

The God Family Controversy

A Basic Comparison of Armstrongism and Trinitarianism

Armstrongism (Mystery of the Ages, pg. 41-57)

1. God is a family composed of two persons, two supreme Beings (bi-theism)
2. God the Father and Jesus Christ have existed eternally, created all things
3. God and Christ are both composed of spirit (they are “of a similar essence”)
4. God and Christ have human form and shape, humans are physical replicas
5. The Holy Spirit emanates from God and Christ as an impersonal force
6. God can project his spirit [sic] to any place (virtual presence, tele-presence)
7. The Holy Spirit is a divine power that does what Jesus commands
8. Christians will become “God persons” in the resurrection (apotheosis)

Trinitarianism

1. God is one Being existing as three coequal, coeternal Persons (monotheism)
2. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have eternally existed, created all things
3. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are consubstantial (“of the same essence”)
4. God is incorporeal; humans are spiritual replicas (mental, moral, social)
5. The Holy Spirit is a divine person who is sent by the Father and the Son
6. God is infinite spirit, without limit in space or time (i.e., true omnipresence)
7. The Holy Spirit is omnipotent, implements the will of the Father and the Son
8. Christians are destined for glorification (not deification) in the resurrection

Anti-Trinitarian Objections - Answered

The term *Trinity* is not found in the Bible (Mystery of the Ages, pg. 54)

- Theological terms were created after the Bible was written to summarize biblical truths
- The term “incarnation” does not appear in the Bible, but Jesus was still God in the flesh
- The terms “God Family” or “God persons” are not found in the Bible

The doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the Bible (Mystery of the Ages, pg. 51, 55)

- The Trinity is an organized summary of what the Bible says about the nature of God
- Robert Bowman lists over 700 biblical references in support of the Trinity
- The Bible never says that God is a family composed of two supreme Beings

The Trinity was borrowed from paganism (Is God a Trinity?, pg. 17-18)

- The Trinity is unique in religious history; it was rejected by Jews and pagans alike
- Modalism is not Trinitarianism (a god or goddess depicted in different forms, shapes)
- Tri-theism is not Trinitarianism (e.g., Horus, Isis and Osiris are not consubstantial)
- Pagans generally believed in a divine family of gods just like Armstrongism

The Trinity is based on ancient Greek philosophy (Is God a Trinity?, pg. 15-19)

- The Trinity is unique in religious history; it was unlike Platonism, Neo-Platonism
- Tertullian opposed the use of Greek philosophy, documented the Trinity ca. 200 A.D.
- The Trinity was eventually accepted based on the testimony of Scripture about God
- Armstrong tried to prove God’s existence using Aristotelian arguments

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Elohim is a collective noun like *family*, *group* or *church* (Mystery of the Ages, pg. 50)

- *Elohim* is not a collective noun; it is the plural form of *el* (a god or mighty one)
- Hebrew nouns can be pluralized to intensify their meaning (e.g., Behemoth)
- Intensive plurals are singular nouns, take singular verbs and pronouns (Job 40:15)
- *Elohim* is used to refer to Ashtoreth in the same fashion (1Kgs 11:5)

Elohim is like a surname for the God Family, each member is called God (Who Is God?, pg. 29)

- Surnames were not used in ancient times, and there is only one true God, Yahweh
- Moses taught that the LORD alone is God and that there is no other (Deut 4:35, 39)
- There are no limits on these two statements; they are all-encompassing in their scope
- The use of singular pronouns proves that *elohim* is not the surname of a God Family

God has human form and shape (Mystery of the Ages, pg. 44)

- God is omnipresent, not limited to a finite body or shape (Ps 139:7ff, Jer 23:24)
- The Bible often speaks poetically, figuratively about God (Ps 18:8, Ps 17:8)
- God (Yahweh) appeared in human and non-human form (Gen 15:17, Ex 13:21)
- Visions and theophanies are not necessarily real, were often symbolic
- Jesus is fully human and fully God (two natures); He has a body via the incarnation

The Holy Spirit is God's power not a divine person (Who is God?, pg. 53-55)

- The Bible distinguishes the Holy Spirit from God's power (Acts 10:38)
- The Holy Spirit issued audible commands using first person pronouns (Acts 13:2)
- The Holy Spirit made a decision in conjunction with the apostles (Acts 15:28)

The Holy Spirit can't be a person because it can be poured out (Mystery of the Ages, pg. 57)

- The Bible often uses figurative language for emphasis (Ps 62:8, Ezek 22:31)
- Using the same logic, Jesus and Paul can't be persons (Isa 53:12, 2 Tim 4:6)

Christians will become "God persons" in the resurrection (Mystery of the Ages, pg. 45)

- In the resurrection, Christians receive: a glorified body, eternal life, (sinless) holiness
- God has the attributes of deity: omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal, immutable
- We can never inherit God's unique attributes, become divine (Isa 43:10, Lk 20:35-36)

Defining the Trinity

Basic Statement: God is one Being existing as three coequal, coeternal Persons

Defining "God"

- Theologians have a special vocabulary, which can be confusing to the uninitiated
- For most people, the term "God" generally refers to the Father as it does in the NT
- Among theologians, the term "God" refers to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

Defining "one Being"

- In Trinitarianism, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct persons not separate beings
- Water molecules can be in three distinct states at the same time (solid, liquid and gas)
- A chord is one sound composed of several distinct yet simultaneous notes

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Defining “coequal”

- This refers to their divine nature, not their functional roles within the Trinity
- They are equally divine, possess the unique attributes of deity (e.g., eternal)
- The Son and the Holy Spirit are “relationally subordinate” to the Father

Defining “Person”

- The common, primary definition of a “person” is a human being or an individual
- The theological definition is “one of the three modes of being” within the Trinity
- Theologians are generally unhappy with the term “person”

“The word *persons* tends to detract from the unity of the Trinity, and it is readily recognized that *persons* is an inadequate term to describe the relationship within the Trinity. Some theologians have opted for the term *subsistence*, hence, ‘God has three subsistences.’ Other words used to describe the distinctiveness of the Three are: distinction, relation, and mode.”¹

A person possesses three basic attributes: intellect, will and emotion

- Anti-trinitarians rarely question the personality of the Father or the Son
- The Holy Spirit has all 3 attributes of personality (Rom 8:27, 1Cor 12:11, Eph 4:30)

Biblical Evidence for the Doctrine of the Trinity

1. The Father is God (Yahweh): Heb 1:1-2, Heb 1:13, Ps 110:1, Heb 5:5, Ps 2:7
2. The Son is God (Yahweh): Heb 1:10, Ps 102:21, 25, John 19:36-37, Zech 12:1, 10, Col 2:9
3. The Holy Spirit is God (Yahweh): Act 28:25-26, Isa 6:8-9, Acts 5:3-4
4. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct persons: Matt 28:19, John 14:26, 15:26
5. There is only one God (Yahweh): Isa 44:6, 45:5, 1 Cor 8:4

Conclusion

The Armstrong God Family Doctrine:

- Defines God as a family of 2 finite, corporeal Beings (bi-theism)
- Denies the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit
- Teaches the unbiblical, blasphemous concept of human deification
- Twists the definitions of words, takes figurative language literally
- Promotes false claims, invalid arguments against the Trinity

The following study papers are available at: <http://www.didacticministries.org/>

- Ye are Gods, Robert Bowman
- The Biblical Basis for the Trinity, Robert Bowman
- The Personality of the Holy Spirit, Richard Hoot

Also recommended:

God in Three Persons, E. Calvin Beisner (ISBN: 1592445454)

Understanding the Trinity, Alister McGrath (ISBN: 0310296811)

Why You Should Believe in the Trinity, Rob Bowman (ISBN: 0801009812)

¹Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, c1989, S. 200