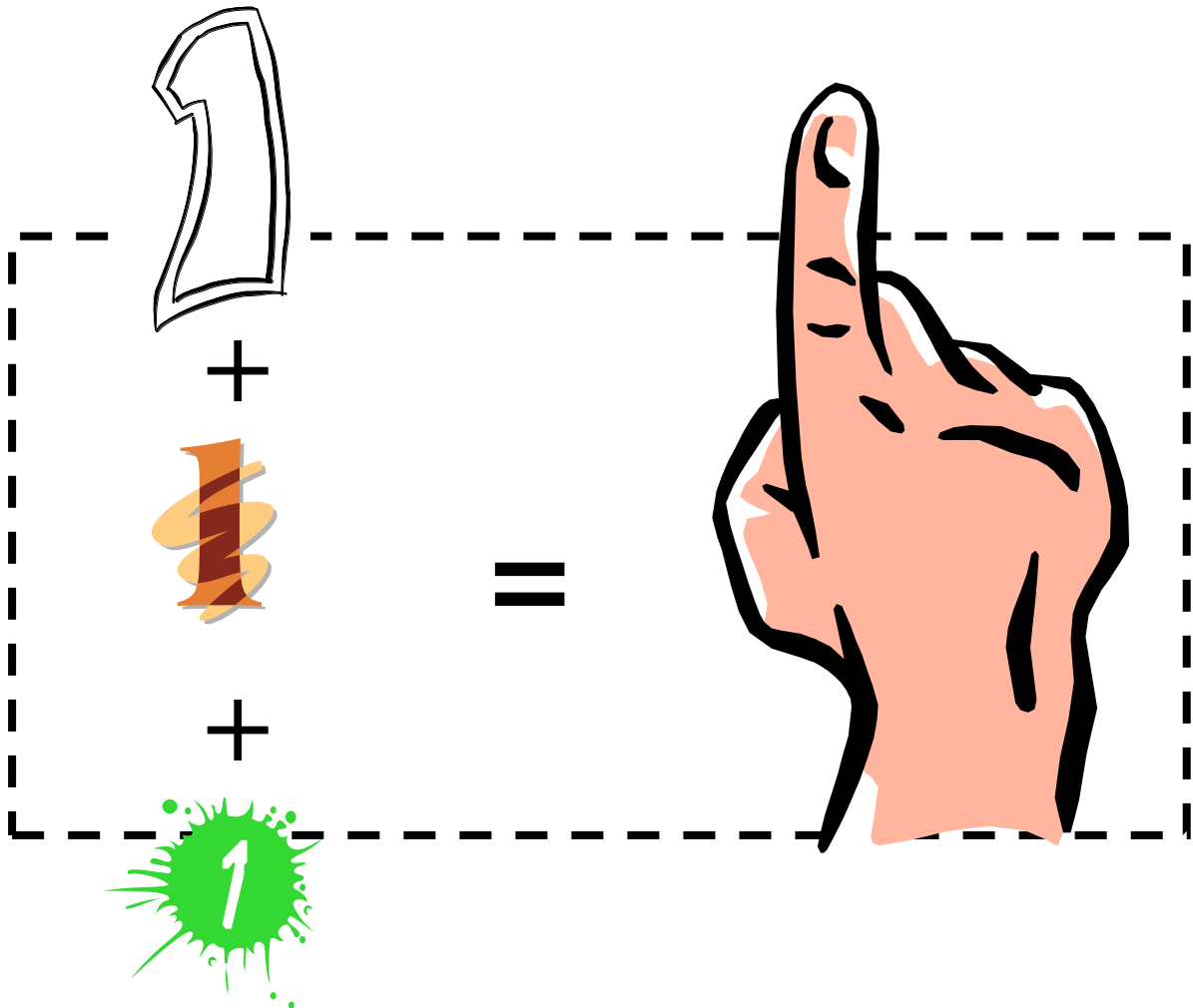


What is the

Trinity



What is the Trinity?

Many Christians find it hard to explain the Trinity yet it is one of the most common question that is asked and one of the most important doctrines of the Bible. This little article attempts to answer the question and lay out its implications in a simple way.

The term Trinity does not appear in the Bible but it is a term that Christians use to describe the unique being of God. Simply put, it is a shorthand way of saying “Three Persons eternally existing as one God” (or a ‘Tri-unity’). The importance of this statement lies in the unity of the three persons in the Godhead. In other words, God is not a simple being but a complex relational being.

Where did the notion of Trinity come from? Well, it came from Jesus. Jesus whom we know to be God (from his claims and actions) often spoke about his heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. He was clearly speaking of divine persons other than himself but yet at the same time affirmed that there is only one God¹. Furthermore the Gospel of John starts with the mention of multiple persons in the Godhead. “The word is God and was with God”². The Bible speaks of a plurality of divine persons while insisting that there is only one God. How can this be? Rather than simply dismissing the Bible let’s try to make sense of it.

How can there be three persons and just one God? Doesn’t that make it three gods instead of one? The problem lies in how think about beings and how beings exists. We think in terms of our own categories as people. For us, each person has a body. If there are three persons well there has to be three bodies housing those three persons and thus making them three very distinct people. That makes sense for us when we apply it to people but fails when we try to apply it to God. The problem is that we are talking about God in these people categories. Our categories are wrong. The bible speak of God in relational terms not mathematical quantifiable terms.

The way the bible speaks about God is that he is a complex God. Not just simply existing alone in eternity feeling very sorry for himself. No, he is

¹ John 5:44 (cf. 1 Cor 8:6, Eph 4:6, 1Tim 2:5)

² John 1:1

God who is in relationship within himself. Notice the distinction, He is not in love with himself, that is not what is being said but rather within the make up of God he is love. His very essence is made up of three persons united by love for one another. He is the Father, Son and Spirit relating in perfect unity for all eternity. Loves unites the three persons together. There are not three gods but one God. They are different but not separate, they are one but not fused together. This will always be a tension for us. That's why God is God. Jesus speaks about this extensively in John Chapters 15- 17.

The closest analogy we have of this is the relationship between the man and the woman. Here the "two are made into one flesh". It is the profound unifying work of love and sex that bonds two very distinct persons into one unit. However it is only an analogy and we must not push the analogy too far.

Please note that we are finding human ways to explain something about God that is essentially a mystery for us.

In order to understand the Trinity we need to let God dictate how he is to be understood. This is by no means easy because He will not fit neatly into any systems which we devise. We have to let God be God and let our minds be expanded by who he is instead of trying to restrict him into our neat little minds. Ultimately we just have to trust God and who he is.

Implications

Having a God who is "three persons eternally existing as one God" has massive implications for us.

1. God is unique. There is nothing that compares to God. He is unique. There is only one like Him. There is no other.
2. God is towards us as he is in himself. God loves us not just because he is loving but the very make up of God is that he is other person centred. Each person in the God head is other person centred thus making them one. Even when there was no creation God is love.
3. Relationships matter most. Love is more than mushy sentimentality. Love is what God is. Because God exists in

relationship we can understand why relationships matter more than anything. Some societies emphasise individuality over community and other societies emphasise community over individuality. The Trinity shows us how individuals live in community with each other without losing their identity or dignity and without compromising their unity. Love is the binding agent for individuals in community.

4. Jesus reveals God to us. Jesus is the Son incarnate. In other words, the eternal Son took on flesh and dwelt amongst us. He reveals God to us in that he is God become flesh, we can meet God face to face. The invisible has become visible. But even more than that Jesus reveals something of the nature of God by showing us the love which the Son has for the Father. It is a relationship based on complete trust and submission to the Father's will. Nothing reveals more to us about the internal dynamics of God through Jesus' love for his Father.
5. It makes sense of the Cross. The cross makes so much more sense because of the Trinity. It is the eternal Son bearing the anger of the eternal Father on our behalf. That's why God bears the cost and pays the penalty at the same time. That's why God is able to reconcile us to himself through the death of his son. God absorbs the cost himself.
6. God's role in salvation. God saves us yet each person in the Trinity plays a different role in salvation. The Father saves us by sending his Son. The Son saves us by dying on the cross. The Father vindicates the son by raising him from the dead. And the Spirit saves us by renewing us and enabling us to rely on the Son's death and resurrection.

What does it mean for us?

God is not a cold, impersonal being, lonely and feeling sorry for himself. At the very core God is love because love binds the three persons together in perfect unity. For us obedience and submission to Jesus means we have God's love in us. Just as Jesus loves the Father by obeying him we love God by obeying Jesus and listening to his words.³

³ John 15