

THE GOD WHO IS (1)

The God who is One and The God who is Three

*"You know me better than you think you know, and you shall come to know me better yet."
(Aslan to Frank the Cabbie in CS Lewis' The Magician's Nephew)*

A. Introduction

1. This series is all about knowing God better.

It is about spending time gazing upon the LORD.

"One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple." (Psalm 27:4)

It is about delighting in the LORD Himself, not just what He's done.

"Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4)

It is about understanding who this God is that we believe in and whose name we have been baptised in.

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

But this series instantly brings with it a problem – the God of the Bible, the God we believe in, is a God who is both One and Three – God is Trinity.

2. The doctrine of the Trinity is often seen as a problem.

It doesn't make sense – how can God be both one and three? How can $1+1+1=1$?

It's meant to be a mystery – do we really need to understand it?

It's too hard to understand – isn't this something we should leave to the experts?

It's not a biblical word – if the Trinity was important, surely the Bible would mention the word?

It doesn't seem to have any relevance to everyday life – what do we do with it?

"For many Christians the Trinity has become something akin to their appendix: it's there, but they're not sure what its function is, they get by in life without it doing very much, and if they had to have it removed they wouldn't be too distressed." (Robin Parry)

3. The doctrine of the Trinity is something we cannot ignore.

It tells us what God we need to believe in, in order to be saved – if you do not believe in this God you are not a Christian.

"The Trinity: Try to understand it and you'll lose your mind; try to deny it and you'll lose your soul!"

"No-one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also." (1 John 2:23)

It is the heart of what we believe – the early creeds, such as the Apostle's creed, are Trinitarian.

"I believe in God, the Father almighty... I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son... I believe in the Holy Spirit."

The FIEC Statement of Faith begins: *"There is one God, who exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."*

It is vital for understanding how God in Himself can be described in terms such as love and light.

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)

"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16)

It is vital for understanding the gospel – the good news of the Bible only makes sense if God is Trinity.

It is vital for understanding who we are – we have been made in the image of a Triune God.

4. The doctrine of the Trinity is an invitation to know God as He really is.

"Though we cannot know God fully, we can know him truly." (Tim Chester)

"The doctrine of the Trinity should not be stated in a way that goes one step beyond what God has revealed... We should also take pains to ensure that we make the most of everything that has been revealed." (Fred Sanders)

"Because the triune God has revealed himself, we can understand the Trinity." (Mike Reeves)

"I've often reflected on the rather obvious thought that when his disciples were about to have the world collapse in on them, our Lord spent so much time in the Upper Room speaking to them about the mystery of the Trinity. If anything could underline the necessity of Trinitarianism for practical Christianity, that must surely be it!" (Sinclair Ferguson)

The word 'Trinity' is simply a way of trying to express that truth of who God is as revealed in Scripture – it sums up His three-in-oneness, his tri-unity.

B. The God who is One

1. The Bible is clear that God is one.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" (Mark 12:29)

What does it mean that the LORD is one?

2. God is unique.

There is only one God.

"For this is what the LORD says – he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited--he says: "I am the LORD, and there is no other." (Isaiah 45:18)

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." (Isaiah 46:9)

"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." (James 2:19)

Other so-called gods exist only because they are given names and worshipped, but they do not truly exist – they are not real.

3. God is united.

God is 'one' (as we read in Deuteronomy 6:4) does not mean that God is one person.

It means within the Godhead there is complete unity.

The same word is used to describe the relationship between the man and woman in marriage.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24)

It also means that you need to believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, if you are to believe in the only God.

C. The God who is Three

1. In the Old Testament, the one God reveals that He is persons not a person.

Elohim, the Hebrew word most commonly used for God is plural.

He speaks of Himself using plural pronouns.

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." (Genesis 1:26)

"The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:22)

"Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." (Genesis 11:7)

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8)

We read that no-one may see God and live, yet people do see God and live.

"But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live." (Exodus 33:20)

"The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre." (Genesis 18:1)

"So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Genesis 32:30)

The angel of the LORD and the promised Christ are described as being both God and distinct from God.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

"In your majesty ride forth victoriously on behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds. Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." (Psalm 45:4-7)

2. In the New Testament, the one God reveals explicitly who the persons are.

God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11)

Jesus is God and distinct from God.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

Jesus is the Son of the Father.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." (John 3:16)

"Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." (John 5:17-18)

The Holy Spirit is God and yet distinct from the Father and the Son.

"Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:3-4)

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14)

When we believe in Jesus we identify with a God who is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

3. What the Trinity isn't.

It isn't three gods (Tritheism) – Jesus did not say in the names of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, He said in the name.

It isn't three moods of one god (Modalism) – Jesus did not say in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, He said in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

4. What the Trinity is.

There is one God and He is three persons.

The three persons are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and they are equally God.

The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

The God who is One is also the God who is Three.

D. Implications

1. We must be clear about who the God we believe is.

2. We are to love God who is One and also Three with all that we are and all that we have.

"Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

3. We are to invite others to come to know this God who is One and also Three and love Him with all that they are and all that they have.

“Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.” (Psalm 96:1-6)

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.” (Psalm 96:7-9)