I. The Bible’s View of the Trinity:

a. Where is the term “Trinity” found in the Bible?
   i. The word “trinity” is never found in the Bible, but the idea represented by
      the word is affirmed in many places.

b. Where can one look in the Bible to find the Trinity affirmed?
   i. For instance, in Genesis 1:26 God said, “Let us make man in our image, after
      our likeness.” His use of “us” and “our” implies that more than one
      person was involved in creation. The only other beings that God could
      possibly be referring to are angels, but we are not made in the image of
      angels but “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27), so this verse must imply that
      there is more than one person in God.
   ii. When Jesus was baptized, “the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the
       Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and … a
       voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well
       pleased’ ” (Matt. 3:16–17). At this moment, all three members of the Trinity
       were performing three distinct activities: God the Father was speaking, God
       the Son was being baptized, and God the Holy Spirit was resting on the
       Son.
   iii. Similarly, when Jesus sent his disciples out to do their work, he commanded
        them to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the
        Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). In saying this,

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Jesus is affirming that all three members of the Trinity are distinct in their personhood (the Father can’t be the Son, for example).  

iv. **Jude 20–21** also affirms the three distinct persons in the Trinity: “Pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

II. **The Meaning of the Trinity:**

a. How would you define the Trinity (hint: you may want to look at the Appendix)?

i. “The Trinity is composed of three united Persons without separate existence – so completely united as to form one God. The divine nature subsists in three distinctions – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (David L. Burggraff, Ph.D., Th.M.)

ii. At times it can seem difficult to understand how there are three distinct persons of the Trinity, each with the whole being of God in himself, even though there is only one God, and he is undivided.

1. And it should be difficult. The Trinity is one of those mysteries we can only describe in part. Although different analogies from creation can help us a bit in understanding the Trinity, ultimately all analogies fail in describing this mystery, for they attempt to explain the being of God in terms of the creation. They are attempts to explain how God is like the creation. But nothing in creation is exactly like God’s being. Attempts to simplify or fully explain this mystery all fail and often lead to beliefs that are contrary to the Bible’s teachings. In short, the doctrine of the Trinity is something we will never fully understand, for parts of it are beyond our comprehension. It is, in part, one of those “secret things” that “belong to the Lord our God” (Deut. 29:29).

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b. Is the Holy Spirit Fully God (Why or Why Not)?
   i. Finally, God the Holy Spirit is also fully God. Because both the Father and
      Son are God, it makes sense that all three are mentioned with equal
      importance in passages like Matthew 28:19 (“baptizing them in the name of
      the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”). This indicates that the
      Scripture views all three as fully God. Peter confirms this view when he
      accuses someone of lying “to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5:3) and then further
      explains that this man has “not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4). The
      Spirit, Paul says, is omniscient like God the Father when he writes, “No one
      comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11).8

c. Why is it Important for the mystery of the Trinity to be True?
   i. Yet it is extremely important that this mystery be true. For example, if Jesus
      is not both fully God and a separate person from God, then he could not
      have borne the complete wrath of God, died, and risen from the dead. And if
      Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, any belief in him is foolish, and those who
      claim to be Christians are, in the words of Paul, “of all people most to be
      pitied” (1 Cor. 15:19).9

III. The Distinct Roles of the Trinity:
   a. What were the various roles of the Trinity in Creation?
      i. Father:
         1. For example, in creation we know that God spoke the earth into being
            (Gen. 1:9–10).10

      ii. Son:
         1. But John 1:3 tells us that God the Son carried out those words: “All
            things were made through him, and without him was not anything
            made that was made.”11

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iii. **Holy Spirit:**
1. And, as Genesis 1:2 tells us, while God was creating, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters,” that is, sustaining and manifesting God’s presence in creation.¹²

b. **What are the different roles of the Trinity in Salvation?**
   i. **Father:**
   1. God the Father “so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,” whom he sent “into the world … in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16–17).¹³

   ii. **Son:**
   1. Of his role, Jesus said, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). And that will was that Jesus die for our sins so that we didn’t have to (Heb. 10:10).¹⁴

iii. **Spirit:**
1. When Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he and the Father sent the Holy Spirit to bring completion to the work the Father and the Son had started (John 14:26 and John 16:7).¹⁵

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c. **Please explain the role submission plays in the Trinity?**
   
i. These different functions and roles are simply the outworking of the eternal relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. They do not diminish the deity, attributes, or essential nature of the Father, Son, or Spirit. The distinction is simply in the ways they relate to each other and to the creation. This is far different from our own experience where every person is a different being as well. But somehow God’s being is so different from ours that it can be both undivided and can unfold itself into interpersonal relationships among three distinct persons. This is far different from anything we have ever experienced, will experience, or can fully understand.\(^{16}\)

d. **How does this relationship within the Trinity affect our marriages?**
   
i. Yet the unity and diversity within the Trinity provide a wonderful basis for the unity and diversity we experience in everyday life. In marriage, for example, two distinct persons come together, and through marriage they become “one flesh” (Eph. 5:31). As husband and wife they have equal standing, value, and personhood before God, but they also have distinct roles. Just as the Father has authority over the Son, so in marriage the husband has authority over the wife. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:3, “The head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” Even though it may be difficult at times to figure out just how the roles of husband and wife are to be specifically defined, the Bible makes it clear that the relationship within the Trinity provides the model for the relationship of marriage.\(^{17}\)

e. **How does this relationship within the Trinity affect our churches?**
   
i. Another example of unity and diversity is seen in the church, which has “many members” all with different skills but “one body” with one purpose (1 Cor. 12:12). It is also seen in the ethnic makeup of the church—which includes members “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9). This diversity adds a complexity that shows us the wisdom of God in allowing both unity and diversity to exist within his

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world. The unity and diversity that exists in this world is simply a reflection of the unity and diversity that exists within the Trinity.\textsuperscript{18}

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\textsuperscript{18} Wayne A. Grudem, \textit{Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know} (ed. Elliot Grudem; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 41.
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Appendix: THE TRIUNITY OF GOD  
(David L. Burggraff, Ph.D., Th.M.)

Definition of the Trinity

The Trinity of God is a doctrine that is fundamental to the Christian faith; belief or disbelief in the Trinity marks orthodoxy from unorthodoxy. Human reason, however, cannot fathom the Trinity, nor can logic explain it, and, although the word itself is not found in the Scriptures, the doctrine is plainly taught in the Scriptures. The early church was forced to study the subject and affirm its truth because of the heretical teaching that arose opposing the Trinity.

The term *Trinity* is not the best one because it emphasizes only the three persons but not the unity within the Trinity. The German word *Dreieinigkeit* (“three-oneness”) better expresses the concept. A proper definition then must include the distinctiveness and equality of the three persons within the Trinity as well as the unity within the Trinity. The word *Triunity* may better express the doctrine. A proper definition of the Trinity would be: *The Trinity is composed of three united Persons without separate existence – so completely united as to form one God. The divine nature subsists in three distinctions – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Misinterpretations of the Trinity

I. **Tri-theism**
   In early church history men such as John Ascunages and John Philoponus taught that there were three who were God but they were only related in a loose association as, for example, Peter, James, and John were as disciples. The error of this teaching was that its proponents abandoned the unity within the Trinity with the result that they taught there were three Gods rather than three Persons within one Godhead.

II. **Sabellianism or Modalism**
   This teaching, originated by Sabellius (c. A.D. 200), erred in the opposite from that of Tritheism. Although Sabellius spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he understood all three as simply three modes of existence or three manifestations of one God. The teaching is thus also known as *modalism* because it views one God who variously manifests Himself in three modes of existence: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

III. **Arianism**
   Arian doctrine had its roots in Tertullian, who subordinated the Son to the Father. Origen carried Tertullian’s concept further by teaching that the Son was subordinate to the Father “in respect to essence.” This ultimately led to Arianism, which denied the deity of Christ. Arius taught that only God was the uncreated One; because Christ was begotten of the Father it meant Christ was created by the Father. According to Arius there was a time when Christ did not exist. Arius and his teaching were condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325.
Explanation of the Trinity

I. God is One in Regard to Essence.
   Early in church history the question developed whether Christ was the same as the Father in substance or in essence. Arius taught that Christ was like the Father is substance ("of similar substance," *omoiousios*), yet the Father was greater than Christ; Athanasius opposed Arius and correctly taught that the Son was of the same substance as the Father (*omoousios*). Although some equated the terms substance and essence, the proper way to designate the Trinity ultimately became "one in essence" (*ousia*).

The essential oneness of God is linked to Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, The Lord is one" (Heb. *echad*, "compound unity; united one"). This statement stresses not only the uniqueness of God but also the unity of God (cf. also James 2:19). It means all three Persons of God possess the summation of the divine attributes but yet the essence of God is undivided. Oneness in essence also emphasizes that the three Persons of the Trinity do not act independently of one another. This was a constant theme of Jesus in rebuffing the charges of the Jews (cf. John 5:19; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10).

II. God is Three with Respect to Persons.
   The word *persons* tends to detract from the unity of the Trinity, and it is readily recognized that persons is an inadequate term to describe the relationship within the Trinity.

Some theologians have opted for the term *subsistence*, hence, God has three subsistences. Other words used to describe the distinctiveness of the Three are: distinction, relation, and mode. The term *persons* is nonetheless helpful inasmuch as it emphasizes not only a manifestation but also an individual personality. In suggesting God is three with respect to His Persons it is emphasized that (1) each has the same essence as God and (2) each possess the fullness of God.

In God there are not three individuals alongside of, and separate from, one another, but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence. This is an important deviation from modalism (or Sabellianism), which teaches that one God merely manifests Himself in three various ways. This unity within three Persons is seen in OT passages such as Isaiah 48:16 where the Father has sent Messiah and the Spirit to speak to the restored nation. In Isaiah 61:1 the Father has anointed the Messiah with the Spirit for His mission. These references emphasize both the equality and the unity of the three Persons.

III. The Three Persons Have Distinct Relationships.
   Within the Trinity exists a relationship that is expressed in terms of subsistence. The Father is not begotten nor does He proceed from any person; the Son is eternally begotten from the Father (John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).
The term *generation* suggests the Trinitarian relationship in that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. **The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son** (John 14:26; 16:7). The word *procession* suggests the Trinitarian relationship of the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. It is important to note, however, that these terms denote a *relationship* within the Trinity and do not suggest inferiority in any way. Because the terms can tend to suggest inferiority some theologians deny their usefulness (Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, 1:111-12, 119-20.)

IV. **The Three Persons are Equal in Authority.**

Although terms like *generation* and *procession* may be used in referring to the functioning within the Trinity, it is important to realize that the three Persons are equal in authority. The Father is recognized as authoritative and supreme (1 Cor. 8:6); the Son is also recognized as equal to the Father in every respect (John 5:21-23); the Spirit is likewise recognized as equal to the Father and the Son (cf. Matt. 12:31). Their equality is often described as the *ontological Trinity*; the fact that the Son placed Himself under the Father and likewise the Spirit under the Son is described as the *economic Trinity*. 