

How to Effectively Communicate the Trinity to a Jehovah's Witness

Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses have long duked it out over the issue of the Trinity. As the late Dr. Walter Martin often mused, most Jehovah's Witnesses can make a doctrinal pretzel out of a Christian in a matter of seconds when it comes to the Trinity. It is therefore absolutely vital for us as Christians who take the great commission seriously to be able to clearly articulate the biblical truth of the Trinity when lovingly sharing the gospel with Jehovah's Witnesses. But how exactly can this be done?

First, it's important to start on common ground with the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Bible unequivocally teaches that there is only one God (see Deut. 4:35, 39, 6:4, 32:39; Ps. 86:10, Is. 43:10, 44:6,8, 45:5, 18,21,22; Gal. 4:8; Eph. 4:6; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5; John 17:3; James 2:19). JW's will give this point a hardy "Amen!" To deny this biblical truth is to fall into the polytheistic heresy of *tritheism* (i.e., the belief in three separate Gods), which Mormons espouse and Jehovah's Witnesses wrongfully accuse Christians of teaching. It is therefore important to clarify that as a Christian you do not believe in three Gods, but only one God.

Second, Scripture teaches that the Father of Jesus Christ is God (see John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Pet. 1:3; Eph 1:3). The Jehovah's Witnesses will not contend this fact. They believe in one God, the Father. Yet Scripture also teaches that Jesus Christ Himself is God (see Isa. 9:6; John 1:1-3; John 5:18, 8:58 ch.Ex. 3:14, 10:33, 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:8-13; cf. Is. 44:24). This is where the battle is won when dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses, so get well acquainted with the above passages. One way to effectively demonstrate the deity of Christ with a JW is to ask them to please read the following passages out loud (the more they read Scripture for themselves without the fuzzy interpretive lenses of the Watchtower the better):

- John 1:1-3,14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...* The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

- Colossians 1:15-17

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by *Him all things were created*: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rules or authorities; *all things were created by Him and for Him*. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

- Hebrews 1:8-10

About the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy,' He also says, '*In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.*'

Not only is Christ directly referred to as God in the above passages (the Father even calls Jesus "God" in Heb. 1:8-10), but as the italicized phrases make crystal clear - *Jesus is the Creator of all things*. JW's agree that Christ created all things, although they believe that he did so after first being created by the Father. The creative activity of Christ is absolutely critical to the question of whether or not Christ is God; especially when considered in light of Isaiah 44:24, in which God declares in no uncertain terms, "I am the LORD, who has made all things, who *alone* stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by *myself*" (emphasis added). The clear biblical teaching that Jesus is the Creator and that the LORD (Jehovah) God *alone* created the universe, indeed carries profound implications as to the identity of Christ.

The Scriptural formula is as follows:

Creator = Jehovah (Is. 44:24)

Jesus = Creator (John 1:3, Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:10)

The necessary logical conclusion, therefore is:

Jesus = God (Isa. 9:6; John 5:18, 10:33, 20:28; and Rom. 9:5).

In other words, Jesus and Jehovah are one and the same, and the honest JW cannot escape this biblical fact.

As a critical point of clarification, Trinitarians do not believe that Jesus is merely God. JW's will frequently counter arguments for Christ's deity with passages that speak of Christ's humanity. Thus it is vital to point out that at the incarnation, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, took upon Himself a *human nature* in addition to and distinct from His *divine nature*.

- Divine Nature
- Human Nature
- The Person of Christ

In doing so, the Son became fully God and fully man; that is, two distinct natures united in the one person of Christ (i.e., two *whats* in one *who*). Ask them to read Scripture's teaching on this issue:

- Romans 9:5

Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

In this theologically terse passage, Christ's humanity and deity are set up side by side.

- Romans 1:3

....regarding His Son, who as to his human nature was a descendent of David and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Scripture goes on to clarify what Christ's claim to be God's Son entails:

- John 5:18

For this cause therefore the Jews tried all the more to kill him because He was not only breaking the Sabbath, but also calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God.

Scripture clearly expresses that Jesus possessed the essential attributes of humanity. He had a human body (Matt. 4:2; Luke 2:7, 40; 24:39, 42; John 4:6; 19:28), a human mind (Luke 2:52; Mark 13:32; Hebrews 5:7-8), and a human soul and emotions (John 12:27; Matt. 26:38; Heb. 5:7). When it comes down to it, you and the JW's are faced with only three options: 1) to tear the passages that teach Christ's humanity out of our Bibles, 2) to tear the passages that teach Christ's deity out of our Bibles, or 3) to accept what all of Scripture teaches; namely that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

In addition, Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit is God (see Acts 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 3:17-18). Witnesses will typically argue that the Holy Spirit is not God but an impersonal force. This teaching, however, is entirely unscriptural. The Holy Spirit demonstrates that He is a personal being by exercising volition (Acts 15:28; Rom. 8:26; John 16:8), emotion (Eph. 4:30), and intelligence (Rom. 8:27). An impersonal force cannot do these things (see also Acts 5:3-5 [only a personal being can be lied to]; Matt. 12:31 [only a personal being can be blasphemed]). Thus the overwhelming weight of Scriptural evidence proves that there is one

God and that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God! To deny this biblical truth leads to the Unitarian heresy of *arianism*, held by the Jehovah's Witnesses, which teaches that the Father alone is truly God and reduces Jesus to a mere created being.

Scripture goes on to clarify that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct and co-existent persons:

- John 14:15-16

The Holy Spirit is referred to as "another" Who is sent from the Father.

Nowhere in Scripture is the Greek term translated "another" in this passage (allon) used in reference to the same person (e.g., John 4:37; 5:7, 32; 7:41; 18:15; 21:18; Rev. 7:2; 8:3; 10:1; 13:11; Matt. 8:9, 21; Acts 2:12). If the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were three manifestations of one person as Oneness Pentecostals teach, Jesus would have said, "I will send myself as the Holy Spirit."

- John 5:31-32; 8:16-18

Jesus makes a clear distinction between His testimony and the testimony of "another," the Father. Once again the Greek term, allon, expressing a clear personal distinction, is used. If the Father and the Son are one person this distinction would not be made.

- John 16:13-14

Jesus repeatedly uses the third person terminology to refer to the Holy Spirit. This passage is translated literally from the Greek as:

But when ***that*** one has come, the Spirit of truth, ***he*** will guide you into all truth. For ***he*** will not speak for himself, but what things ***he*** will hear ***he*** will speak and the things coming ***he*** will announce to you. ***That one*** will glorify me, because ***he*** will take what is mine and ***he*** will announce it to you. (third person terms italicized).

If God was merely one person manifested in three forms as Oneness Pentecostals contend, Jesus would have said:

But when ***I*** have come as the Spirit of truth, ***I*** will guide you into all truth. For ***I*** will not speak from myself, but what things ***I*** will hear ***I*** will speak and the things coming ***I*** will announce to you. ***I*** will glorify myself, because ***I*** will take what is mine and ***I*** will announce it to you. (first person terms, which do not appear in the biblical text, italicized).

Such a reading is entirely nonsensical. Jesus' repetitive use of the third person in reference to the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the first person, clearly communicates the personal distinctions within the Godhead.

- Luke 3:21-22

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit carry out different functions simultaneously at the baptism of Jesus. Thus all three persons are God at the same time. In other words, God doesn't become the Father to do certain things, become the Son to do others, and so forth. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God at the same time, three co-existent and distinct persons.

Other helpful passages that clearly teach the personal distinctions within the Godhead include 1 John 1:3b, 2:1; 2 John 3; Phil. 2:10-11; Gal. 1:1,3; Rom. 15:5-6; John 14:23-26, 15:26, 16:12-15; Titus 3:5-6; and Eph. 2:18). To deny this biblical truth is to succumb to the heresy of *modalism* (i.e., the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely manifestations of the same person and not three distinct persons). This heresy is currently espoused by modern day Oneness Pentecostals.

Having examined Scripture, we arrive at the following, the inescapable conclusion: *Within the one Being that is God there are three co-existent and distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.* Simply put, God is one *What* and three *Who's*.

Jehovah's Witnesses are often quick to point out the term "Trinity" never appears in the Bible. It is true that this specific term never appears in the Bible, but then again, neither do the terms, "Bible," "Christianity," or "rapture." Simply because a given term does not appear in Scripture does not mean that what it conveys is not taught in Scripture. Simply put, "Trinity" is just a term used to express the clear biblical teaching about the Godhead.

Jehovah's Witnesses also often argue that the Trinity was borrowed from pagan philosophy. However, pagans believed in triads of Gods who ruled in a pantheon of other Gods (Ron Rhodes, Reasoning From the Scriptures, [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993] 222). The polytheistic tritheism of paganism is radically different from the monotheistic Trinitarianism of biblical Christianity. Moreover, such polytheistic pagan ideas predate Christianity by two millennia and circulated

in an area of the world far removed geographically from where Christianity developed (Ibid., 222). But suppose, hypothetically, that Trinitarian concepts were taught by pagans in the same time and area as Christianity (which they weren't as pointed out above). Would that preclude the biblical doctrine of the Trinity? As a case-in-point, the Gilgamesh Epic, a Babylonian pagan source, speaks of a flood sent as divine punishment for man's wickedness, in which an ark was constructed for the preservation of human and animal life (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of The Bible*, volume 2 D-G, ed. Merrill Tenney, (Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan, 1976) 553). Should we toss out the biblical account of the flood because of these pagan parallels? The obvious answer is "no."

As a quick recap:

- First, there is only one God.
- Second, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God (and this is the key issue when dealing with JW's).
- Third, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct, co-existent persons.
- Fourth, the word "Trinity," though it never appears in Scripture, is a term used to express this clear biblical teaching about the Godhead.
- Fifth and finally, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity was not borrowed from pagan religions as many argue.

It is GTO's sincere prayer that this info better equips you to defend the awesome reality of the Trinity with your Jehovah's Witness friends.

For further insight into this issue we recommend:

- *Reasoning From the Scriptures With a Jehovah's Witness* by Ron Rhodes (Baker Books).
- *Kingdom of the Cults* by the late, great Dr. Walter Martin (Bethany House).
- *Index of Watchtower Errors*, edited by David A. Reed.
- *The Watchtower Files* by Duane Mignani.