), [Acts 8:12](#), [Acts 16:18](#), [Acts 26:9.)](#)

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17). Anyone going to a church service would think he had said, "Do everything in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost".

The Word *Person*

How many times does the word "person" occur in the Bible? Same answer as for Trinity! Zero! In fact, neither ancient Hebrew nor ancient Greek had any word for *person*. (Modern Hebrew uses the word *adam* (אדם) meaning *man*). The church needed a descriptive word that would be suitable for God, the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They coined the Latin word "persona" from the Greek word προσωπον (they have the same root letters of p, r and s). The word προσωπον means *face* and was used to describe the masks worn by actors in Greek plays. The idea was that God had three faces - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. English dictionaries say the word *person* means *a human being* or *a man, woman or child*.

The Word "God"

Before discussing whether the Holy Spirit and Jesus are God, we must ask a question. What is the meaning of the word God? Or to be exact, what is the meaning of the Hebrew word *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים)? Does Elohim mean the same as the English word God? The answer is "No"! The exact meaning of the word Elohim is not known though it seems to contain the idea of strength and power. It is something like *the Almighty*. In the Old Testament, of course, it is normally translated *God*. Sometimes, however, Elohim is translated *angels* as in [Ps 8:5](#). Sometimes *Elohim* is translated as powerful or important human beings as in [Ps 82:6](#):

and [Exod 22:8](#). Θεος (Theos), the Greek word for God, is used in the New Testament in a similar way to *Elohim*. It usually means God, but can also refer to angels or men.

Is the Holy Spirit God?

The Old Testament scarcely mentions the Holy Spirit, but refers frequently to the Spirit of God. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit (πνευμα άγιον) is mentioned 89 times, including 40 times in the book of Acts. I think most people agree that the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God are the same.

Are God and his Spirit two separate persons? Nothing in the Bible indicates that this is so. My spirit and I are not two separate persons. They are both me. You and your spirit and your mind and your body all make up the one person you. Are God and his Spirit separate beings? The Hebrew word for spirit רוּחַ (ruach) and the Greek word πνευμα both literally mean *wind* or *breath*. Is God's spirit or breath really a separate person from God?

Is Jesus God?

What is the identity of Jesus? Is he God, or is he **son** of God? Or is he both?

The New Testament refers to Jesus as **son** of God about 40 times. Jesus referred to himself as **son** of God. His followers referred to him as **son** of God. Even demon possessed people referred to him as **son** of God.

When Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered with the words, "You are the Messiah, the **Son** of the living God." Jesus gave total approval to this answer: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." Peter had got it right! He did not say, "You are God" as we would expect if traditional teaching is right. He said, "You are the Son of God".

Three passages of Scripture make clear statements about the identity of Jesus: [Phil 2:5-11](#), [Col 1:15-20](#) and [Heb 1:1-3](#). None of them say that he is God.

Just one passage in the New Testament appears to say that Jesus is God, rather than Son of God. In [John 20:27-29](#), when Thomas saw Jesus alive after his resurrection, he exclaimed in amazement, "My Lord and my God". But we cannot interpret this one statement in contradiction to the rest of the New Testament and indeed the whole of the Bible.

I have explained this verse and written in much more detail on whether Jesus is God or **son** of God in a separate writing, [Is Jesus God or Son of God?](#)

If Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God, then the word "God" in the Bible would be ambiguous. Every mention of God would have to say whom it meant. Did it mean "God the Father" or "God the Son" or "God the Holy Spirit"? These three phrases occur again and again in church services, but never once in the Bible. The Bible refers to "God the Father" simply as God. It refers to Jesus by his name and never as "God the Son". It refers to the Holy Spirit either as "the Holy Spirit" or "the Spirit of God" or simply "the Spirit" but never as "God, the Spirit". All the way through the Bible the word God means God (the Father) and never means Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

Specific Bible verses

Where does the Bible name *the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* together? We will look at the strongest New Testament verses.

1. Matthew 28:18,19: And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**". This is much the strongest New Testament passage used to support the doctrine of the Trinity. Verse 19 is the only verse containing all the words *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, but this verse in no way states that God is a Trinity consisting of three persons.

This verse occurs in its standard form in all available Greek manuscripts, but the church historian Eusebius (263-339 AD) quotes it as "Go ye and make disciples of all nations **in my name**." Probably this was what Matthew originally wrote, but it was altered to include the doctrine of the Trinity early on before manuscripts began to be copied.