

Trinity: Why I no longer believe it – by Matt Sacra

This is an abridged version of why and how I came to reject the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically regarding who Jesus was and is, according to scripture. My past inner monologue is not meant to offend the Trinitarian reader, but to give a vivid reality of the questions, challenges, and self-examination I put myself through with, I believe, God and Jesus' help. I believe we can put forth such thoughts to others in love, in the right tone, to edify one's understanding.

In the fall of 2011, after months of repentance, I finally began to walk in consistent obedience to God and Jesus, realizing I previously had an incorrect view of sin and of Jesus. Prior to those months and years, I had elevated Jesus above God (in my own mind and while evangelizing) but thought it okay reasoning, "he was God" or "he was part of God" or "God in a different form".

Isaiah 7:14-16, Luke 2:52, and James 1:13 were the first 3 scriptures I'd never truly understood before 2011. I realized Jesus grew in favor with God, and his temptations were real (Matt 4, Hebrews 4:15, James 1:13-16). Sin was a possibility for him; it's praiseworthy he chose not to sin with God's help. Those scriptures helped me to realize Jesus was really tempted (which God can't be), there was a time when he didn't know to choose good and refuse evil (yet God always knows), and he grew in wisdom, and favor with God (God is the source of all wisdom, and it didn't make sense for God to grow in favor with Himself).

I still focused my studies that fall mostly on scriptural (and Hebrew or Greek) definitions of sin, righteousness, perfect, temptation etc., but it helped to realize Jesus didn't have an "easy button" when it came to growth, temptation, and favor with God. As my studies moved from obedience to original sin, holidays, atonement theories, and what the church really was, I kept hearing these excuses from others as I preached consistent faithful obedience: *"Jesus could live holy or not sin because he was God, we can't,"* or *"we can't obey God, only Jesus could because he was God"*.

I had no better explanation at that time of God's relationship with Jesus other than the typical "ice, water, steam" analogies (which ironically are Modalism/Oneness and not Trinitarian). I claimed Trinity true yet couldn't explain it because after all, "it's a mystery", I and others would say. Though not in scripture, I guessed the concept was there, but hardly thought of challenging the doctrine I'd taught for fifteen years. As God showed me key strongholds in people's minds against true freedom from sin in Christ, I began to realize Trinity was such a stronghold. Paul's "test all things" did not apply to Trinity or Jesus being God, in my view then. Yet it kept coming up, and I wondered why.

Since I previously assumed it was impossible for Jesus to sin, and heard others use his "God nature" or "being God" as an excuse for why they or we all as humans cannot obey God, I decided in 2012 to prayerfully and thoroughly test the Trinity doctrine in scripture. I did so with a close brother who was also a Trinitarian at the time; this kept us accountable to each other before God. I'd never questioned if Jesus was God, and asked myself: Did Jesus claim to be God? Did the apostles teach Jesus was God? Is "Triune God" a concept in scripture? Could Jesus have really sinned?

I slowly read again each gospel - "God nature", wasn't there. Jesus never said, "I'm God", "I'm dual-natured", or "I'm part of God". Every apostle called Jesus the Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, King, Prophet, etc., but never "God-man" though they had opportunity to do so. John 20:28 "my Lord and My God" by Thomas (clarity of what Thomas and Phillip couldn't see a week prior - John 14:5-11), and Hebrews 1:8 to the Son "your throne, O God" were the only places any apostle or writer use this term of Jesus. "Begotten God" in Jn 1:14 and Rom 9:5 "who is over all God" I examined closely, noting they were poorly worded (or inaccurate) translations in English.

I examined the terms "Theos" and "Elohim" in nearly every scripture they appeared and realized the terms in scripture apply to God, Jesus, gods, Satan (2 Cor 4:4), Moses (Ex 4:16, 7:1), Samuel (1 Sam 28:13), and judges to whom scripture came by Jesus' own mouth (John 10:34, Ps 82:6). Never did such terms mean "substance, essence, nature" or make others God Himself. Peters words to Jesus in Matthew 16 were correct, Jesus was the "Christ, the Son of the living God" as revealed by Jesus' Father. Yet this answer wasn't good enough for me? He must be God Himself also? There is really no argument in Matthew (aside from Immanuel "God with us" or "God is with us"), Mark, and Luke for the unscriptural phrase "deity of Christ". Most place it in John.

In John 1, I asked myself, does scripture say, "in the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God"? Or am I reading what God's word, plan, reason, or purpose (*logos* in Greek) became (flesh as embodied in Jesus) back into the text backwards (or backwards from Rev 19:13)? John 14:1 and 17:3 stood out to me: am I teaching what Jesus taught if I lump Jesus to be the one true God, when he said, "you Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"? Why didn't he just claim, "we are the one True God"? "You believe in God, believe also in me", why didn't he say, "believe also I am God"?

All the "I am", "I am he" statements in context of each chapter, point to Jesus being "Messiah", not "God Himself", and the context of the gospel of John itself shows who he claimed to be from the beginning (John 8:25, John 4:26 - the Messiah or Christ). Not God Himself. Was I reading my Trinitarian theology into the texts out of context, because I was taught to do so? John 8:58 was in context of Abraham, who looked forward to Messiah's day "rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad" (8:56). This was not Jesus randomly declaring before Abram was, "I Jesus, am 'the great I AM'" as I'd always preached. Jesus' God is the same as ours (John 20:17), even glorified from the throne in Rev 2:12. John even states in John 20:31, such things are written so we may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Not God himself. Why did I force my Trinitarian view upon this? Must I? Is it fair to the text, and to Jesus' claims? Is it the natural reading of scripture?

Reading again Paul's writings, I saw they began or ended with greetings from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Never once did he or any apostle say, "God the Son". Did I want to use biblical language from scripture, or traditions from philosophers, creeds, and councils hundreds of years after Jesus and his apostles? I thoroughly examined old testament scriptures. Not one prophecy claimed God's Messiah would be God Himself (not even Isaiah 9:6 when understood properly).

Along with Paul's writings, the apostles' words in Acts confirmed I was wrong to preach Jesus to be God, and God to be "Triune" when Jesus and his followers didn't do so. What did they emphasize? Acts 2:22 "a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did through Him in your midst", 2:36 "God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." These are crystal clear. If "Triune God" with "dual-nature God-man" was a theme, why is there no mention of it here? Maybe Jews couldn't handle Trinity God-man talk, how about gentiles? Acts 10:28 "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...for God was with Him... (vs 42) it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead." Not to gentiles either. A plain, simple message of who Jesus was.

Paul preached in Acts 13:38 "through this man is preached to you forgiveness of sin." No "Dual-nature-God-man-2nd-Triune-person" here either. But this was Paul to Jews, maybe he'll do something else with gentiles? Nope. Acts 17:30-31 to gentiles, God will "judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." Maybe by the time of Romans Paul would change the message? Nope. Romans 1:4 "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead". 1 Cor 3:23 "you are Christ's, and Christ is God's", 1 Cor 8:6 "yet there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we live."

Why did I have to make Jesus into God, and God "Triune" when plain language of scripture says the Father is God? 1 Cor 11:3 "the head of Christ is God". 1 Cor 15:24-28 made it clear God put all things under Messiah's feet (except God himself), yet the Son is subject to God. "Ah but self, there is 'subordination in Trinity'" as I had taught others - which is non-biblical language and meaningless fluff. No apostle ever taught such a concept, nor "fully God fully Man" either. Why was I complicating such a simple truth? It's hard enough for people to repent and believe in or obey the gospel of God's kingdom as it is, does it need a massive stumbling block of complexity for atheists, Jews, Muslims, and professing Christians?

I'll drop the inner monologue at this point, citing just one or two scriptures each for many epistles, and their key words which opened my eyes further:

-2 Cor 4:6 (Christ is the image of God), 2 Cor 5:19-21 (God in Christ, ambassadors for Christ, God through us)

-Eph 1:17 (God of our Lord Jesus Christ), Eph 4:5-6 (one Lord...one God and Father of all),

-Phil 2:5-9 (he didn't grasp equality with God...God exalted Him), 4:19-20 (God...by Christ Jesus...God and Father)

-Col 1:15 (image of the invisible God), Col 2:9 (in Him dwells...)

-1 Thess 1:9-10 (true God, and to wait for His Son), 2 Thess 2:16 (Lord Jesus Christ himself, and our God and Father)

-1 Tim 2:5 (one God and one Mediator between God and men the Man Christ Jesus), Titus 1:3-4 (God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ)

-Heb 1:1-2 (God spoke by prophets...spoken to us by His Son), Heb 4:14 (Son of God), 5:1 (taken from among men), 5:8-10 (Son, learned obedience...became author...called by God), Heb 10:12 (this Man...at the right hand of God)

-James 1:1 (God and of Lord Jesus Christ)

-1 Pet 1:3, 21 (God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory), 2 Peter 1:17 (He received from God the Father honor and glory...beloved Son)

-1 John 1:3 (the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ), 1 John 5:1 (Jesus is the Christ) 5:13 (written...believe in the name of the Son of God)

-Jude 1 (God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ),

-Rev 1:6 (to His God and Father), Rev 22:1-3 (God and the Lamb).

My accountability partner and I realized by mid-summer we no longer could claim the Trinity doctrine (1 God in 3 persons, all co-equal, co-eternal, co-substantial) to be true according to scripture. We saw Trinity doctrine must be read into scripture and doesn't stand on its own. We examined the scriptural terms for Lord, glory, bowing, worship, and concepts surrounding them. Over fifty scriptures old and new testament confirmed in my mind how misunderstood such concepts are, and how the Greek and Hebrew terms often do not apply solely to God Himself.

I examined the Holy Spirit in scripture too, realizing it referred either to God's power (Luke 1:35, 24:49 with Acts 2:4) and personal presence in believers (Acts 5:3-4), or God Himself as a Spirit who is obviously holy (John 4:24), but not a "third person" of any "Trinity." It was personified like wisdom or understanding in Proverbs (1:20, 4:5-9, 7:4, 8:1-12, 9:1-6, etc.). I noted scriptures speaking of Jacobs spirit being revived (Gen 45:27), Daniel's spirit being troubled (Dan 2:3), and our own spirit (1 Cor 2:11) with no hint of it being a separate "person".

As I shared my new understanding in 2012, the backlash was worse than for other doctrines, yet I saw even more how most people (but not all) who claimed Trinitarian or Oneness views used them as an excuse as to why neither they (nor others) could consistently take the way out in temptation. Worse, many Trinitarians (but even many Oneness and some Unitarians) used their understanding to condemn other people as "unsaved" or "non-Christian." This prompted the two articles I wrote on the topic: "Is Jesus the One True God?" (an explanation of truth and an appeal for peace across differing views), and "False Septinity" (a satire of Trinity logic based on seven spirits of God in Revelation 5:6, and many other scriptures).

Years later in 2014, I read pre-Nicene church writings on the Father-Son topic, many which confirmed my view. I studied the history of the councils and creeds and saw how divisive this topic was in the first four centuries. I saw how Trinitarian or Oneness views (including literal "pre-existence") were a stumbling block for Jews, Muslims, Atheists, and even new Christians. Instead of preaching repentance, freedom from and forgiveness of sin, along with belief in Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God, and his coming kingdom, I see countless hours spent trying to convince people "Jesus is God" when neither Jesus nor any apostle ever preached it.