

A. The God of Relationship (Trinity)

*“He who denies the Trinity will lose his soul;
he who tries to understand the Trinity will lose his mind...”* - Augustine

1. Why study *Trinity* when it is such a contentious & highbrow doctrine?

1.1 Other religions

People’s doctrine of Ultimate Reality determines how they engage/relate to Ultimate Reality (God)

Religion	Understanding of “Ultimate Reality”	How engage with Ultimate Reality
Buddhism		
Hinduism		
Islam		
Judaeo-Christian		

1.2 Christian religion

Within the Christian world, the starting point / identification of the primary characteristic of God has significantly affected the way Christians expect to engage with God, and the message they preach...

Calvin vs. later Calvinism

1.3 A word of warning – Greek philosophy vs. Hebrew community

- Greek preoccupation with ontology (being); logical propositions, analogy, mathematics
- Hebrew focus on community, use of language of relationships, acceptance of paradox

2. Words

“Trinity” – a word coined by the Church-father Tertullian to sum up a cluster of inter-related Scriptural ideas that describe the personal God. Not a biblical word, but certainly conveys biblical content.

Focus on passages where God is presented in terms of both *plurality* and *unity*

3. The End and the Beginning

3.1 Revelation 1, 21-22 – God, the Lord Jesus (the Lamb), the Spirit

God and Jesus *Rev 1:8,17-18 cf. 22:6-7,13,16; 21:22*

Jesus and the Spirit *Rev 1:19; 2:1,7*

3.2 Genesis 1-3

a. “Gods” (plural form) created ... “the Spirit of God” hovered... *Gen 1:1*

b. Plural nouns and pronouns *Gen 1:26,28*

c. “the Lord God walked in the garden” *Gen 3:8*

→ talked with the man and the woman *face-to-face?*

4. Biblical references (*we'll only look at a few of these*)

4.1 The backdrop for understanding God's OT revelation of Himself

a. The LORD lives ("the true and living God") *Jer 10:10-11*

b. The LORD is One

Deut 6:4-9

"one" and "only" are equally permissible translations

4.2 The only God reveals Himself as *personal*

The LORD's Name

Ex 3:13-15; Ex 33:11,17-20; 34:5-8

4.3 OT hints of plurality within the only God

a. Plural nouns and pronouns

Gen 1:1; 1:26,28

b. Repetition of the LORD's Name

Ex 35:6

c. Three-fold liturgical formulas

Isa 6:3

d. Personification of Wisdom

Prov 8

e. The angel of the LORD

Ex 23:20-21

4.4 Explicit NT three-fold references

a. Jesus' baptism

Matt 3:16-17

b. The Great commission

Matt 28:16-20

c. Pauline blessings

2 Cor 13:14

d. The act of salvation

Rom 8:9-11

4.5 The Divinity of each person

a. Father

Matt 6:9-10

b. Son

Mark 2:1-12

Php 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20;

c. Spirit

Heb 9:14

5. Key Passages showing the Relationships expressed by/within the Trinity

5.1 Jesus' use of "one"/"unity" language in his last discourse

Look closely at *John 15:26-27; 16:12-15; 17:1-5,20-26*. Discuss what Jesus' words reveal about the relationships between the Father, the Son and the Spirit; and our relationship with them.

Father & Son

Son & Spirit

Father-Son & Spirit

God & Us

6. Implications (how this doctrine helps us live)

6.1 Trinity is the heart of reality, and sharing in it is the goal of reality

2 Peter 1:3-4

Acts 17:26-28

Revelation 22:1-5

6.2 God's intention for our relationships is modelled in the Trinity

Delighting in the other

Desiring and acting so that others can share in the mutual delight

Serving the other, even at apparent loss of self

To be like God is to glory in bringing blessing to others, even if you have to deny yourself. You will only be willing to consistently and repeatedly lay down your life to serve another if you believe your life can be given back to you (Rom 8:11). Trust in the Living God, who alone has life in Himself, and who delights in giving life to others, is the key to being able to selflessly serve others. Faith and hope allows us to love.

7. Discussing Trinity

7.1 Fruitless vs, Fruitful ways to discuss Trinity

a. Inadequate models that are misleading – physical/mathematical models

b. Much better models that use right categories – relational models
– marriage/family

→ *filial* or *familial* paradigm

7.2 Challenge but Resonance

a. Recognise the *challenge* of communicating (in the 21st century) truths conveyed by biblical relational language.

- i. “Equality” is an ill-fitting category
- ii. “Submission” is a dirty word
- iii. “Sacrifice” is an alien concept

b. Expect your hearers to *resonate* with the core relational reality that the Bible reveals is the heart of God and which

- i. is the end in which we were made to share
- ii. we can begin sharing in this even now (through the gospel)
- iii. we experience already, reflected in some measure in our human relationships

7.3 Accept our limitations in explaining relationships, and just rejoice in them!

Paradox is part-and-parcel of real relationship. Not “no mystery”, but “which mystery?”

We will never fully plumb the depth of God and our relationship with Him (*Romans 11:33-36*), even though he fully knows us (*1 Cor 13:12*). *Sufficient* knowledge that is *effective* to know God is all that is required. We have this in the gospel! And we have eternity in which to rejoice in deepening that knowledge of Him.