

Doctrine 2 – God – NMTC3 2012¹

1. Which God?

Brainstorm: What words word you use to describe God?

Read Psalm 115:1-8

1. What do you learn about the true God here?
2. What do you see here about idols?

You make them like you then they make you like them. You make them to serve you and you end up serving them. Do we have idols?

Baal – Prosperity

Asherah & Ashtoreth – Sex

Golden Calves – Yahweh domesticated

High places – Anything goes religion

Chemosh – A god who must be cajoled with desperate sacrifices

Molech/Milcom – Child sacrifice

Do you see these in our society, in the church?

Romans 1:25 What is the great Sin?

Col. 3:5 How do you understand that?

A god is whatever we run after

where we expect all good to come from

where we take refuge in distress

what we lean on

what we set our heart on

what we cling to and will never give up

“The human heart is a factory of idols”

Brainstorm – What gods do we have?

Zephaniah 1:5 Is this just about pagans?

The question is not “Do you believe in God?” the question is “Which god or gods do you believe in?” Everyone is a believer, everyone is religious, everyone is worshipping something or someone, probably multiple things – we are naturally polytheistic.

It’s also a question of “Who do you mean by ‘God’?” - Either we have things as gods (prosperity, football, popularity, technology etc.) or we have a false idea of who God is – and that’s the more subtle one – who is this ‘God’ we’re talking about?

¹ Throughout this paper I am very largely dependent on the work of Glen Scrivener on his blog [Christ the Truth](#) and particularly his 2012 [Lent Course on the Doctrine of God for the Hailsham Churches](#).

Here are some common ways to talk about him:

D. Miller, *Discipling Nations*, YWAM, 2001

God is personal – reality is relational, a Creator relating to his creatures who are made in his image to relate to one another – the universe is physical and spiritual

Versus secularism – reality is ultimately only a physical machine

Versus animism – reality is ultimately only spiritual

God is rational – the universe is intelligible – revelation gives us a foundation for observation

Versus secularism – no ultimate truth, just observe, ultimately subjective

Versus animism – all is mystery, just meditate and hope for mystical experience

God is good – the universe is moral

Versus secularism – no truth, ultimately amoral, subjective

Versus animism – god(s) is/are both good and evil, dualism

W. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, IVP, 1999

Incommunicable attributes (possessed by God alone):

1. Independence – God does not need us (though we do bring him glory and joy)
2. Unchangeableness – his being, perfections and purposes are constant (but he is passionate)
3. Eternity – no beginning and end, sees all time (but he does act within time)
4. Omnipresence – present everywhere (but in different ways in different places)
5. Unity – every attribute of God is true of all of God's being all of the time

Communicable attributes (shared *to some extent* with humanity):

1. Being:
 - a. Spirituality – non-material being
 - b. Invisibility – his spiritual being is unseen
2. Mental:
 - a. Omniscience – knowing all things actual and possible
 - b. Wisdom – chooses best goals and best means to reach them
 - c. Truthfulness & faithfulness
3. Moral:
 - a. Goodness, mercy, grace
 - b. Love – giving himself
 - c. Holiness – separate from sin
 - d. Righteousness, justice
 - e. Jealousy
 - f. Wrath
4. Purpose:
 - a. Will, freedom
 - b. Omnipotence – power & sovereignty
5. General/summary:
 - a. Perfection – possessing all excellent qualities to an infinite degree
 - b. Blessedness – perfectly happy and joyful in himself
 - c. Beauty – does not lack anything desirable

There's a lot of useful stuff there but there are some problems with this kind of approach:

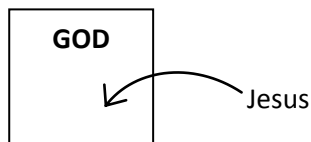
1. Dry and boring – God is not boring!
2. Abstract idea versus person
3. Atemporal versus story – in many ways when you ask 'Who is God?' the Bible answer is 'This is what he has *done* – *that* is who he is'
4. Lacks unity – how does it all hold together?
5. Theistic – a lot of this you could say about Allah or some God of philosophy – he is an omni-being – a big giant in the sky

The question is who is the God of the Bible – the Christian God – the one we know and love, who's saved us personally?

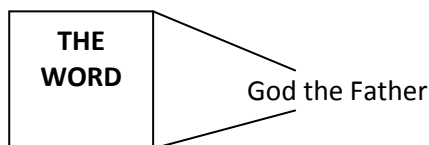
2. The Christ-like God

Let's go to the beginning of the story. What's the beginning of the Bible story?

John 1:1-18



Usually we start with God and then try to fit Jesus into that category and then the Spirit.



John starts with the Word (v1) – he is God, he is the full revelation of God – that's why he's called the Word – he is the self-expression, the self-disclosure of God – v18.

Jesus is the full and only revelation of God:

Matthew 11:27 – how do we know the Father?

John 14:6-10 – how do we see the Father?

2 Cor. 4:6 – how do we know the glory of God?

A few objections:

- What about creation? – It's the word of Christ (Romans 1:17-18) but it's always suppressed (Romans 1:18) and only through the lens of Scripture can we begin read it as all about Him (e.g. John 12:24)
- What about philosophy? Futile (Romans 1:21); not the way (1 Cor. 20-21)
- What about other religions? Idolatry (Romans 1:25) Important because a lot of people would say other religions are worshipping the true God in some way, or there are things we can learn from their spirituality, or at least there are things there which we can build on – Not what the Bible says – worshipping demons, nothing to learn, don't try to build on it – its sinking sand (Numbers 33:50-53; Deut 7:1-6; 12:1-3; 29:16-18; 32:15-21; Psalm 96:4-5; 106:35-40;

115:2-8; 135:15-18; Isa. 41:24, 29;44:9-20; 41:21-24; 44:6-26;
Jeremiah 10:3-16; 16:19-21; Acts 17:24-30; 19:26; 20:21; Romans
1:23-25; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:20.)

- What about in the Old Testament? The LORD speaking and saving and being trusted in the OT *was Jesus* (e.g. John 8:56-58; Hebrews 11:26; Jude 5; Ezek. 34//John 10; Isaiah 45:23//Phil 2:10-11; Zech. 12:10//John 19:37; Isaiah 60:19-20//Rev. 21:23)

Read Colossians 1:15-23

1. How do we see the invisible God?
2. What do you learn hear about Jesus? Is this how you normally think of him?
3. How does Jesus reshape our view of what God is like?

“Imagine if you made heaven and earth. Imagine if you were the operating system for the whole universe. Imagine if everything held together only because of you. And imagine if, as in v21, your creatures who you made out of sheer love, hated you, were at war with you and committed horrendous evil against you and against everything you loved. What would you do? I’d wipe them out.”

But what does the Creator God do – he takes on flesh and he takes “every blow of the enemy and NEVER retaliates. He gets met by hatred and derision and He submits to it. The world rejects and mocks Him, and He takes it. His back is pulped by flogging and the soldiers humiliate Him and punch Him and spit on Him, and He’s silent. Eight inches of iron are driven through each wrist, and one through His feet and Jesus prays “Father, forgive them.” He’s thrust up into the air – hated by earth, facing the judgement of heaven – lifted up between the two to die the death of the rejected. And the blood that pours down is reconciling the world.” (G. Scrivener)

That’s the God that we have.

Jesus is God-sized

God is Jesus-shaped (G. Scrivener)

There is nothing of God beyond or outside or behind Jesus.

He is The image of God, The Word of God

An English poet called Byron said “If God isn’t like Jesus he ought to be” – and he is – God is Jesus-shaped. So we’ve got to get out of our minds this idea of God as some abstract concept or a giant policeman in the sky. Look at Jesus washing feet, laughing and crying, eating and drinking, suffering, bleeding – that’s what God is like.

3. The overflowing Trinity

We ask again: What is at the very beginning of the Bible story?

John 1:1 – a plural God – you see him even in Genesis 1 – God, Spirit hovering, “Let us create”

John 17:24 – before Creation love

1 John 4:8 – before anything else God is love – before he is creator or law-giver or judge – he is love – that is his essential nature – three persons united in loving one another

- Father – Gives life to the Son, loves the Son, glorifies the Son – John 3:16, 8:54; 17:24

- Son – loves the Father, submits to the Father, glorifies the Father – John 14:31; 17:1
- Spirit – Proceeds from the Father and the Son, glorifies the Son – John 14:26; 16:7,14

Problem is we tend to start with idea of omni-being and try to fit that with the Trinity.
We need to replace the omni-being with the Trinity.

Not a riddle or maths problem it's great news because:

- God is happy, joyful, loving community – if he's a policeman then you'll just want to avoid him or give him kitu kidogo to pay him off – this is a God you want to be around
- Creation and salvation and all God's works are overflows of this love
Richard Sibbes: "God's goodness is a communicative, spreading goodness. . . . If God did not have a communicative, spreading goodness, he would never have created the world. The Father, Son and Spirit were happy in themselves and enjoyed one another before the world was. If it were not for the fact that God delights to communicate and spread his goodness, there had never been a creation nor a redemption. God uses his creatures not because he can do nothing without them, but for the spreading of his goodness."
– everything is a gift, it's all Top Down – human religion is all about giving things to God – giving money, giving my life – and maybe he'll give me something back - but look at 1 John 4:8-10 – The triune God is an outpouring, overflowing, missional God and we are on the *receiving* end of that
- There can be true unity and equality and diversity all at the same time:
There is submission and hierarchy at the same time as equality and love – do you see that in human organisations?
Genesis 2:24 – first use of 'one' in the Bible – a great visual aid of the trinity – two persons, equal but different are One, the husband's body is the wife's the wife's is the husband's, the husband in love gives himself to his wife, the wife in love gives herself to her husband, different roles, equal status, one flesh
- We're swept up into the trinity!

Read Galatians 3:23-4:7

1. Who are we 'in', who are we clothed with, who do we belong to? (3:23-29)
2. Who is in our hearts? What is he doing? (4:6)
3. How do the Father and the Son and the Spirit relate to one another? (4:6)
4. What does it look like for us to be swept up into the trinity?

Notice the entry to the Trinity is the Son.

There is one mediator between God and man.

We only know the Father through the Son.

The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ speaking nothing but the words of Christ. (John 16:12-15)

So we are to be Trinitarian **and** Christ-centred. (Luke 3:22)

Application, activities and extension

1. Which God?

Act out 1 Kings 18:20-40

- How do the prophets of Baal pray? What does that tell you about their god?

- How does Elijah pray? What does that tell you about his God?
- What does the way we pray tell people about our God?

2. The Christlike God

The question is which God you believe in

God is Jesus-shaped

Jesus is the full and only revelation of God

- How does this change the way we do evangelism and apologetics – with nominal ‘Christians’, with Muslims?

3. The overflowing Trinity

- How does love hold together all the attributes of God – his wrath, mercy, holiness, jealousy, beauty etc.? (SoS 8:6)
- If God is eternally **giving, overflowing**, what is “godliness”, “faith”, “sin”, the Christian life?

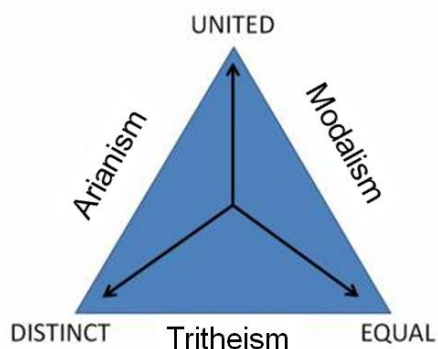
More on the Trinity:

In one sense the persons of the trinity do not have different roles in the sense of doing different things. They all love, they all created the world, they are all saving the world. But because there are distinctions:

- **Father** – *initiating* – giver of life, eternal begetting the Son, sending the Son to save the world
- **Son** – *executing* – eternally begotten, took on flesh, took on flesh (he didn’t become the Son when he was born – Muslims misunderstand this – he is not the result of a sexual union between God and Mary – he was always the Son, at Christmas he took on flesh in the womb of Mary), Lamb of God, heir of the world
- **Spirit** – *applying* – the love of the Father, uniting us with the Son

All things are FROM the Father, THROUGH the Son, BY THE POWER OF the Spirit.

In the Trinity there are three distinct persons (not one person) who are completely equal (all fully God) and perfectly united in love (one God). If you miss one of these you have a heresy.



- Do our prayers or does the preaching we hear sometimes run into any of these heresies?
- Can you see these heresies working out in marriages or societies?