



THE TRINITY
in PLAIN
LANGUAGE

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Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	3
<i>Introduction – What is ‘The Trinity’</i>	7
<i>Part I – The Idea of a ‘Trinity’</i>	9
<i>It’s Unique to Christianity</i>	9
<i>It’s Revealed Gradually in The Bible</i>	10
<i>It’s in The Bible... But the Word Isn’t</i>	13
<i>Part II – What the Trinity IS</i>	16
<i>God is One Singular God</i>	18
<i>God is Three Distinct Persons</i>	20
<i>The Three Persons are Each Fully God</i>	24
<i>Part III – What the Trinity IS NOT</i>	26
<i>Conclusion</i>	29

Preface

The Christian concept of “Trinity” is either the most unusual, unintelligent, and unreasonable concoction of misguided human fabrication a person could have the misfortune of attempting to understand or it’s the most essential, effulgent, and ebullient truth that an individual could come to realize and live in light of. One must either reject it as a foolish notion or accept it as a magnificent reality. The concept of “Trinity” should *never* be insipid, ordinary, or unexciting. But, almost impossibly, many have assumed exactly this kind of resignation towards the Trinity.

Most Christians seem resigned to the pitiful notion that the Trinity is little more than a divine mystery that can never be comprehended and, therefore, is not worth the effort of exploring with much grit. “After all,” they say, “a God you can comprehend isn’t a God worth worshipping!” And they’re right, in a sense. But you also can’t worship what you can’t comprehend to at least *some* degree, otherwise the object of your worship would merely be a vague “something” or “nothing” or “anything!” God *is* mysterious, but He’s also revealed Himself to the world in stunning magnitude.

Still, for many Christians, the Trinity is more-or-less an inconvenient doctrine to be tip-toed around, rather than a glorious reality to be waded into and lived within. For many Christians, a single-person God would be neater, simpler, and easier. They may even sing “God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity”¹ on Sunday, but internally be thinking of something else entirely. Something more “convenient.” Something more “believable.” Something more “pocket-sized.” Something dismembered, disfigured, and disintegrated.

And with such an attitude from Trinitarians, it becomes that much easier for non-Christians to dismiss the idea altogether – consigning the

¹ Heber, Reginald. *Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!* Written, 1826. Composed by John B. Dykes, 1861.

doctrine of the Trinity to the same mental vaults as Roswell, Bigfoot, and Pinocchio. Rarely will a Christian speak confidently of what they know about the Trinity... and rarer still, an outsider who is literate and conversant on the topic.

Few will venture out past the breakers of the Trinity as a *concept* and go on into the vastness of *God's actual being*. Yes, He is incomprehensibly vast – we will never know His full scope. But in His Word we've been given the wayfaring tools to explore what He has revealed to us about Himself. And the things He's revealed have been so that we might plumb their depths (Deut. 29:29).

When God reveals Himself He is essentially saying, “*I can be known. I want to be known. So come and know me!*” God's revelation is God's invitation into relationship. What will we do with the fact that God has revealed Himself as triune? We can ignore it and discard it like we do junk-mail... We can pillage it for head-knowledge like we do episodes of Jeopardy... Or we can grab hold of its weight like a dropping anchor and allow it to take us into deeper relationship with the living God.

This short book will be an attempt to synthesize the doctrine of the Trinity into *plain language*. What proceeds after this Preface will be meant, in particular, for non-churchy folk. It's for the people who want to know what Christians believe about the odd idea that God is '*Triune*,' but don't have the patience, desire, or ability to engage on an overtly academic level.

However, *plainness* should not be confused with *simplicity*. This brief work is *not* meant to take what is in actuality complex and magically make it simple.² I can't turn the Trinity into an easy-bake doctrine any more than I can turn quantum mathematics into Cheerio-counting with a toddler. Rather, I'll seek to explain what Christians believe about their 'one God in three Persons' straightforwardly – avoiding as much filler and academic jargon (like '*ousia*,' '*perichoresis*,' '*hypostasis*,' '*filioque*,'

² To be sure, there is a “simplicity” to God that many theologians have explored and written at length about. I especially appreciate John Frame's handling of the subject throughout *The Doctrine of God and Theology in Three Dimensions*.

etc...) as possible. Additionally, because of this narrow goal, I will not be providing any applications for how to live in light of the Trinity – though I cannot stress enough how pervasive the truth of the Trinity can and should be for human life.

I would rather that the doctrine of the Trinity be rejected on the basis of pure disagreement than on the basis of pure confusion. If a person should reject the Triune God, let them at least know Who they're rejecting. I hope in *plain* language to unfold a *bombshell* truth – that God is one, and also three. And to show that this, somehow, is not a contradiction. So, I have attempted to order my thoughts with a flow, brevity, and directness that I hope non-church people will find helpful.

For me the Trinity has become the most believable and rational basis for understanding God and human life. The concept of a 'single-person God' has become as preposterous to me as the notion that there is 'no God.' I see both as dry and unconvincing attempts at explaining away or over-simplifying our beautifully-ordered world and the humans who inhabit it. The triune nature of God revealed in the Bible is so compelling and reasonable to me that I cannot conjure up a better or more believable alternative. I cling to the notion that God has existed eternally as Father, Son, and Spirit – experiencing deep relationship and joy within that context. Nothing else adequately explains *why* God would create, or why He has created *in the way that He has*. When we rightly understand God's triune nature we can rightly understand ourselves,³ because we were made in His likeness.

For further study on the Trinity I would point readers to my bibliography. The most approachable and applicable resource for lay and unchurched people that I've found is '*Connected*' by Sam Allberry. The most approachable-yet-rich and scripture-saturated is the first chapter of '*Doctrine*' by Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears. The most helpful for the historically-motivated reader is '*The Quest for the Trinity*' By

³ Allberry, Sam. *Connected: Living in the Light of the Trinity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012. 78.

Stephen R. Holmes. Lastly, the resource with the most potential to transform a Christian with regard to this subject is *'Delighting in the Trinity'* by Michael Reeves – this book gripped me so unexpectedly with the reasonable beauty of God's Triune nature that I had no warning before falling more deeply in love with His three-in-one-ness.

God in Three Persons! Blessed Trinity!

Introduction

What is ‘The Trinity’?

The Trinity is the Three-Person-God revealed in the pages of the Bible. He’s the God that Christians believe exists. This God is one singular God who has always existed in three distinct Persons who are each fully God. Not three *parts* of the same God, not three *aspects* of the same God, and He’s not three *different gods* either. There is *one* God who exists in *three* distinct divine Persons. The Bible reveals that those Persons are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. A way to summarize it is like this:

1. God is one singular God.
2. God is three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
3. The three Persons are each fully God.⁴

You might think this sounds like a contradiction. $1+1+1$ does not equal 1 in any universe. But that’s just not the right math problem. God isn’t “one” in the same way that He’s “three.” If you like math, it’s probably better to think of God like this:

1. 1 God + no other God = 1 God.
2. 1 Person + 1 Person + 1 Person = 3 Persons.
3. 1 God + 3 Persons = 1 God and 3 Persons.

His *nature* is one but his *personhood* is three.⁵ He doesn’t have three *personalities* like some Divine Schizophrenic. He’s also not three *different beings* that get along like some Divine Boyband. But the

⁴ This summary is a mixture of Grudem, Frame, and Breshears’ summaries. I like Grudem’s conciseness, but not his order (Grudem, 1994: 231). I like Frame’s initial order, but not his conciseness (Frame, 2013: 423). I like Breshears’ order and conciseness, but his wording is not meant for non-church-folk (Breshears. Video ‘Trinity Analogies’: timestamp 10:50-11:10).

⁵ Allberry, 2012: 60-61. Idea inspired.

singular God is one in His actual nature and three in His actual personhood.

There's no perfect analogy for God's one-and-three-ness – that's because only God is God. People are *one* in nature and *one* in personhood. That's it. That's all there is to us. Not so with God. People do reflect what God is *like*,⁶ but no one is actually God except God.⁷

A really great marriage can show us *something* about how God is both one and more than one at the same time...⁸ especially if the couple takes the same last name. But God isn't three separate beings that got married in some cosmic move of polygamy. We don't call The Trinity "The Divine Marriage." The three Persons have always been one God. Only the God of the Bible is one-and-three in a perfect and non-contradictory kind of way.

⁶ Genesis 1:26-27.

⁷ 1 Kings 8:60; Psalm 71:19, 77:13; 89:6-8, 113:5; Isaiah 44:7, 45:5-6, 45:21-22; Jeremiah 10:6; 49:19, 50:55.

⁸ Breshears, Gerry. "Applied Integrative Biblical Theology I: Knowing the Living God." *TH591*. Portland, OR: Video Lecture filmed for Western Seminary, November 12th, 2021. The word for God being "one" in Deuteronomy 6:4 is 'ēhād (אֶחָד) – the same word is used in Genesis 2:24 for describing the way God designed a husband and wife to be "one."

Part I – The idea of a ‘Trinity’

It’s Unique to Christianity

Some point out that other religions have their own “Trinities.” In fact, Hinduism has a “Trimurti” – a triad of important gods named Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. However, this triad is not one God in three distinct persons, but simply three *forms* of Brahma. In fact, that’s the meaning of the word “Tri-murti;” it literally means “three forms.”⁹

Ultimately for Hindus, all reality – all 330 million gods, all people, all things, all life – are all really just part of One Divine Reality in which all things have a bit of Brahma in them.⁹ This is not Trinitarianism, but Pantheism (a view that sees everything as a part of the Divine).

What’s clear is that this Hindu triad (or any other divine triad) is not like the Christian God. Triads are out there if you search for them, but the Trinity is completely unique to Christianity. Put bluntly, no other religion holds that there is *actually* just one singular God in three *actual* distinct persons who are all *actually* fully God.¹⁰

⁹ Tennent, Timothy C. *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2007. 25.

¹⁰ Reeves, Michael. *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012. See Reeve’s handling of the Trinity as “The Christian Distinctive” on pages 14-16.

It's Revealed Gradually in The Bible

Christians believe that you don't need the Bible to know that God exists. In fact, you don't need the Bible to know several important things about God. For example, you can look at the world and know God must be a creator who is supernaturally powerful, smart, orderly, good, and beautiful.¹¹ Humans also have an innate sense of "right" and "wrong," so it's natural to believe that *Something* or *Someone* intentionally put that in all of us.¹² But to know much more about Him – especially to know that He is Triune – well, you'll need more than just a diary or a pretty sunset for that. You'll only find out that God is Triune because *God has revealed that about Himself in the Bible*.

But the Bible doesn't reveal God's triune-ness¹³ all at once. There's not one neat verse that packages and succinctly presents it. But even from the first page of the Bible it's clear that God is, in some way, *more than one*. Let's look at two verses in chapter one of the Bible, Genesis 1:26-27.

26 Then **God** **said** “**Let us make** man in
plural singular plural
our image, after **our likeness**...
plural plural
 27 So **God** **created** man in **his own image**,
plural singular singular
 in the image of **God** **he created** him;
plural singular
 male and female **he created** them.¹⁴
singular

The author of Genesis writes this in a fascinating way. This kind of dance between plural-form and singular-form would've gotten you thrown out of grammar class, but this author does it intentionally to

¹¹ Romans 1:19-20.

¹² Romans 2:14-15.

¹³ I find the word “triune-ness” to be more approachable for outsiders than “triune nature.”

¹⁴ Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV), emphasis mine. Color-coding the forms is my own.

communicate something important about God. The opening scene of the Bible tells us that God is in some way *singular* and in some way *plural*. Genesis 1:26 is the sprout of the idea that God is Triune,¹⁵ and it grows significantly throughout the Bible’s story. Genesis 1:26-27 is just the first in a myriad of passages in the first half of the Bible (called the ‘Old Testament’) that help the reader see that there is a kind of plurality in God.¹⁶

My wife and I rent a house on the water – on an inlet. Every morning I watch the sun rise. It’s not possible to see everything clearly when it first begins to cast its light – just silhouettes of trees at first. It’s a mix of darkness and daylight, shadow and sun, obscurity and clarity. But the sun gets gradually brighter and soon everything is fully revealed. The way the Bible reveals God’s triune-ness is a bit like that.¹⁷

We see silhouettes and glimpses of God’s triune-ness throughout the first half of the Bible’s story, and we see it more fully in the second half (called the ‘New Testament’). The first few books in the New Testament of the Bible share the story of how the First Person of the Trinity (the Father) sent the Second Person of the Trinity (the Son) to become a human to show the world what the Father is like.¹⁸ The story keeps going and shares how the Father and the Son sent the Third Person of the Trinity (the Spirit) to be with God’s people forever.¹⁹ It’s a story of what lengths the One God will go to in order to be with His people; and all three Persons of God are completely unified in that mission. But again, the sun doesn’t fully rise on the idea of the Trinity until almost the end of the Bible’s story.

¹⁵ Breshears, Gerry, November 12th, 2021. Breshears calls this “the first *seed* of the Trinity in the Bible.” I’m calling it a “sprout” because it begins growing at this point and keeps growing throughout the Biblical Narrative.

¹⁶ List of popular OT passages in which we see the “sprout” of the Trinity: Genesis 1:26; 11:7; 18:1-19:4; Numbers 6:22-27; Isaiah 6:8; 9:6; 32:22; 48:16; Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 33:6; 110:1. See also the list starting on the next page.

¹⁷ Allberry, 2012: 54. Allberry uses the analogy of the dimmer switches in his living room.

¹⁸ John 14:9.

¹⁹ John 14:15-16, 26, 15:26; Acts 2:1-4.

It is for this very reason – because God has revealed Himself as triune – that we should attempt to understand the Trinity. We can and should understand as much about the Trinity as God has revealed.²⁰ God *can* be known, and God *wants* to be known for who He is – Triune.

²⁰ Reeves, 2012: 12.

It's in The Bible... But the Word "Trinity" Isn't

Maybe I should've mentioned it earlier... but one of the things God *didn't* reveal to us in the Bible is the word "*Trinity*." It's not there – not in the first half of the story and not in the second half either. But, says Allberry, “there’s a difference between the *word* [“Trinity”] being absent and the *concept* [of “Trinity”] being absent.”²¹

The word “Trinity” was first used near the end of the 100’s AD by a Christian writer named Tertullian.²² He lived in modern-day Tunisia, on the North Coast of Africa. Tertullian wasn’t inventing something new, He was just using a clear word for what the church already so obviously believed about God.²³ The earliest Christians debated about a lot of little things, but they didn’t really debate about whether Jesus was God or whether there were three divine Persons – virtually everyone in the Christian community believed that.²⁴ Early Christians saw that the Bible ascribed divinity to three Persons and so their worship of One God in Three Persons became a reflex.²⁵

It’s helpful to know where the word “Trinity” came from, but it’s also helpful to recognize that no Bible author really thought God’s plurality or triune-ness *needed* a word to encapsulate it. They were apparently content that God is... God. They’d say things like, “There is none like you, O LORD!”²⁶ and feel no constraint to add labels about His plurality. They must have believed that God’s plurality (His three-ness) spoke for itself loudly enough. Here’s a non-comprehensive sampling of

²¹ Allberry, 2012: 16. Emphasis mine.

²² Driscoll, Mark, and Gerry Breshears. *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010. 12

²³ Holmes, Stephen R. *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012. 71

²⁴ Holmes, 2012: 56. Of course, there were a few who challenged this formulation of the Trinity like Arius (3rd century) Sabellius (3rd century) and the Docetists (3rd century). All of these were swiftly condemned as Christian leaders unanimously agreed on common language for accurately describing the Trinity at the Council of Nicea in 325AD.

²⁵ Holmes, 2012: 51, 56.

²⁶ Jeremiah 10:6.

verses that point to God's plurality and triune-ness in the Bible. A brief description is provided with each of them:

The concept of God's *Plurality* in the Bible:

- **Genesis 11:7** – God says “let *us* go down...”
- **Genesis 19:24** – God rains down fire from God.
- **Psalms 45:6-7** – God anoints God.
- **Psalms 110:1** – King David talks about a conversation that God has with David's Lord (but King David's only Lord is God).
- **Isaiah 6:8** – God says “whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*?”
- **Isaiah 9:6** – Isaiah talks about a human child who will be born and be called “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father.”
- **Daniel 7:13-14** – A human is given God's authority and is worshipped.
- **Hosea 1:7** – God promises to save southern Israel by God.
- **Zechariah 2:10-11** – God sends God to be with His people.
- **Malachi 3:1-2** – God sends God suddenly to Israel's temple.
- **John 1:1-3** – Jesus is God and was also with God at creation, doing the work of creation Himself.
- **John 14:9** – Those who have seen Jesus have seen the Father.
- **John 20:28** – Jesus allows Thomas to call him “God.”
- **Colossians 1:16** – It's said that Jesus is the creator.
- **Hebrews 1:1-4** – God spoke to humanity through Jesus who is the exact imprint of God's nature.

The concept of God's *Triune-ness* in the Bible:

- **Genesis 18:1-19:24** – God appears to Abraham as three men.
- **Numbers 6:22-27** and **Isaiah 32:22** - The personal name of God, Yahweh, is repeated three times (repetition is very important in Hebrew).
- **Psalms 33:6** – “By the *word* of the *LORD* the heavens were made, and by the *breath* of his mouth all their host.” New Testament authors call

Jesus God's 'Word' and in Hebrew 'Breath' and 'Spirit' are the same word.

- **Isaiah 6:3** – The angelic beings worshipping God call him “holy” three times.
- **Isaiah 48:16** – The Messiah that Isaiah prophesies about says, “And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.”
- **Isaiah 61:1** – God's Spirit is on the Messiah because God anointed him.
- **Isaiah 63:9-10** – God, the angel of God's presence, and God's Spirit are all mentioned together.
- **Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-13, Luke 3:21-22** – When Jesus was baptized: The Father said “this is my Son...” and then the Spirit descended on Jesus.
- **Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13** – When Jesus was tempted by Satan: Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit and rested on the words of his Father (that He is the Son – Mt. 3:17) rather than needing to prove it to Satan.
- **Luke 23:46, Hebrews 9:14** – When Jesus was crucified: Jesus offered Himself up through the Spirit to the Father.
- **Matthew 28:19** – Jesus tells His disciples to baptize people “in the *name* (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
- **John 14:11, 16-17** – Jesus and the Father are one, and the Father will send the Spirit to Jesus' disciples.
- **2 Corinthians 13:14** – Paul ends this letter by saying “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”
- **Galatians 4:6** – “God has sent the Spirit of his Son... crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
- **Ephesians 4:4-6** – There's one Spirit, Lord, and Father.
- **Titus 3:4-6** – “God our Savior” saved us through Jesus and then regenerated and cleansed us by the Holy Spirit.
- **Jude 20-21** – The author encourages his audience to pray in the Holy Spirit, stay in the love of God, and wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ.

This list not only shows that the Bible is dripping with the concept of the Trinity, but it also proves what the last section was getting at – that the Bible reveals more about God’s triune nature as the story progresses. The first list of verses (about God’s general *plurality*) is heavy with Old Testament references, and the second list of verses (about God’s more defined *triune-ness*) is heavy with New Testament references. It’s not hard to tell that the second half of the Bible’s story uncovers God’s triune-ness in more detail than the first half does. In the New Testament the ‘sun’ is shining much more brightly, revealing the triune landscape – even if the word “Trinity” is never used.

Part II – What the Triune God of the Bible IS.

So far, we've given a basic definition of what Christians believe about the idea of 'Trinity.' It's an idea that is completely unique to the Christian faith and is revealed gradually across the Bible's story. Early Christians were in such agreement that God was three Persons that they eventually clarified the idea further by using the word "Trinity" to describe Him. They unanimously worshipped God as one God in three distinct and fully divine Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

In this section we'll go a little deeper into each aspect of that summary – (1) God is one singular God, (2) God is three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and (3) The three Persons are each fully God.

(1) *God is One Singular God.*

God’s oneness means two things. *First, it means that there is only one God.* Christians believe that there *are* other unseen spiritual beings, but that God created them all.²⁷ In other words, all other beings are created but there’s only one Creator. Even spiritual beings who oppose God know there’s only one God.²⁸ It’s possible for humans to reject the Creator and worship something created instead,²⁹ but God expects humans to worship nothing else as God except Him.³⁰ There is one God³¹ – and He deserves and expects our complete loyalty and devotion.³²

Second, God’s oneness means God is completely one in Himself. God is totally unified and unchanging in who He is. Christians believe that God will always be who He has always been – that He’s never changed and never will.³³ He’s tenaciously committed to being true to who He is – that’s what Christians mean when they say that ‘God is *faithful*.’³⁴

Furthermore, all of God’s attributes³⁵ are not things He learned along the way. He didn’t read self-help books because He realized He needed to grow up a little. All of God’s attributes are completely native to His being, not a performance or a curated identity. All of God’s different attributes should really be seen as one attribute: “God-ness.”³⁶ God isn’t a mix of ideal attributes shoved into one being, He is one being

²⁷ Genesis 1:1; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2.

²⁸ James 2:19.

²⁹ Romans 1:25.

³⁰ Exodus 20:3.

³¹ Isaiah 45:4; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39. 32:39; Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Timothy 2:5.

³² Deuteronomy 4:1-6.

³³ Psalm 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17; Hebrews 1:12

³⁴ Exodus 34:6. The word translated ‘*faithfulness*’ in *ESV* is *ēmēt*, נֶאֱמָר. The faithfulness of God is the unchanging integrity of God – His perpetual stubbornness to be true to who He is.

³⁵ Exodus 34:6-7 gives a list of God’s core attributes: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, loving, faithful, forgiving, and just.

³⁶ I preached two sermons on “God’s Simplicity” in 2019 – I can’t remember the source that I got this idea from.

whose identity exudes every ideal attribute. This is why the Bible can say things like “God is love.”³⁷ Sam Allberry says it so well: “[God’s love] is not just a phase he is going through and might come out of. It’s not just something he sometimes does; it is who he is. God has always been love, for he has always been Trinity.”³⁸

³⁷ 1 John 4:8.

³⁸ Allberry, 2012: 69.

*(2) God is Three Distinct Persons:
Father. Son. Spirit.*

The early church saw what God had clearly revealed: The Father had given the Son³⁹ to the world in order to establish peace between God and humanity⁴⁰ and in order to give them the fullness of His own presence by sending the Spirit.⁴¹ For early Christians, there was no denying the interplay of these three distinct divine persons. Understanding God as Father, Son, and Spirit became so instinctive for the early church that their writings and gatherings were customarily concluded with a Trinitarian blessing⁴² (e.g. “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen”).

The three Persons are one in nature (one singular God, perfectly and fully aligned in being and mission), but they’re also three distinct Persons. They each have distinctions they don’t share with the others. For example, the Father sent the Son (Jesus) to die a substitutionary death⁴³ – but not the other way around. The Son didn’t send the Father. Likewise, the Father and Son sent the Spirit,⁴⁴ not the other way around.

Here’s a non-comprehensive list of some of their distinctions⁴⁵:

³⁹ John 3:16.

⁴⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:18.

⁴¹ John 16:7-8.

⁴² Holmes, 2012: 56.

⁴³ John 6:39; 1 Corinthians 5:3-4.

⁴⁴ John 14:15-16, 26, 15:26; Acts 2:1-4. John 15:26 also says Jesus sends the son.

⁴⁵ This is a non-comprehensive list of their distinctions in God’s redemption-plan for humanity. Such lists could also be created for God’s work in creation, judgement, new creation, etc...

Father	Son	Spirit
Begets the Son ⁴⁶	Begotten by the Father ⁴⁷	Empowers the virgin birth ⁴⁸
Plans the redemption: ⁴⁹ Pursues sinners	Begins the redemption: ⁵⁰ Atones for sinners	Completes the redemption: ⁵¹ Regenerates, empowers, sanctifies
Sends/ Directs the Son ⁵²	Follows/ Obeys the Father ⁵¹	Empowers Son's ministry ⁵³
Wills the Son to die for sins ⁵⁴	Dies willingly for sins ⁵⁵	Raises Son from the dead ⁵⁶
Sends the Holy Spirit ⁵⁷	Asks and sends the Spirit ⁵⁸	Comes to indwell believers ⁵⁹
Receives believers' prayers ⁶⁰	Prays for believers ⁶¹	Helps believers pray ⁶²
Entrusts judgement to Son ⁶³	Has authority to judge ⁶⁴	Bids us to avoid judgement ⁶⁵

One common point of speculation in these distinctions is that God the Father would send God the Son to die. Some mistakenly see this as “divine child abuse” – a cruel father and a helpless son sent to a brutal death at the father’s un-contestable demand. This cannot be further from what the Bible teaches. The will of the Father and Son were completely

⁴⁶ Ps. 2:7; Jn. 3:16; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5, 5:5.

⁴⁷ Ps. 2:7; Jn. 3:16; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5, 5:5.

⁴⁸ Luke 1:35.

⁴⁹ Acts 2:23, 4:28; Eph. 1:9-10, 3:9.

⁵⁰ Acts 2:23, 4:28; Eph 1:7, 3:11.

⁵¹ John 15:26; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:13, 15:16; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:2.

⁵² Matt. 10:40, 15:24; Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18, 4:43, 9:48, 10:16; John 3:34, 4:34, 5:19, 23, 24, 30, 36, 27, 38, 6:29, 38, 39, 44, 57, 7:16, 28, 29, 33, 8:18, 26, 29, 42, 9:4, 10:36, 11:42, 12:44, 45, 49, 13:20, 14:24, 15:21, 16:5, 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25, 20:21; Acts 3:26; 10:36; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9, 10, 14.

⁵³ Isa. 11:1-3; Mt. 12:28; Luke 4:18-19, 5:17; Acts 10:37-38; Heb. 9:14.

⁵⁴ Isa. 53:10; Luke 22:42.

⁵⁵ John 10:18; Heb. 12:2.

⁵⁶ Acts 2:24; Rom. 8:11.

⁵⁷ John 14:15-16, 26; Acts 5:32, 15:8; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 4:6; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:12.

⁵⁸ John 15:26; 1 Pet. 1:12.

⁵⁹ Acts 2:1-4; Gal. 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:14.

⁶⁰ Matt. 6:9; John 16:23-24; Col. 3:17; 1 John 5:14.

⁶¹ Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25 – We pray “in His name”: John 14:13, 14, 15:16, 16:23, 24; Col. 3:17.

⁶² Rom. 8:26; Jude 20.

⁶³ Dan. 7:13-14; John 5:22, 30; Acts 10:42, 17:31.

⁶⁴ Dan. 7:14; Jn. 5:22, 12:48; 30; Acts 10:42, 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5; Rev. 19:11.

⁶⁵ Rev. 22:17.

one.⁶⁶ Their wills were not in competition, but in perfect harmony – Jesus knew the plan beforehand and predicted it three times to His friends⁶⁷ so that they would believe Him once it happened.⁶⁸ Then, Jesus perfectly submitted Himself to the Father’s plan,⁶⁹ willingly dying for the joy of reconciling rebellious humans to God.⁷⁰

A second common point of speculation is whether the Spirit is a *Person of the Trinity* or more of the *impersonal power of God*. But an impersonal force can’t be “grieved” (like Paul says of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:30). An impersonal force cannot speak (like the Spirit does in Hebrews 3:7 and Revelation 22:17). And an impersonal force cannot be lied to (like a married couple lie to the Spirit in Acts 5:3-4). Throughout the Bible, Jesus and others speak about the Spirit as a “He” rather than an “it.”

Because God doesn’t change³³, this is how God has always been for eternity – three distinct Persons. This means the singular God has always had divine company. He has always been in relationship – the Father, Son, and Spirit have always had each other. There has always been a relationship of unfathomable love and unity between them. Michael Reeves points out that it’s natural for God to create, because He has always been a life-giver.⁷¹ It’s natural for God to send the Son to die in the place of rebellious people because He’s always been generous and self-giving.⁷² It’s natural for God to send the Spirit to be with His people because He has always known how to love and enjoy others.

In that light, a Triune God is sensible, and a single-person-God is not. If God were only one person alone and in isolation for all eternity,

⁶⁶ John 4:34, 10:30.

⁶⁷ 1st prediction: Matt. 16:21–23, Mark 8:31–32, Luke 9:21–22. 2nd prediction: Matt. 17:22–23, Mark 9:30–32, Luke 9:43–45. 3rd prediction: Matt. 20:17–19, Mark 10:32–34, Luke 18:31–34.

⁶⁸ John 14:29.

⁶⁹ Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42, John 6:38.

⁷⁰ John 10:18; Heb. 12:2.

⁷¹ Reeves, 2012: 21, 23.

⁷² Reeves, 2012: 68–69.

then he would either have little use for anyone else or he would be terrifyingly needy.⁷³ If he'd always been content and satisfied on his own – why start something? And if he did choose to create, then we should be suspicious of his intentions. You couldn't quite know what he wants from you or how he feels about you, if anything at all. He wouldn't know how to love another person or be self-giving because he'd never done that before. He may decide that his experiment was nice but that he'd now prefer to act malevolently with his creation, or walk away from it, or “uncreate” some or all of it. We can be very thankful that God is three Persons.

⁷³ Concept in this paragraph is from Reeves, 2012: 41. Supported by Allberry, 2012: 69.

(3) *The three persons are each fully God.*

It's vital to recognize that each of the Persons in the Trinity is *fully* God. They are not each 33.3333333% of God. When the Spirit comes to be with a Christian, they are not getting one-third of God. I'll briefly show from the Bible that each person of the Trinity is fully God.

God the Father is fully God:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” –

2 Corinthians 1:3

God the Father is the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” The Father is the God of 100% (“all”) of God’s comfort. If each member of the Trinity is only partly God, that would mean that the Son and the Spirit have 0% comfort to give because the Father gives “all” the comfort – a real comfort-hog. However, this same passage says that we also share in Christ’s comfort (2 Cor. 1:5). And, in John 14:26 Jesus calls the Spirit the “*Parakletos*” – a word that means Helper, Advocate, Intercessor, or *Comforter*. So, if the Father has 100% of God’s comfort to give and any other Person of the Trinity still has *any* comfort to give, that must mean that the Father isn’t simply the one-third of the Trinity that offers comfort, it must mean that He’s 100% God. The Father is fully God.

God the Son is fully God.

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

– Colossians 1:19

“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

– Colossians 2:9

These verses speak very plainly for themselves. Q: How much of God dwells in the Son? A: The fullness of God. The Son is fully God. Of course, if these verses aren't convincing enough, the New Testament has a lot of things to say in support.⁷⁴ Similar to the argument that we made above about how the Father is the God of "all" comfort, one could be made for the Son, who according to Romans 9:5 is "God over *all*."

God the Spirit is fully God.

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

– 1 Corinthians 3:16

"We are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"

– 2 Corinthians 6:16

Paul calls Christians both "the temple of God" and "the Temple of the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians 3:16 doesn't say, "Don't you know that you are 1/3 of God's Temple because God's Spirit lives in you?" When the Spirit of God dwells in you, the fullness of God dwells in you.

⁷⁴ John 1:1; John 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Col.1:19; Col. 2:9; 2 Thess. 1:12; 1 Tim. 3:15-16; Heb. 1:8; 1 John 5:20. There is also a substantial list compiled by John Frame – Frame, 2013, 461-467.

Part III – What the Triune God IS NOT.

We have now explored how the God of the Bible is presented as (1) *one singular God* who is (2) *three distinct Persons* and that (3) *the three persons are each fully God*. But what happens when we remove or retool one of these three dynamics? Perhaps it would be easier to believe God’s *oneness* but not His *threeness*... or vice-a-versa – His *threeness* but not His *oneness*! Many throughout history have made these blunders while attempting to make sense of the Trinity – and many still do today.

There are, for example, a number of ‘*Oneness*’ churches in my hometown whose congregants believe God is not actually three distinct persons, but one God who has three different forms He has historically shifted between.⁷⁵ There are also a number of ‘*Iglesia Ni Cristo*’ churches in my hometown whose congregants believe that Jesus is not God⁷⁶ and that the Spirit is not God’s Spirit.⁷⁷

But the singularity of God and full divinity of the three distinct Persons in God are clear from Bible, as I hope this little book has adequately drawn out. At the cost of being redundant, there is (1) *one singular God* who is (2) *three distinct Persons* and (3) *the three persons are each fully God*. All attempts at making one of the three points feel more convenient or easier to understand should be seen as a departure from what the Bible says about God and, thereby, a departure from the Christian faith. To paraphrase Michael Reeves: the triune God is the

⁷⁵ <https://www.upci.org/about/our-beliefs> - “...our Creator became our Savior. The God against whom we sinned is the One who forgives us... He came in flesh to save us... He did not send someone else.... our Creator-Savior is also the indwelling Spirit who is ever-present to help us.”

⁷⁶ <https://iglesianicristo.net/beliefs/the-lord-jesus-christ/> - “We do not subscribe to the belief that Christ is a God-man or both God and man. He is man in nature according to His own testimony (John 8:40) and teachings of His Apostles (1 Tim. 2:5; Matt. 1:18).”

⁷⁷ <https://iglesianicristo.net/beliefs/the-holy-spirit/> - “Although the Holy Spirit is a spirit, never does the Scriptures (sic) refer to it as “God the Holy Spirit” because it is not God but one of the spirits being sent by God.”

bedrock of the Christian faith, and if you don't believe in *that* God, then, quite simply, you are not a Christian.⁷⁸

*God is not three different Gods.*⁷⁹

- ~~1. God is one singular God.~~
2. God is three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
3. The three Persons are each fully God.

*God is not merely single in personhood.*⁸⁰

1. God is one singular God.
- ~~2. God is three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.~~
- ~~3. The three Persons are each fully God.~~

*God isn't just switching between three different modes.*⁸¹

1. God is one singular God.
2. God is three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
- ~~3. The three Persons are each fully God.~~

*God isn't just made up of separate parts that are each partly God.*⁸²

1. God is one singular God.
2. God is three distinct Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
- ~~3. The three Persons are each fully God.~~

⁷⁸ Reeves, 2012: 15-16. A paraphrase.

⁷⁹ Tritheism.

⁸⁰ Arianism, Docetism, Ebionitism (ex. Iglesia Ni Cristo, Jehovah's Witness, sun-light-heat analogy).

⁸¹ Modalism (ex. Oneness Pentecostals, three-forms-of-water analogy). Forms of the modalist approach include Sabellianism, Noetianism, and Patripassianism.

⁸² Partialism (ex. Three-leafed-clover analogy, egg-analogy)

It serves both Christians and Non-Christians best to affirm all three of these dynamics of God's character revealed in the Bible. The Christian who believes all three will experience a three-person-God whose choice to create and redeem the world is sensible. The Non-Christian who affirms that these three dynamics are truly what the Bible reveals can choose to accept or reject the Christian God on the basis of who He actually is rather than who He is not. I can honestly say I'd rather be rejected for who I am rather than for who someone inaccurately assumes me to be – and I think the same is true of God.⁸³

⁸³ Romans 1:21.

Conclusion

From its opening scene the Bible reveals God to be resolutely one, yet also plural in some sense. Gradually, like a sunrise, the Bible reveals Him more fully to be one singular God in three distinct and fully divine Persons – Father, Son, and Spirit. This idea is completely unique to the Christian faith and was eventually encapsulated by early Christians using the word “Trinity.” Christians for two thousand years have marveled at the divine mystery of God’s triune-ness splendidly revealed by Him to us in the Bible so that we can know Him better. To know the Father who loves us so fervidly despite our state of rebellion that He would send the Son who would willingly die a brutal death in our place for the joy set before Him, and then send the Spirit, who is the fullness of God, to be forever with those who accept the Peace terms that God has extended through the Son.

God in Three Persons! Blessed Trinity!

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All scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.