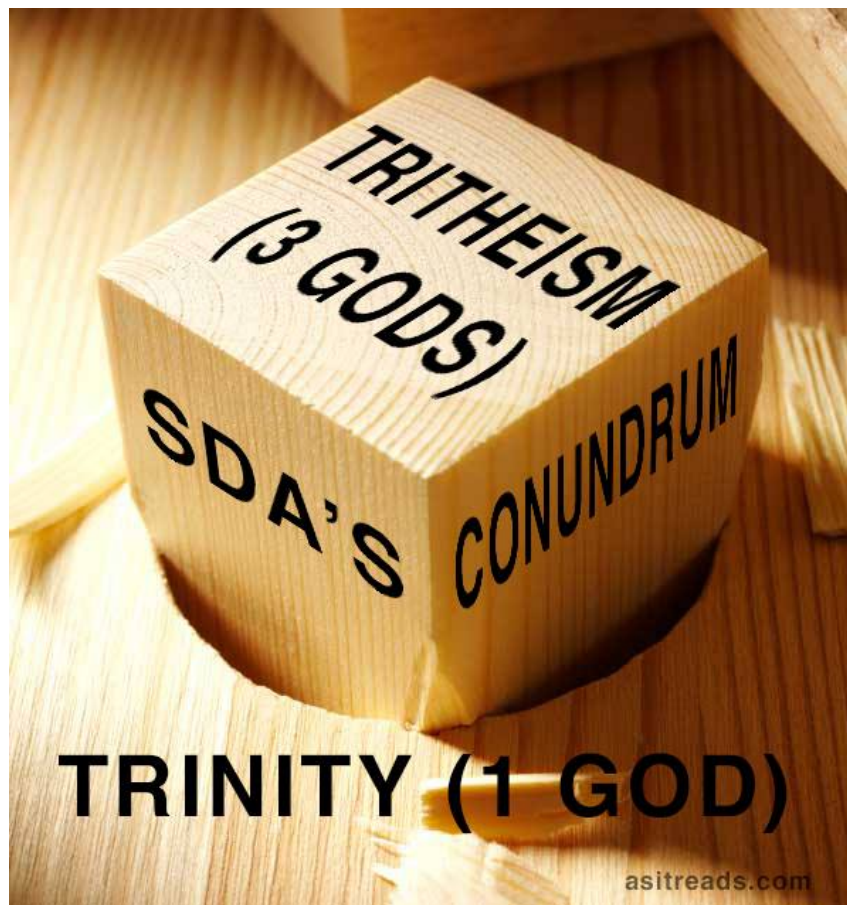




**“The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.” – Proverbs 18:17 (ESV)**



A belief in the divinity, personality, unity, and equality of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit does not itself make one a Trinitarian, for even non-trinitarians can accept the existence of more than one divine "Person" or even 3 divine "Persons". The distinctive teaching of the doctrine of the Trinity is specific: There is one God, and this one God is a unity of three Persons.

There are two integral factors to a trinity doctrine. This is 'threeness' and 'oneness'. As Paul Petersen wrote (as Chair of Religion & Professor of the Hebrew Bible, Andrews University):

**"The core elements of the doctrine of the Trinity are oneness and distinctiveness. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one, yet three.** To express this conviction, words and expressions came into use that are not explicitly used in the Bible. **The oneness of God we confess by claiming that God is one in being; the distinctiveness we confess by teaching that there are three persons.**" (Paul Petersen, Andrews University, May 2015, page 3, 'God in 3 Persons – in the New Testament')

While all Trinitarians agree on this core concept, within Trinitarianism there can be notable variation from one denomination to another or even variants within each denomination. That said, there too exists within Adventism, two main notable variations, namely the tritheistic and the orthodox variety. Learn more on the variants within Adventism [HERE](#).

**In general, there are three main categories of how trinity or triunity is understood:**

**1. Consubstantial trinity** – This version of trinity is characterized as a single divine **"Being,"** comprised of three **"Persons,"** sharing one indivisible (undivided) substance (Catholic/Orthodox trinity and many theologian class of SDA Church who are heavily influenced by evangelical authors would fall under this category). ("One Being" = "3 Persons"; "Being" and "Person" is distinguished)

**2. Modalistic trinity** – This version of trinity is comprised of three modes or roles occupied by single divine individual wherein one God is manifesting or revealing himself in three different ways, without distinct and coexisting persons in the divine nature. (i.e. Father is Jesus, Father is the Holy Spirit, etc.; same person operating in 3 different modes)

**3. Tritheistic trinity** – The “trinity” is comprised of three distinct divine “persons” but they understand “persons” as individual Beings; who all have same power, same nature, purpose, etc. Because they are in agreement in everything they do, they are said to be “one God,” not that all three make up a single Being (Majority of Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians would fall under this category).

“There were some very early that **turned the doctrine of the Trinity into Tritheism, and, instead of three divine persons under the economy of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, brought in three collateral, co-ordinate, and self-originated beings**, making them three absolute and independent principles, without any relation of Father or Son, which is the most proper notion of three gods. And having made this change in the doctrine of the Trinity, they made another change answerable to it in the form of baptism.”—Antiquities, b. 11, chap. 3, § 4.

J. H. Waggoner, Signs of the Times, January 27, 1881, pg. 40

<https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/ST/ST18810127-V07-04.pdf>

In general, SDA Trinitarians have made the Holy Spirit into a third “being” that is essentially the same as the Father and Son, to the point where any of them could just as well swap roles and it wouldn’t make any difference. The Father could have taken the role of the Son, the Son could have taken the role of the Spirit, the Spirit could have taken the role of the Father, etc (you can find statements by SDA theologians surmising to these sort of ideas further down in this article). This is different than the Trinity doctrine taught by other churches, which firmly declares that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three “persons” inside a SINGLE “being”. So Sunday-keeping Trinitarians (as well as Catholics) teach three persons that make up one being, whereas Adventist teach three “beings” that are likened to 3 individual divine beings belonging to a single family.

From the [Biblical Research Institute Release-9, “God is 3 Persons-Theology” by Kwabena Donkor, May 2015](#); we read the following:

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church has succinctly expressed itself on the doctrine of the Trinity in her Fundamental Beliefs numbers two through five. In order to evaluate the charges against the Church mentioned at the beginning of this paper, it will be important to set out clearly what the Church’s position on the Trinity is. **The statement seems to deliberately attempt to state only the basic facts about God’s nature—one eternal God who has been revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It does not elaborate on the nature of God’s eternity; neither does it address how the one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, nor the nature of the unity amongst them.** In comparison with the traditional Christian doctrine, the Adventist statement is significant because in the polemic context of its formulation the traditional doctrine sought to address precisely the very issues that the **Adventist statement is silent on. The traditional formula “one essence, three Persons” is an explicatory concept intended to clarify the nature of the unity, identity, and relations of the three Persons. Absent from the Adventist statement is the ontologically pregnant statement of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, ‘Light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father.’**” (Tanner, 1:5) — [Kwabena Donkor, Biblical Research Institute, “God is 3 Persons-Theology”, pp. 18, 19](#)

To reiterate, the Adventist’s statement of beliefs deliberately **“does not elaborate on the nature of God’s eternity; neither does it address HOW the one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, nor the nature of the unity amongst them”** (How are these 3 Persons 1 God? How is the “Father” a “Father”? How is the “Son” a “Son”? Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father or the Son? Or is the Holy Spirit an entirely independent, self-originating entity, completely external to Father and Son?, etc.). Furthermore it avoids the issue of ontological pre-incarnate sonship of Christ, unlike the creedal orthodox trinitarianism.

## The Seventh-day Adventist 28 Fundamental #2 reads,

“There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **a unity of three coeternal Persons.** God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. **He is infinite** and beyond human comprehension, yet known through **His self-revelation.** God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)”

# And the Seventh-day Adventist 28 Fundamental #6 reads,

“...This unity has its source in the oneness of the **triune God, who has adopted us as His children...**”

Note: “One God,” at least how it is expressed in the SDA Fundamental belief, is not a numerically singular personal Being but a Being who is a “UNITY of three coeternal Persons.” Please note how the singular pronouns, He and His, are used to describe this “One God.” The intended expressions such as, “**He** is infinite,” “**His** self-revelation,” and “**His** children,” clearly denotes a singular Being, and yet this “One God Being” is made up of 3 distinct Persons (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit).

## Six main objections about the current SDA’s doctrine of Trinity

**1. Defines “one God” of the Bible only as a “unity.”** One God of the Bible therefore is not a numerically singular personal Being but is a composite entity (or a committee) made up of three distinct, co-existing Persons (**Father, Son and the Holy Spirit**) and thereby disallowing God the Father as the Only True God (John 17:3, 1Corinthians 8:6) of the Bible in an exclusive sense.

**2. Denial of Christ’s pre-incarnate (ontologically) begotten Sonship and regards it as volunteerism or metaphor or arbitrarily interchangeable role play.** According to this view, Christ’s Sonship is recognized only in light of His incarnate birth or His resurrection, whereby the title, “Son of God” is attributed only in a proleptic, soteriological or metaphorical sense. Accordingly, “begotten” (μονογενής monogenes) is defined as “unique” and NOT in an ontological sense. This would affectively place us along side the enemy in obscuring the Sonship of Christ (Lt42-1910.3; 1 John 2:22) and would undermine the gospel narrative as a pretense.

**3. Denial or obfuscation of the Father and Son’s omnipresence by defining the Holy Spirit only as an entirely separate individual rather than He/It being the Spirit of the Father and the Son.** According to this reasoning, because Christ is forever to retain or bound by His human nature, that He has forfeited His omnipresence. With this view, all the work that is being done on our behalf here on earth is now being performed vicariously through someone else other than Christ. This undercuts the very efforts trinitarians are putting forth to uphold the integrity of Christ’s divinity by insisting upon Christ’s “unbegotten” (without beginning) existence. By denying one of the key attributes of divinity (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence), the trinitarians are actually contradicting (perhaps unwittingly) their efforts by denigrating Christ’s divinity. Furthermore, this undermines the full scope of Christ’s mediatorial ministry by affectively making two intercessors and two mediators.

**4. All three Persons of the Godhead are considered to have independent source of life.** This raises serious questions as to the source of life. Since there are multiple source of life, whose life is it that sustains all of God’s creation? Whose life do we receive? Is it the Father’s, the Son’s or the Holy Spirit’s? Whereas, pen of Inspiration tells us,

“But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. “I do nothing of Myself,” said Christ; “the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.” “I seek not Mine own glory,” but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the GREAT PRINCIPLE WHICH IS THE LAW OF LIFE FOR THE UNIVERSE. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: THROUGH THE BELOVED SON, THE FATHER’S LIFE FLOWS OUT TO ALL; THROUGH THE SON IT RETURNS, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, TO THE GREAT SOURCE OF ALL. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” {Ellen G. White, The Desire of Age, pg. 21.2}

**5. The integrity of Christ’s death and resurrection is greatly compromised by postulating the idea that Christ’s divinity is independently immortal apart from His humanity.** If there are three separate divine lives, each one responsible for His own divinity, or if the essence of divinity is inseparable, then it could not be the divine side of Christ that died, but only the human Christ. The original divine life therefore was untouched. In that case, none of the Three, as they originally existed, actually died. The inherent life of the

Second Person of the Trinity (Jesus) was never in jeopardy. He faced no real, eternal risk to His life (contrary to Inspiration). And if Jesus had His own separate divine life, His mortal humanity would need to be detached from His own immortal divinity in order to be able to die. But this would defeat the whole purpose of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the key to the atonement. It wasn't just about Jesus becoming human. In the Incarnation, divinity was mysteriously blended with humanity {6MR 112.3}. It is that blending of the two natures that makes His death efficacious. A divine life in human flesh unites man with God. Only thus can atonement be made. But to divide Jesus at the cross into two separate natures negates the effect of the Incarnation.

**6. Making extra-biblical propositions be made a test of fellowship.** It questions the appropriateness of requiring doctrinal conclusions that are not explicitly stated in the Bible but only implied. Keep in mind that the doctrine of the Trinity is a human attempt to synthesize the teachings of the Bible on the nature of God as being composed of three co-equal, co-eternal persons or beings of the same substance. So the question we are asking is: Is it proper to impose our synthesis on our members, and discipline those who conscientiously do not agree with the church's reasoning, even though those members accept everything the Bible actually says?

"The concept of the Trinity, namely the IDEA THAT THE THREE ARE ONE, IS NOT EXPLICITLY STATED BUT ONLY ASSUMED." – Fernando L. Canale, *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, Volume 12, pg. 138, 'Doctrine of God'

"The reasons for which member shall be subject to discipline are:

"Denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel **and in the fundamental beliefs of the Church or teaching doctrines contrary to the same**" (SDA Church Manual pg. 62)

## **Statements by Seventh-day Adventist theologians further affirms what the SDA Trinity doctrine really teach.**

"Therefore, we must confess that the Trinity is ONE INDIVISIBLE GOD and that the distinctions of the persons do not destroy the divine unity. THIS UNITY OF GOD IS EXPRESSED BY SAYING THAT HE IS ONE SUBSTANCE. Nevertheless, in the divine unity there are three co-eternal and co-equal persons, who, though distinct, are THE ONE UNDIVIDED AND ADORABLE GOD. This is the doctrine of Scripture." – Raoul Dederen, *Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 16, Andrews University Seminar Studies, Vol. VIII, No. 1 January, 1970

"The core elements of the doctrine of the Trinity are oneness and distinctiveness. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one, yet three. To express this conviction, words and expressions came into use that are not explicitly used in the Bible. THE ONENESS OF GOD WE CONFESS BY CLAIMING THAT GOD IS ONE IN BEING; the distinctiveness we confess by teaching that there are three persons." (Paul Petersen, Andrews University, May 2015, page 3, 'God in 3 Persons – in the New Testament')

"The "oneness" of God refers to THE SINGLENESSE OF HIS BEING. In other words, the oneness of God refers to the fact that according to the Bible there is only one God, as opposed to more than one." – Fernando L. Canale, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 'Doctrine of God,' the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia Volume 12, pg.109

"the God of the Bible is one and not many, all the various revelations about Him presented throughout the Bible refer to the same, ONE divine reality and NOT TO A PLURALITY OF DIVINE BEINGS." – *ibid*, pg. 121

"In Scripture GOD HAS REVEALED HIS TRANSCENDENT NATURE AS TRINITY, namely three distinct divine Persons who act directly and historically in history and CONSTITUTING THE ONE DIVINE TRINITARIAN BEING." – *ibid*. pg. 138

"TRINITARIANISM is the orthodox belief that there is only one living, true God, or "Godhead," in a unity of three eternal divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These are of one substance, power, authority, and glory. True orthodox Trinitarian dogma insists on three

difference hypostases (or ousia) IN ONE BEING- a Tri-Unity. – Pastor Jan Voerman, Ellen White and the Trinity, pg. 9

“Trinitarianism is the orthodox belief that there is BUT ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD. Nevertheless THIS ONE GOD IS A UNITY of three persons, who are of ONE SUBSTANCE, power and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” – Gerhard Pfandl (Associate Director, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute), ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity among Adventists’, 1999

“The three persons SHARE ONE INDIVISIBLE NATURE. Each person of the Godhead is BY NATURE AND ESSENCE GOD, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, EACH PERSON OF THE GODHEAD IS INSEPARABLY CONNECTED TO THE OTHER TWO.” – Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute newsletter Reflections, July 2008

“The three persons of the Trinity, however, must be inclusive and not independent of one another. Because there is but one true God, by nature we have to conclude that HE IS PLURAL AS TO PERSONS BUT SINGLE AS TO SUBSTANCE.” (Max Hatton, Understanding the Trinity’, page 20, 2001)

“The Three are obviously One, INEXTRICABLY BOUND TOGETHER IN ONE DIVINE SUBSTANCE. ” – Max Hatton, Our God is an awesome God, page 21, April 2014

“No informed Trinitarian has ever said that 3 persons = 1 person. What Trinitarians really do say is that what we can only describe as three persons all exist WITHIN THE ONE SUBSTANCE. The three Persons are therefore the one God.” – Max Hatton, Understanding the Trinity, S.133

“We do not believe in three Gods but ‘one God in three persons.’ In other words, God has revealed his nature as Trinity, that is, three coeternal and coequal persons, who, though distinct, constitute the ‘ONE DIVINE TRINITARIAN BEING.’” – Ekkehardt Mueller (Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute), “Our God,” 2008 Biblical Research Institute paper

“The three persons ‘share one INDIVISIBLE nature.’ Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is INSEPARABLY CONNECTED TO THE OTHER TWO.” – Ekkehardt Mueller (Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute), “Our God,” 2008 Biblical Research Institute paper

“Given Adventists’ commitment to biblical inspiration, the inability of human reason to describe the inner structure of God’s being should not distract from the fact that ‘in Scripture God has revealed His transcendent nature as Trinity, namely three distinct divine Persons who act directly and historically in history and ‘constitute the one divine Trinitarian being’” – Kwabena Donkor (Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute), God in Three Persons – in Theology, p. 22, Biblical Research Institute Release – 9, May 2015.

“The most we can say is that in Genesis we find, ‘within the intradivine being,’ ‘the one God,’ a plurality of persons that through further divine revelation will be identified as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” – Angel Rodriguez (Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute), Adventist World, April 2017, pg. 26).

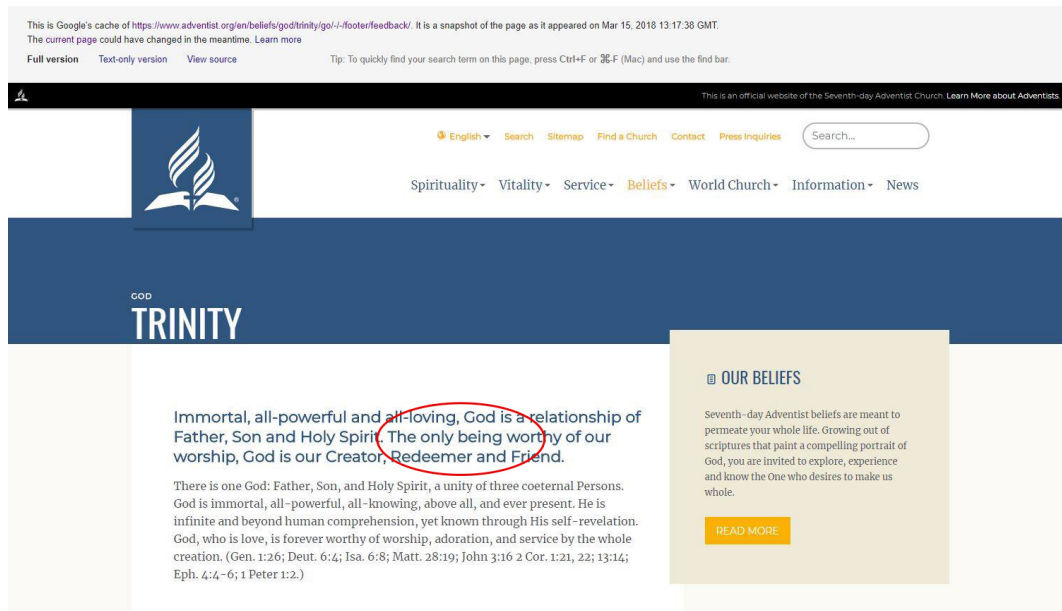
“God is one, but that one name, Ha-Shem, is shared by three (see Matt 28:19). ‘One being’ but three persons is the language we use” – Paul Petersen, “God in Three Persons – in the New Testament,” pg. 23, Biblical Research Institute Release, May 2015

“By the end of the century (1800’s) the Adventist ministry had largely swung over to viewing the Trinity as three coequal, coeternal members of the Godhead, UNITED IN SUBSTANCE, purpose and character, but each with His own personality and work.” – R. W. Schwarz (Historian), Light Bearers to the Remnant, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, California, 1979, pg. 168

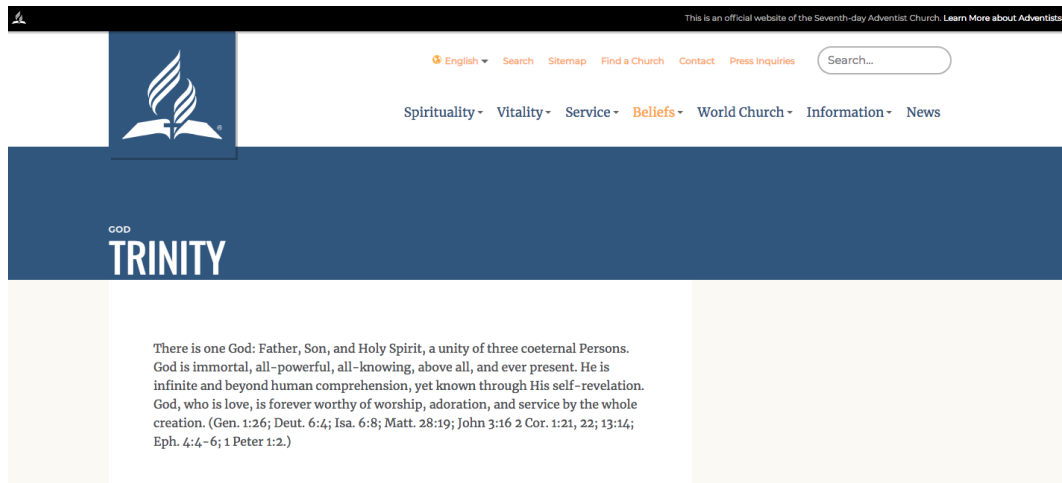
“At the center of this doctrine is the concept of the Trinity, or the Godhead, by which is meant that God is ONE IN ESSENCE but three in person.” – Daniel K. Bediako, Adventist World, NAD Edition, June 2012, pg.22, under the heading “Number 2: Distinct—but Indivisible”

“Immortal, all-powerful and all-loving, God is a relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. THE ONLY BEING worthy of our worship, God is our Creator, Redeemer and Friend.” – <https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/god/trinity/> See the screen shot below.

The phrase “The only being worthy of our worship” appeared on the SDA’s official website until March of 2018:



Screenshot of the website sometime after 3/15/2021. The paragraph containing the phrase, “The only being worthy of our worship” was removed from the page sometime after March 15, 2018:



Screenshot (12/17/2021) of the same website states: “Seventh-day Adventist Christians believe there is one God. And that this one God is three co-eternal BEINGS who work together in unity.”:



## What Adventists Believe About the Trinity



Seventh-day Adventist Christians believe there is one God. And that this one God is three co-eternal beings who work together in unity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have always been, and always will be.

It's impossible to wrap our finite minds around this infinite concept. How does the doctrine of the Trinity work? How can there be one God, but three persons?

### Our Beliefs

Seventh-day Adventist beliefs are meant to permeate your whole life. Growing out of scriptures that paint a compelling portrait of God, you are invited to explore, experience and know the One who desires to make us whole.

- [1. The Holy Scriptures](#)
- [2. Trinity](#)
- [3. Father](#)
- [4. Son](#)
- [5. Holy Spirit](#)
- [6. Creation](#)
- [7. Nature of humanity](#)
- [8. The Great Controversy](#)
- [9. The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ](#)

While there are other notable **variants within the SDA church**, the aforementioned SDA theologians are in agreement with each other. They all agree that the trinity doctrine says that the three persons exist inseparably in one indivisible substance (one triune or trinitarian being) as the one God. In fact, one of these statements is from the Seventh-day Adventist Handbook of Theology (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, volume 12).

**Question:** Can you find anything in the Bible or even the Spirit of Prophecy that indicates that the 3 Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are an “only being” or “one Divine trinitarian being” and that They are “indivisible” and “one substance” or, again, have “one indivisible nature” and are “inseparably connected” to each other or, yet again, are all “inextricably bound together in one Divine substance”? The answer is you will not find such statements anywhere. Could it be that these traditional views have no basis in inspiration?

## Implications of the Trinity as taught by Seventh-day Adventists

**It teaches that the Father and Christ are playing an arbitrarily decided roles, that Jesus is merely a metaphorical Son and not the real Son of God. Furthermore, the role of each member can be interchangeable and is a matter of mere choosing:**

*“Eternal Sonship of Christ:* Christ is the eternal Son of God. Paul wrote that “when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). Christ was the Son of God before He was born of a woman. Through the preexistent Son, God “made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). However, the sonship of Christ is unique. Believers are spiritually born of God as children of God, but the Son is never described as being spiritually born of God; He is the Son, who came directly from the Father (John 16:28). He has life in Himself and is one with the Father in will (John 14:31; 15:10), character (John 14:8-11), purpose (John 15:16; 16:15; 17:4-8), and nature (John 8:58). Yet He is a different person. **We are dealing with a metaphorical use of the word ‘son.’**” — A Question of Sonship by Angel Manuel Rodriguez (Seventh-day Adventist theologian and “director” of the Adventist Biblical Research Institute) Source: <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/godgodhead-jesus-christ/question-sonship>

“We are dealing with a metaphorical use of the word ‘son.’... There is no biblical support for the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. The Son came from God but was not generated by Him. [T]he [human] father-son image cannot be literally applied to the divine Father-Son relationship within the Godhead. The Son is NOT the natural, literal Son of the Father. A natural child has a beginning, while within the Godhead the Son is eternal. **THE TERM “SON” IS USED METAPHORICALLY** when applied to the



Godhead. It conveys the ideas of distinction of persons within the Godhead and the equality of nature in the context of an eternal, loving relationship.” – *ibid*; Also published on [Adventist World November 2015, p. 42.](#)

“The sonship of Jesus, however, is NOT ONTOLOGICAL, BUT FUNCTIONAL. In the plan of salvation each member of the trinity has ACCEPTED A PARTICULAR ROLE.” – *The Trinity In Scripture* by Gerhard Pfandl, Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, MD. June 1999.

“Imagine a situation in which the Being we have come to know as God the Father came to die for us, and the One we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven... NOTHING WOULD HAVE CHANGED except that we would have been calling Each by the name we now use for the Other.” – Roy Adams, Adventist Review associate editor, [Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, Lesson for April 10, 2008.](#)

“Entirely through Their own initiative, **THE GODHEAD ARRANGED FOR ONE AMONG THEM TO BECOME A HUMAN BEING.** They did so in order to (1) provide us with our Substitute and Surety, (2) make God’s ways plain, (3) restore us to our pre-sin perfection, and (4) settle the debate about God’s Justice. At precisely the right time and in the right way, the three Members of the Godhead put into operation a plan They had devised before the world was created. They surrendered a portion of Themselves—the Divine Son—to become the Saviour of the world.” – *Our Wonderful God*, Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, 4th Quarter 1998, Principal Contributor: Edwin R. Thiele.

“The gospel commission commands surrendered souls to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The apostolic benediction lists the Three and names Christ first. Paul usually places God the Father first but here it is reversed. To me **THIS SIGNIFIED THE INTERCHANGEABLENESS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE GODHEAD** since they are one in action and purpose.” – J.R. Spangler *Review & Herald*, Oct. 21, 1971, “I BELIEVE in the Triune God.”

“It may be **INFERRED** from the Scriptures that when the Godhead laid out the plan of salvation **AT SOME POINT IN ETERNITY PAST, THEY ALSO TOOK CERTAIN POSITIONS OR ROLES** to carry out the provisions of the plan. – Pastor Frank B. Holbrook, *Signs of the Times*, July 1985, ‘Frank Answers’ (also *These Times*, our *Times*, June 1st, 1981)

“In God’s foreknowledge and great love, such a provision had already been made. A plan of salvation was encompassed in the covenant made by the Three Persons of the Godhead, who possessed the attributes of Deity equally. In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, one of the divine beings accepted, and **ENTERED INTO THE ROLE OF THE FATHER**, another the **ROLE OF THE SON**. The remaining divine Being, the Holy Spirit, was also to participate in effecting the plan of salvation. **ALL OF THIS TOOK PLACE BEFORE SIN AND REBELLION TRANSPIRED IN HEAVEN.**” – Gordon Jenson (President of Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India, “Jesus, the Heavenly Intercessor”, [Adventist Review, Oct. 31, 1996. 12/32 on digital pdf](#))

**“BY ACCEPTING THE ROLES** that the plan entailed, **THE DIVINE BEINGS** lost none of the powers of Deity. With regard to their eternal existence and other attributes, they were one and equal. But with regard to the plan of salvation, there was, in a sense, a submission on the part of the Son to the Father.” – Gordon Jenson (President of Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India, “Jesus, the Heavenly Intercessor”, [Adventist Review, Oct. 31, 1996. 12/32 on digital pdf](#))

“Is it not quite apparent that the problem texts become problems **only when one assumes an exclusively literalistic interpretation of such expressions as “Father,” “Son,” “Firstborn,” “Only Begotten,” “Begotten,”** and so forth? Does not such literalism **go against the mainly figurative or metaphorical meaning** that the Bible writers use when referring to the persons of the Godhead? Can one really say that the Bible writers meant such expressions as “the only true God” and “one God the Father” **to exclude the full deity of the Son, Christ Jesus?**” (*Woodrow Whidden, The Trinity, ‘Biblical objections to the trinity’ page 106, 2002*)

“The Father, Son relationship in the New Testament, must **always be understood in the light of the event of Bethlehem.** The only child born into this world with a divine rather than a human father is Jesus. The title ‘son’ refers to **His entry into time** and does not deny at all His **eternal origins.** There are references in the Old Testament to **‘Sonship’** but these **are always in anticipation of the incarnation.**” (*J. R. Hoffman, Seventh-day Adventist Minister, Ministry Magazine article ‘Is Jesus Jehovah God?’ June 1982 page 24*)

Note: It is being emphasized here that the ‘Father-Son’ relationship has no application to Christ’s pre-existence. Rather it is said only to be terminology made applicable by the events of the incarnation.

"While the three divine persons are one, **THEY HAVE TAKEN DIFFERENT ROLES OR POSITIONS** in the Godhead's work of creation, redemption and loving administration of the universe. The Father has assumed overall leadership, the Son has subordinated Himself to the leadership of the Father, and the Spirit is voluntarily subordinate to both the Father and the Son" (The Trinity, pg 243)

**Seventh-day Adventist trinitarians overtly teach unbegottenism. That is, they say that the pre-incarnate Son of God was not begotten. In fact some even say that He was not a Son in His pre-incarnate existence but held a title of a Son only in a proleptic, salvific sense – an anticipation of the future fulfillment. Sadly, this is out of harmony with inspiration and it has brought several problems into the fold.**

**The driving idea undergirding this theology comes from the thought that a divine being must exist without beginning and therefore according to this view, any compromise on the Son's eternal existence denigrates the integrity of Christ divinity, etc. This however is a great irony, for biblical affirmation of Christ's divinity is established by the very fact that Christ was begotten of His Father (Jn 5:18) – Christ is divine like His Father because He is the Son of God!**

Trinitarians of other persuasions (i.e. Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian) also invalidate His begetting but not so overtly. They say that the pre-incarnate Son of God's experience was and still is one of "eternal generation." However, due to the presupposition that the 3 persons of the Godhead are one inseparably unified God Being, they make this meaningless because, in order to maintain this one triune God Being, they make Him formless. Thus it is all mysticism or spiritualism as the early SDA pioneers would dub it and thereby destroys the integrity of the image and the likeness of the corporeal personality of either the Father or the Son.

"Unfortunately, many unsuspecting Seventh-day Adventists do not even realize what their own church teach. They do not realize that the Trinity doctrine actually claims that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three co-equal, co-eternal persons/gods with 3 distinct personalities and yet they are not three separate beings but rather a single being (at least this is how it is officially articulated). Most Adventist members, however, insist that they believe something different than what the church doctrine actually teach. Most believe that there are *three Almighty Beings* with distinct personalities who all have exactly the same authority and power and that they have all lived for all eternity. All three are said to be one God, because they are in agreement in everything they do – not that they make up a single being. According to this belief (also contrary to Scripture and should be construed as some form of Tri-Theism rather than Trinity), these three divine Beings (Gods) decided long, long ago (for the purpose of saving mankind) to act in three different roles. One would enter into a roll as the Father, one as the Son and one would work as the Holy Spirit, etc.

## Assumed As Facts – Admittance by the Church

Where though in Scripture can be found such an idea? The answer is, it cannot be found. This is because it is not there. It is purely supposition (philosophical speculation). This is why the trinity doctrine is only an assumed doctrine. This is even duly recognized in our own denominational handbook of theology:

"The concept of the Trinity, namely the IDEA THAT THE THREE ARE ONE, IS NOT EXPLICITLY STATED BUT ONLY ASSUMED." – Fernando L. Canale, The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, Volume 12, page 138, 'Doctrine of God'

Here's what the church's official website say:

"The Bible's clear ALLUSIONS [not explicitly stated] to the Trinity are enough for Adventists." – (bracket supplied) <https://www.adventist.org/.../trini.../article/go/-/the-trinity/>

Another respected SDA theologian says,

"The role of the trinity in a doctrine of God always raises questions. One reason is that the word itself does not appear in the Bible, NOR IS THERE ANY CLEAR STATEMENT OF THE IDEA. But the Bible does set the stage for its formulation, and the concept represents a development of biblical claims and concepts. SO EVEN THOUGH THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY IS NOT PART OF WHAT THE BIBLE ITSELF SAYS ABOUT GOD, IT IS PART OF WHAT THE CHURCH MUST SAY to safeguard the biblical view of God." – Richard Rice, The Reign of God, An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective', page 89, 'A constructive proposal', 1985

"We can find **hints of this doctrine** in the Old Testament and **preliminary expressions** of it in the new." (Ibid)

Again this is the admittance that the trinity doctrine cannot be found in Scripture. All that can be found there, according to Rice, are "**hints**" and "**preliminary expressions**".

After quoting several passages that speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the same author wrote:

"As these passages indicate, the idea of the trinity has precedents in the Bible, even though a full-fledged doctrine of the trinity is not to be found there." (Ibid)

Another official SDA church publication notes:

"In contrast to the heathen of surrounding nations, ISRAEL BELIEVED THERE WAS ONLY ONE GOD (Deut.4:35;6:4; Isa.45:5; Zech14:9). The New Testament makes the same emphasis on the unity of God . . . This monotheistic emphasis does not contradict the Christian concept of the triune God or Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit; rather it affirms that there is no pantheon of various deities. Although the Old Testament DOES NOT EXPLICITLY TEACH THAT GOD IS TRIUNE, IT ALLUDES TO A PLURALITY WITHIN THE GODHEAD . . . While the Godhead is not one in person, God is one in purpose, mind and character. This oneness does not obliterate the distinct personalities of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Nor does the separateness of personalities within the Deity destroy the monotheistic thrust of Scripture, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God." – *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrine, 1988. R & H, pp 22-23.

**Adventist Review 7-30-1981 Special Issue on Bible Doctrines** – The Trinity was explained one year after it was voted as an official doctrine of the church (which was in 1980; initially composed of 27 fundamental beliefs). It states,

"While no single scriptural passage states formally the doctrine of the Trinity, it is assumed as a fact by Bible writers... Only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity." (p. 4)

person in the Godhead. If God were only one person in eternity, His love would have been limited to self-love.

While no single scriptural passage states formally the doctrine of the Trinity, it is assumed as a fact by Bible writers and mentioned several times. It is implied in Genesis 1, where God and the Spirit of God are portrayed acting in Creation. The New Testament makes it clear that Christ participated in Creation too, in fact as actual Creator (John 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:2). Matthew 28:19 commands baptism "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Here the doctrine of

### Traditional proofs of God

Only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity. Nevertheless, reason supplies evidences that support our belief in God. Through the ages theologians have developed what have become known as the traditional proofs of God. They are:

1. *The moral proof.* Each person's quest for the "highest good" implies the existence of a moral Being. Conscience and morality distinguish humans from animals. There must be an independent coherent source of human morality—God.

2. *The mental proof.* The human

ADVENTIST REVIEW

Adventist Review 7-30-1981

## Strongest clues?

The Trinity, by Moon, Whidden & Reese, Andrews University.

"Probably the strongest clues to such a divine triunity occur in the famous gospel commission that Jesus gave the church in its baptismal formula: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28:19)." – The Trinity, by Jerry Moon, Woodrow Whidden, & John W. Reese, published by R & H 2002, p.32. (Chapter entitled "The Strongest Biblical Evidence for the Trinity") (emphasis supplied)

While scholars admit that trinity doctrine is an assumed doctrine, We are now told by our three well respected Adventist academics that Matthew 28:19 is the "**strongest clue**" that we have to prove the

trinity, when it is not even a text laying out a doctrinal position on the nature of God! Christ is making a statement on Baptism, and the passage does NOT reveal anything about,

- (1) how “the Father”, “the Son”, and “the Holy Spirit” are related to each other.
- (2) how they are co-equal, co-eternal Beings or Persons.
- (3) It does not say that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are unified as one God.
- (4) It does not say that the Son is unbegotten.
- (5) It does not say that the Spirit isn’t the Spirit of God.
- (6) It doesn’t even say that the Holy Spirit is a separate individual not unlike the Father and the Son.

And yet, this is “strongest clue” we have? Is that the best that God has revealed for us, His remnant people, as the foundation of our faith, in regard to the God whom we worship?

Even the Catholics admit the the trinity doctrine is only assumed in Scripture. In their challenge to so-called Protestants who invoke “Sola Scriptura,” they say:

“Our opponents sometimes claim that no belief should be held dogmatically which is not explicitly stated in scripture . . . **But the Protestant Churches have themselves accepted such dogmas, as the Trinity, for which there is no such precise authority in the Gospels,**” – (Assumption of Mary, Life magazine, October 30, 1950, p. 51)

*“In Scripture there is as yet **no single term** by which the Three Divine Persons are denoted together....The Vatican Council has explained the meaning to be attributed to the term ‘mystery’ in theology. It lays down that a mystery is a truth which we are not merely incapable of discovering apart from Divine Revelation, but which, even when revealed, remains ‘hidden by the veil of faith and enveloped, so to speak, by a kind of darkness.’” (Const., “De fide. cath.”, iv). (Joyce G.H. The Blessed Trinity. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XV Copyright © 1912 by Robert Appleton Company Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by K. Knight)*

## Some in the church say Trinity is taught explicitly

“The New Testament does not have any explicit statement on the Trinity—apart from 1 John 5:7, which has been rejected as a medieval addition to the text—but the Trinitarian evidence is overwhelming.” – Dennis Fortin <http://www.perspectivedigest.org/article/17/archives/15-4/god-the-trinity-and-adventism>)

“Explicit in the New Testament, implied in the Old, the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to Adventist faith.” – R. Allan Anderson, Review and Herald, September 8th 1983, ‘Adventists and the trinity’

“Internal evidence provided below, however, indicates that the Trinity can rise to the level of being explicit in the Old Testament.” – Systematic Theology God as Trinity, Norman Gulley pg. 26

## Instead, we would do well to heed the Testimony of Jesus Himself, by the pen of His Messenger:

“I am instructed to say to our people: **Let us follow Christ. Do not forget that He is to be our pattern in all things. We may safely discard those ideas that are not found in His teaching.**” Ellen G. White, {CCh 326.1}

## Variant beliefs about the Trinity within the church

It is worth mentioning here that not all current SDA scholars on the doctrine of the trinity agrees on the subject and that there are notable variants within the church; below are a list of 9 significant variants.

- 1) Current SDA scholars are not agreed as to whether the doctrine of the trinity is explicit in the Bible.
- 2) Current SDA trinitarianism is not agreed as to how many Divine Beings there – 3 Beings or 1 Being?
- 3) In harmony with Catholic trinity or out of harmony?
- 4) Interchangeable Roles or Not?
- 5) God has a body or is God formless?
- 6) God the Father is Head vs. there is no Headship when it comes to the Godhead
- 7) The Son of God?
- 8) Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and Spirit or Christ vs. Holy Spirit is not the Spirit of God or Spirit of Christ.
- 9) Separable and thus capable of dying forever or Inseparable and thus incapable of dying?

## Some within the Church admit church's doctrinal harmony with the Roman Catholics?

In the year 2000, following statement was included in a document prepared by George W. Reid (director of Biblical Research Institute 1984–2001): A brief review of the history and doctrines of the SDA church. Prepared for the dialogue with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church (visiting Andrews University).

"Nature of God. A reading of the above statements will show that with respect to their doctrine of God Seventh-day Adventists are in harmony with the great creedal statements of Christendom, including the Apostles' Creed, **Nicea (325)**, and the additional definition of faith concerning the Holy Spirit as reached in **Constantinople (381)**." — [Seventh-day Adventists: A Brief Introduction to Their Beliefs, Biblical Research Institute; 6/19 on digital pdf](#)

Note: What is the "Faith Concerning the Holy Spirit as reached in Constantinople (381) as noted above?" "The Council of Constantinople also declared finally the Trinitarian doctrine of the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son." — <https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Council-of-Constantinople-381>

"The member churches of THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS ARE IN AGREEMENT ON THE FUNDAMENTAL ARTICLES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AS SET FORTH IN THE THREE ANCIENT SYMBOLS (Apostolicum, NICAENON-CONSTANTINOPOLITUM, ATHANASIUM). This agreement finds expression in UNQUALIFIED ACCEPTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY and the Two-Natures." — *So Much In Common*, p. 107 (1973) Co-authored by B.B. Beach and Dr. Lukas Vischer-Faith and the Order Secretariat of the WCC.

"...THE CATHOLIC SIDE RECOGNIZES in the document the Christocentric character of our beliefs, AND ESPECIALLY OUR BELIEF IN THE TRINITY, as well as ecclesiological identity of the Church, a status affirmed by an act of the Polish Parliament. On our part, we spoke of a need to change attitudes toward our denomination and recognized the openness of the Catholic Church, especially in recent times, toward the Bible, Lyko explained." — "Adventist Church Cannot be Treated as a Sect," Say Adventists and Catholics in Poland, Feb, 14, 2000

## Some within the church say it's not in harmony with Catholic trinity?

"Secondly, as several of the gentlemen have pointed out, THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY THAT WE TEACH IS NOT IDENTICAL TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AS DEVELOPED BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH..." — A panel participant at the Q&A Session at the end of the Adventist Theological Society's 2006 "Trinity Symposium,

"It is true that the Council of NICAENON and the Council of CONSTANTINOPLE did make declarations THAT WE MUST NOW REJECT BECAUSE THEY DISAGREE WITH SCRIPTURE." — *The Trinity* by Whidden, Moon and Reeve pg 150

As you can see, the Bible scholars of Seventh-day Adventists are not in agreement as to whether or not the church's trinitarian position is in agreement with the Catholics. That said, both positions are maintained without much fanfare.

## Who Is Right?

A well-known Adventist Trinitarian Jerry Moon who was a co-author of the book *The Trinity* wrote: "That most of the leading SDA pioneers were non-Trinitarian in their theology has become accepted Adventist history."

He then goes on to say, "either the pioneers were wrong and the present church is right, or the pioneers were right and the present Seventh-day Adventist Church has apostatized from biblical truth." — Jerry Moon, *The Trinity*, Chapter, Trinity and antitrinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history, p. 190

## Regarding idolatry, Ellen White says,

"No outward shrines may be visible, there may be no image for the eye to rest upon, YET WE MAY BE PRACTICING IDOLATRY . . . Thousands have a false conception of God and His attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal. Are we worshipping the true God as He is revealed in His word, in Christ, in nature, or ARE WE ADORING SOME PHILOSOPHICAL IDOL ENSHRINED IN HIS PLACE?" – Testimonies for the Church vol. 5, p. 173-174. (Compare Ezekiel 14:3 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart")

Related articles:

**[What is the Doctrine of Trinity? Part 1](#)**

**[What is the Doctrine of Trinity? Part 2 -Variants Among Seventh-day Adventist Trinitarians](#)**