

# 1Peter 1:1-2

## *God in Three Persons*

### Open your Bible to...

1Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

1Peter 1:2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

### Pray

### Intro

✓ Intro

The Jehovah's Witnesses standing on our doorstep shifted nervously as they wrestled with what they knew was an irreconcilable dilemma.

For they had just read, out loud no less, two scriptures from their own tarnished translation of the Bible that completely dismantled their false doctrine of the nature of God.

Their dilemma began when I asked my visitors to read John 6:46, which in their Bible is rendered...

*"Not that any man has seen the Father, except the one who is from God; this one has seen the Father."*

Just to clarify I asked the interrupters of my breakfast...

*“Who is the Father that Jesus speaks of in this verse?”*

*“Well, God of course”*

...responded the mislead lady on my doorstep.

*“By ‘God’ do you mean ‘Jehovah?’”*

I suggested?

*“Yes, God’s name is Jehovah”*

Was the enthusiastic reply from both Witnesses. To make sure that we were all on the same page I asked...

*“So Jesus is telling us that no human being has ever seen Jehovah—Father God, is that right?”*

The ladies shock their heads to acknowledge that Jehovah is the Father and were now smiling broadly, probably thinking that they had a potential convert on the line.

But I had one more scripture I wanted them to read, so I asked...ever so innocently...

*“Well then perhaps you could help me reconcile what Jesus’ said in John 6 with the record in Genesis 18?”*

Once again the eager JW opened her Bible to the verse I had suggested and began to read aloud, initially with a strong clear voice, but then haltingly in almost a whisper she read...

*“Afterward, Jehovah appeared to him (Abraham) among the big trees of Mam're while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day.” ~ Genesis 18:1 NWT*

Ah, the irreconcilable dilemma! Jesus said in John 6 that no person has ever seen the Father, which, the now anxious JW's had affirmed is Jehovah...

...but here in their own New World Translation they discovered that Abraham not only saw Jehovah but...

Walked with Jehovah!  
Ate with Jehovah!  
Negotiated over the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah with Jehovah!

So, I asked the now less than confident ladies at my door...

*“Was Jesus wrong? Or did Jesus lie when He said that no one has seen the Father, Whom you identified as ‘Jehovah’”?*

Of course they had no answer because while they reject Jesus' deity they do believe that He was a perfect man...

Therefore He could not have been wrong or lied when He said that no one has ever seen God.

But they were stuck because clearly Abraham saw Jehovah—God Himself in human flesh!

The only way to reconcile these two scriptures is to acknowledge that Jesus is Jehovah...He is God!

And that any time that God shows up in human form that people can see, touch, and hear, He does so in the Person of God the Son...

...the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Holy Trinity!

A mystery to be sure, but the clear declaration of scripture that the One God is manifest in more than one Person!

Ap. JW witnessing tool online with my sermon by Wednesday

✓ God in Three Persons

Well, in our last study we learned that God is One, which means that...

There is only One God—Divine Unity  
God has no parts—Divine Simplicity

To that biblical revelation we now add the attribute of God's Trinity, that is, that the One God exists externally as Three Persons.

## The Trinity ~ a definition

✓ The Trinity

We could define the doctrine of the Trinity in this way...

*“There is only one God (monotheism), but there are three Persons in that One God—the Trinity.”*

By “Persons” we do not mean “human”. Rather, we mean that God has an...

Intellect  
Will  
Consciousness

Personality  
Emotion

And of course, God is the First and most perfect Person in all of existence!

When the Bible tells us that God made humans in His image...it means that He gave us personhood.

Obviously since we are created beings, and not pure spirit like God, we are not exactly like God—but we do bear His image.

Some have suggested that our three-part nature in which we are a body, soul and spirit reflects the Triune Nature of God.

However, God is unique in that He is One Being, yet Three distinct Persons—what we call the Trinity.

Some students of the Bible have suggested that we can think of the Trinity in this way...

There is One “What” (God), and Three “Who’s” (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Or, we might say that God has a plurality of Persons and a unity of Essence.

God is One in His being and has absolute unity in His essence—Three in One.

Where Father, Son and Holy Spirit are...

Three distinct Persons.  
Each Person is fully God.  
Yet, there is only one God.

While this is admittedly a brain twister, and some would even say that it's illogical the reality is that the Triune nature of God is an inescapable truth revealed in the Bible!

As my JW visitors discovered you can't reconcile scripture with scripture unless you accept God's revelation of Himself as being One God manifest as Three Persons.

In fact, you must go to extraordinary lengths to deny the biblical revelation of God's Triune nature as we'll see in our study this morning.

## The Biblical Foundation for the Trinity

✓ The Trinity

So, how do we know that God exists as a Trinity—One God in Three Persons?

Well, we look to the Bible of course because it is the final authority on the subject of God.

The Bible is the ultimate source of all theology (study of God).

The point is that whatever we choose to believe to be true about God must be founded on the inspired (God-breathed) pages of Scripture.

Our opinions, private interpretations and speculations are no value at all because none of us can speak by our own authority on the nature of God.

That's because God exists beyond our ability to fully comprehend Him.

He is an infinite Spirit Who transcends the material universe and our intellectual capacity to fully understand.

Therefore, when it comes to His nature, His Name, His works, His plans, and His love for us and so much more, we can only know for certain what He has chosen to reveal to us in His Word, the Bible.

And what He has not revealed of Himself we cannot know!

So, when it comes to the nature of God the Bible is the only authoritative source of knowledge available to us.

√ Biblical foundation for the Trinity

As we learned last week the Bible unapologetically proclaims that there is only One God.

Yet, with just as much clarity the Bible also tells us that that One God exists as Three Persons...

...God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

For example, we read on the pages of Scripture that...

1. God's Triune nature is revealed in the Hebrew word Elohim.
2. Each Person of the Trinity possesses the unique attributes of God.
3. Each Person of the Trinity is involved in the divine work of God.
4. Each Person of the Trinity is called God.
5. Father and Son share many titles that are unique to God.
6. Father and Son are worshipped as God.

The inescapable conclusion then is that the Bible presents God to us as One Essence manifest in Three Persons...

...a mystery to be sure, but a truth that God has clearly revealed to us in His word.

So let's look at the biblical evidence for the Trinity.

1) Elohim

The triune nature of God is revealed in scripture beginning with the very first verse of the Bible we read...

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*

The word translated as "God" in our English Bibles is the Hebrew word, Elohim.

What's fascinating is that grammatically *Elohim* as constructed here is in a plural form, but written as if it were singular (because it is connected with a verb—*bara*, "created".)

It would be like saying in English, "The Men is" vs. "The Man is".

Bible scholar Joseph Rotherham points out that the word *Elohim* as used in the first verse of the Bible means a "*plural of quality*", or "*God-head*" clearly inferring the Triune nature of God.

But it's not just Christian scholars who recognize the unique grammatical construction of the word Elohim in the Hebrew Bible. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Jewish Rabbi Simeon ben Yoachi calls his readers to...



*“Come and see the mystery of the word Elohím; there are three degrees, and each degree by itself alone, and yet notwithstanding they are all one, and joined together in one, and are not divided from each other.”*

You would be hard pressed to find a clearer description of the Trinity even among Christians! The point is that the concept of the Trinity...

That God is One, yet manifest as Three Persons, is not a New Testament invention to somehow prop up the deity of Jesus as often claimed by critics and the cults.

Rather, it is the divine revelation that God has given to us of Himself in both the Old and New Testaments and found in the very first verse of the Bible—which is highly significant!

Point in fact the declaration of the Trinity as revealed by the word *Elohím* is so clear that the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Bible translator Henry Ainsworth wondered aloud...

*“He must be strangely prejudiced indeed who cannot see that the doctrine of a Trinity, and of a Trinity in unity, is expressed in the above words.”*

Those who reject the Trinity must go to great lengths to either change the plain meaning of God’s word...

...or literally change God’s word by removing and/or adding words in an attempt to hide the Triune nature of God!

## 2) Divine attributes

It should go without saying that anyone who has all-power, or any of the unique attributes ascribed to the divine must be God.

For example, only one can have all power!  
That's because two or more beings can't have all of anything!

So, when the Bible describes someone as "Almighty"—that is, having All-Power...

It should be obvious that the Person being described is God!

Well the Bible tells us that each of the Three Persons in the Godhead have all power!

Ex. God alone is Almighty

God the Father said to Abraham...

*"I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless." ~ Genesis 17:1*

Jesus—God the Son said to the apostle John...

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*  
*Revelation 1:8*

Job testified that the Holy Spirit is God when he said...

*“The Spirit of God has made me,  
And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”  
Job 33:4*

Three distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each described as being the “Almighty”...

That is, possessing all power.

But only One can have all power. Therefore, the Three must be One...

...One God, Who exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, co-equal in nature, sharing One divine essence, but existing as Three distinct Persons.

Ap. All the divine attributes

See download on the website.

3) The divine work of God

The Bible also presents each Member of the Trinity as being involved in the work of God, including the work of our salvation. Yet each Person of the Trinity has a different role in that work of salvation to make us the children of God...

God the Father loved us and sent His Son to save us (John 3:16).

God the Son provided the means of our salvation through His death, burial, and resurrection (1John 2:2).

God the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and our need for a savior, regenerates us into a new creation, seals us as a guarantee of our salvation, and empowers us to live a life like Christ (Ephesians 4:30 & Titus 3:5).

Put succinctly, in the work of the Triune God to save us can be thought of in this way...

The Father planned for our salvation before the world began.

The Son provided Himself for our salvation in the world at the appointed time.

The Holy Spirit proclaims our need for our salvation throughout the world today.

Listen to how the author of Hebrews beautifully captures this unique working relationship between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit to save us writing...

*“how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*

*Hebrews 9:14*

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that there are three distinct Persons in the Trinity for only Christ died for our sins...

...neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit were pinned to the cruel Cross of Calvary. Rather, only Christ Jesus who took on human flesh could spill His blood for our sins.

#### 4) Called God

The Bible is clear that there is only One God. Yet, we find that each member of the Trinity is called “God”!

God the Father said to Abraham...

*“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.” ~ Genesis 17:1*

When Thomas saw Jesus after the resurrection, he called Him...

*“My Lord and my God!” ~ John 20:28*

And Peter equated the Holy Spirit with God in Acts 5 when he said to Ananias...

*“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”*

5) Father and Son share many titles

Titles, like names, have great significance in the Bible because when used of God they communicate something of His nature.

Ex. The First and the Last

When God the Father says through Isaiah...

*“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,  
And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:*

*"I am the First and I am the Last;  
Besides Me there is no God."  
Isaiah 44:6*

The title, "The First and the Last" speaks of God's eternal nature. That is, only God has always existed and will continue to exist for all eternity.

Everything else in creation has a beginning and an end...

...expect God.

Thus it's of no small consequence that three times in the Revelation Jesus takes to Himself the same title that God the Father used back in Isaiah!

*"Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen."  
Revelation 1:17b-18a*

There is only one "First and the Last", the One God Who exists in Three Persons.

6) Worshipped as God

The Bible is very clear that to worship anyone except God is idolatry! And God hates idolatry! Point in fact when Jesus rebuked Satan in the wilderness He said...

*“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” ~ Matthew 4:10*

Yet, Jesus accepted worship! For example, after He calmed the storm on the sea of Galilee we’re told that the frightened disciples...

*“...came and worshipped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’” ~ Matthew 14:33*

And God the Father commanded the angels to worship the God the Son...

*“But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him (the Son).’” ~ Hebrews 1: 6*

Anyone who is worthy of the worship of men and angles must be God!

✓ God in Three Persons

Moving on the Bible makes it clear that the Trinity is Three distinct Persons, not merely different expressions of One Person.

For example in Isaiah 48:16c the prophet records God saying...

*“And now the Lord God and His Spirit Have sent Me.”*

In this one verse we see how God does His work on earth through the Three Persons of the Godhead, where...

God the Father—“Lord God” (YHWH), and the Holy Spirit—“His Spirit” sent God the Son—“Me”.

We see a similar picture of the individual members of the Godhead at Jesus’ baptism where we read...

*“When He had been baptized, Jesus (God the Son) came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God (God the Holy Spirit) descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (the voice of God the Father.)”*

*Matthew 3:16-17*

Note that...

Jesus, the Son of God, is in the river.  
God the Holy Spirit is descending from Heaven as a dove.  
While God the Father is speaking from Heaven.

Clearly there are Three distinct Persons involved in Jesus’ baptism...

...not One Person operating in three different modes.

Then we have Paul’s closing benediction to his friends where he penned...



*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (God the Son),  
and the love of God (God the Father), and the  
communion of the Holy Spirit (God the Holy Spirit)  
be with you all. Amen.”*  
*2Corinthians 13:14*

To these few examples we could add the testimony of many additional scriptures, but I believe these are sufficient to provide a biblical foundation for our belief in the Trinity...

...that there is One God, Who exists as Three Persons.

## The Implications of God's Triune Nature

✓ The implications of God's Triune Nature

Let's start by describing what the doctrine of the Trinity does not mean!

Important because confusion over the nature of God's Triune nature is the foundation upon which every cult is based!

- 1) To begin with the doctrine of the Trinity does not mean that that there are three gods!

That's the heresy called tritheism, “tri” = 3 and “theism” gods.

It's heretical because it denies God's unity, His Oneness, by claiming that there are three gods in the Godhead.

Ex. Mormonism

Joseph Smith the founder of Mormonism taught tritheism with a twist! Listen to what he wrote just before his death...

*"I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods."*

*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pg. 370.*

The twist is that Mormonism also teaches a form of henotheism, that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the "chief" gods in the Mormon pantheon...

...who rule over good Mormon men who become "gods" after they die.

- 2) Nor does the Trinity mean that God has three modes of being.

That's the heresy called modalism.

That's heretical because it denies the plurality of Persons in the Godhead.

Modalism claims that there is one Person called God, Who manifests Himself in three different modes, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Like how I am a husband, a father, and a son.

That's false because God the Father is not the same Person as God the Son, nor is God the Son the same Person as God the Holy Spirit.

Each Member of the Godhead are distinctive Persons.

Examples of those who hold the doctrine of modalism today are groups like the United Pentecostal Church and the United Apostolic Churches...

...thus you will sometimes you will hear these groups called “Oneness Pentecostals”.

### 3) The Trinity

The word Trinity means that God is a Triunity, that is, a plurality of Persons within a unity of essence.

God is Three Persons in One Nature.

There is only One “What”—God.

But there are Three “Who’s”—Persons in that One “What”.

Again, we confess that the Triunity of God is a mystery beyond our human comprehension, but we believe it because God has declared it to be true through His divine revelation to mankind...

...the testimony of the Bible!

Ap. God is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend

If God wanted to hide Himself from His creation He could do so, and we would never be able to find Him.

That’s because He who is infinite in nature is by definition beyond the comprehension of finite creatures like us!

God is bigger than our brains!

For example, as finite beings we do not possess the philosophical capacity nor the scientific tools to find the infinite God!

All that we can discern from the natural world around us is the truth that God must exist as evidenced by His Creation.

But Who God is can only be known by what He has chosen to reveal of Himself.

And, since He is an infinite being there are aspects of His nature—including what He has revealed of Himself...

...that exceed our finite capacity to fully comprehend.

Such is the mystery of the Trinity. God's revelation of Himself is that there is One God, Who exists eternally in Three Persons...

A mystery to be sure, but not a contradiction!

For example, we can express the Triunity of God mathematically where  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ .

There are THREE 1's, but when multiplied the total is only ONE, not THREE.

So we cannot logically dismiss out of hand the Triune nature of God because we can express it mathematically...

...and because logic tells us that what is true of the Infinite is not false just because those who are finite cannot comprehend it.

#### Ap. Analogies

Because the Trinity is difficult to understand people have tried to explain the Trinity using an analogy like an egg, Shamrock, water, sun, etc. However, none of these are great analogies to explain the Trinity, in fact most of them describe a heresy!

The best analogy we have to represent the Trinity is to remember that John tells us that God is love (1John 4:8).

And that love requires a subject and an object, where one loves, and another is loved by an expression of love.

Since God has always been love, even before He created anything, the question must be asked...

*“Who did God love before He created?”*

The Triune nature of God informs us that from all eternity past before anything other than God existed that He was able to express love where...

The Father is the Lover (the subject).

The Son is the Beloved (the object).

The Spirit is the Love (the expression).

Not a perfect analogy, but when describing an infinite God it is perhaps the best we can do, at least Augustin thought so!

Ap. For fun

If you want to see know how theologians entertain themselves on the subject of the Trinity check out the video clip on YouTube titled, “*St. Patrick’s Bad Analogies*.”

## Objections to the Trinity

√ Objections

There are a number of objections raised by those who reject the Trinity but because of time we’ll limit ourselves to the two most common objections.

1) The Bible doesn’t use the word “Trinity”

Their argument is that if the word isn't in the Bible, then they claim it isn't a biblical truth.

But that's really just a silly smoke screen because there are lots of theological words that we use to describe biblical truths that aren't found in the Bible...

...including lots of words that people who don't believe in the Trinity use!

For example, people who reject the doctrine of the Trinity do believe in the Immutability of God.

That is, that God is unchanging as declared throughout the Scriptures.

We use the term "immutability" because it captures in one word what it takes an entire sentence in the Bible to communicate!

The same is true of the word Trinity. As we've already demonstrated the testimony of Scripture clearly describes that there is only One God, but that He exists in Three Persons.

So the argument that the Trinity isn't true because the word isn't in the Bible is without merit.

## 2) Jesus prayed to God in the Garden of Gethsemane

Cult members like to point out that the night before He was crucified Jesus prayed to God, thus they argue...

Jesus can't be God because He prayed to God!

But that's not completely accurate. The Gospel tells us that Jesus prayed to His Father.

There's nothing in the scriptures in question that tells us that Jesus, the Son of God, is not God.

It only tells us that the Son prayed to the Father.

Which fits perfectly with God's revelation that when Jesus took on the body of Man, that He also willingly made Himself subject to the limitations of a human being (see Phil. 2:5-11).

As such, it should come as no surprise that He communicated with The Father through prayer for the strength that His human body and mind would need to endure the horrors of Cross.

This does nothing to diminish the deity of Jesus Christ or to contradict the monotheistic nature of the Triune God.

## The Blessings & Benefits of the Trinity

### ✓ Blessings & Benefits

The Triune nature of God provides many blessings and benefits to those who have come to know God by faith in Jesus.

Not the least of which is to help us reconcile the many Scriptures that declare that God is One...

...yet presents that One God as three distinct Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But perhaps the most intimate and precious blessing of the Trinity is the reality that in the Person of God the Son...

...God made Himself knowable to us!

✓ The Trinity makes God knowable

I read John 6:46 in our opening illustration where Jesus told us that...

*“No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.” ~ NIV*

That of course is true because God is pure spirit, and He is greater and more immense than the whole of Creation!

We don't possess the capacity to see that God!

But, when God the Son took on a human body God made Himself like one of us.

So that when Mary took the newborn Jesus into her arms she was literally holding God close to her heart!

When Jesus reached out to touch the rotting skin of the leper the unclean man felt the hand of God upon him!

When Peter slipped beneath the waves it was the hand of God that took hold of his!

When the body of Lazarus heard the command of Jesus calling him back from the grave it was the voice of God Himself that he obeyed!

This is the truth that John wrote about when he penned...

*“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”*



*1John 1:1*

The point here is that the God who exists beyond our capacity to know is made knowable because of the Trinity...

...where God the Son came close that we might see Him, hear Him, touch Him, and most of all experience God's love through Him!

## Close

✓ God is Three Persons

We will never fully comprehend the Infinite Triune God this side of eternity.

And the reality is that the only kind of god we could fully understand would be a god we made in our own image.

But God is greater than our understanding, so we chose to believe God's revelation of Himself as recorded in the testimony of His Word—the Bible.

That there is One God, Who exists as Three Persons.

Therefore...

*“We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit. But the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have one divinity, equal glory, and coeternal majesty.”*

## *Athanasian Creed*

A mystery we ought not deny for a Jesus who is not God cannot save you! (Ref. 2Corinthians 11:1-4).