



# The Trinity in 1 John

Patrick J. Griffiths

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Waukesha Bible Church  
S53 W24079 Glendale Road  
Waukesha, Wisconsin 53189  
[www.waukeshabile.org](http://www.waukeshabile.org)

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# The Trinity in 1 John

The following material is presented with very little commentary. It is desired that the Scripture itself would simply wash over the reader and the Holy Spirit would continue to do what He does in guiding the individual in truth.

“If any doctrine makes Christianity Christian, then surely it is the doctrine of the Trinity. The three great ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—are all structured around our three in one God, underlying the essential importance of Trinitarian theology.”<sup>1</sup>

However, such thought is not without its antagonists.

“Absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of the doctrine of the Trinity taken literally.”<sup>2</sup>

“...the doctrine of the Trinity so easily appears to be an intellectual puzzle with no relevance to the faith of most Christians.”<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine of a monotheistic faith expressed in Trinitarian language is immeasurably practical. In its absence saving faith is impossible.

It is important to remember how Pastor John writes in response to an unsettling that has impacted the local churches in Asia Minor of which he has oversight. There is a factious group who either left the local church voluntarily or

had been removed through church discipline causing strife and doubt to enter the hearts and minds of God's people. Their error is a rejection of their own personal sin and thus a need for their own personal Savior. They reject Jesus as God incarnate. Although they would profess to know "God," they openly reject Jesus as God. They reject Him as God's only begotten Son. Because they refuse to see themselves as sinners and thus in need of a Savior, they equally reject the thought that Jesus is a substitutionary sacrifice which atones for sin, placates God's just sentence against sinners and then stands before the Father to mediate their own station before Him. The group to whom Pastor John writes are those who accept Jesus as God, equal with the Father and equal with the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle John writes within the context of the first century. Monotheism is ingrained within Jewish theology. God's singularity is assumed. His plurality within singularity is not. The early church wrestled with the concept of a Triune God. One who is singular in essence; but plural in persons.

"The doctrine of the Trinity is this: there is one God who exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is not the same as the other person; that is, the Father is not the same person as the Son who is not the same person as the Holy Spirit. But, each is fully divine in nature. Each person is **not a god** which would make three gods. Instead, the totality of all three persons comprises the one God. Again, the Trinity does not teach that there are three gods. The Trinity is monotheistic since it is the doctrine that only one God exists in all space and time. Christians believe there are no partners with God because we believe there is only one God in all existence."<sup>4</sup>

Within the early church there were those who denied the deity of Jesus Christ and denied that Jesus was God incarnate. The revelation received by His people opposed such thinking. What follows is Pastor John's presentation of this idea within his Letter to the churches of Asia Minor.

I. Pastor John refers to God as **the Father**.

"For at least the past 40 years, traditional language for God has come under fire. While formal feminist theologians disagree about what language to use instead, they are unanimous that masculine words for God, especially *Father*, must be expunged from our theological vocabulary. For the church to be inclusive, they argue, it must replace man-centered language with language that accounts for both male and female. Furthermore, since our human words cannot adequately portray God's fullness, no single characterization will suffice. God could be addressed as *father* and/or *mother* in order to bring out his multifaceted nature."<sup>5</sup>

However, such reasoning as this opposes what is clearly stated in the Bible. There are nine observations we can make from 1 John concerning the Fatherhood of God.

A. Throughout John's writing he refers to God as **the Father**.

"and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with **the Father** and was manifested to us" (1 John 1:2).

"what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with **the Father**, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with **the Father**, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

“I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know **the Father**” (1 John 2:13).

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of **the Father** is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from **the Father**, but is from the world” (1 John 2:16).

“Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies **the Father** and the Son” (1 John 2:22).

“Whoever denies the Son does not have **the Father**; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23).

“As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in **the Father**” (1 John 2:24).

“See how great a love **the Father** has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1).

“We have seen and testify that **the Father** has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves **the Father** loves the child born of Him” (1 John 5:1).

God is not simply an indefinite father among many fathers, but **the** Father of His only begotten Son and **the** Father of those who agree with Him concerning their sin and Jesus as their Savior.

B. God's status as Father causes Jesus to exist in the relationship of the Son (1 John 1:3).

"what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with **His Son** Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

"but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus **His Son** cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of **His Son** Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us" (1 John 3:23).

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent **His Son** to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

"If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning **His Son**" (1 John 5:9).

"The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning **His Son**" (1 John 5:10).

"And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in **His Son**" (1 John 5:11).

"And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in **His Son** Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

- C. There is an intimacy between the Father and His Son that speaks to their equality (1 John 1:2).

You cannot know one without knowing the other (1 John 2:22-24).

“and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:2).

<sup>22</sup> “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. <sup>24</sup> As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 John 2:22-24).

- D. If sinners need an Advocate before the Father, then the Father is one before whom all of fallen humanity will appear and give an account of their lives (1 John 2:1).

And if advocacy is necessary and Jesus is that Advocate, then Jesus has a relationship and offers a relationship to the alienated before the Father that is incapable of being achieved by humanity independent of Jesus.

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).



- E. Pastor John speaks of the Father as one who can and must be known by fallen humanity (1 John 2:13).

“I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because **you know the Father**” (1 John 2:13).

God is knowable by fallen humanity. All that God is is capable of being known by humanity. This does not mean we can have an exhaustive knowledge. But enough can be known of God to have a real and vital relationship with God.

- F. The Father as depicted by Pastor John is one who loves and whose love exists within His people (1 John 2:15; 3:1).

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, **the love of the Father is not in him**. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:15).

“**See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us**, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1).

This idea will be marked more fully in the short study booklet, “Love in 1 John.”

- G. The antichrist denies the authority of the Father to speak truth about the fallen and their need of a Savior (1 John 2:22, 23).

<sup>22</sup> “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who **denies the Father and the Son.** <sup>23</sup> **Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also**” (1 John 2:22, 23).

This is where a sharp line is drawn between biblical Christianity and everything else existing in the world. The separation is severe. Accommodation is impossible with such a stain.

H. His Fatherhood also has progeny, those who are born of Him (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

As those born of God, His people do not practice sin (1 John 2:29; 3:9), they love those born of God (1 John 4:7; 5:1). This new birth is caused by believing Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1). They overcome the world (1 John 5:4) and are kept by Him and the evil one does not touch them (1 John 5:18).

“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is **born of Him**” (1 John 2:29).

“No one who is **born of God** practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is **born of God** and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child **born of Him**” (1 John 5:1).

“For whatever is **born of God** overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4).

“We know that no one who is **born of God** sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18).

- I. His status as Father gives Him the position of sending His only begotten Son into the world to be its Savior (1 John 4:9, 10, 14).

<sup>9</sup> “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that **God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.** <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. . . <sup>14</sup> We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:9, 10, 14).

And if there is a Father, then of necessity there must be a Son.

- II. There is within the Godhead the **Son**.

There are eight observations we can make from 1 John concerning the relationship of Jesus to the God the Father.

- A. Jesus has the status or position of Son to God the Father.

Within this relationship there is equality of persons (1 John 2:22-24). And to reject the Son is to equally reject the Father (1 John 2:23).

<sup>22</sup> “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and **the Son.** <sup>23</sup> Whoever denies **the Son** does not have the Father; the one who confesses **the Son** has the Father also. <sup>24</sup> As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If

what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father" (1 John 2:22-24).

- B. The Son took on human flesh/nature [i.e. incarnation].

"By this you know the Spirit of God: **every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**" (1 John 4:2).

- C. His status as Son has a distinct role within the redemptive work of God in the saving of sinners.

It is His death whereby sin is cleansed (1 John 1:7) and the works of the devil are destroyed (1 John 3:8). It is only in the Son the Father's justice can be satisfied (1 John 4:10) and through whom the world can be saved (1 John 4:14).

"but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of **Jesus His Son** cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

"We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14).

- D. Cleansing from sin's defilement is only possible in the provision of Jesus and by agreeing with God concerning this record (1 John 2:22-24; 4:15; 5:9, 10).

Such an agreement is called believing (1 John 3:23; 5:5).

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23).

<sup>2</sup> “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; <sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world” (1 John 4:2, 3).

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15).

“This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us” (1 John 3:23).

“Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).

E. The Son is knowable (1 John 5:13, 20).

“And **we know that the Son of God has come**, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

F. Life from death is only found in the person and work of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:9; 5:9-13).

<sup>9</sup> “If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. <sup>10</sup> The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God

has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. <sup>11</sup> And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, **and this life is in His Son.** <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. <sup>13</sup> These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that **you may know that you have eternal life**" (1 John 5:9-13).

G. His status as Son to the Father is unique (1 John 4:9).

And although God has offspring born of His seed (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18), there is nothing and no one else like His Son Jesus the Christ.

"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).

H. The Father's love is seen in the sending of His Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:9).

"By this the love of God was manifested in us, **that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him**" (1 John 4:9).

I. As the Son of God, He is the Christ. As such He is to be believed resulting in new birth for the believing.

"what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with **His Son Jesus Christ**" (1 John 1:3).

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, **Jesus Christ the righteous**” (1 John 2:1).

“Who is the liar but the one who denies that **Jesus is the Christ**? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22).

“This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of **His Son Jesus Christ**, and love one another, just as He commanded us” (1 John 3:23).

“By this you know the Spirit of God: **every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**” (1 John 4:2).

“**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God**, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him” (1 John 5:1).

“This is the One who came by water and blood, **Jesus Christ**; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth” (1 John 5:6).

“And we know that **the Son of God has come**, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, **in His Son Jesus Christ**. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

In this short section we spoke of Pastor John’s perspective on who Jesus is and what Jesus did. For a more thorough study of Jesus in 1 John you are encouraged to read through the short booklet, “Jesus in 1 John.”

Not only do we read of the Father and His Son, but we also encounter the Spirit.

### III. There is within the Godhead the Spirit.

There are six observations we can make from 1 John concerning the relationship of the Holy Spirit to God the Father and Jesus the Son.

- A. The Spirit is given by the Father (1 John 3:24). Like the Son, He comes from the Father.

However, unlike the Son He is not referred to as Son or begotten. He is referred to as from or of the Father.

**“By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit”** (1 John 4:13).

- B. The Spirit enables fallen humanity to know the truth of God’s record (1 John 3:24).

**“The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us”** (1 John 3:24).

- C. The Spirit enables fallen humanity to confess Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:2).

<sup>2</sup> **“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;** <sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world” (1 John 4:2, 3).

- D. The Spirit enables the people of God to listen and receive truth (1 John 4:6).



“We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).

- E. The Spirit enables the people of God to know they abide in Him and He is them (1 John 4:13).

“By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

- F. The Spirit testifies and validates the truth about God that is knowable (1 John 5:6, 8).

<sup>6</sup> “This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. . . <sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement” (1 John 5:6, 8).

“In considering this letter we have already seen how John recognizes the existence in his day (as it is also in ours) of a counterfeit Christianity. He has described its general characteristics. It makes its appearance in cycles in human history. It is always characterized by an attack upon the person of Christ and those who teach along these lines eventually depart from New Testament Christianity, though they begin within the circle of the church, the fellowship of faith. Then we have gone on with John to recognize the supreme fact that is always true of real Christians: they have received the Holy Spirit of truth, the One who has come to reveal Christ. Jesus said he would take of the things of his and reveal them unto us, and guide us into all truth. Because of this, John says, Christians are able to know, able to understand things that no man, apart from this instruction of the Spirit, can understand. In the second chapter of his letter,

[John] resumes his analysis of heresy, of anti-Christianity. He now unveils to us the nature of error in two verses. He exposes here the fundamental issue of error, i.e., the goal toward which all lies trend, and also the reason why this error is diabolically terrible and destructive in its character. 'Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also'" (1 John 2:22-23 RSV).<sup>6</sup>

For further study on the Trinity see the booklet *Roots* by Patrick J. Griffiths. This devotional booklet is available at [www.waukeshabile.org](http://www.waukeshabile.org).

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/09/28/the-doctrine-of-the-trinity-no-christianity-without-it/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/trinity\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/trinity_1.shtml)  
Immanuel Kant, Der Streit der Fakultätencite

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/trinity\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/trinity_1.shtml)  
Karen Kilby

<sup>4</sup> <http://carm.org/trinity-makes-no-sense-it-isnt-logical> [Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry]

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/july-august/why-we-call-god-father.html?start=1>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/1-john/no-son-no-father>

# Studies in 1 John

## 5 of 11

It is important to remember how Pastor John writes in response to an unsettling that has impacted the local churches in Asia Minor of which he has oversight. There is a factious group who either left the local church voluntarily or had been removed through church discipline causing strife and doubt to enter the hearts and minds of God's people. Their error is a rejection of their own personal sin and thus a need for their own personal Savior. They reject Jesus as God incarnate. Although they would profess to know "God," they openly reject Jesus as God. They reject Him as God's only begotten Son. Because they refuse to see themselves as sinners and thus in need of a Savior, they equally reject the thought that Jesus is a substitutionary sacrifice which atones for sin, placates God's just sentence against sinners and then stands before the Father to mediate their own station before Him. The group to whom Pastor John writes are those who accept Jesus as God, equal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit.

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