

Explain in your own words the doctrine of the Trinity. What are the most important features of this doctrine, and why are these features so central to our understanding of God?

From the early pages of Genesis we are presented with the plurality of the Godhead¹, and throughout scripture we see God as Father, Son (that is, Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit. This plurality is held in tension with the words of the Shema, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one."² The doctrine of the Trinity asserts that these three separate persons, each with their individual roles and characteristics, are fully God in their own right, yet together are the full essence and expression of the one true God. This one doctrine is sufficient to set the Christian faith apart from all other world religions.

In doubting God's goodness and failing to adhere to his instructions in the garden of Eden, Adam sinned and brought death to all mankind³. Through the sacrificial system God made a way for sin to be covered⁴, or forgiven⁵, yet this was not sufficient to cover sin in its totality, requiring the sacrifices to be made year after year. Only by taking on human form and living in sinless perfection was Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, able to bear the full punishment on our behalf, having no requirement to make restitution for his own sin. The separation within the Trinity made it possible for God to pour out the fullness of his wrath on himself thus providing the legal payment for all sin for all of mankind⁶ for all time.

The Apostle John put it plainly, "God is love."⁷ As much as society-at-large may conflate it with its associated emotions, love is a verb; something one does. If God were singular, before any of his creations came into being he could have been the only object of his love. This would reasonably give rise to a narcissistic deity, one utterly at odds with the characteristics of God portrayed in scripture. However, living in perfect triune community, the natural outworking of this divine love is creativity, summed up in the phrase, "Let us make man in our image."⁸

A logical extension of the doctrine here is the centrality of community. If God exists in divine community then likewise, we are designed to live together in good relationship,

¹ Genesis 1:26-27 & 3:22

² Deuteronomy 6:4

³ 1 Corinthians 15:22

⁴ Genesis 3:21

⁵ Leviticus 4

⁶ Matthew 26:28

⁷ 1 John 1:7

⁸ Genesis 1:26

encouraging and building each other up into conformity with the image of the Son⁹; there is no case for individualism and isolation¹⁰.

There is much mystery in the nature of God. Trying to understand that which is beyond us is logically impossible; we may be able to conceive of, but cannot fully comprehend the infinite. We know that we, human beings created in the image of God¹¹, are body, mind and spirit. Whilst no portrait can do full justice to its subject, acknowledging our own triune existence is helpful in our conception of God as Trinity. It does not follow that mystery precludes truth. Rather, the mystery of the Trinity serves to underline the fact that Yahweh, the God who revealed himself as the self-existent one¹², is no mere human fabrication.

Word count: 500

Reference material:

The Message of The Trinity, Brian Edgar, IVP 2004
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-reasons-trinity/>

⁹ Romans 8:29

¹¹ Genesis 1:26

¹² Exodus 3:14