

Trinity (3-in-1) simply means God-Is-Love.

A. The Limits of Logic: We need revelation

[1 Cor. 1:21] *In the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom.*

If there is a God who created the universe, then it is only logical that for us to know Him, He must first reveal Himself. For if all our knowledge is conditioned by and is a result of our experience of the universe, then how can we have any knowledge of a God who is outside of the universe – unless He chooses to somehow reach inside the universe and reveal Himself to us.

The claim of the Bible is that the God who created the universe has indeed revealed himself!

[John 1:18] *No-one has ever seen God, but God the Only-Begotten has made Him known.*

[Acts 17:23] *“As I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown God’. What therefore you worship as unknown this I proclaim to you...”*

[Heb. 1:1-2] *Long ago, at many times and in many way, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son... through whom also He made the world.*

B. What do we mean by the word ‘God’?

Whenever we are using human words (and all our words are human words) to describe God, we need to remember that they won’t necessarily mean exactly the same thing when used of God as when used of people. Jesus raised this question of what exactly we mean by the word ‘god’ when he was accused of blasphemy by the Jewish religious leaders:

[John 10:34] *Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I said, you are ‘gods’ “...?’*

‘God’ can mean **‘a spiritual power’**:

- In this sense, Satan is called the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and the Bible affirms the reality of various ‘principalities and powers’ (eg. rationalism, Allah, the UK Border Agency).
- Discuss: what things have power over you?

Or ‘god’ can mean **‘something/one that is worshipped’**:

- In this sense, “everyone who is covetous is an idolater” (Ephesians 5:5).
- Discuss: what things do you love most?

C. Three sorts of religions/philosophies

Atheism (/Monism)	Theism (/Dualism)	Trinitarian Christianity
‘All is One’	‘There is Someone Else there’	“God, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself” 2 Cor. 5:19
Atheism ; Buddhism ; Advaita Hinduism ; Hard Agnosticism/‘Liberalism’	Judaism ; Islam ; Bhakti Hinduism ; (People who believe in aliens!)	Christianity
(...Nothing...?) ----- Everything	(God) ----\Word/----- V Everything	(Father) ^ --- Son ---/-----\----- (Spirit)/Church\ Everything

D. The Israelite Revelation: “One God”

1. The Defining Moment: Israel at Sinai

Exodus 20:1-6 *“And God spoke all these words, saying: ‘I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, YHWH your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”*

2. Israelite Monotheism

The key features of Israelite monotheism are clearly recognised and understood by Moses:

1. God is Absolute (‘YHWH’=“I AM WHO I AM” Ex. 3:14) — and uniquely so.
2. God is superior to all other ‘gods’(systematically shown in 10 Plagues; cf. Ex. 8:18-19).
3. God refuses to be worshipped the way we worship our other idols (Golden Calf Ex. 32:5)—
YHWH is not a tribal idol!
4. God is personal Ex. 33:12-23; (and therefore is “jealous” for us; Ex. 34:14).
5. And because God cares jealously for each individual person, he is interested in the nitty-gritty ethical issues of everyday life (eg. Ex. 21-23) —even when involvement becomes messy! (eg. Divorce: Deut. 24:1, Matt. 19:8).

But for all Israel to recognise this was a slow, painful process (as Moses prophesied! Deut. 31:29).

E. The Christian Revelation: “Father, Son, & Holy Spirit”

1. The Defining Moment: Jesus’ baptism

Mark 1:9-11 *“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from Heaven, “You are my beloved Son ; with you I am well pleased.”*

2. The Trinity in the New Testament

Some say the Christian church didn’t have any agreed systematic doctrine of the Trinity until the Church Councils of the 4th Century. This is true only insofar as the New Testament never attempts to give us ‘systematic doctrine’, but is always teaching truth in the context of the lives of particular churches or people. But the Trinity is undeniably foundational to the thinking of the New Testament authors, as can be seen by the way the Trinity appears in the discussion of other issues.

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

1 Cor. 12:4-6 *There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.
And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God...*

Eph.4:4-6 *There is one body and one Spirit..., one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...*

1 Peter 1:2 *...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,
in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ...*

F. Two Common Stumbling-Blocks

1. The Full Deity and Humanity of Jesus

Deity shown by his pre-existence (John 8:58; 1 Cor. 8:6) and his right to receive worship (Rev. 5:13). Humanity shown by the fact that “he had to be made like his brothers in every respect” (Heb. 2:17).

2. The Personality of the Holy Spirit

Shown by use of masculine pronouns in spite of “*pneuma*” being neuter (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:8). Also HS is said to “help”, “intercede”(Rom.8:26) & to be “insulted”(Heb 10:29), “grieved”(Eph.4:30).

G. Two ways of thinking about the Trinity

“No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled with tears, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me.” (Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration XL, paragraph XLI)

1. God/Word/Spirit as One

John 1:1,14 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father...*

This model puts the emphasis on God being one: a single, unique, personal being.

Implication: **Communication** is possible.

If the Word of God is fully God, then that means words – even our words – are not just noises that we make that trigger neural reactions in the brain, nor are they simply utilitarian tools to manipulate the world around us. Rather, they are—or at least should be—a truly profound personal communication from one person to another.

Imperative: Truth.

“Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No’ – anything more comes from the evil one!” Matt. 5:37

2. Father/Son/Spirit as Three

2 Cor. 13:14 *“...the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the communion of the Spirit”*

This model puts the emphasis on God being three: a loving social community!

Implication: **Community** is possible.

The implication is this, that ‘Family’ is not just a human construct, but an eternal reality. ‘Father’ isn’t just a metaphor that means God displays some characteristics of a human father, but is actually the most profound description of what God *is* (cf. Eph. 3:14). Therefore Community is truly possible.

Imperative: Openness.

To those you know

*“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but **love your neighbour** as yourself. I am the LORD.”* Leviticus 19:18

To those you don’t know

*“Do not neglect to **show hospitality to strangers**, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it”* Hebrews 13:2 (cf. Lev. 19:34)

To those you don’t like

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, **love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:43-48)*

H. Trinity in the Old Testament

Note, 1. Appearance of pre-incarnate Jesus (Ezekiel 1:26; Gen. 32:22-32; Zech. 3:1-2); 2. Outpouring of pre-Pentecostal Spirit (Numbers 11:24-29; 2 Kings 2:9); 3. Plurality of Creator (Genesis 1:26-27).

I. Conclusion: “God is love”

Once we have been convinced that the Bible clearly teaches that God is Trinity, and have begun to get a little more comfortable with the idea that there is only One God, and yet Three Persons, we might go even further, and make a somewhat audacious suggestion:

If God truly is Love, then how could God possibly not be a Trinity?

The logic goes something like this:

1. Since love is personal, love requires multiple persons—“love seeks not its own” (1 Cor. 13:5).
2. *Eternal* love therefore requires multiple *eternal* persons.
3. Thus if “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16) and is eternal (Mal. 3:6) then God must be multiple persons.

1 John 4:15-16 *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love—& whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.*

J. Triple Commitment: Receive, Lead, & Intercede

The doctrine of the Trinity isn’t an abstract doctrine, but rather the foundational model that Christian community should imitate. **I encourage everyone to commit to three groups, to lead (like the Father), receive (like the Son), and intercede (in the Spirit) respectively.**

Most Christians are probably committed to one group (‘their church’) where they receive; some might be committed to intercede consistently for another group – but few would be consistently leading. Except, that is, for ‘the church leaders’, who may not have a way of consistently receiving from other Christians (which can be why leaders quickly burn out).

Discuss: Who are you receiving from? _____
 Who are you leading? _____
 Who are you interceding for? _____
 Are you committed to these groups? Receiving [] ; Leading [] ; Interceding []

K. A Trinitarian Prayer (Ephesians 3:14-17)

I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
¹⁵ **from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,**
¹⁶ **and pray that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory,**
to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,
¹⁷ **that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;**
that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
¹⁸ **may be able to comprehend with all the saints**
what is the width and length and depth and height—
¹⁹ **to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge;**
that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
²⁰ **Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or imagine,**
according to the power that works in us,
²¹ **to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus**
to all generations, forever and ever. AMEN.