

Introduction to the Trinity

What are our questions?

How much do we hear about the Trinity in our churches?

What do we hear?

1. God is Trinity from the beginning

We don't start with a Unitarian God and then try to fit three persons into him.

The Bible is Trinitarian from the first chapter onwards: Gen. 1:2, 26; 3:22; 11:6-7; 19:24.

The unseen God and the seen God: Exodus 33:20, 11; 24:9-18; cf. John 1:18

The Angel of the Lord – e.g. Exodus 3:1-12; Joshua 6:11-24

Psalm 45

Psalm 110

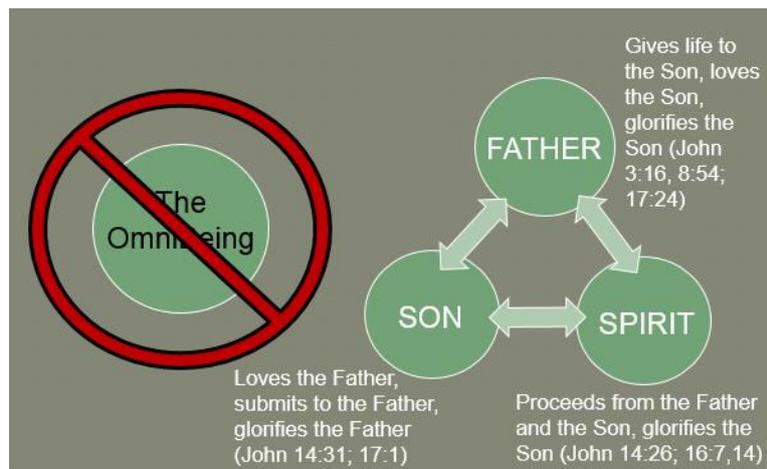
Isaiah 63

Zechariah 2:6-12

Malachi 3:1-4

Problem is we tend to start with idea of omni-being and try to fit that with the Trinity.

We need to replace the omni-being with the Trinity.



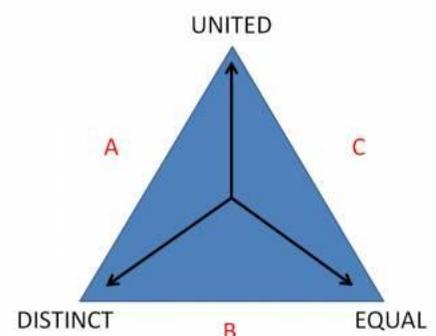
2. Three persons united in love

John 5:16-47

- The Jews certainly understand Jesus' claim to have God as his Father as a claim to be equal with God and deserving of death.
- Jesus is claiming to be doing everything God the Father does, including giving life to the dead.
- Love between the Father and the Son.
- Delegation of some duties from Father to Son.
- But the Son is dependent on the Father for these duties.
- v26 – Father and Son have 'life-in-himself' – self-existence, Creator God – but they are not two Gods; the Father has eternally being pouring himself out into the Son ('eternal generation of the Son', 'eternally begotten'); so there is dependency and inseparable unity while still both are fully God
- there is difference, hierarchy, submission, as the Father sends the Son, the Son does nothing on his own, comes in the name of the Father etc
- At the end of the day there is the grammar – "he", "I" – different persons

Luke 3:21-22

- Three distinct persons
- Working together on the same project of salvation (turn up at precise moment when Jesus is being 'counted with the transgressors' in preparation for the Cross)
- Love relationship



3. Marriage as a parable of the Trinity

Gen. 1:26-28; 2:24 – image = man and women, equal, different, united as one

1 Cor. 11:3 – not about value or greatness of being; as fallen humans we instinctively think that hierarchy and authority must be about difference of being and status and importance and value; but both in the Trinity and marriage there is complete equality and headship/submission. The Son submitting to the Father and or washing his disciples' feet does not mean that he is any less than the disciples or less than the Father.

4. The Christian life as being swept up into the Trinity

Read Galatians 3:23-4:7

1. Who are we 'in', who are we clothed with, who do we belong to? (3:23-29)
2. What is the decisive event that has happened? And what was the ultimate purpose of that event? (4:4)
3. Who is in our hearts? What is he doing? (4:6)
4. How do the Father and the Son and the Spirit relate to one another? (4:6)
5. What does it look like for us to be swept up into the trinity?

We're swept up – in Christ - into a divine community of love! That's what 2 Peter 1:4 is talking about. That's eternal life – John 17:3.

5. The Trinity is Christ-centred and entered through Christ

Start with Jesus and he introduces us to the Trinity

Luke 3:22 – focus on Jesus - he is the Son of the Father and the anointed-with-the-Spirit-one

Luke 9:28-36 – Christ-centred

Acts 1:1-8 – Trinity all involved but we preach Christ

Acts 2:33 but focus on Jesus - 2:22,36

1 Cor. 2:1-5 – testimony of Father and demonstration of the Spirit-power IS preaching of Christ-crucified

Ephesians 1:1-14 - Trinity all involved in work of salvation (initiating, executing, applying) but the blessings are all in Christ

Ephesians 3:14-19

Galatians 3:23-4:7 - notice the entry to the Trinity is the Son

6. God is Trinity from before the beginning: the overflowing Trinity

Not a riddle or maths problem it's great news because:

The ultimate reality, the beginning of the story is that God is happy, joyful, loving community (John 1:1, 3:16; 8:54; 14:26,31; 16:7,14; 17:1, 24; 1 John 4:8). God is a happy, joyful, loving community.

Three persons united in love. If he's a policeman then you'll just want to avoid him or give him *kitu kidogo* to pay him off; rather this Trinitarian loving God is a God you want to be around!

Creation and salvation and all God's works are overflows of this love

John 17:24; Matthew 22:2

Richard Sibbes: "God's goodness is a communicative, spreading goodness. . . . If God did not have a communicative, spreading goodness, he would never have created the world. The Father, Son and Spirit were happy in themselves and enjoyed one another before the world was. If it were not for the fact that God delights to communicate and spread his goodness, there had never been a creation nor a redemption. God uses his creatures not because he can do nothing without them, but for the spreading of his goodness.

The desire of the Father from the beginning has been to get a bride for his Son, to have a people enjoy his Son and enjoy his love for the Son. The desire of the Son has always been that his people would see the love and glory that he had with the Father before creation.

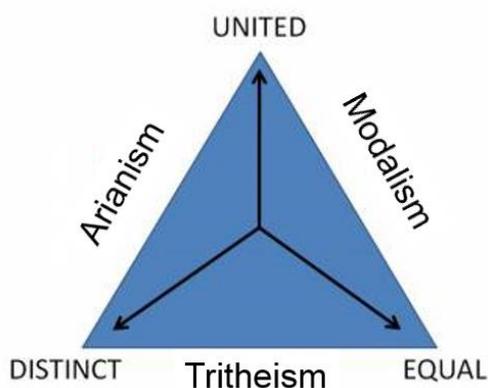
- **If God is eternally three persons loving giving, overflowing, what is "godliness", "faith", "sin", "our hope", "having a relationship with God"?**

The human problem is not *only* about the rebellion of a subject against a ruler, or the disobeying of a law maker, it is also fundamentally, at a deeper level, about the rejection of the love and grace of God; we are made to love the Son, worship the Son, enjoy the Son and we turn from the Son to cling to this world; as the prophets say, we prostitute ourselves to idols; we treat Christ as rubbish and think the world is more beautiful, great, worthy (the opposite of Philippians 3); and that calls forth the jealous anger of God.

Salvation is a) the overflowing, amazing love of God to his enemies, wretched prostitutes; b) our adoption, sweeping up into the holy Trinity; c) a change of our affections as our eyes our opened to see the beauty of Christ and the love of a Triune God.

Heresies ancient & modern: engaging Islam & the cults

Trinity = three equal, distinct persons united in love.
Heresies attack one or more parts of this.



- Unitarianism, Islam – at the UNITED Point - one simple God, no distinctions within
- Jehovah's witnesses are essentially Arian – Jesus and the Spirit are less than God – or even at the DISTINCT point. Mormonism is also pretty much at the DISTINCT point.
- Oneness pentecostalism is essentially Modalist - there is one God who exists in 3 modes – TD Jakes and Tommy Temmy (The God Chasers) – would say God *manifests* in three *modes*.

What is the problem with these?

1. You can't really know God. If Arius is right then Jesus doesn't really fully show us what God is like – when he loves us, when he serves, when he suffers for us – that's Jesus – it's not really God. God remains unknowable and distant from the world. And with Modalism – you still don't really know what God's like – he wears 3 masks – sometimes father, sometimes son, sometimes holy spirit – but who is he really, behind the mask? – there's this thought that behind the names is just this mysterious abstract being – all Power and no personality.
 2. Another problem is that they destroy the Trinity – the beautiful truth that God is and has always been three persons united in other-centred, serving love – God is a loving community, serving, glorifying, rejoicing in one another. If Arius is right then service and submission and being dependent means that you are less than the person you serve and submit to and are dependent on – so Jesus is less than Father – and wife is lesser being than her husband. (See how cruel this is?) And if modalism is right then service is something that God does sometimes but it isn't essential to his nature.
 3. And a final problem with both is there's no real atonement. With Arianism you can be saved by Jesus, in Christ, given the Spirit but you're not in God. Sometimes even in evangelical churches we can have this idea that being saved is just a status you're given by a distant God. Athanasius said No – you're in the Son you're drawn into the community of the Trinity, your life is hidden in God. And with Modalism – what does it mean to be in Christ when Christ is just a mask that God can take off again?
- *How can we slip into these ways of thinking in our praying, worship, preaching?*
 - *How does knowing the Trinity change the way we approach evangelism and apologetics?*

We are not trying to convince people of a Unitarian God or persuade them that Allah had a Son who died on a Cross.

- a. Start with the Scriptures (e.g. John 5; Luke 3)
- b. Start with Jesus who introduces us to the Trinity
- c. Show the beauty and glory of a God who is eternally Father, Son and Spirit pouring themselves out for us that we might be in Christ, with them for eternity. And especially the nature of the Christian life as Sonship.
- d. Particularly go to the nature of marriage as a picture of united, distinct, equal