

There are some things that defy explanation. It's weird: you know about them – but you can't describe them very well.

For instance, **The Placebo Effect**.

It's known that if you give someone morphine to control their pain and then secretly replace the morphine with plain saline solution – the saline takes the pain away! Doctors have known about the “Placebo Effect” for decades – but can't explain it.

Or something as common as **Yawning**.

We do it all the time. We try not to yawn in front of others because it looks like we're bored or tired. We usually consider it a signal to head for the pillow.

But yawning is still a mystery to scientists. No one seems to know why we yawn - there are theories – but no definitive answers. *And why is yawning contagious?*

Some things defy explanation.

The Trinity is one of those things.

“Trinity” is the Christian name for God.

Christians in every place and every time unite in proclaiming that our God eternally exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – **1 God in 3 Persons**.

Those who deny that truth place themselves outside the circle of Christian orthodoxy.

But despite being familiar and indispensable - the Trinity defies explanation.

It's been said that if you try to explain the Trinity, you'll lose your mind.

But if you deny it, you'll lose your soul.

So, with that warning in mind – today we embark on a study of this most mysterious of God's attributes.

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We're concluding a 5-part series on God's Attributes called “God Is...”

We've already looked at God's attributes under the headings of His Greatness, Holiness, Love, and Truth.

Today we'll examine the final dimension, God's Three-In-Oneness.

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Among the religions of the world, Christianity is unique in making the claim that **God is one and yet there are 3 who are God.**

“Trinity” is easy to say – not so easy to explain.

Because – *what can be simultaneously one and also three?*

It sounds like a contradiction – or something “made up.”

Add to the difficulty the fact that the word “Trinity” doesn’t even appear in the Bible – neither is the concept explained there.

*So why do Christians insist upon it?*

*Aren’t there enough mysteries surrounding God that we must add this oddity?*

*Can’t we just dispense with it?*

*Where did the idea come from and why does it matter?*

It’s important to recognize: The Trinity doesn’t come from human reason.

Generations of Christians from earliest days have been led to this doctrine as they sought to do justice to the witness of Scripture.

In other words, as you assemble a composite picture of who God is from Scripture – you are led unswervingly to the trinitarian attribute of God.

What we discover is: the Trinity isn’t an optional doctrine.

It’s a depiction of Who God is, What He’s like, How He works, and How He is to be approached.

Without an understanding of the Trinity, we are at a loss of WHO we are to worship.

*Should we worship only the Father? Or also Jesus? What about the HS?*

*Or should we worship the Triune God?*

*Is One Person of greater status than the Others?*

*To whom should we address our prayers?*

*Who accomplished our salvation? Was it only Jesus?*

*Or was the death of Jesus somehow the work of the Father as well?*

*Was the Spirit involved?*

*How does the Trinity interrelate?*

*Are they in competition?*

*Do they coexist simultaneously?  
Are there differences between them?*

To get those answers, we have to do some theology. Theology is simply digging into the Bible to discover what God says about Himself. And one of the First Things you discover about God is that...

## **God Is One**

The OT makes it perfectly clear that there is just One God. There's very little debate about the Bible's commitment to monotheism. Worship of any other god is strictly forbidden – throughout the Bible.

For instance, The Ten Commandments given to Israel begin with the words...

NIV **Exodus 20:2** "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.<sup>3</sup> **You shall have no other gods before me.**

The second commandment says that God won't tolerate any idolatry. You shall not worship anything in the heaven above, on the earth, or in the sea. Nothing!  
There's one God and only one God.

Judaism then and today affirms monotheism (though Israel had trouble *practicing* it). So, to keep them on track – the Jewish people were taught to recite the “Shema” of Deuteronomy 6 twice per day.

It beings....

NIV **Deuteronomy 6:4** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, **the LORD is one.**

When Jesus appeared, He didn't disagree. Jesus affirmed the “Shema” as the greatest commandment.

He said in Mark 12...

NIV **Mark 12:29** "The most important [commandment]," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, **the Lord is one.**

We westerners are so accustomed to monotheism we don't require much convincing. It would be a different story if we were in Africa, India, China, or Japan. Eastern cultures are more accustomed to polytheism.

The early church, however, was entirely Jewish.

And first century Jews were thoroughly committed to monotheism.

But then they met Jesus.

And Jesus said and did things only God could do.

Such as controlling nature, casting out demons, feeding thousands, healing the blind, lame, deaf, and mute, followed, of course, most famously, by rising from the dead.

So the Church was confronted with evidence for the deity of Christ.

Add to that – the specific attestation that the Holy Spirit was also God – and the Church was forced to grapple with the evidence that...

### God Is Three

The early Church had no doubt that the Father was God.

But the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit engendered some controversy.

So let's take a moment and see what Bible says concerning each one.

It's true that the Bible never records Jesus saying the words, "I am God." Some people take that as a disqualification.

But that DOESN'T mean that Jesus never claimed divinity, or the Bible didn't make the case for His Divinity in other ways.

Jesus may not have capitulated to our preferred formula by saying, "I am God" - but He used other words that are synonymous.

For instance...

NIV **John 10:30** I and the Father are one."

There can hardly be a more appropriate statement of divinity for Jesus to make than this one.

Jesus knew God as a Trinity - so He wouldn't have said, "I am God."

It's more in keeping with the Trinity for Him to claim equality with God.

And we only need to look at how the Jews reacted who heard Him say it.

NIV **John 10:33** "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, **claim to be God**."

It's clear THEY understood Jesus was saying the equivalent of "I am God."

And there were other occasions where Jesus claimed equality with God.

Those too were met with accusations of blasphemy and threats of stoning.

Jesus certainly would have corrected them if He thought they misunderstood Him.

If He was only claiming to be a devout Rabbi or a Prophet – and they had mistakenly thought He was claiming to be God – He would not have let such a misunderstanding persist.

He couldn't! It would discredit Him. He would have been guilty of blasphemy!

And He would have derailed His entire mission!

But He didn't correct them.

It's clear Jesus thought of Himself as God. And this is the consistent testimony of Scripture.

Here's a quick list of evidence...

1. He claimed preexistence and
2. Eternality.
3. He claimed to forgive sins.
4. He claimed He would "judge the world," "dividing the righteous from the unrighteous," and assign people to an eternal destiny.
5. He spoke about His future kingdom, the "kingdom of God."
6. He claimed authority over the Sabbath – making him the Law Giver.
7. He claimed to be able to grant eternal life.
8. He referred to Himself as the Son of Man of OT lore.
9. The Father Himself was heard to audibly call Jesus His Son.
10. The Gospel of John calls Jesus "the Word who was in the beginning with God."
11. The Book of Hebrews calls Jesus "the radiance of the glory of God"
12. Hebrews also says Jesus is superior to angels, Moses, and the High Priests.
13. The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God, through whom and for whom all things hold together."
14. Paul wrote that He would reward Christians at "the Judgment Seat of Christ."
15. And in Philippians Paul wrote that "Jesus exists "in the form of God."
16. Jesus is frequently called "Lord" – a term for God in the OT.

Add to all this - Jesus rose from the dead which implicitly validates all the other claims – since He could not have been raised if He weren't God.

And if He didn't rise – after He said He would - He could be nothing more than a serial liar or a blathering lunatic.

So, though Christ didn't say the exact words some want Him to have said – there's a preponderance of evidence that He believed, and Scripture attests, that **He is God.**

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Now – *how about the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit also God?*

Often the HS is spoken of as being an impersonal force.

But like the Father and the Son – the HS is a “person.”

That's why Scripture always refers to Him by the masculine pronoun “he.”

And Scripture describes Him performing actions only a “personal being” can perform such as working, guiding, teaching, speaking, interceding, commanding, illuminating, testifying, forbidding, sealing, indwelling, and permitting.

The Scripture says that He can be “grieved”, “quenched” or even “resisted.”

Things which cannot be said of an inanimate force.

Take for instance the story in Acts 5, Ananias and Saphira lied to the Apostle Peter.

Peter said to them, “why have you lied to the Holy Spirit?... You have not lied to men, **but to God.**”

Peter equates lying to the HS with “lying to God.”

Since the HS is God, we see many examples – too numerous to list this morning - that He performs Activities only God can do – and He is said to possess all the same attributes of God that we find displayed by the Father and the Son.

The Spirit is everywhere, all-knowing, all-powerful, eternal, holy, and life giving.

So, the HS deserves to receive worship and be acknowledged as God.

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So, we find the Bible is thoroughly committed to monotheism – God is 1.

But the Bible makes it clear that 3 Persons are God.

*So, are there any places in the Bible where this 3-in-1 idea is clear?*

One place the Trinity is seen is in the baptismal formula in the Great Commission.

I quoted it just a while ago from the baptismal pool...

Jesus said...

NIV **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,

The word “name” in Greek is singular, although there are 3 persons listed.

It’s not an explanation – but it is an accurate reflection of the doctrine.

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All this information was available to the early church – but the early church didn’t have the opportunity to study the relationship between the Persons of the Godhead.

They were busy organizing themselves and struggling to survive in a hostile world.

In the first centuries that followed, there came attempts at formulating a doctrine.

These were debated and some were declared heretical.

But, the controversy caused Church leaders to grapple with the issue at several ecumenical councils – at Nicene and Constantinople – eventually settling on the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity we know today.

Perhaps the best phrasing of the Trinity is found in the Athanasian Creed which reads...

“We worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.”

This is as much a statement of what the “Trinity” ISN’T as it is about what it IS.

But, it’s the best anyone has been able to articulate.

One God in 3 Persons. Perfectly and completely united.

Yet each Person remains distinct.

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People have tried to come up with analogies to help us understand the Trinity.

But every analogy falls short.

One widely used analogy is the **egg**.

The egg consists of 3 parts: the yolk, the white, and shell – yet together it’s 1 whole egg.

But, God is not comprised of 3 separate and different parts.

In the Trinity, each Person is entirely God.

Another attempt at an analogy is **water**.

Water can be a solid (when frozen), steam, or liquid.

One substance – 3 forms.

But, any given quantity of water can’t simultaneously exist in all 3 forms – as God does.

Another illustration is to think of a **Man**.

That man could be a student, a son, and brother. One man – 3 roles.

The problem with this illustration is that it reflects a heresy called modalism.

God is not one person who plays three different roles.

He is One Being in three simultaneous Persons.

Another suggestion is the analogy of **Identical Triplets**.

Triplets each have the same genetic material.

Often they have similar interests and share a close bond.

But, they have different preferences, different spouses, and different employers.

But this analogy falls short too.

They are not the same person. They are three – but they are not one.

You see, there's nothing like the Trinity in existence!

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And so – if we can't fully understand the Trinity - *What practical difference does it make to us?*

*Why did God peel back the curtain a bit – and reveal His Trinitarian nature to us – if we have no way of fully understanding it?*

I think God revealed His Trinitarian Nature for good reason.

Let me suggest 5....

### **First, because The Trinity Reveals God to be Awesome**

If God is as spectacular as the Bible says He is – *why should it surprise us that He is beyond our comprehension?*

It would be shocking if He weren't!

We tend to create God in our own image – scaling Him down to fit our understanding.

But, the Trinity makes it clear that God is way beyond human comprehension.

The ancient church father Tertullian, who is said to have coined the term “trinity,” said that the Trinity HAD TO BE divinely revealed.

It could not have been invented by humans because - from a human perspective - it's absurd.

Christians don't hold to the Trinity because it makes sense.

Or because it's self-evident, logical, or easy to explain.

We hold to it because this is what the Bible says God is like.

No other religion teaches anything remotely comparable.

And isn't that fantastic!?

We tell people that God is great, awesome, holy, and majestic.

Why should it surprise us that He literally defies explanation?

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My family has an attachment to the book “Charlotte’s Web.”

I think it began when one of my daughter’s had to read it for school.

You’ll recall that Charlotte – the spider – was trying to save Wilbur - the pig - from becoming scrapple.

Charlotte hatched the plan to get Wilbur entered at the County Fair.

If Wilbur could win first prize – the farmer might not slaughter him.

So, Charlotte came up with 4 statements she wove into her spider web above Wilbur’s Fair stall to impress the onlookers.

She came up with “Radiant, Terrific, Humble, and Some Pig.”

(Our family has the strange tradition of periodically challenging one another to recite the 4 attributes. Weird, I know.)

Anyway - Charlotte’s plan worked – and Wilbur was saved!

That got me thinking.

*What adjectives could anyone come up with to describe “the awesomeness” of God?*

Radiant? Terrific? Humble? Some God?

He’s “some God” alright! They’re all true! and we could add a million others!

But I submit – nothing is so awe-inspiring as the word “Trinity!”

God is not just “the big man upstairs” – the “Big Kahuna.” The “Big Cheese.” “The Top Dog.”

We need another word – an accurate word – that let’s us know how Awesome God is!

That word is “Trinity!”

“Trinity” reveals that God is not like us.

He is a unique, awe-inspiring, incomprehensible, multifaceted God!

Which means for most of us – “Your God is way too small!”

And this leads to the **second implication of the Trinity....**

**Second, The Trinity Arouses Worship.**

*Why did God reveal His trinitarian nature?*

I don’t think it was to frighten us or confuse us.

I believe God wants us to gain a proper perspective of Him as the most holy and captivating Being in the universe.

The fact that God – by His very nature - is someone incomprehensible and without equal – should serve to instill in us a sense of awe, reverence, and fascination with knowing Him.

This should quicken your pulse!

It should cause your palms to get sweaty!

It should invigorate your worship – challenge your thinking and living – and quite frankly – He should blow your mind!

### **Third, knowledge of the Trinity Demonstrates His Independence**

*Have you ever wondered what God was doing before He made man?*

*If God is eternal, what was He doing all that time?      Wasn't He bored?*

The Trinity helps us understand – God has never been alone.

God didn't create us because He needed us to make Him feel complete.

God had eternal fellowship within the Trinity.

He is self-sufficient and independent from His creation.

He has all the Love, Joy, and Contentment He desires within the Trinity.

*We need Him* for us to live and be complete – He doesn't need anything!

### **Fourth, The Trinity Exalts The Son and the Spirit**

In the OT, all worship was invariably directed to the Father as God.

The revelation of the Trinity exalts the Son and the Spirit to be equal with the Father.

Since we understand that all 3 Persons of the Trinity are equally God – now we can worship the Son and the Spirit.

We can pray to the Son and to the Spirit.

We can sing to the Son and to the Spirit – as well as the Father.

Each is worthy of exaltation.

The revelation of the Trinity makes this possible.

### **Fifth, The Trinity Helps Explain the Cross**

The Love within the Trinity helps us to understand God's motivation for our salvation.

It was the Father's loving plan. The Son's loving sacrifice. The Holy Spirit's loving application of it all – that is the reason for our salvation.

It was the Love “to” and “for” each other that motivated each Person.

There are some sayings of Jesus before and while on the Cross that are better understood with knowledge of the Trinity.

When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

We get a glimpse of the love, sacrifice, and submission within the Godhead.

When Jesus cried out from the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?”

We have a better understanding of the judgment He faced for mankind’s sin.

And the justice procedure He was passing through.

We get a picture of the depravity Jesus was asked to bear on our behalf.

We enter into the negotiations – if you will – as the Godhead was stretched to deal with our pathetic situation.

We have a sense of the holiness of God – and the sinfulness Jesus became for us.

We recognize how arrogant it is to think we could in any way contribute to the solution to our sin problem.

When God peels back the curtain on the Trinity – so to speak – and we hear the eternal Son of God cry out to the Father at the moment the penalty for our sins is laid on Him – we can only put our hand over our mouths – and worship.

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The Trinity opens a window of light on God that is truly exhilarating, mesmerizing, and awe-inspiring!

We Christians should Delight in the Trinity.

In our prayers, recognize the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit as God.

We should model the “others-orientation” displayed by the Trinity in our relationships.

We should be humbled and thrilled at how awesome God is!

The Trinity is without a doubt the most mysterious and astounding aspect of God.

We should never get over it!

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At the start of our journey, I quoted AW Tozer’s words, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

—A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 1.

Now that we've taken a few Sundays to specifically think about the God of the Bible - it's my hope that having taken this journey we are all more deeply attuned to God.

That when we think of God – we are better informed ABOUT Him, and more in wonder OF Him.

That we understand better His Greatness, Holiness, Love, Truth, and Trinitarian Nature. That we **love** Him and **obey** Him and **enjoy** Him more than ever before.

We will never know Him *exhaustively* – but He has allowed us to know Him **better**.  
And knowing the Triune God better – will always be the most important thing about us.