

Tonight we are talking about the doctrine of the trinity. It's one of those doctrines that most Christians have heard of, but it's usually in the "I will never understand this so why even bother learning about it category." Now, only part of that statement is true. We will never fully understand how the trinity operates.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't bother ourselves with it. In fact, I think that the more we try to understand what the trinity is, and how the persons in the trinity work in our lives the more our faith will increase in the greatness and strength of God. And I think that knowing and trusting and hoping in this doctrine will actually train our church to accomplish God's mission unlike anything we could do without it.

So tonight I want you to see three things about the trinity:

1. The scriptures teach there is only one God.
2. The scriptures apply the terms, attributes, actions, and responses for God to more than one distinct individual.
3. Understanding and trusting in the doctrine of the trinity helps us worship God properly, and accomplish his mission effectively.

So what is the doctrine of the trinity?

Here's how the early church put it all together.

1. The Father is God.
2. The Son is God.
3. The Holy Spirit is God.
4. The Father is not the Son.
5. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
6. The Holy Spirit is not the Father.
7. There is exactly one God.

I know that is mind blowing. The Bible teaches that there is only one God, but he exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And those three persons are distinct. **In essence God is one. In person, God is three.**

Most of the questions you will get, because you believe in the trinity sound like this:

“Don't you really believe in three gods?” or “Aren't the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three different Gods?” And these questions mostly come from folks who are really concerned about the oneness of god. So you get these questions from your friends and coworkers who are maybe Muslim, Jewish, or Jehovah's Witness. They are all about the oneness of God and so they hear you mention the trinity and they aren't sure what to do with that.

So let me just take a moment and guide you to some places in your Bible that teach about God's oneness:

A. The scriptures teach there is only one God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Isaiah 45:5-6

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God...⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

⁴ Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist,

What you see here is the Bible affirming the unity and oneness of God. It’s also important to note where these three passages are located. The first passage is from the Torah, or the Law. Isaiah is in the Prophets, and 1 Corinthians is in the New Testament. There are plenty other places, in the wisdom literature of the OT, and the Gospels of the NT that affirm this claim for the oneness of God.

I just want you to see it from both the Old Testament, and the New Testament. We believe, on the authority of the scriptures, that there is one God. So we do not believe that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three different beings, or gods. We are not tri-theists. There is only one God, and beside the one God there are no other gods. The scriptures are clear that there is only one God, and anything that we call god that isn't him isn't really a god at all.

The kind of question that you often get about the trinity sounds like this:

“You don’t really think that Jesus was God do you?” “Wasn’t Jesus just a man?” or “Isn’t the Holy Spirit just some type of force? He’s not really god is he?”

And again, if you live in one place long enough, the Jehovah’s Witnesses will eventually make it to your house, and you will be asked this question.

B. The scriptures apply the terms, attributes, actions, and responses for God to more than one distinct individual.

Plural references used of God

Genesis 1:27

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

Isaiah 6

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

'ēlōhîm

The most common word used to describe Israel's God in the OT is a masculine, plural word.

The Father is presented as God

Jesus believed in God the Father.

Matthew 6- Jesus uses the terms God and Father interchangeably.

John 6:27- Jesus specifically says that God the Father is the one who gives eternal life.

Paul believed in God the Father

Romans 1.7 and Galatians 1.1 are both references to God the Father.

Peter speaks of a God who, as a father, has begotten us as his children to a living hope. 1 Peter 1.3

The Son (Jesus Christ) is presented as God

Jesus understood himself to be God.

John 5 –Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath. When the religious leaders confronted Jesus about this he responded by saying that his Father was at work in the world, and he was doing his Father's work. Then John explains something to us in verse 18:

"This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

John says, if you want to know why the Jews wanted Jesus dead, it wasn't because he healed a guy. They wanted him dead because he claimed to be God.

We see the same thing happen in John 10:24

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, ^[a] is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

³¹ *The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.* ³² *Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?"*
³³ *The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."*

Jesus believed himself to be God.

The apostle Paul also presents Jesus as God

Philippians 2:6

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant¹ being born in the likeness of men.

What Paul means when he says that Jesus was in the form of God is this: Everything that is true about God is true about Jesus. Jesus possessed the very nature of God.

Colossians 1:15 & 2:9

He is the image of the invisible God

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily

Paul tells us that if you want to know what the essence of God looks like, if you want the divine nature illuminated for you...look no farther than Jesus. He is the one who images what was once invisible and impenetrable.

Hebrews 1:1-3

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,

The author of Hebrews says, just like the radiance of the sun reaches the earth, so too the very light of God has been fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is presented as God.

Acts 5

*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? ⁴ While 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.**" ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.*

The Holy Spirit possesses attributes and faculties that only God can possess.

- Eternal (Heb. 9:14)
- Omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
- He regenerates those who turn to Christ (John 3:5-8)
- He sets believers apart as they grow into Christ (1 Pet. 1:2)
- He reveals God to us by inspiring the biblical authors to write the scriptures (2 Pet. 1:21)
- He was involved in raising Christ from the dead. (Rom. 8:11)

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

And this last section is where I want to park. As you read the Bible you see that there is one God. And you clearly see that there are three persons in the Godhead who distinctly exist simultaneously. They actually relate to one another. Why does that matter? And how does knowing about the trinity actually make us better worshipers and missionaries?

1. We rejoice in God's oneness. There aren't any who can oppose him. He stands alone as the sovereign, sole creator and sustainer of everything we see. No one can challenge his strength. Apart from him there is only creation.

2. We are thankful for God's redemptive plan. Do you realize what the trinity means to our salvation? It means that the Father, who has always loved the Son, from eternity into eternity was willing to give him as our ransom. It means that the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, who was in very nature God didn't think that was something to be grasped and he humbly gave up his position for you and for me. He emptied himself for us. It means that the Holy Spirit, when we first heard of the glory of the cross, convicted us of sin, of God's righteousness, and his judgment and then he regenerated our hearts so that we can respond to God in faith. It means that the story of God redeeming the world wasn't a backup. It wasn't a response to the terrible sin that God never expected in the world. It means that Jesus really was the lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world. The Holy Trinity acted in concert out of love for us.

3. If the Father is the one who gave his son as a sacrifice, and the Son is the one who has paid God what we owed, and the Holy Spirit alone can regenerate the hearts of men and women, then our only job is to be faithful. You see, faithfulness is a servant's word. Fruitfulness is a master's word, and we are not the master. So as we try to lead you all as pastors, and as you all lead those God has placed in your path know that all you can do is be faithful. You can't make results happen. You can't change hearts. It's not your job. You can't make the church grow, or your small group grow, or your neighbor trust in Jesus. Only the kindness and love and patience and wooing of the Holy Trinity can grow the church. The trinity tells us that God is the giver. We are just receivers, and stewards.

And any time we act under the mentality that we have to give God something, or that God should be glad we found him, or that God should take a break and let us handle things we are mistaken. We can't give God anything. Try it. Try to give him your thoughts. He created your mind. Try to give him your words. He created your mouth.

C. S. Lewis said that when we act this way we are like a small child going to it's father and saying, 'Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.' Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child's present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction.

My friends, the Trinity tells us that the Father gave us the Son. The Son gave us the Holy Spirit. He is giver, we are receivers and stewards. Let's serve him faithfully, and look to him to increase and multiply his Kingdom.

A special thanks are in order:

Part of my outline for this lecture was adapted from Dr. John Feinberg's chapter on the Trinity in his magnum opus, *No One Like Him*.

Feinberg, John S. *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*. [rev. ed. Foundations of Evangelical Theology. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006.

I lean heavily on the preaching of J.D. Greear at the Summit Church in Durham, NC.

The story from Lewis can be found in his classic, *Mere Christianity*.