



## Knowing our limitations

The above demands a belief in the Trinity, but formulating this doctrine into words is full of pitfalls and dangers. The Trinity is something that is fundamentally beyond our comprehension. Humans are monopresent we are in one place at one time, how can we understand what it means for God to be everywhere fully at the same time. As a monopeople, we cannot understand how God can be a Trinity, three and one at the same time. Just because this is above reason does not mean it is contrary to reason.



## Getting it Wrong

Back to that lump of plasticine. You could take the lump, form it into a triangle and draw the face of each person on one side. This accounts for the unity of the godhead but does not do justice to their threeness. In theological terms, this is called modalism. God assumes one of three faces when He speaks to us. The bible does not read this way as each member of the Trinity speaks to or describes themselves as separate to each other member. Jesus talks to the father or the father speaks to Jesus (eg at Jesus baptism or on the cross John 14:5-11, 17:6-26, Matthew 27:46.) Sometimes this is taken a bit further to suggest that God can do just this and present more than one face at a time. This is called dynamic modalism. God is always all three He is never just one of the three.



Historically we have approached this doctrine from two perspectives

If God is one how can He be three (St. Augustine)

If God is three how can He be one (Cappadocian Fathers)

### Which do you find easier to understand, 3>1 or 1>3?

The church has tended to follow St Augustine's view which is a shame because the Cappadocian father view makes more sense and also pre-dates the view of Augustine. It was the Cappadocian father who were largely responsible for the wording of the Chalcedonian creed.

They understood the Trinity in terms of a dance, each person making room, or yielding space for the other to exist, each continually cause the other to exist. This is a helpful way of understanding it. It helps to explain the interdependence of the Trinity.

Our view of the Trinity has to take the oneness of God seriously and the threeness of God equally seriously. **Can you do this?**



We believe that the nature of God is a Trinity, we do not believe that there was ever a time that God existed in any other way. That means that the Trinity is not just a form God took to reach out to us with salvation. It is how He really is throughout eternity. We go further than this and suggest that this is the only way that God can exist. If God is love then love needs an object, God cannot be love if before the universe is created there is nothing else to love



### Do you think that an understanding of the Trinity is important?

The doctrine of the Trinity is a uniquely Christian doctrine. Today it is seen as a core doctrine because without it nothing else works in our faith. No Trinity on salvation, no Trinity revelation of God, no Trinity no immediate presence of God with us today. It really is important.



Trinity tells us some fundamental things about God.

God is a fellowship.

God is a unity.

God is relational.

God is internally equal.

These things are core to God's interaction with us, it has been a monogod might be more concerned with hierarchy, power and control. A bit less user-friendly.

If God is a fellowship of love, freedom and equality.

### What might He want from us?

### How might He want us to behave?

Bringing life, hope and freedom to people, communities and nations.

# FREEDOM

## Christian Church

### The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity state that God is one, but that He exists in three distinct 'persons'; (or hypostases); God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.



### What do you think of when you hear the word Trinity?

### What do you understand by Trinity?

**This is often considered a hard doctrine. Why do you think this is?**



This may well be the least understood and the most misunderstood doctrine in our faith. The idea of Trinity is a mystery. It is one of the things about God that is so different from our human experience that will never fully understand it. It is a God thing, not a human thing. Even the word person is a problem because God is not a human and therefore not a person, we only use it for want of a better term.

If God is greater than a human being that means there will inevitably be things about God that we cannot understand. Most of these will appear to us to be contradictions. The Trinity is an example of such a contradiction: God is One. God is Three.



### Can you cope with the idea that you will never fully understand the doctrine of the Trinity?

Often at this point, we jump to analogies, a shamrock, a coin, an electric heater, or the way that water exists as ice, a fluid or steam. The truth is that there is nothing like the Trinity except the Trinity. Analogies may help us to understand, but they are at best only partly true and at worst misleading. (God is nothing like a shamrock.) The best analogy is us, we are body soul and spirit a tripartite begin, but still not quite a Trinity.



### What analogises have you heard of for the Trinity?

Carl Barth's analogy of the Word of God may also be helpful here; the Word of God exists in three forms; the Bible, the person of Jesus and when it is preached, yet it is one Word.



Second. It is a doctrine that the bible necessitates rather than teaching. The word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible. It was first used by Tertullian (160-240AD). Tertullian was one of the church fathers, leaders in the next generations after the New Testament was written. These leaders left a significant body of literature that helps us to understand how the early church understood their faith.



There is no single passage in the scriptures that explains the Trinity. It was not until the fourth century that the doctrine was formulated the way that we believe it today. The timing is significant as it coincides with the time that Christianity became a legitimate religion in the Roman empire and Christians stopped living in fear of their lives. It was only now that such issues could be openly addressed.



The Nicene creed 325AD states that Jesus, God the Son is homoousios, of the same essence as the Father. This means that Jesus made of the same divine essence that God the Father is made of. But it also means that it is not just the same kind of stuff, but the actual stuff. God the Father and God the Son share the same substance.

We express this by saying that all that it is to be God, is found in the Father. All that it is to be God is found in the Son and All that it is to be God is found in the Spirit, All at the same time.



www.freedom.gen.nz  
studies@freedom.gen.nz  
Pastor Ray Moxham

✓ Think of it this way: Imagine you could take all that it is to be God, God's divine essence, and form it into a lump of clay or plasticine. If you divided that lump into three you would divide up the nature of God and end up with three mini-gods, so we cant do that. The whole lump is the father, the whole lump is the Son and the whole lump is the Spirit all at the same time.

## 7 Seven Truths

- The three persons of the Godhead are not components or parts that somehow combine to make up God.
- Each person is all of God
- No one person can exist independently without the others.
- All are equal with regard to deity and power.
- God is always all three at once.
- They are not three separate gods as their existence is interdependent.
- God's revelation of himself to us is as a Trinity.

## ▶ Why the doctrine was formulated

The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated to address a clear and distinct paradox found in the scriptures.

*Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Deuteronomy 6:4*

This is probably the most important verse in the First Testament. It is quotes of echoed in the New testament. John 17:2, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, 1 Timothy 2:5 and James 2:19. It is intended to oppose the idea that there are many different gods. The word for God used in this passage is Elohim, which is a plural word. The word one can be understood as unity.

## ? Does belief in the Trinity mean that we believe in three gods?

No, we believe that there is only one God. The issue is the nature of this one God, for we believe that He is a unity.

On the other hand, the New Testament describes Jesus in many different ways as God (see the studies on the Deity of Christ). The same can be said of the Spirit.

! The problem then is God is one but the bible describes; God as God, Jesus as God and the Spirit as God. The New Testament never tries to resolve this problem, it just accepts it. We call this Inclusive Monotheism. God is one God, But Jesus is God and so is the Spirit. Inclusive monotheism makes no attempt to explain how this works or how it is possible, it just accepts it as true.

## ? God is God and Jesus is God and the Spirit is God, what conclusions can we come to?

The driving force behind this doctrine was exactly this issue. If Jesus is God how should God be understood. This question was asked because of another issue, should Jesus be worshipped? Historically the doctrine of the Trinity grew out of a desire to worship God correctly.

? There are illusions to the idea that God is more than a monobeing all through the bible.

### Read Genesis 1:26-27

#### Did you notice the contradiction in tenses?

When God creates humankind, he says let us make humans in our image This is plural but then Genesis records that God created humans in his own image this is singular.

## ? Why the shift between plural and singular? What could this mean?

The 'us' here is probably the only two characters that have been introduced to us so far God and the Spirit. This is proto-Trinity.

& Then there is the 'Angel of the LORD' who speaks as God, bears His name, receives divine honour, exercises divine power, seems to disconcertingly morph into God and yet is distinct from God, Genesis 16:7, 18:1-10, 32:22-31; Exodus 23:20-23; Judges 13:1-22.

The First testament also speaks of the 'Spirit of the LORD', which the Lord sends but is also the LORD Joel 2:28; Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:27

Some have also seen the same kind of illusion in the 'personification of wisdom', Proverbs 8; Job 28:20-18.

## ? Read Isaiah 63:9-10 and Isaiah 48:12&16b What characters are described in these passages? In what way are they described together?

You can also see this paradox in Isaiah's teaching about the Messiah, he is the Servant of the LORD and is distinct from God, but is also called 'God with us' and 'Mighty God' Isaiah 7:14; 9:6.

The New Testament continues this paradox. It identifies three entities; Father, Son and Spirit which are described as distinct and separate from each other but are all described as God. All this while the New Testament maintains there is but one God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the best way to do justice to (or even make sense of) what the New Testament teaches about God. If you believe that the Father, Son and Spirit are all God as the New Testament teaches, you have to believe in the Trinity or accuse the bible of being inconsistent about the nature of God.

Jesus said "the Father and I are one" John 10:30 but He also said "the Father is greater than I" John 14:28. The Spirit is God 2 Corinthians 3:17, but the Spirit intercedes for us with God Romans 8:26-27

✓ The New Testament Juxtaposes the father, Son and Holy Spirit in a way that is not done with people or angels.

John 15:23,26	Ephesians 3:16-17
Galatians 4:6	1 Peter 1:2
Ephesians 1:17	Hebrews 9:14
Ephesians 2:18	2 Thessalonians 3:5

## ? Did you observe a fixed order in the above verses?

You might notice that there is no fixed order here. Usually, God the father, is first but not always. In a Greek world, order was important. To mention Jesus before God the Father is to make a statement.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit all indwell the believer. To suggest that an angel indwells the believer is just a little bit freaky.

## ? What did you notice about the way the Godhead is described in the above verse?

There is a real co-operation with God, the Trinity like to do things together in harmony. The way in which Father, Son and Spirit are always seen as working in co-operation not independently. So the Father creates through the Son, the Son functions because of the Spirit. John 1:3; Matthew 12:28. It is also interesting to note that the birth (Luke 1:35), death (Hebrews 9:14) and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 8:11) are all acts of the Trinity.

### How do you get to say that Jesus is Lord? 1 Corinthians 12:3

♥ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 1 Corinthians 13:14

In the First Testament YHWH is seen as saviour and redeemer of His people. IN the New Testament that is Jesus role. In the First Testament YHWH dwells among His people. IN the New Testament the Holy Spirit dwells in the church. The Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are seen as synonymous. Romans 8:9-11 cf. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

## ? In what way are they different?

The Son is...  
The Father is...  
The Spirit is....