

## Session 1: Introducing the Trinity

*The Trinity is a mystery: a deeply complex idea at the heart of the Christian faith. So if it's a mystery, why bother thinking about it at all? In this first session, we introduce the idea of the Trinity and begin to explore how God's triune nature is revealed through Scripture.*

## Introducing the Trinity

### A thought experiment about the eternal nature of God

‘In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable’ (Augustine)

‘The Trinity isn’t ultimately for anything, any more that God is for the purpose of anything. Just as you wouldn’t ask what purpose God serves or what function he fulfils, it makes no sense to ask what the point of the Trinity is or what purpose the Trinity serves. The Trinity isn’t for anything beyond itself, because the Trinity is God... If we don’t take this as our starting point, everything we say about the practical relevant of the Trinity could lead us to one colossal misunderstanding: thinking of God the Trinity as a means to some other end, as if God were the Trinity in order to make himself useful. But God the Trinity is the end, the goal, the telos, the omega. In himself and without any reference to a created world or the plan of salvation.’ (Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, p62)

‘What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.’ (A.W. Tozer)

1) If you had to pick one word to define God’s eternal identity and complete the sentence: “God is \_\_\_\_\_” what would it be?

2) What was God doing before Creation?

John 17:24: God is \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:7-8: God is \_\_\_\_\_

## The Revelation of the Trinity

How does the OT lay the foundation for the Trinitarianism of the NT?

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Creation	Theophanies	Distinctions	Word and Wisdom	The Messiah	The Spirit
<p>God creates by His word, with the Spirit hovering over the waters.</p> <p>“Let us create mankind in our image.” (Gen. 1:26)</p> <p>‘By the word of the LORD were the Heavens made, their starry host by the breath [<i>Spirit</i>] of his mouth.’ (Psalm 33:6)</p>	<p>The Angel of the Lord speaks as if he is the Lord (e.g. Gen. 16:7-13; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; 31:10-13; Ex. 3:2-6; Judg. 2:1-5; 6:12-24)</p> <p>The Lord appears in bodily form (eg. Gen. 18-19)</p> <p>The commander of the army of the Lord (Josh. 5:13-15. Compare with Rev 19:10; 22:8-9)</p>	<p>‘The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Psalm 110:1)</p> <p>‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever... therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions.’ (Psalm 45:6-7)</p> <p>Isaiah 63:8-14</p>	<p>In the (mainly) post-exilic literature God is seen to work through heavenly figures with divine attributes and powers.</p> <p>Wisdom (Job 15:7-8; 28:12; Prov 8-9)</p> <p>Word (Ps. 33:6-9)</p>	<p>“He will be called... Mighty God” (Isa. 9:6)</p> <p>‘...whose origin is from old, from ancient days’ (Mic. 5:2-5)</p> <p>Son of Man (Dan 7:14)</p>	<p>Parallelism (Ps. 139:7)</p> <p>Gives life (Gen 1:2; Ezek 37:8-10)</p> <p>Empowers (Num. 27:18; 1 Sam. 16:13)</p> <p>Protects (Isa. 63:11-12),</p> <p>Indwells (Num. 27:18; Ezek. 2:2; 3:24)</p> <p>Linked to the Messiah (Isa. 11:1-2; 42:1; 61:1)</p> <p>A gift (Joel 2:28ff; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26; 37:12; Zech. 12:10)</p>

## The Revelation of the Trinity

Worship in the NT is explicitly Binitarian...

### Jesus and the Father

Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matt 11:25-27)

NT worship was "in the name of the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:1, 7; 1 Cor 1:1-3; 2 Cor 1:1-2; Gal 1:1-5; Eph 1:1-2; Phil 1:1-2; Col 1:1-2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1-2; 1 Tim 1:1-2; 2 Tim 1:1-2; Titus 1:4; Phil 3)

People worshipped Jesus (John 1:1-18; Heb 1:3-4; Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:5-11; 2 Tim 2:11-13; Rev 5:8-10) and prayed to him (Acts 7:59-60)

Since salvation is a work of God himself, the apostle Paul's consistent description of Jesus as Saviour implicitly attributes deity to him (Titus 2:11-13; cf. Titus 1:4; 3:6; Phil 3:20; 2 Tim 1:10; for Peter see 2 Peter 1:11). Moreover in Titus 2:11-13 Paul explicitly calls Jesus Christ "our great God and Saviour." Peter also calls him both "God" and "Saviour" in 2 Peter 1:1.

Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9, 12-13; 14:5-9; 2 Cor 4:5; 12:8-10; Phil 2:9-11 [expressly after the resurrection]; Col 2:6; 1 Tim 6:3; Titus 2:13 [where he is called God and Saviour]; Heb 1:3-14).

Christ is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) in the form of God (Phil 2:5). Christ is God (Rom 9:5).

The fullness of God dwells in him (Col 1:19; 2:9) and he is in God (Col 3:3).

God and Christ are often coupled together (2 Cor 10:4-6; Col 2:2; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 4:1; Heb 13:20), as is the Lord Jesus Christ with our God and Father (Rom 15:5-7, 8; 1 Cor 8:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Thess 3:11, 13; 5:23; 2 Thess 1:5-10; 2:16; 3:5).

(Adapted from Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, chapters 2-3)

## The Revelation of the Trinity

...and implicitly Trinitarian.

### The Holy Spirit

The Hebrew *ruach* is used 90 times for the Spirit in the OT. Paul alone uses *pneuma* 115 times in his letters.

He has personal traits: He grieves (Eph 4:30), persuades (John 14-16), intercedes (Rom 8:26-27), testifies (John 16:12-15), cries (Gal 4:6), speaks (Mark 13:11), creates (Luke 1:35), leads Jesus and the apostles (Luke 1:35-4:22; Acts 8:29, 39; 16:6-10).

The Spirit has divine characteristics: He sanctifies, gives joy in sufferings, opens people's minds to believe, enables us to worship, and brings about union with Christ. He can be blasphemed (Mark 3:28-29; 12:32) and lying to Him is lying to God (Acts 5:3-4)

Paul refers to the Spirit in the same breath as the Father and the Son, and thus as God. In writing of the gifts of the Spirit, he refers to "the same Spirit", "the same Lord", and "the same God" (1 Cor 12:4-6)

Triadic statements link him to the Father and Son (Rom 15:30; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 4:4-6; Eph 2:18; Col 1:3-8; 2 Thess 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-7). He is called the "Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11) and "the Spirit of God's Son" (Gal 4:6).

(Adapted from Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, chapter 3)

'The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself. For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the Father was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was not yet received to burden us further... with the Holy Spirit... [I]t was necessary that, increasing little by little, and, as David says, by ascensions from glory to glory, the full splendour of the Trinity should gradually shine forth.' (Gregory Nazianzen)

# The Trinity and Mystery

## Can we understand the Trinity?

### What is a 'mystery'?

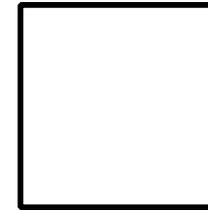
'The revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed' (Rom 16:25-26)

'The plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God... now... made known.' (Eph 3:9-10)

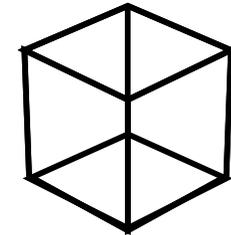
1 Dimension  
1 line



2 Dimensions  
4 lines = 1 figure



3 Dimensions  
6 figures = 1 solid body



'As you advance to more real and more complicated levels, you do not leave behind you the things you found on the simpler levels: you still have them, but combined in new ways - in ways you could not imagine if you knew only the simpler levels.'

Now the Christian account of God involves just the same principle. The human level is a simple and rather empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings - just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure, and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine.

In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course we cannot fully conceive a Being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it. And when we do, we are then, for the first time in our lives, getting some positive idea, however faint, of something super-personal - something more than a person. It is something we could never have guessed, and yet, once we have been told, one almost feels one ought to have been able to guess it because it fits in so well with all the things we know already.

You may ask, 'if we cannot imagine a three-personal Being, what is the good of talking about Him?' Well, there isn't any good talking about Him. The thing that matters is being actually drawn into that three-personal life, and that may begin any time - tonight, if you like.'

(C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, ch24)