

Assumptions:

- We should carefully use our God-given common sense in interpreting the Bible.
- All contradictions are false.
- Appearance of incoherence is strong evidence of falsehood.
- Contradiction-implying readings of the Bible should be an absolute last resort.

Logical properties of the relation *numerical identity* (=), or *being numerically the same thing as*.

- **Necessarily reflexive: for any a, a = a.**
 - Some relations can be reflexive or not: I can make fun of you, but I can also make fun of myself. So the *making fun of* relation can obtain between two things, or between a thing and itself.
 - In contrast, the numerical identity relation can *only* obtain between a thing and itself.
- **Symmetrical:** if a = b then it follows that b = a.
 - This means it can't be that a = b and yet it is false that b = a.
- **Transitive:** if a equals b, and b = c then it follows that a = c.
 - It is like many other relations in this way, such as the *bigger than* relation.
- **Forces absolute indiscernibility:** when a = b that means that a and b are *one and the same thing* and so a and b cannot differ in any way.
 - It is self-evident that some one thing can't be *and* not be a certain way (in the same way, at the same time).
 - Of course, we know that things change over time--I'm taller than I was in 1980--but *at any given time*, if a and b are one and the same, then a and b can't differ in any way.
 - This means that *any* simultaneous difference (no matter how small) proves *non-identity* (numerical distinctness).

In this sense of "identity" the NT assumes and implies the identity of the Father with the one God. (I think we agree about this.)

**Trinitarians assert that each of the Persons "is God."
Are they thereby *identifying* each Person with the one God?**

It depends! (See my "Trinity" entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.)

But *if* they argue like this for the "deity" of each, they *are* asserting numerical identity, whether they recognize it or not!

1. Only God is A.
2. Jesus is A.
3. Therefore, Jesus is God.

This is a valid argument (the premises imply the conclusion).

But the logical form of the premises implies that the conclusion is an identity statement (assertion of numerical sameness). Here is a logical partial translation that reveals the hidden structure of 1.

1. For any x, if x is A, then x = g.
2. j is A.
3. Therefore j = g.

Here are some applications of these insights about identity statements to Trinity theories.

1. Some Trinity theories commit to $f = g$ and $s = g$. Theological disaster logically follows. In other words, this is a valid argument:
 1. $f = g$ trinitarian premise
 2. $s = g$ trinitarian premise
 3. $g = s$ (2, symmetry of =)
 4. $f = s$ (1,3, transitivity of =)

(Or just: things identical to the same thing must be identical to one another.)

4 is

- a claim any Trinity theory must deny
- an expression of heretical modalism
- contradicted by the NT, which teaches f-s differences.

But 4 is *implied by* 1 & 2!

2. If, e.g. $s = g$ then it follows that **s and g can't differ in any way!**

But the trinitarian also holds that g is tripersonal while the s is not tripersonal, which implies $s \neq g$.

This also helps us to see how trinitarian orthodoxy clashes with NT teaching.

1. $g = t$ core trinitarian claim
2. $f \neq t$ implied by f-t qualitative differences
3. $f \neq g$ (1,2 - replacing t with g, since they're = according to 1)

This clashes with the New Testament teaching that $f = g$, e.g. [John 17:1-3](#), [1 Corinthians 8:6](#), the greetings in all the Pauline letters.

One way to see this clear teaching $f = g$, and the clash with Trinity theories:

1. f is the god of j . Many clear texts, e.g. [Rev 3:12](#), [John 20:17](#), [Eph 1:17](#)
2. t is a god. Implied by core trinitarian claim: t is *the* god.
3. There is only one god. Monotheism: taught in many OT & NT texts.

As I will show, these three premises imply a contradiction;
thus, **at least one of 1-3 is false**;
thus, a Christian must deny at least one of 1-3.

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4. f is a god. (from 1)
5. The one god is both tripersonal and not tripersonal. (2-4)
6. At least one of 1-3 is false. (from 1-5)

Which should a Christian deny?

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It's a clear-cut case of **Scripture (1,3)** vs. **post-biblical tradition (2)**.
Therefore, a Protestant should deny 2.

Is belief in a tripersonal god a *post-biblical* tradition?

Both NT studies and the history of theology tell us that the answer is Yes.

No NT term or phrase was then understood to refer to a tripersonal god, e.g. *theos*.

In the 100s and 200s there were plenty of speculations about Jesus' pre-human existence, and his being divine in some way or other.

But they still had no term for a tripersonal god - not even *trias* (Greek) and *trinitas* (Latin). Each of those was used only as a plural referring term, for the one god plus two other beings. (compare: the gang)

Mainstream Christian theology c. 230, the heyday of Origen (Alexandria, then Caesarea) and Novatian (Rome): three groups in the (non-gnostic) mainstream,

- Logos theorists: $f = g$, s (or l) & h lesser "divine" beings, a.k.a. lesser gods
- Modalistic monarchians: $f = s$ (and = h ?)

- Dynamic monarchians: f = g, s a man in whom g/f worked by his power
- (trinitarians MIA)

This only changes by some time after 350, deep into the so-called "Arian" controversy, where we see two new word meanings emerge:

trias, trinitas as singular referring terms for the tripersonal God
theos, deus now used not only for f, s, and h, but also for t

These uses only become widespread after the enforcement of the 381 creed, the first (implicitly) trinitarian creed.

These new meanings go hand-in-hand with a new idea. Stung by constant accusations of tritheism (the Nicene adherent holds that each of three different beings has all it takes to be a god)--see the works of Basil on this--they urged that *somehow* the Person are, or are all "in" one and the same god.

On this see my free online published paper: "When and How in the History of Theology Did the Triune God Replace the Father as the Only True God?" *Theologica* 4:2 (2020).

Their claim was highly obscure then, and clashed with Scripture, and things haven't changed down to this day. But NT theology stands just fine on its own.