

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 6: The Trinity

Last time: *God is like us in many ways. These qualities help us to know him and guide us to act like him. He is, however, unlike us in many ways. Confusing these incommunicable attributes will lead us to believe wrong and harmful things about God.*

The Trinity is a mystery. All worldly analogies break down and veer off into dangerous heresies. It is, though, a revealed mystery. We know a great deal about the nature of the Trinity from what the Bible tells us.

WCF II.3 *In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.*

A Defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture

1. That God is One is well-established biblically.

- Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!”
- 1 Cor. 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

2. That this One God is yet three in Persons is established by the following: The title of God is applied to each of the three Persons of the Trinity

The Father:

- John 6:27 “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, {even} God, has set His seal.”
- John 20:17 Jesus *said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’”
- 1 Cor. 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2) The Son:

- John 1:18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God [Jesus], who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.
- John 5:18 For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.
- Rom. 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.
- John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

- John 12:41 [quoting Isaiah 6] Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him [Jesus].

3) The Holy Spirit

- Is. 6:8 Then I heard *the voice of the Lord*, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”
- Is. 6:9 And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’
- Acts 28:25 And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, “The Holy Spirit *rightly spoke* through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, 26 saying, ‘ Go to this people and say, “You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;”

Trinitarian formula in Scripture:

- 2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- Matthew 28:19 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,
- Also 1Cor. 6,11; I Cor. 12,4f.; 2 Cor. 1, 21f., I Thess. 5, 18f....I Pet. 1, 2.)

*“The Trinitarianism of the New Testament is rarely explicit; but the frequency with which the triadic schema recurs suggests that this pattern was implicit in Christian theology from the start. The impression inevitably conveyed is that the conception of the threefold manifestation of the Godhead was embedded deeply in Christian thinking from the start, and provided a ready-to-hand mold in which the ideas of the apostolic writers took shape.” J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds**

Trinitarian Grammar

Matthew 28:19 *“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”*

1. Notice the way Mat. 28:19 describes God. There are three persons, but one name. Name is singular.
2. The Bible consistently identifies the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as God, but it never refers to God in plural; there is only One God.
3. Scripture consistently distinguishes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son but begets the Son. The Son prays to the Father.

The Trinity Means God is Personal

Trinity is personal. God reveals himself in personal terms and the Three Persons of the Trinity relate to each other. Especially note relevance to the rise of Eastern religions and the a-personal conception of God.

The Trinity Means We Can Truly Know Him

“If Jesus Christ and God are not of one and the same being, then we really do not know God, for he is some hidden inscrutable Deity behind the back of Jesus, of whom we can only be

terrified—and then the final judgment of the world will be a judgment apart from and without respect of Jesus Christ and is forgiving love and atoning sacrifice. Cut the bond in being between Jesus Christ and God, and the Gospel message becomes an empty mockery.” T.F. Torrance

The Son reveals the Father not by being Father but by being Son. We could say the same about the Father and the Spirit. The Son incarnate gives us access to the Father by sharing with us his Sonship.

Torrance again:

“How could the Spirit pour the love of God into our hearts, how could the Spirit mediate Christ to us, and how could Christ be present to us in the Spirit, if the Spirit were not himself divine like the Father and the Son and of one and the same being himself divine like the Father and the Son and of one and the same being with them? Like the Son of God the Holy Spirit is no mere cosmic power intermediate between God and the world, but is the very Spirit of God who eternally dwells in him and in whom God knows himself, so that for us to know God in his Spirit is to know him in the hidden depths of his Triune Being as Holy Spirit as well as Father and Son. Apart from the Communion of the Holy Spirit we could not enjoy the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God the Father.”

Teaching the Trinity Through Analogy

Nothing in our world is like God, so it should not surprise us that all analogies have problems explaining the Trinity. Some people have used a triangle to represent the Trinity. A triangle is one triangle with three sides. But that is not an adequate analogy. Each side is a *part* of the triangle. But God does not have parts.

God is simple, meaning he does not have parts. The Father is not a part of God but fully God. The Son is not a part of the Father or part God, but fully God.

Similarly, the example of water is flawed. Water has three states, solid (ice), liquid, and gaseous (water vapor). It is not the case that God merely *appears* in three forms, one after another. Rather, God is Father, Son, and Spirit always, even before he appears to us.

God is unique. He alone is the creator. It is ok to teach children that God is so much greater than we are that it is hard to understand what he is like. God is infinite and we are finite. What a great lesson to teach our children!

The Trinity: internal and external

“What distinguishes the persons of the Trinity from each other are their relations to each other, not their relations to us.” Scott Swain.

Internal

The Father begets the Son; the Son does not beget the Father. The Father and Son send the Spirit, but the Spirit does not send the Son or Father. Within the Trinity, these relationships are equal in power and glory but distinct in relation.

External

The Triune God is united in all his acts to everything outside of his being. The Father, Son, and Spirit share one will.

Who is responsible for creation? Redemption? Sanctification? The answer is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All of God's works are indivisible: He doesn't parcel out tasks among his persons.

Certain works of God are specially associated in scripture with certain persons: Father gives divine decrees (Eph. 1:4-5). The Son accomplishes redemption (2 Cor. 8:9). The Spirit sanctifies believers. This does not mean that the other persons do not act in that work, but that the work especially relates to the internal relationship.

God begets the Son and sends the Spirit. So, it is fitting to ascribe eternal decrees to the Father, yet the decrees are the work of the Triune God.



Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: God is One Being in Three Persons. This reality is difficult to understand but there are many advantages in understanding his nature. The Trinity teaches us that God is relational; it means we can know God through Jesus; and, it teaches us that he has integrity, he is One

- How can you keep from misleading others when talking about the Trinity?