

## Introduction and Goals

My goal is to support our discipleship AND evangelism by seeing that it is good news to know and to share that God is Trinity.

Three outcomes:

1. Personal growth: We mature as we gain confidence in Scripture's witness to God as Trinity
2. Evangelistic Confidence: Our evangelistic conversations improve as we gain confidence with Scripture's witness to God as Trinity
3. If we can achieve these two goal our understanding of God as Trinity will mature from being "a confessional formula that's important to get right i/o to not be a heretic" or "an idea that I believe is true but doesn't seem very practical" to "this is true, relational and relevant for my life".

1. We mature as we gain confidence in Scripture's witness to God as Trinity

A. God's most basic identity

Illustration: falling in love...

God's most basic identity as "Trinity" is a truth that is DISPLAYED / REVEALED...

... And the most basic objection: "The Bible Never Uses The Word Trinity / Talks About The Trinity!"

God the Father

"The Trinity isn't for anything beyond itself, because the Trinity is God. God is God in this way: God's way of being God is to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit simultaneously from all eternity, perfectly complete in a triune fellowship of love."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus tells us explicitly in John 17.24. *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

Before he ever created, before he ever ruled the world, before anything else, this God was a Father loving his Son."<sup>2</sup>

"The most foundational thing in God is not some abstract quality, but the fact that he is Father... Since God is, before all things, a Father, and not primarily Creator or Ruler, all his ways are beautifully Fatherly. It is not that this God "does" the job of being Father as a day job, only to kick back in the evenings as plain old God. It is not that he has a nice blob of fatherly icing on the top. He is Father. All the way down. Thus all that he does he does as Father. That is who he is. He creates as a Father and he rules as a Father; and that means the way he rules over creation is most unlike the way any other God would rule over creation."<sup>3</sup>

God the Son

If God the Father is a loving Father from eternity, the Son must a beloved Son from eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 23

*John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the **Father**, full of grace and truth.*

*John 5:15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, "My **Father** is working until now, and I am working." 18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own **Father**, making himself equal with God. [And see Jesus's sustained presentation in John 5]*

The Father is the Father of the eternal Son, and he finds his very identity, his Fatherhood, in loving and giving out his life and being to the Son. That is why it is important to note that the Son is the eternal Son. There was never a time when the Son didn't exist. If there were, then God is a completely different sort of being. If there was once a time when the Son did not exist, then there was once a time when the Father was not yet a Father. And if that is the case, then once upon a time God was not loving since all by himself he would have nobody to love.

God the Holy Spirit

*Matt. 3:16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

*John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy **Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

*John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the **Spirit** of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*

B. God the Trinity's Creating and Saving Work Flow From His Basic Identity

#### Creation

When we improve our awareness of God as Trinity we expand our answers to a question that comes up often in spiritual conversations: "Why did God create anything at all?"

Intuitively insufficient answers:

*Col. 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

Richard Sibbes: "If God had not a communicative, spreading goodness, he would never have created the world. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were happy in themselves, and enjoyed one another before the world was. Apart from the fact that God delights to communicate and spread his goodness, there had never been a creation or redemption."<sup>4</sup>

#### Salvation

*John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

*John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them*

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<sup>4</sup> Sibbes quote in Reeves, 48.

*your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

Romans 8:9-17

In the believer's spiritual union with Christ, the Son shares his sonship. Consequently, as adopted sons we participate in Christ's relationship with the Father.<sup>5</sup>

Practical encouragements from the Trinity for us as people and ministry workers.

1. God is more relational than we can understand.
2. When the HS brings us to faith in Christ and unites us to Christ, he places us into the midst of the eternal love story between God the Father and God the Son.
3. For ministry workers – to seek others to love generously and selflessly is to put the character of God into practice.

2. Evangelistic Confidence: Our evangelistic conversations improve as we gain confidence with Scripture's witness to God as Trinity

A. Trinity: a mystery or a "mystery"?

Mystery = information completely hidden from us

Mystery in the NT = information that was hidden or incomplete for a time but has become more plain.

1. Example 1: Paul says that the Gospel was a mystery...

*Rom. 16:25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the **mystery** that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — 27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

2. Example 2: God's absolutely equal inclusion of Gentiles into his family is described as a mystery....

*Ephesians 3:6 This **mystery** is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

The Trinity is a "mystery" like the gospel, like Gentile inclusion in God's people – God has always been Trinity, the reality became more plain later in Scripture.

B. Trinity and Pluralism

A Jewish answer

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

A Muslim answer

"Say not "trinity." Desist; it will be far better for you; for God is one God. Glory be to him: far exalted is he above having a son." (S. 4.171)

Say: "He, Allah, is one. Allah is he on whom all depend. He begets not, nor is he begotten. And none is like him." (S. 112)<sup>6</sup>

How can a god be loving when love essentially involves loving another?

If God's basic identity is Creator...

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion in Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*.

If God's basic identity is Ruler...

God Trinity who creates, saves out of love > Creator, Ruler

Considerations for Trinity and evangelistic conversations

1. Have you ever considered happiness to be an attribute of God?
2. Appreciate the difference between a mystery (information hidden from us) and a mystery (information that has become more plain over time). That we can't comprehend ALL that is meant by Trinity does not mean we should neglect ALL THAT WE CAN understand from Scripture about Trinity.
3. Does your self-perception change when considering that the Triune God's complete happiness in himself overflows into his creative activity?
4. How is creation an expression of God's grace?
5. How does our understanding of God grow when we consider that he acted graciously in creation before the entrance of sin into the world necessitated redemption?
6. Creation care / environmental stewardship are areas of common concern and entry points into evangelistic conversations.
  - a. Where does the impulse for ecology, environmental stewardship come from? (It's part of being made in the image of God who creates out of love.)
  - b. Why do we feel bad when we see the environment abused?
  - c. How is our misuse of the environment (creation) a sin? How do we diminish our own happiness by mismanaging creatures or creation?

Cited

Fairbairn, Donald. *Life in the Trinity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Reeves, Michael. *Delighting in the Trinity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Sanders, Fred. *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.