

# The Trinity

In this study, we briefly look at Mark's account of the baptism and temptation of Jesus, as an introduction to how the Trinity was at work in Jesus' earthly ministry. Next we explore some of the passages in the book of Ephesians which are decidedly Trinitarian.

Read **Mark 1:9-13**.



1. Notice how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all active at Jesus' baptism. Who does what?
2. From this brief account, what can you say about the relationship of the Father to Jesus? What can you say about the Spirit's work?

Read **Ephesians 1:1-14**.

Paul is writing about God's purpose to form a people for himself and to sum up all things in Christ. Paul's thinking here is very Trinitarian.

3. Work through the passage, noting down the different names given in these verses for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I've filled in the first few as examples.

God the Father	God the Son	God the Holy Spirit
God v 1	Christ Jesus v 1	
God our Father v 2	the Lord Jesus Christ v 2	
		v 3
		v 3
		v 5
		v 6
		v 9, 10, 12, 13
		v 14

4. As you made the list above, were there any surprises for you that you would like to talk about?
5. As you read through the passage again, pay attention to who is doing what in our redemption from sin. What part is played by God the Father? What does God the Son do? What is the role of the Holy Spirit?

6. What gifts do believers receive, by God’s grace? See verses 7, 8, 13, and 14.



7. According to Paul, does every believer receive the Holy Spirit? For what purposes is the Holy Spirit given?

**Read Ephesians 1:15-23.**

Paul encourages the Ephesian believers by telling them what he is praying for them. It’s a very Trinitarian prayer.

8. Work through the passage, and find the ways the different persons of the Trinity are referred to.

God the Father	God the Son	God the Holy Spirit
v 17		the Spirit of wisdom and revelation v 17
v 17		
	v 20	
v 22		
him who fills everything in every way v 23		

9. Again, as you found the different names for the persons in the Trinity, were there any surprises you would like to talk about?

10. As you re-read the passage, pay attention again to the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Which person of the Trinity does Paul pray to? Who gives the Holy Spirit? Why? What did God the Father do for Christ?

**Read Ephesians 2:18-22.**

Paul has been talking about how Christ Jesus’ death has demolished the great barrier between Jews and Gentiles, making one new man out of the two.

11. Work through the given passage again, noticing who is doing what, and how the different persons in the Trinity are referred to. How do we get access to the Father? How does the Holy Spirit apply what Christ has done for us?

Next Paul explains how the union of Jews and Gentiles into one body in Christ was always God's eternal purpose, and that therefore the Ephesian believers shouldn't be discouraged about how he might have to suffer as a messenger bringing this good news to Gentiles like them. And so he prays for them.

Read **Ephesians 3:14-21**.

12. What does Paul really, really want the Ephesians to grasp hold of? verses 17-18

13. And what will be the result if they understand this? verse 19

14. Work through verses 14 to 19 again, noticing who in the Trinity does what. To whom does Paul pray? What does he want him to do for them? What is the role of the Spirit in this?

Re-read **verses 20-21**.

15. How is God glorified?

Read **Ephesians 5:15-21**.

16. Explore the roles of the different persons of the Trinity in our worship life together. Who do we make music to? Who do we thank? Why? How would it all be different if we didn't have Jesus? How would it all be different if we didn't have the Spirit?

### ***Pulling it together***

17. Using the passages we have looked at in this study, try to summarise what Ephesians teaches about the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our lives today.

### ***To sum up:***

The passages we have looked at in this study speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together but being separate persons. They imply that the three persons in the one God are equal in rank and play different roles.

**Only if you have time . . .**

If you have time and would like to cover the rest of Ephesians, you could also look at **Ephesians 4:3-7** and **6:10-18**, and ask yourself similar questions about what is said of the roles of each of the persons of the Trinity.

**Further references to explore<sup>1</sup>**

Other texts which speak of the three persons together, implying equality of rank while maintaining separation of persons include:

Matthew 28:19	1 Corinthians 12:4-6
Galatians 4:6	1 Peter 1:1-2
2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 13:14	

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Verses which speak of God's one-ness include:

Deut 6:4	1 Timothy 1:17
Isaiah 44:6	

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Passages about God as Father:

John 6:27	Titus 1:4
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Passages that say Jesus Christ the Son is God:

John 1:1	Hebrews 1:3
John 8:58	Titus 2:13
Colossians 2:9	(Luke 24:52; John 20:28; Mark 2:7)

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Passages that say that the Holy Spirit is God:

Hebrews 9:14	Acts 5:3-4
1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19	

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Passages which hint at the plurality of persons in the Godhead:

Genesis 1:1-3, 26	Daniel 7
Psalm 2:7	1 Corinthians 8:6

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<sup>1</sup> This is just an extra resource. Not intended for you to do in the group.

## Notes on Mark 1:9-13<sup>2</sup>

Mk 1:9 *'baptised by John'*—In Matt 3:15, Jesus says to John that *'it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness'*. In his baptism, Jesus identifies fully with the sinful human condition. He undergoes the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins on our behalf. Jesus fulfils all that the law requires of us, including repentance. We cannot repent perfectly, but he repents perfectly for us.

Mk 1:10 *'immediately'*—the NIV translation leaves this out!—Mark is the action man, using this expression 42 times in his gospel. Things always sound urgent for Mark. Perhaps he's not emphasising speed so much as that things had to happen this way under God's plan.

*'he saw heaven being torn open'*—This reminds us of the curtain in the temple being torn open, top to bottom (i.e. by God), at the crucifixion.

*'the Spirit descending on him like a dove'*—“At Christ's baptism there was a manifestation of the Trinity: the Father spoke from heaven, and a dove descended, as a sign of the spirit's anointing. The significance of the dove descending and abiding was not that Jesus was being filled with the Spirit for the first time but that He was being marked as the bearer of the Spirit who would baptize with the Spirit (John 1:32, 33) and so bring in the age of the spirit that was to fulfil Israel's hopes (Luke 4:1, 14, 18-21)” [Reformation Study Bible, p. 1561]. The Spirit descending marks Jesus as the long awaited Messiah.



Just as the work of the Trinity was evident in Jesus' baptism, Christian baptism must be Trinitarian, performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

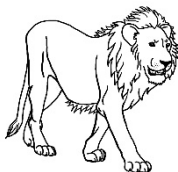
Mk 1:11 *'And a voice came from heaven: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"'*—The Father endorses Jesus as his anointed Messiah, King, and Prophet, using language from Ps 2:7 and Deut 18:15. This endorsement is repeated at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:7).

This scene of Jesus' baptism and the scene at the crucifixion are like bookends for Mark's gospel. At the crucifixion, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom, and then instead of the heavenly voice, we hear the voice of . . . wait for it . . . a Roman centurion (!), proclaiming that this was the Son of God (Mark 15:38-39).

Mk 1:12 *'the Spirit sent him out into the desert'*—Better, *the Spirit drove him* [NKJV]—The idea is of strong divine and scriptural necessity. Jesus recapitulated the Israelites' experience. The Israelites were *'baptised into Moses . . . in the sea'* (1 Cor 10:2), and then led by the Spirit (Exod 14:19-20) into the wilderness to be tested. So too Jesus after his baptism must be tested.

Mk 1:13 *'forty days'*—Another clear indicator of the link between Jesus' test in the wilderness and Israel's wilderness testing, which lasted 40 years.

*'being tempted by Satan'*—Jesus recapitulates mankind's experience in the garden. As humanity's representative, Adam fell to the serpent's testing and thus earned dreadful consequences for mankind; by contrast Jesus as the new Adam prevails and through his obedience satisfies God's requirements for mankind on our behalf.



*'wild animals'*—The presence of wild animals implies that this is a threatening place where evil is ascendant. Jesus, however, is not threatened. He is like the stronger man who subdues the strong man and robs him of his captive possessions (Mark 3:23-27). Jesus is in Satan's domain but he is not overcome. Similarly, Christians experience the world as Satan's domain and face spiritual battles (Eph 6:20). Jesus' confrontation with Satan is a major theme in the book of Mark.

Persecuted early Christians were comforted by the knowledge that Jesus too had faced wild animals.

*'and angels attended him'*—just as angels attended Israel in the wilderness (Exod 14:19; 23:20; 32:34; 33:2).

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<sup>2</sup> For further notes on the baptism of Jesus and the temptation of Jesus, see also studies from early 2019 on Matthew 4.

**Some old notes on some of the passages in Ephesians covered by this study.** (These notes are from previous Bible studies we have done on Ephesians.)

Eph 1:17 *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*—You might find it puzzling that the Father is described as Jesus' God, when they are equal in power and glory. However, the Father and the Son have different roles. The Son is obedient to the Father, and 'gave himself up . . . as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (5:2); as a result, God the Father exalts Jesus to a position of unparalleled authority (1:19-23).

*the glorious Father*—literally, *the father of glory*, which is a Semitic way of saying it.

*the Spirit of wisdom and revelation*—Some people feel this should be translated as 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation,' meaning a human spirit of wisdom and revelation, which would be possible, as God can indeed give wisdom and revelation to our human spirit. However, given the Trinitarian structure earlier in this chapter (1:3-14), it seems like Paul is cycling through the various persons of the Trinity here as well, so the NIV's translation of *spirit as [Holy] Spirit* is good here; also, Paul seems to be echoing Isaiah 11:2, where the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding. Further evidence that Paul means the Holy Spirit is that later in Ephesians, he says the Holy Spirit is revealing the mystery of Christ now (Eph 3:3-5). See Exod 31:3 and 35:31 too.

*that . . . God . . . may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better*—People emphasise all sorts of things about what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in a believer's life, but what Paul is focusing on here—what he feels is most essential for these believers—is the work of the Holy Spirit to help them to know God better.

Eph 1:18 *his glorious inheritance*—This could either mean what God inherits, or what we inherit; that is, it either means the inheritance he gets, or it means the inheritance he gives to us. If it means what God inherits, then it echoes OT passages which say that God's people are his inheritance and possession [e.g. Exod 34:10; Deut 4:20]. However, just a few verses earlier in Ephesians, Paul has said we obtained our inheritance in Christ (1:11), and spoken of the Holy Spirit as the guarantor of our inheritance (1:14), so here in verse 18 it probably means the inheritance we receive, paralleling a similar passage in Col 1:12. Because we are in Christ, we are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17).

Eph 1:19 *the working of his mighty strength*—literally, "the energy of the might of his strength"

Eph 1:20 *seated him at his right hand*—This fulfils the promise of Ps 110:1 to the Messiah: "*The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.'*"

Eph 1:21 *all rule and authority, power and dominion*—Continuing on from 1:20, Paul is reflecting on Ps 110:1, where the Messiah triumphs over his enemies. At very least we can conclude that the forces in this verse are Christ's enemies. But who or what constitutes these four spiritual forces that Christ is placed above? Paul often pairs *rulers* with *authorities*. For example, in Eph 3:10, Paul describes *rulers and authorities* as being *in the heavenly realms* (cf. 6:12; rulers and authorities are also paired in Col 1:16; 2:10, 15). *Powers* often refers to angels (1 Cor 15:24; Rom 8:38; 1 Pet 3:22). In the OT, angelic hosts are the armies surrounding God as king and lord—the LORD of Hosts (e.g. 2 Kings 17:16), and the Israelites were forbidden to worship them (Deut 4:19). According to BAGD (a widely used Greek lexicon), *dominions* means a special class of angelic powers. There was intense interest in the spirit world during NT times, and all four of these Greek expressions are used in the book of 2 Enoch, a non-Biblical Jewish writing dating from this period.

Some people feel uncomfortable with the identification of the powers in this verse as spiritual powers. They like to demythologise them, and say Paul just talking about human rulers and political systems. However, Paul speaks of these forces that Christ has subdued as being *in the heavenly realms*, and he goes on to say they are *evil* forces (Eph 6:12). So where there is evil in political systems and human institutions, he would say evil spiritual forces lurk behind that evil.

*far above . . . every title that can be given*—Paul's point is that it doesn't matter what you call them, all enemy spirits enemies have been subjected to Christ. He has been enthroned *far above . . . every title that can be given, not only in the present age*, so "Every conceivable power is encompassed within the mighty reign of the Lord Jesus Christ" [P. T. O'Brian, p. 142]. Cf. Phil 2:6-11, where God exalts Christ to the highest place and gives him "*the name that is above every name*". Notice that Paul says Christ is not just higher than the powers, he is *far* above them. In Colossians, Paul similarly argues that Jesus is lord of the spirit world.

All of which doesn't mean we can be complacent! Despite their defeat, we still struggle *against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of even in the heavenly realms* (Eph 6:12), and need to be equipped for battle (Eph 6:13). This is because we now live *in the present age*, not the *age to come* (Eph 1:21).

*not only in the present age but also in the one to come*—Jewish non-Biblical writings around the time of the NT made a distinction between “this age” and “the coming age”. Paul teaches that with Jesus’ coming as man, the coming age invaded the present age. Since we live between the first coming and the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are in the time where *the present age* and *the age to come* overlap. The age to come has been inaugurated, but has not yet reached its fulfilment. In Ephesians, Paul emphasises the blessings of the coming age which are already here.

Eph 1:22 *all things under his feet*—see note on verse 20

*appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body*—OK so we usually think that a *body* has to have a *head*, right? And that’s why Christ is the head? Because we are his body? Actually it turns out that that is *not* the right way to think of the meaning of “head”. He is *head over everything because God placed all things under his feet*. Notice the pairs of head/feet and over/under. He’s not just the church’s head; he is *head over everything*—the whole cosmos. “Head” means he’s the ruling authority; he is supreme commander.

*the church*—The word used here for “church” means “gathering” or “assembly”. It is often used by Paul to talk about a local congregation in a particular place (e.g. in his letters addressed “*to the church of the Thessalonians*” (1 Thess 1:1) or “*to the churches in Galatia*” (Gal 1:2)), or to refer to a house-church (e.g. “*Greet Priscilla and Aquilla . . . Greet also the church that meets at their house*” (Rom 16:3, 5); cf. Col 4:15, Philemon 2). While in the study of theology we often think the term *church* describes a universal spiritual body throughout the world to which each individual believer belongs, this may not be an appropriate way to think about the church in this Ephesians context, as the universal church isn’t exactly a gathering in one place. P. T. O’Brien argues that “It is better to understand the term metaphorically of *a heavenly gathering* around Christ in which believers already participate (cf. Heb 12:22-24)” [pp. 146-47]. That is, the church gathers around Christ in heaven, and we as believers are—amazingly!—already there. Remember, we have already been blessed “*in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ*” (Eph 1:3). So where does that leave local churches? While it is never specifically spelled out by Paul, it seems that he thinks of local congregations as visible demonstrations on earth of that gathering around Christ in heaven.

*head over everything, for the church*—In what sense is Christ ruling in the most exalted position over everything *for* the church? Christ governs the universe for our benefit. Later in the letter to the Ephesians Paul calls us forth in service—we have received everything spiritual blessing in Christ (chapters 1–3), so now we serve each other (chapters 4–6). Christ is the foremost exemplar of this. Having been given great authority by God the Father, he rules in the interests of his church.

Eph 1:22b-23 *the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*—In the OT, *fullness* is associated with God’s great power and glory (e.g. “*the house of the Lord is full of his glory*” (Ezek 44:4; cf. Ezek 43:5; Isa 6:1; Jer 23:24; Hag 2:7)). Now in the incarnate Christ, *all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form* (Col 2:9). “Jesus’ power and presence permeates the entire universe because his rule is divine (4:10; see Jer 23:24)” [Williamson, p. 55]. But how is the church his fullness? The ESV study note at 1:23 says “The church, filled by Christ, fills all creation as representatives of Christ” [p. 2264]. This is a nice thought but I don’t see evidence for it in this passage. Williamson says “Paul means that the Church is completely filled with the presence of the risen Lord” [p. 55]. Notice that Christ is a whole lot greater than the church—he fills *everything*, not just the church.

Eph 4:3 *the unity of the Spirit*—Notice how much of Paul’s exhortation to right behaviour in this chapter is rooted in the truths he has already explained in chapter 2. For example, Paul has already connected *unity* and *the Spirit* in chapter 2; Christ has made ‘*one new man*’ out of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:15), and now both ‘*have . . . access to the Father by one Spirit*’ (Eph 2:19). ‘This unity is defended . . . by an active effort to preserve peaceable relationships among the members of the church. We know how easy it is for conflicts to arise and divisions to appear in family and church life’ but Jesus himself “‘is our peace,’ established peace, and “preached peace” (2:14, 15, 17)’ [Williamson, p. 110].

*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit*—The unity of the church is declared to exist; however, it must also be *kept or maintained* (this verse), and also *attained or reached* (verse 13).

Eph 4:6-7 Notice how Paul moves from the grand statements about God as '*Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*' (verse 6), to '*each one of us*'. He moves from the fundamental unity of the church to the significant diversity of ministry in the church. We are united, but we are not mono-chrome.

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