

Men's Discipleship

False Religions: Jehovah's Witnesses Part 2.1

The Doctrine of God: Denial of the Trinity

Introduction: The Trinity at the Heart of Christian Faith

The doctrine of the Trinity – that God is one in essence yet eternally exists as three distinct Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) – is central to historic Christianity. The Athanasian Creed declares that “we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance” ccel.org. In other words, Christians insist that **God is one being** (one “*substance*” or essence) **in three Persons**: the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God – “and yet there are not three Gods but one God” ccel.org. This mystery is foundational to the Christian faith, to the point that the Athanasian Creed warns, “*He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity*” ccel.org. Protestant churches wholeheartedly embrace this doctrine. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, for example, teaches: “**There are three persons in the Godhead: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.**” cambridgepres.org.uk. Likewise, the 1689 London Baptist Confession calls the Trinity “*the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him.*” the1689confession.com In short, to know God truly and savingly is to know Him as triune.

Yet not everyone who claims to follow the Bible accepts the doctrine of the Trinity. **Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs)** famously **deny the Trinity**, calling it unbiblical and even blasphemous. This week, we will examine the JW rejection of the Trinity and contrast it with the historic Protestant perspective. We will see that the JW view is essentially a revival of the ancient **Arian** heresy – a doctrine the early church condemned – and we will expose the errors of the JW theology, considering Scripture, church history, and Protestant theology. Along the way, we'll cite Jehovah's Witness literature, Protestant confessions (such as the Westminster, Belgic, and 1689 Baptist confessions), creeds, Puritan divines, and classical theologians. We'll also consider why the Trinity matters for our faith and life, drawing practical lessons from a Protestant perspective.

1. Jehovah's Witnesses' Denial of the Trinity

JW Beliefs about God: Jehovah's Witnesses **worship one Person as God: Jehovah the Father**. They firmly reject the idea that Jesus Christ is equal to Jehovah or that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person. In JW theology, **Jesus is a created being** – the highest creature (identified with Michael the archangel) – and **the Holy Spirit is not a person at all but an impersonal force** (God's active energy). Thus, JWs are **unitarian** (believing God is a single person) and **anti-Trinitarian**. This doctrine stems from the early 4th-century **Arianism** of Arius, who taught that the Son of God was a sublime creature but *not* the eternal God. JW teaching is “**most closely aligned to Arianism**”, denying “the eternality and the absolute Deity of Jesus” by describing Christ as a created being jwfacts.com. In JW view, Jesus is “a little god” or “*inferior deity*” beneath Jehovah jwfacts.com, and the Trinity is vehemently opposed.

JW Literature on the Trinity: The Watchtower Society (the JW organization) consistently condemns the Trinity doctrine as false, nonsensical, and pagan. For example:

- “*Christendom's unchristian doctrine of a Trinity of 'God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Ghost' will be rejected by all enlightened mankind as being a blasphemous pagan lie.*” – *Paradise Restored to Mankind by Theocracy*, p.388 jwfacts.com.
- “*Their worship is not distributed to three gods in one, the so-called godhead of some mysterious Trinity, but they are united as the one people who worship the one God, Jehovah.*” – *The Watchtower*, March 1, 1984, p.23 jwfacts.com.

JWs often assert that the Trinity doctrine *originated in paganism* and was imposed on Christianity later. They argue that the word “Trinity” never appears in Scripture and claim the concept was absent from the original Christian teachings. JW publications label the Trinity as “**confusing,**” “**contradictory,**” and “**unreasonable,**” portraying it as three gods and thus a form of polytheism. Notably, the Watchtower literature routinely **redefines the Trinity** as belief in “*three Gods in one*”, a description no orthodox creed teaches. This tactic misrepresents the Trinity in a way that can be easily attacked jwfacts.com. For instance, one JW article accuses Christians of teaching “*that God is a trinity, three Gods in one Person.*” jwfacts.com Of course, historic Christianity has *never* taught “three gods” or “one person,” but JWs persist in using such phrases to confuse and mislead their followers. By caricaturing the Trinity as tri-theism or modalism, the Watchtower makes it impossible for JWs to form an informed understanding of the actual doctrine jwfacts.com.

JW Use of Sources: To bolster their anti-Trinity stance, JW publications frequently quote secular or religious reference works (often out of context). In the booklet *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, they cite encyclopedias and theologians to imply that the Trinity was unknown to Jesus and the apostles and is beyond human reason. However, researchers have found that the Watchtower *selectively edits and even misquotes* these sources jwfacts.comjwfacts.com. For example, they might quote a scholar saying the New Testament has “no explicit doctrine of the Trinity...” but omit the scholar’s next line that the NT contains “the data from which such a formal doctrine... may be formulated.” jwfacts.com Such misrepresentation undercuts the credibility of JW arguments. In reality, the *entire Bible* (though it doesn’t use the term “Trinity”) teaches all the components of the doctrine. JWs reject this biblical evidence due to their governing body’s interpretations, but historic Christian teaching has recognized the Trinity in Scripture from the earliest centuries.

Summary of the JW Position: In short, Jehovah’s Witnesses assert:

- (a) There is only one true God, Jehovah (the Father);
- (b) Jesus is *not* equal to Jehovah – He is a mighty being but created, “*not co-eternal or co-equal*” with the Father;
- (c) The Holy Spirit is an *impersonal* force, not a distinct divine Person. They view the orthodox Trinity as a **heresy**. This JW position **directly contradicts** the historic Christian faith. By denying Christ’s eternal Godhood and the Spirit’s personhood, JW doctrine strikes at the heart of

who God is, which is why Protestant Christians classify JW theology as **heretical**. Next, we'll see how the early church confronted a similar heresy (Arianism) and firmly established the Trinity as biblical truth.

2. The Early Church vs. Arianism: Establishing the Trinity

Arian Heresy in the 4th Century: The controversy over the Son's deity is not new; it erupted in the early Church, most notably with **Arius** (c. 250–336 AD). Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, taught that the Son of God was a sublime creature who had a beginning – *“there was [a time] when the Son was not.”* He argued Jesus was *divine* in some sense but not equal to the Father; the Son was of a **different substance** (nature) than the Father. In effect, Arius made Jesus a lesser, created god – strikingly similar to the Jehovah's Witness view that Jesus is an exalted created being. Arius's ideas gained traction in the early 4th century, causing a major crisis in the Church.

Council of Nicaea (AD 325): In response, the Church convened the **Council of Nicaea** in 325. Over 300 bishops from across Christendom debated the issue. The result was a decisive rejection of Arianism. The Nicene Council affirmed that Jesus Christ, the Son, is fully and truly God – **“of one substance with the Father.”** The original Nicene Creed (expanded at Constantinople in 381) declares of Christ: *“God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father”* en.wikipedia.org. In saying Christ is *“begotten, not made,”* the Creed insists the Son's sonship is an eternal relationship, not a created origin – He is **begotten from the Father's essence, not a creature called into existence**. And the critical Greek term **homoousios** (“same substance”) means the Son **shares the identical divine nature** as the Father. Thus, according to Nicaea, **the Son is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father**, not a demigod or high angel. This was a direct refutation of Arius. The creed anathematized those who say “there was a time when the Son was not” or that the Son is of a different substance than the Father. In essence, Nicene orthodoxy taught what the Gospel of John had always taught: *“In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). Jesus Himself claimed oneness with the Father (John 10:30) and was confessed by Thomas as *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28), so the Church rightly concluded that *to honor the Son we must honor Him as God* (cf. John 5:23).

Athanasius – Defender of Christ's Deity: A key hero in this struggle was **St. Athanasius** of Alexandria. As a young deacon, Athanasius attended Nicaea and later, as bishop, became the chief defender of Nicene Trinitarianism. He stood virtually alone at times (*“Athanasius contra mundum”* – *Athanasius against the world*), battling resurgent Arianism even when emperors and some bishops sided with Arius. Athanasius argued passionately that only if Christ is truly God come in the flesh can He bring salvation: *“Those who maintain ‘There was a time when the Son was not’ rob God of His Word, like plunderers.”* He refuted the Arians from Scripture, showing that the Son is eternal and uncreated, one with the Father. Eventually, Athanasius's stance prevailed; the Nicene faith was upheld at the Council of Constantinople (381 AD), and Arianism was formally condemned as heresy. The **Nicene Creed** (in its 381 form) also confesses the Holy Spirit as fully divine: *“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.”*

This affirms the Spirit's personhood and deity, countering any notion (ancient or modern) that the Spirit is merely an impersonal force.

The Athanasian Creed: By the 5th century, Trinitarian doctrine was thoroughly articulated in what is now known as the Athanasian Creed (although not written by Athanasius, it reflects his theology). This creed provides one of the clearest summaries of orthodox belief about God's triune nature. Key lines include: *"So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God."* and *"In this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal and coequal."* [ccel.org](http://ccel.org/ccel.org). The Athanasian Creed painstakingly avoids both **tritheism** (the doctrine of splitting God into three gods) and modalism (the doctrine of collapsing the Persons into one person). It insists we must neither *"confound the persons"* nor *"divide the substance"* of God, ccel.org. In summary, the early church's response to Arianism was to **vigorously uphold the Trinity** as the authentic biblical teaching passed down from the apostles.

Connection to Jehovah's Witnesses: The relevance is clear: **Jehovah's Witnesses today adopt the core errors of Arius**. They deny the Son's eternal Godhood and the Spirit's personality, thus falling under what the ancient church branded heresy. The JWs claim to be restoring original Christianity, but history shows their theology was tried in the crucible of debate 1700 years ago and found contrary to Scripture. The **Nicene and Athanasian creeds** represent the united conclusion of the early Christians: The **Trinity is true** and non-negotiable. Any group, like the JWs, that preaches a *non-triune* God is therefore outside the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. As we move forward, we'll see how the Protestant history (15th–17th centuries) continued this orthodox Trinitarian faith, and we will look at the Protestant confessions and theologians on the matter.

Next week's topics:

3. Protestant Confessions Affirming the Trinity

4. Puritan and Classical Theologians on the Trinity