

This morning we will be directing our attention to **The Unity of God**. The Bible teaches us throughout its pages that there is but one true God. However, as you read through your Bible you will sooner or later have your attention being drawn to the Father, and also to Son Jesus Christ, and then to the Holy Spirit as well. And what Christian faith strongly declares is that we worship one God in Trinity. The godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit is one: their glory is equal, and their majesty is coeternal.

And this is a hard truth to wrap our minds around, that God is one in three persons; Father, Son, and Spirit.

For instance, four or five years ago, I was in my office at our Ministry Center, and I received a phone call. I receive phone calls periodically from individuals who have found our website and have some questions regarding what kind of church we are. And I'm happy to answer their questions. Sometimes we get questions about logistics: Where do you meet? Do you have ministries for children? But other times their questions are more theological?

And this particular phone call was a theological one: this gentleman asked me to prove the trinity from the Bible. Over the next few minutes of our conversation I came to realize that he wasn't asking out of curiosity sake, he didn't want to genuinely discover what the Bible has to say about our unified and triune God; he simply called to attempt to prove me wrong. He wanted to pick a theological fight.

I took him to various passages of Scripture; we looked at John 1; we looked at John 17; we looked at Matthew 3; we looked at Colossians 1. And probably several other passages of scripture as I attempted to have a conversation to point this man towards our self-existent God that has dwelt for all of eternity as Father, Son, and Spirit. But it's as if he had his fingers in his ears the whole time going, "la la la la la... I don't want to hear what you have to say, I just want you to know that you're WRONG!!!"

Here I am, sitting in my office, trying to keep my cool, being as even toned in my voice as I possible can, because I know that I'm representing Christ and His church... On the surface I'm playing it cool, but below the surface, my heart is racing a mile a minute as I attempt to point him towards what the Bible has to say. Well, eventually he calls me a heretic, and primarily stresses that the word "trinity" is never mentioned once in the Bible, goes on for several more lines and then hangs up on me.

I sit back in my chair as if I just got finished with a boxing match. And I play back in my mind what had just happened. Should I have said this or should I have asked that? But there is one thing that he was right about, the Bible never does mention the word "trinity." And he was building his whole case on that point.

However, just because the word is not mentioned, that does not mean that the concept is not taught within the Word. There are plenty of words that we use within historical, biblical Christianity, that are not actually found in the Bible.

For instance, the word “bible” is not found in the Bible. Nor are the words “omniscience,” which means “all-knowing,” or “omnipotence,” which means “all-powerful,” or “omnipresence,” which means, “present everywhere.” These words are not in the Bible but it is right for us to use these words to describe the attributes of God. So, to say that the Trinity isn’t true just because the word isn’t used in the bible is an invalid argument.

The doctrine of the Trinity was not something that was arrived at through wild speculation and philosophical babble in the centuries following Christ’s death and resurrection. The early church arrived upon this word, not in an attempt to *add* to God’s revelation of Himself, as if Scripture were insufficient; they were trying to express the truth of who God is as revealed in Scripture when they looked at various verses. Verses like,

There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. ~ 1 Corinthians 8:6

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ~ John 1:14

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ~ Matthew 28:19

And we could go on sharing more and more verses that highlight the trinity of God.

But I can understand the stumbling block for some to think of this all the way through. For the trinity is complex, even for those who by faith, embrace this reality of our great and almighty God. And I want you to embrace this truth, for embracing this truth you come to Know God to a greater degree. But in order to embrace it thoroughly, we need to understand.

So want to provide you with today a fairly general summary of what we mean when we say that God is Trinity. Now, I may go a little quick through here, because I don’t want to turn our study of God, into simply an intellectual and academic endeavor. However, I do need to lay out some foundational truths.

Trinity:

- Trinity = “tri-unity” or “three-in-oneness”
- God is three distinct persons.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons. I want to point that out in Scripture. Now, you can look these passages up for yourself if you’d like, but because I’m going to give a number of them, I’m going to place most of them on the screen behind me. And the first is Philippians 1, where the Bible speaks of **the Father as God**.

Philippians 1:2 –Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture also talks of **Jesus as God**.

Titus 2:13 –waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

And Scripture also declares that **the Holy Spirit is God**.

Acts 5 -³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”

Now, are these just three different ways of looking at God, or simply ways of referring to three different roles that God plays? No! The answer must be no. And some have ventured into heresy for believing that God has different modes that He operates out of. But God does not change from Father to Son or to Spirit. Each person in the Godhead is distinct.

Each of the three persons is not the other two persons. (Jesus is God, but Jesus is not the Father. The Father is God, but the Father is not the Spirit, and so on.) **[SHOW PICTURE]**

The Bible is clear on their distinctiveness. For instance, since the Father sent the Son into the world (John 3:16), he cannot be the same person as the Son. Likewise, after the Son returned to the Father (John 16:10), the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit into the world (John 14:26; Acts 2:33). Therefore, the Holy Spirit must be distinct from the Father and the Son.

In another instance at the baptism of Jesus, we see the Father speaking from heaven and the Spirit descending from heaven in the form of a dove as Jesus comes out of the water. Let me read that for you,

¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark 1:10–11.

God is three distinct persons and each person (this is the next point on the outline) is divine.

- **Each person (Father, Son, and Spirit) is Fully God.**

The doctrine of the Trinity does not divide God into three parts. The Bible is clear that all three Persons are each one-hundred-percent God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully God. For example, Colossians 2:9 says of Christ,

“in him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form.” ~ Colossians 2:9

We should not think of God as a “pie” cut into three pieces, each piece representing a Person. This would make each Person less than fully God and thus not God at all. Wayne Grudem puts it well,

“the being of each Person is equal to the whole being of God.”¹

The divine essence is not something that is divided between the three persons, but is fully in all three persons without being divided into “parts.”

So, the Son is not one-third of the being of God; he is all of the being of God. The Father is not one-third of the being of God; he is all of the being of God. And likewise with the Holy Spirit. So, “When we speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together we are not speaking of any greater being than when we speak of the Father alone, the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone.”²

For each person of the Godhead is Fully God. And this brings us to another point in our outline.

- **There is only one God.**

Now, some, those who are unfamiliar with the Christian faith, may look at the first two points on our outline and ask: **If each Person of the Trinity is distinct and yet fully God, then shouldn't we come to the conclusion that there is more than one God?** Obviously we can't! For Scripture is clear that there is only one God:

“There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” ~ Isaiah 45:21-22

(see also Isaiah 44:6-8; Exodus 15:11; Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:4-5; 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:2; 1 Kings 8:60).

Having seen that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, that they are each fully God, and that there is nonetheless only one God, we must conclude that all three Persons are the same God. In other words, there is one God who exists as three distinct Persons.

¹ Grudem, Systematic Theology, 1994, page 255

² Grudem, Systematic Theology, 1994, page 252

I believe that a passage that brings this all together is found in Matthew 28. Jesus is talking with His disciples when He tells them,

“Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” ~ Matthew 28:19

First, notice that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished as distinct Persons. We baptize into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Second**, notice that each Person must be deity because they are all placed on the same level. In fact, would Jesus have us baptize in the name of a mere creature? Definitely not. Therefore each of the Persons into whose name we are to be baptized must be deity. **Third**, notice that although the three divine Persons are distinct, we are baptized into their name (singular), not names (plural). The three Persons are distinct, yet only comprise one name. This can only be if they share one essence.

Now, I understand that this can be somewhat confusing. More than likely, some of you are a bit puzzled thinking this through for this stretches the mind beyond its normal boundaries. God is three persons in one... that's tough.

But just because it's tough doesn't mean we shouldn't think it through. We must think it through. And we must think it through accurately. But do you know where people get off track most often when thinking of the Trinity? It's typically when illustrations are used to give an analogy of the Trinity.

Now, analogies are a great tool for teaching a lot of different things. And I understand why people would use an analogy in their attempts to explain who God is. They're trying to take (and I've done this myself) something complicated and put it on a level of understanding. But analogies of the Trinity, I've never come across one that actually works.

Have you ever heard one of those illustrations or used one yourself? Allow me to give an example, someone who is sincerely seeking to explain our triune God might say, “**The Trinity, is like an egg, where there is the shell, the yolk, and the egg white, and yet it is all one egg.**”

Or another might say, “**No, the trinity is like a shamrock leaf: that's one leaf, but it's got three bits sticking out. Just like the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.**”

People have used all sorts of illustrations; the sun in the sky, the layers of an atom, the three states of H₂O, and so on. But all illustrations fall incredibly short. And actually instead of teaching of who God is, the illustrations distort the image of God, and the teacher unknowingly depicts heresies that have been challenged in previous centuries.

Heresies like **Modalism**, which teaches the three persons of the Trinity as different “modes” of the Godhead. Or **Partialism**, which teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not distinct person of the Godhead, but are just parts of God. Or **Arianism**, which states that Jesus and the Spirit are creations of the Father, and are not in one nature with Him.

So we need to be careful as we seek to understand and then cautious as we seek to explain the complexities of the Trinity.

But just because the Trinity is complex and hard to understand, and maybe even harder to explain, I don't want that to scare you away. For we cannot neglect the Trinity. For what makes Christianity absolutely distinct is the identity of our God. Which God that you worship is the specific aspect of faith that stands before all others. Jehovah Witness and Mormons talk about Jesus, but it's not the same Jesus. We must know our God, the one true God.

The very bedrock of our faith is nothing less than God Himself, and every aspect of the gospel – creation, revelation, salvation – is only Christian insofar as it is the creation, revelation, salvation of *this* God, the triune God.

Listen to what Michael Reeves says in his excellent book, “Delighting in the Trinity.”

I could believe in the death of a man called Jesus, I could believe in his bodily resurrection, I could believe in a salvation by grace alone; but if I do not believe in this God, then, quite simply, I am not a Christian. And so, because the Christian God is triune, the Trinity is the governing center of all Christian belief, the truth that shapes and beautifies all others. The Trinity is the cockpit of all Christian thinking.³

Sadly though, who and what God is like tend to be things we *assume* we already know and so many do not think much more about it. And assumptions are dangerous. For in our assumptions of God there is a tendency to shape God into our own image according to our own expectations and presuppositions. And that makes it even more difficult to understand the Trinity.

Because of instead starting from scratch and seeing that the triune God is a radically different sort of being from any other candidate for “God,” we try to stuff the Father, Son and Spirit into how we have always thought of God.

So, in seeking to come to the most accurate understanding of our triune God, where should we start? If you were the one getting a phone call and someone asked you to prove the trinity, what would you say? Well, you've got an outline from today,

1. God is three distinct persons.
2. Each person (Father, Son, and Spirit) is Fully God.

³ Reeves, Michael. *Delighting in the Trinity*. pg. 16

3. There is only one God.

Those are basic truths to the doctrine of the Trinity that must be understood, as we seek to understand who God is. And hopefully that's helpful in giving you a better understanding of who God is.

But I tell you what, if I could go back and have a conversation with that gentleman on the phone, probably before bringing him to a passage of Scripture, I think I'd like to begin by asking him a question. And it's not that it's a question to end all questions, and I don't even know if it would change the direction of the conversation, but it's helpful in my own mind in thinking through the Trinity. And the question this, I'd ask Him, **"What was God doing before Creation?"**

Last week we talked about **The Self-Existence of God**. How He has existed for all of eternity, from everlasting to everlasting. God did not come into being, but has always been. And what was He doing prior to the creation of the world.

Take your Bibles out and turn to [John 17](#), for I want to show you something. For in this passage we get an insight in the nature and character of God, but also into the relationship of God the Father with Jesus Christ the Son. This chapter is often times called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, and we get to eaves drop on a conversation that Jesus has with His Heavenly Father.

I'd like to read verses 1-5, please follow along.

Read John 17:20-24

Going back to the question, "what was God doing before the creation of the world" ... do you see the answer here? It's found specifically in verse 24. "Father," Jesus says, "you loved me before the creation of the world." Before God ever created, before He ever ruled the world, before anything else, this God was a Father loving His Son.

The most foundation thing in God is not some abstract quality, but the fact that he is a Father. Repeatedly in the Scriptures the terms *God* and *Father* are associated. God is, before anything else, a Father. Before He is the Creator, before He is the Ruler (and He is those things)... before all that He is a loving Father. And all He does He does as a loving Father. That is who He is. That is who He has always been. He creates as a Father and He rules as a Father; and that means the way He rules over creation is completely different than the way any other God would rule over creation.

*I understand that not everyone instinctively warms to the idea that God is a Father. There are many for whom their own experiences of overbearing, indifferent, and abusive fathers make them cringe when they hear God spoken of as a Father. And my heart goes out to you if that is your background. But God the Father is not called Father because he copies earthly

fathers. He is not a pumped-up version of your dad. Human fathers are supposed to reflect God –some dads do well, while other dads do a better job of reflecting the devil.

But it is without a doubt that our Heavenly Father is a far better, absolutely loving Father, that is completely who He is all the way through. He is a good Father.

Calling God, Father, it means something. It's NOT just a name. A father is a father who gives life, who begets children. And that gives us insight into who God is. For if, before all things, God was eternally a Father, then this God is an inherently outgoing, eternally loving, life-giving God. God did not begin to love for the first time when He decided to create; from eternity past he has been life-giving and eternally loving Father who delighted in His Son.

And this is where that has a beautiful implication for us. The outgoing, outpouring love relationship that is shared between the eternal Father and eternal Son and eternal Spirit, gets then poured out upon us through the gospel, and we get invited into that loving relationship. The love that begins with the godhead of the trinity begins a gracious cascade, like a waterfall of love: as the Father is the lover and the head of the Son, so the Son goes out to be the lover and the head of the church.

“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you.” ~ John 15:9

And therein lies the very goodness of the gospel: Christ loves the church first and foremost: His love is not a response, given only when the church loves Him; his love comes first, and we only love Him because He first loved us.

Conclusion:

The love within the Trinity has tremendous implications for our lives and I feel like I'm only scratching the surface this morning on this particular attribute of God. And there is so much more to say. However, can I simply encourage you to take time this week to marvel at the mystery of the Trinity.

Now, I know that life often times comes at us at a break neck speed. I know for myself that my alarm goes off in the morning and it's easy for my mind starts racing to what needs to be done that day. What is my calendar filled with? What tasks do I need to make progress on? What relationships do I need to pursue or what relationships do I need to mend? Do any of my kids have any events today, a soccer game, or a cross-country meet?

Those are all thoughts that come racing through my mind before I even pull the covers off and put my feet on the ground.

And I would like to say that I always hit the ground running, and that I'm always diligent and disciplined with every moment that I have throughout the day... that I always stay on task with what needs to get accomplished. But I can't always say that. I'm distracted so

easily... There are moments in my day that I drift aimlessly. And I can let time just fall through my fingertips like sand in an hourglass.

My day is filled with a combination of responsibility, and with a little bit of drifting, but usually with some relaxation of some type as well... But before I know it my day is done and I'm heading back to bed to do it all over again the next day. With the craziness of my schedule, [there are times that I feel like my life is a lot like a squirrel](#). Have you ever watched a squirrel? They are constantly on the move just to survive.

[But that is how God has designed them to be. To the glory of God they scurry from one place to the next... but that is not how God has designed you to be. Now, you do have a responsibility to work, get tasks accomplished to the glory of God, but do you know that you have an ability that God has given to humanity that no other creature possesses to the same degree that you do? It's the ability to wonder and be amazed.](#)

[As far as I know, no other creature looks at the sunset on a cool fall evening and is astonished by its beauty. No other creature has examined its own existence and being to the point that they're capable of becoming a skilled and successful doctor or surgeon. And no other creature contemplates the incomprehensible God.](#)

The reason that I bring that up is because it would do us well to establish rhythms in our lives where we make sure that we are taking the time to develop a fuller understanding of our God, not just rushing from one day to the next. We are created in the image of God, and have been given the ability to wonder, to marvel, to be amazed by all sorts of objects within our created world, but even more so to be amazed as we gaze at our incredible God.

I think that needs to be stressed in today's culture more so than ever because everyone is rushing around at such a frantic pace, but also because it has become far too easy for someone or something else to do our thinking for us. You have a question today, and you want it answered immediately, so what do you do? You Google it, you get your answer, and move on.

But that ought not to be our approach to comprehending God. There is a great need in our day to slow down, and marvel... even when what you're marveling at is mysterious. Contemplate the reality that:

1. God is three distinct persons.
2. Each person (Father, Son, and Spirit) is Fully God.
3. There is only one God.

[And that for all eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit have been delighting in love of one another, and through the gospel we have been called into that marvelous and loving relationship. Praise be to God.](#)