

Sermon - The Trinity

Lately we have been speaking about Jesus and who he is. Before we delve even more deeply into that subject, I believe that we need a fundamental understanding of the Trinity. So I make this statement: Today we are going to talk about God. You might believe that preachers always talk about God. I find it telling though that in my experience we often don't talk about who God is very much, but we spend a significant amount of time on talking about what God wants of us. If my colleagues are good preachers they will talk even more about what God has done and is doing for us.

When we talk about God and not just refer to him, it is extremely difficult because it is an area of language where words fail. Yet, still I believe that we must press on because if we are to believe in something, we need at least a fundamental understanding of what we believe.

When I think about God, sometimes the music we sing and play in worship does a better job of telling us who God is experientially than a sermon. Never the less, Today my goal is to pass on to you our current understanding of our God.

This is a sermon with a lot of meat in it, so if you find yourself overwhelmed, write down your questions and we can talk about it after the service today and I will be glad to answer any questions I can. Please forgive me in advance as due to the complex nature of this subject, I may throw out some arrogant sounding terminology. Wherever possible, I will show examples to clarify exactly the concept that I am sharing. I realize that it is far easier to do story type preaching with lots of Jokes, fun anecdotes and easy to grasp concepts. I do that a lot, but today, I ask for your grace as we delve into this difficult to grasp issue and your forgiveness for the headache I may or may not impart. Well enough with the disclaimers...

As I have already said talking about who God is can be difficult. At the end of the Day, God is Love.

Let me start with a summary of the Trinity or Godhead:

The Godhead:

The Godhead exists eternally in three persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three individuals comprise one God, each aspect of which has the same nature and attributes of the others and which is worthy of the same obedience, confidence and worship. (Matt 3:16, 17, Matt 28:19-20, Mark 12:29, John 1:14, Acts 5:3, 2 Corinthians 13:14) All three have always existed and have not been created of the other.

The Father is the creator of the heavens and the Earth. He is the giver of the law and all things are subject to the will of the Father.

The Son is personified in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is eternal and yet begotten of the Father. Jesus is truly fully God and fully man. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. We have greater revelation of the nature of God through his sinless life and teachings. We can only understand an infinite God in the context of the revelation of himself that he has shared with us. To give us greater

revelation of himself he has come, died and is our risen great High Priest. He has provided a substitutionary sacrifice resulting in Justification and sanctification (both instant and ongoing) for those who accept him. It is only through Christ's atoning sacrifice that we can be saved.

The personage of the Holy Spirit is also God and performs the actions and possesses all of the attributes of the Deity. He is daily engaged in the creative work of regeneration.

Trinity Conflicts:

Throughout history the development of human understanding the concept of the Trinity has been fraught with problems.

Let me start with a couple of definitions for our purposes:

- Theologians are those who study God.
- Semantics is the meanings of words.
- Context refers to how the words are used.
- Postulate means to suggest or assume the truth of something as a basis for belief

As theologians have struggled with semantic and contextual issues in the original scripture, there have been many proposed ideas about how to envision the great mystery of the Trinity. Many of these postulations have resulted in dead ends because either the ideas deny the deity of Christ or they deny the unified nature of the Godhead.

I believe that some of the confusion results from, the ability for people to understand of the nature of Christ as fully God and fully man.

Christ was both begotten of the Father and conceived of the Holy Spirit and yet as the Logos or the living Word of God, he is a member of the eternal Trinity. When we speak of the trinity we are talking about God.

Some of the difficulty in the conceptualization has been as a result of the gnostic influences in our culture which believe that flesh is evil, and only spirit is good. Our thinking as well as the limitations of human reasoning power has also caused problems. It is hard to think of Christ as fully God and fully man if we believe that which is of the flesh is evil and that which is of the spirit is good. This is contradictory to the scriptures. We have one God with a unified will and purpose that exists externally in three distinct persons.

This is subtle because we use the term flesh to refer to the areas in our nature we still need to work on as well as the meat and tissue of our bodies. The Gnostics are speaking of the meat and tissue. Semantics have confused the issue because if we are talking about our nature that needs changing the statement is correct, but the body is not evil. Get it?

In the past several views of the Trinity have historically been proposed:

- Dynamic Monarchianism – The Son and the Holy Spirit are **consubstantial** with the Father's divine essence only as attributes. Christ was a mere man, miraculously conceived, but constituted the Son of God simply by the infinitely high degree in which he had been filled with divine wisdom.
- Modalistic Monarchianism – The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three modes by which the one God reveals himself. One person, three names.
- Subordinationism – God is the Father. The Son and the Holy Spirit are discrete entities but are not divine. It is a doctrine that holds that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to God the Father in nature and being.
- Economic Trinitarianism – God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one identical indivisible substance. There is no separateness or division. This substance has manifested itself in three incarnations in triadic deeds such as creation and redemption. The economic Trinity refers to the acts of the triune God with respect to the creation, history, salvation, the formation of the Church and the daily lives of the believers.
- **Orthodox Trinitarianism** – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial (which means of one and the same substance), co-inherent, co-equal and co-eternal. This is the formula that was eventually decided upon at the second Christian ecumenical council held at Constantinople in AD 381. All exist as 3 separate people.

So what does all that mean?

It means that a lot of theories have been proposed for how God is structured. To get to the truth we must look deep into the scriptures...

The Apostles teaching gave us a clear indication of the deity of Jesus. The apostolic fathers gave us the concept that Christ is from God and pre-existent but they were ambiguous about the Trinity. Through the Apologists and Polemicists (which is those who deal with: perceived errors and controversy respectively) enhanced the definition of the Trinity by the necessity of scriptural defence. There were several specific individuals that provided teaching which helped to establish the Trinity:

- Justin Martyr – Christ is distinct from the Father
- Athenagorus – Christ was without beginning
- Theophilus – The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Logos
- Origin – The Holy Spirit is co-eternal with the Father and the Son
- Terullian – Spoke of the Trinity and persons but one in substance

As we look at the historical development we see that the First Council of Nicea AD325 was useful in establishing that Christ was co-eternal with the Father and not a subordinate entity. The Council of Constantinople was useful in establishing that the Holy Spirit was an equal partner in the Godhead.

As we look at each of these three proposed views we can clearly see that when we line them up with the biblical perspective elements, only one really represents a biblical model; The Orthodox Trinitarian model.

Orthodox Trinitarianism – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial, co-inherent, co-equal and co-eternal.

If you have made it here without mentally channel surfing, mentally wishing a bus would fall from heaven and land on my head, God would come back - like “right now” or having gone to sleep, congratulations, that’s all the academic stuff we will have to deal with.

Activity and Nature of Persons in the Godhead

All are holy, truth, benevolent, powerful, eternal, called God, called creator, sanctifiers, life givers, omnipresent and omniscient.

- **Holy:** Rev 15:4, Acts 3:14, Acts 1:8
- **Truth:** John 7:28, Rev 3:7 1 John 5:6
- **Benevolent:** Rom 2:4, Ephesians 5:25, Nehemiah 9:20
- **Powerful:** 1 Peter 1:5, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Romans 15:19
- **Eternal:** Psalms 90:2, John 1:2, Rev 1:8, Rev 1:17, Hebrews 9:14
- **Omnipresent:** Jeremiah 23:24, Matthew 18:20, Psalms 139:7
- **Omniscient:** Jeremiah 17:10, Rev 2:23, 1 Corinthians 2:11
- **Called God:** Philippians 1:2, John 1:1,14, Acts 5:3-4
- **Called Creator:** Isaiah 64:8, 44:24, Colossians 1:15-17 Job 33:24, 26:13
- **Sanctifier:** 1 Thessalonians 1:10, John 2:19, 10:17, Romans 8:11
- **Life Giver:** Genesis 2:7, John 1:3, 5:21, 2 Corinthians 3:6, 8

All are fully God and are of equal status and stature. They all share many of the same characteristics and attributes. Never-the-less I will try to state some of the nature of each.

They have performed different roles in:

- The creation of the world – Psalms 102:25, Colossians 1:16, Genesis 1:2, Job 26:13
- The creation of man – Genesis 2:7, Colossians 1:16, Job 33:4
- Baptism of Christ – Matt 3:17, Matt 3:16
- Death of Christ – Hebrews 9:14

The Father is eternal. The Son is eternal. The Holy Spirit is eternal and nevertheless, not three eternal but one eternal. They have separate yet never conflicting wills.

The Holy Spirit is divine, eternal, omnipresent and omniscient.

Holy Spirit’s Role in Salvation:

- Regeneration
- Indwelling
- Baptizing
- Sealing
- Filling
- Guiding
- Empowering
- Teaching

Holy Spirit's Works:

- Active in Creation
- Inspired Biblical Writers
- Empowered the conception of Christ
- Convicts of Sin
- He Regenerates
- He Counsels
- Brings assurance of Salvation
- Teaches and enlightens
- Aids in prayer by intercession
- Resurrected Christ
- Calls to Service
- Seals the elect's salvation
- Indwells the believer
- Works in the Church

The Person of Christ:

- Absolutely Holy
- Humble
- Has existed eternally
- Participated in creation
- Possesses all of the divine attributes of the Godhead
- Forgives sin
- Raises the dead
- Executes Judgement
- Sustains
- Fully God and Fully man
- Intercedes
- Justifies us to the Father
- His blood is our atonement
- Reconciles man to God

- Fulfills the Law
- He is the Logos

The Father:

- Relational
- Loving
- Faithful
- Merciful
- Delights in his children
- Giving
- Desires Love
- Redemptive
- Patient
- Wrathful
- Jealous
- Light & Life
- Creator
- Transcendent
- Wise
- Sovereign
- Holy
- Immutable

The essential elements are:

- 1) God is one
- 2) Each entity in the Godhead is Deity
- 3) The oneness and the three-ness of God are not contradictory
- 4) The Trinity is eternal
- 5) The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of the same essence and are not inferior or superior to the others in essence.
- 6) The Trinity is a mystery

The bible teaches us that God is one.

- Deuteronomy 3:13-15, 6:4, 20:2-3
- 1 Timothy 1:17, 2:5-6
- 1 Corinthians 8:4-6
- James 2:19

The bible also declares three distinct individuals as Deity.

- Genesis 1:1-2
- Exodus 31:3
- Judges 15:14
- Psalms 2:7, 68:18
- Hebrews 1:1-13
- Isaiah 6:1-3, 9:6, 11:2
- 1 Peter 1:2
- John 1:17
- 1 Corinthians 8:6
- Philippians 2:11
- Matthew 3:16-17
- Acts 5:3-4
- 2 Corinthians 3:17

The two example cult views of the trinity that I will include here are:

Modalistic Monarchianism:

In this view the God is qualitatively characterized in his essence as one nature and one person. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are different names for the same entity. There are not three persons but rather three modes of God. Gods Subsistence is in one person not three. He is one person with three distinct roles. (Oneness Pentecostals) This version of Monarchianism holds that Jesus Christ was not a distinct person of the Trinity. It proposes that God the Father suffered on the cross.

Subordinationism:

God's nature is identified with the Father only. The Son and the Holy Spirit are discrete entities who do not share the divine essence. God is one entity and subsists entirely in the Father. The Holy Spirit and the Son are subordinate entities.

Subordinationism is therefore a heretical view that God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are not merely relationally subordinate to God the Father, but also subordinate in nature and being. In other words, this view maintains that, within the Trinity, the Son and the Spirit are ontologically inferior to the Father.

The scriptures above show that God is one but that he exists in three persons. Each of these cults that attempt to rationalize God into their own understanding makes the same mistake. They do not understand the trinity and as a result try to make God fit into their understanding. The bible clearly describes three entities who are God. If they do not use the bible as the basis for their understanding then they will invariably vary from the truth.

While we have seen that they share common attributes the examples with include the creation of the world, creation of man, baptism of Christ and the death of Christ. Show each member of the Godhead in a different role in these events clearly illustrating their individuality in the Godhead.

My Personal Thoughts on a couple of Attributes of the Trinity

Each one of us needs to put all this academic stuff into context. I can't speak for you but I can share the way I perceive God in several of his major attributes, so that maybe through my illustration, you can personally relate to the scope of the material we have covered here today.

I love that God is Omnipresent

God is all around us, he inhabits the praises of his people. He will never leave us nor forsake us. It is an amazing comfort to know that in every situation, God is with me. There are many times I have felt that I couldn't do something or that it was beyond me at the time; but when I remember that he is with me and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me I realize that I can do nothing in myself, but that I can do all things with him. I have a serious co-dependency issue with Jesus. And...I never want that to change. Because he is always with me, I know that at any time I can reach out and praise him or talk with him and he will be right there. I know that when situations arise that I don't have the knowledge or the wisdom to deal with he is right there to ask for wisdom and guidance. I don't think long distance relationships work very well. Knowing that the Spirit of God is with me gives me a sense of security that is indescribable. There is also the aspect that when I fall or make a mistake, I know that he sees it. I have been fortunate to be the recipient of his grace on more occasions that I can count. What a tremendous gift to know that I am not calling out aimlessly to a far off God that I hope will deign to hear me, but that I have a God who knows every hair on my head. Okay, granted in my case not such a big deal, but the principle still applies. Holy Spirit you are welcome in this place.

I love that God is Omnipotent

God created with nothing more than his will and his word. There is nothing that God cannot accomplish. He set the stars in motion and provided such a wonderful world and universe for his people. When I think of a God who spits stars the size of our entire solar system out of his mouth, I have to stand in awe that he would spend time with me. Here is the creator who can do anything; caring about me and our relationship. How powerful must his love be towards us to invest his time in us? He gave his only begotten son as a perfect sacrifice so that we could be restored in fellowship with him. There is nothing he cannot accomplish. The Father the Son and Holy Spirit have always been and were not created. As human beings we cannot even comprehend that. We cannot step outside of the boundaries by which we measure our existence to grasp the fundamentals of eternity. We are blessed by God that he, an infinite being, has decided to reveal himself to us through the revelation of his word. Without the Word of God and the Holy Spirit providing revelation as to what is contained in it how could we ever hope to understand him?

I love that God is Omniscient

God knows everything there is nothing that he does not know. Chess masters can think many moves ahead in a game with limited dimensions and movements. When we consider that God knows all about us and understands the future of every choice we make, his limitless knowledge becomes unimaginable. How can I a simple human being relate to a God who is limitless? Well first off, I can praise him for who he is not what I can get from him. Secondly, I can take comfort that he is the painter of the canvas of my life and though I can only see a little way, the footsteps of the righteous are ordered of the Lord. It gives a great sense of security knowing that no matter what: God has my back. All things work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purposes. Recently I was thinking about how I spent the last forty years of my life and all the circumstances that I placed myself in. The enemy tried the old condemnation thing. God showed me that I took that journey to prepare me for what he had in store for my future. Fortunately for me, I wasn't whale vomit, but you get the idea.

I loved that God is Eternal

God was, is and will be. He has always existed and will always exist. The depth of his love is greater than we can even imagine. His power is greater than we have seen, his loving care set the stars in motion and his loving kindness wakes me in the morning and puts me to bed at night. I live, I exist and I have hope because there is an eternal God who loves me. God fills all time and dwells in the realm of eternity (Isaiah 57:15). He is the great I am he is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalms 90:2) He is the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9) The very nature of God is eternal in its quality not just its quantity.

I love that an part of the nature of God is Spirit

God is Spirit (John 4:24). God has appeared as a Burning Bush, a Pillar of Fire, a Cloud and so on. God provides these manifestations for our benefit. His substance is pure and uncreated Spirit. When we consider the Trinity: we have God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They have all always existed. Yet Christ was given flesh so that he would be fully man and fully God on earth. The attributes of God are not parts of him but rather are qualities that make up his whole essence. God is Love. God is Truth and so on. The Godhead exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, having the same nature and attributes.

Conclusion

We have evidence within the Word of God that clearly illustrates the divine nature of God. While the bible does not explicitly mention the word "trinity", it is clearly evident. Each of the members of the trinity share a common will and essence. In addition the attributes of God are evident in each. Mankind seems to have a problem with understanding that God can exist eternally in three persons and yet still be the same singular God. For me it seems that if we let go of our pride and simply have faith, the trinity makes sense. While we may not be able to reason it out fully, God never promised us we would understand it now. He said that we see through a glass darkly. I will have plenty of questions when I see him face to face, but in the end, I think the trinity is just another cornerstone of faith.

My final point is this and if nothing else goes home with you today remember this...

When we see God the Father's love in action we see in him the characteristics we talked about. We see that he is like a parent who cares for his children. God the Father cares, nurtures, directs and watches over us.

When we see God the Son, we see a person who has come alongside us. He was a person who lived and died for us, who was both fully God and fully man. God the Son we will always view in loving solidarity with us as our advocate before the Father.

When we look to God the Holy Spirit we see one who draws us to salvation, comes into the depths of us, who loves us, who brings about the very nature of Christ within us and empowers us for ministry.

Remember we talked about Love? When we view the Trinity we can see that God doesn't just talk about Love, he is Love.

He wants us not to not just take ownership of who he is through study, but to get to know him, to have a relationship with him. He wants to bless you, he wants to love you. If you have learned one thing about the nature of our God today, I have fulfilled what I set out to do, which is bring you one step closer in your relationship with God.