

Week 5

The Trinity

Key Verses

Matthew 3:13-17 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan, coming to John to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have the need to be baptized by You, and yet You are coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus, answering, said to him, "Allow it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. ¹⁶ After He was baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and settling on Him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

+ Introduction

"Trinity – God's revelation of Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, unified in the Godhead yet distinct in person and function." ¹

It is fascinating that a key, cardinal doctrine of Christianity uses a word that is not in the Bible.

Although the word "trinity" is not specifically mentioned, the concept, the truth of the Trinity, is all through the Bible. The Trinity's doctrine is difficult to grasp – that we have one God who exists in three Persons. However, it is a crucial doctrine of the Christian faith because it focuses on who God is, on the Deity of Jesus Christ, and on the Deity of the Holy Spirit. *The Baptist Faith and Message* booklet explains,

"The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being." ²

Let's take a look at the key truths and a few explanatory scriptures.

+ Truth #1 - God Is One

EXODUS 20:1-3 *Then God spoke all these words, saying, ² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before Me."*

This is the first of the Ten Commandments. Israel was expected to understand that there is only one true God. The theological word for this concept is "monotheism," mono – one; theos – God.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4 *"Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"*

This verse is called the *shema*, which is the Hebrew word for "hear," the first word in the verse. The statement is the basic confession of faith of Judaism. It means that the Lord is totally unique; He alone is God.

1 TIMOTHY 1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

This verse reads like a doxology, filled with reverence and awe for the Lord. "King eternal" emphasizes His sovereignty over all creation. "Immortal" and "invisible" refer to 2 of His attributes. "The only God" emphasizes His uniqueness.

+ Truth #2 - The Godhead Consists of Three Persons

In his book *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, Wayne House states, "The oneness of God and the threeness of God are not contradictory." This is the toughest concept to understand. How can one God exist in 3 Persons? The following verses teach the concept of the Godhead consisting of 3 Persons.

GENESIS 1:1-2 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

At the very beginning, God is there, and the Spirit of God is present.

JOHN 1:1-2 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.*

JOHN 1:14 *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

"In the beginning was the Word..." The Word is very clearly a reference to Jesus Christ. It says in verse 2, "**He** was in the beginning with God." And, in verse 14, it says that "...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

At creation, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were all present. But, Dr. Charles Ryrie, in his book *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* says, "...the doctrine of the Trinity must not imply in any way that there might be three Gods." All 3 Persons of the Godhead are eternal; they have always existed; there was never a time when they did not exist.

We can also see the distinctions in function with regard to redemption. Wayne Grudem explains it like this:

"God the Father planned redemption and sent His Son into the world (John 3:16; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:9-10). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us (John 6:38; Hebrews 10:5-7). God the Father did not come and die for our sins, nor did God the Holy Spirit, that was the particular work of the Son. Then after Jesus ascended back into heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to apply redemption to us."³

Let's take a scriptural look at each member of the Godhead individually.

God, the Father:

That God created the heavens and earth is both powerful and personal. From the moment He created Adam and Eve there was an emphasis of relationship. God said *"it is not good for man to be alone."* (Genesis 2:18) The creation of humankind was because God wanted relationships to be foundational for all creation. God Himself was and is relational not only as the powerful creator, but as a personal father.

EPHESIANS 4:6 *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

2 CORINTHIANS 6:18 *"And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."*

PSALMS 68:5 *Father to the fatherless, defender of widows –
this is God, whose dwelling is holy.*

Even in the story of Abram, God wanted His people to be relational. Abram was promised to be a father of many nations, based on a relational covenant God established with him.

GENESIS 17:3-5 *Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, ⁴ "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.*

⁵ *No longer shall you be named Abram, But your name shall be Abraham;
For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*

God fulfilled that promise and Abraham became a father, grandfather, great grandfather, etc. And God became known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was Jacob who became father of the 12 boys who would become leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel.

It all began with God as Father relationally to His people, including His own Son. The most famous of verses is based on God being a father.

JOHN 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus even recognized this relationship and position of God as Father.

JOHN 6:27 (Jesus speaking) Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.

JOHN 14:7-11A (Jesus speaking) If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? The one who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own, but the Father, as He remains in Me, does His works. ¹¹ Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me;

Jesus even talks about God as Father as He acknowledges the Trinity. Picture Jesus speaking about both the Father and Spirit in the same sentence, thus having all 3 connected.

JOHN 14:26 (Jesus speaking) But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.

God, the Son:

Jesus was part of creation (John 1:1-5) and left heaven to become man. The divinity of Christ and the humanity of Christ intertwined in a manger leading all the way to the cross and beyond. God, the Son is a vital part of the Trinity past, present, and future. Paul would write it like this to the church in Phillipi.

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11 For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus is not less than God, nor greater than God. Jesus, the Son is co-equal with God. There is a specific role for God, the Son (Jesus). It was in humility that He came down out of heaven and it will be in triumph that He returns one day. While Jesus was on the earth, He was God in the flesh. And because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, the flesh was pierced to the point of death. Death was not victorious, for on the third day Jesus rose from the grave, though the flesh was now scarred.

JOHN 20:26-29 Eight days later His disciples were again inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be to you." ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "Place your finger here, and see My hands; and

take your hand and put it into My side; and do not continue in disbelief, but be a believer."
²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you now believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

Thomas saw the victory of the resurrection in the flesh. God, in the flesh, was standing before him, allowing him to touch that which had been pierced. Thomas saw, touched, and believed saying to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

It was in humility He came down out of heaven, it was in obedience He died on the cross, it was in victory He rose from the grave, it was in authority He ascended into heaven and it will be in triumph that He returns one day.

Paul would summarize the truth of God, the Son by simply saying,

COLOSSIANS 2:9 *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*

God, the Holy Spirit:

ACTS 5:3-4 *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some 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 under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God."*

The Holy Spirit is God. Peter told Ananias that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:10-11 *For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who among people knows the thoughts of a person except the spirit of the person that is in him? So also the thoughts of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God.*

Paul is explaining to the Corinthians and to us that The Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God. He is all-knowing.

ROMANS 8:9 *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

When a person trusts in Jesus Christ as his Savior, it is the Holy Spirit who enters that person. You do not receive Jesus as Savior and then at some point in the future receive the Holy Spirit. A believer has the Holy Spirit the moment he trusts Christ; if someone does not have the Holy Spirit, then he is not a believer according to Romans 8:9.

JOHN 16:13-15 *But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose it to you.*

This passage teaches us the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to Jesus and to believers. He will guide us into the truth; He will teach us what the Bible means. Also, He will glorify Jesus Christ, pointing people to Christ. The Holy Spirit does not glorify Himself. Therefore, we are not to worship and glorify the Holy Spirit over and above Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is God and equally a member of the Godhead with the Father and the Son. He is a Person, not a "force." He is a Person in the same way that God the Father and God the Son are Persons. He possesses intellect, emotion, and will.

The Mission Statement of Second Baptist Church is based on Matthew 28:19-20. In this passage, Jesus commands us to "...make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." All three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned with equal importance in one verse. When one of our Pastors baptizes someone, he says, "I baptize you (my brother/sister in Christ) in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" in obedience to Matthew 28:19. Every time we baptize someone, we are affirming our belief in the Trinity!

✦ Truth #3 - We Can Never Remove All Mystery From The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be simplified and made completely understandable by human minds. It is something we just cannot fully grasp – it is a mystery. We have to take it by faith.

In *The Baptist Faith & Message* book the writers state, "When we affirm the Trinity, we stand with Christians throughout all the ages who, like the Apostle Paul, understood the assurance this doctrine brings." ⁴ I love that statement – we stand with Christians throughout all the ages - we are in good company!

While all analogies have shortcomings, here are 3 illustrations that can be helpful in wrapping your mind around the Trinity.

1. At the same time, I am a husband, father, and grandfather; three in one; one person, three roles.
2. H₂O is the chemical makeup of water. It comes in 3 distinct forms: liquid, solid (ice), and gas (steam/vapor). In all three, it is still H₂O.
3. The egg has three components: shell, yolk, and white. Each part is fully egg, yet each has its own identity that distinguishes it from the other parts. ⁵

These kinds of illustrations can help, but they still fall short for this reason: we are trying to explain the infinite using finite analogies from our world with our human minds. We should simply acknowledge that the very being of God is far beyond anything that we can comprehend.

+ Conclusion

The three main non-Christian religions all reject the doctrine of the Trinity: Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Scientists. When someone stumbles over the Trinity, it often has to do with the Godhead, three in One. So, we ask the question: what difference does acknowledging the Trinity make to our faith? It makes a huge difference.

A. God's Word teaches it.

John 1:1 teaches that Jesus Christ, the Word, is God NOT a God. C.K. Barrett in his commentary, makes this statement about John 1:1:

"John intends that the whole of his Gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous." ⁶

So, John 1:1-2 clearly teaches that Jesus is God. We are not to change it or explain it away as meaning something else. We believe it because it is in God's Word. The Bible clearly teaches that not only is Jesus God but that He became a man. The theological word for this is "Incarnation" – God took on human flesh. He did not just **look like** a man but He actually **became** a man. As an old backwoods preacher said, "God's got skin on."

B. If it is not true, then our sins have not been covered.

Commentator Wayne Grudem explains it like this:

"Yet it is extremely important that this mystery [the Trinity] be true. For example, if Jesus is not both fully God and a separate person from God, then he could not have borne the complete wrath of God, died, and risen from the dead. And if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, any belief in Him is foolish and those who claim to be Christians are, in the words of Paul, 'of all people most to be pitied' (1 Corinthians 15:19).

In Matthew 3:16-17, our key verse for this topic, a very significant event happened. Jesus was baptized, and all three members of the Trinity were present. For the first time, the Trinity, foreshadowed in many ways in the Old Testament, is clearly manifested. The Spirit descends upon the Son, and, at the same moment, the Father's voice is heard from heaven. ⁸

"Holy, Holy, Holy," that great old hymn, was written by two men. Reginald Heber wrote the lyrics in 1826, and it was used for Trinity Sunday in the Church of England. John Dykes wrote the tune in 1861 as a tribute to the Council of Nicea, which formalized the Doctrine of the Trinity in A.D. 325. The hymn ends with the line, "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." God is One who exists in 3 Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three are part of the Godhead but distinct from each other. They have three different roles but work together in perfect harmony.

We conclude as Paul concludes in his second letter to the church in Corinth: *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* (2 Corinthians 13:14).

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¹ *The Baptist Faith & Message* (the book), p. 26.

² *The Baptist Faith and Message* (the booklet), p. 7.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, p. 116.

⁴ *The Baptist Faith and Message* (book) p. 127.

⁵ *Dr. Constable's Notes on John*, p. 13.

⁶ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 156.

⁷ *Christian Beliefs* by Wayne Grudem, p. 39.

⁸ *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, Oxford Press, New York, 1967, p. 995.