

Session 2 The Glory of God Expressed in Trinitarian Love

I. THE TRINITY: ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS

- A. The reality of the Trinity is one of the most important doctrines in the Bible. Over 70 passages in the New Testament present the Father, Son, and Spirit in deep relationship together. Today, this truth is under attack as many are seeking to blend all the religions of the world into one faith. It is impossible to blend other religions with the Trinity. Monotheistic religions (Islam and Judaism) are especially opposed to it. We must be equipped to defend this doctrine when sharing our faith and must understand some of the truths related to it in order to engage in Trinitarian conversation.
- B. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God exists as **three Persons**—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each distinct Person is fully and eternally God, yet there is **only one God**. The mystery of the Trinity is that three divine Persons dwell together forever in deep relationship as one God. All three Persons are coeternal, together, and equal. Jesus is equal to the Father, as touching His deity, yet inferior to the Father as touching His humanity.
- C. The word “*Trinity*” is not in the Bible, but its truth is. *Trinity* means “tri-unity” or “three-in-one.”
- D. Two men who helped to establish the doctrine of the Trinity were **Athanasius** (AD 293-373), Bishop of Alexandria, who suffered great resistance and persecution in defending the doctrines of the Trinity against Arian attacks, and **Augustine** (AD 354-430), Bishop of Hippo, in present-day Algeria, whose teaching on the Trinity is the most influential in history.
- E. **The Athanasian Creed** (about AD 500) is the clearest statement of faith about the Trinity. The Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds are three of the main creeds of the Church. The Athanasian Creed teaches that each Person of the Godhead is uncreated, limitless, eternal, and almighty (omnipotent); all three Persons are coeternal and equal.
- F. **The Arian heresy**: Arius, Presbyter of Alexandria, taught that Jesus was created by the Father and therefore was not God. The Council of Nicea (AD 325) declared this a heresy. Today, many speak of Jesus as a great prophet, who is empowered by God, but who is not the eternal God.
- G. **Tozer** wrote: “*Our sincerest effort to grasp the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity must remain forever futile...Some persons who reject all they cannot explain have denied that God is a Trinity. Subjecting the Most High to their cold, level-eyed scrutiny, they conclude that it is impossible that He could be both One and Three. These forget that Their whole life is enshrouded in mystery. They fail to consider that any real explanation of the simplest phenomenon in nature lies hidden in obscurity and can no more be explained than can the mystery of the Godhead.*”
- H. **Anselm** said, “*Let me seek Thee in longing...let me find Thee in love, and love Thee in finding.*”
- I. **Review**: I see 5 parts of the “intimacy process” with God—they overlap and flow together, yet it begins with *knowing* the truth mentally (Jn. 8:32). The 5 parts are *knowledge, conversation, illumination, inspiration*, and then *transformation* which is satisfying, pleasurable and unifying.

II. INDICATIONS OF THE TRINITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Indications of the Trinity can be seen in the Old Testament. The first time God speaks in Scripture (as well as at other times), He uses the plural—Us and Our (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8).

²⁶*God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...” (Gen. 1:26)*

- B. In several places in the Old Testament, God addresses God (Ps. 2:7-12; 45:6-7; 110:1; Isa. 6:8). Two distinct Persons are in view. In Psalm 45:6, the Father speaks to Jesus (quoted in Heb. 1:8).

⁶*“Your throne, O God, is forever...⁷You love righteousness...therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” (Ps. 45:6-7)*

- C. Jesus asked the Pharisees four questions to help them understand that He was the God-Man. In Psalm 110:1, David wrote, “The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Jesus pointed out that David referred to the son of David as David’s Lord, meaning David considered Him to be God as well. Psalm 110 highlights the fact of plurality and humanity within the fellowship of the Godhead.

⁴²*“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “The Son of David.”⁴³He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying:
⁴⁴“The LORD [God] said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”?”⁴⁵If David then calls Him ‘Lord [God],’ how is He his Son?” (Mt. 22:42-45)*

III. REVELATION OF THE TRINITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. There are several scriptural examples of all three Persons of the Godhead active or speaking at one event. Examples include Jesus’ baptism, when the Spirit rested on Him and the Father spoke over Him (Mt. 3:16-17); and Jesus commissioning His disciples to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the *Father* and of the *Son* and of the *Holy Spirit*” (Mt. 28:19).

- B. The doctrine of the Trinity is established on the *deity of Jesus* and the *plurality of the Godhead*. Today, these are both great stumbling blocks and sources of conflict. However, these truths are essential to Christianity and will be resisted in an increasing way as we approach Jesus’ return.

³⁰*“I and My Father are one.”³¹Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him...³³The Jews answered Him, “...For blasphemy, and because You...make Yourself God.” (Jn. 10:30-33)*

¹⁸*The Jews sought all the more to kill Him because He...said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. (Jn. 5:18)*

- C. Jesus now has two natures; He is fully God and fully man. Ian Thomas said, “*Though Jesus was never less than God, He lived on earth as though He was never more than a man.*”

- D. Jesus’ deity is established in the New Testament (Mt. 1:23; 3:3 [Isa. 40:3]; 18:20; 22:44 [Ps. 110:1]; 26:64-65 [Dan. 7:13-14]; 28:20; Mk. 1:1; Lk. 1:35; Jn. 1:1-3, 14, 18; 4:26; 5:18; 8:58; 10:30-33; 14:9; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-19; 2:9; 1 Tim. 3:16; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:2-3, 8-12; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Jn. 2:23; 4:15; Rev. 5:12-13; 19:16; 21:6; 22:13).

IV. SEVEN TRUTHS ABOUT THE TRINITY

A. Seven important truths related to the Trinity:

1. There is only one God.
2. God forever dwells in three distinct Persons who are coequal as divine Persons.
3. Each Person fully possesses all God's attributes—infinite in measure and eternal in duration.
4. Each Person enjoys Their eternal, voluntary, mutual relationship of love, humility, and unity.
5. Each Person is different in function and authority in their relationship and work.
6. Each Person's work is unified, inseparable, and interdependent with the others' work.
7. Each Person mutually dwells in the other two Persons.

B. **Summary:** One God exists forever as three distinct Persons, equal in nature as God and enjoying a deep relationship of love with each other, fully possessing the divine nature, yet differing in function and authority in their relationship and work together, while dwelling in each other.

C. **#1. *There is only one God.***

God is only one being. In His essence, He is one—His essential nature is one (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5-6, 21-22; 44:6-8). The apostles taught that there is one God (Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

¹⁹***You believe that there is one God. You do well. (Jas. 2:19)***

D. **#2. *God forever dwells in three distinct Persons who are coequal as divine Persons.***

How God with one undivided being can dwell in three Persons is beyond our full understanding. There is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Spirit. Each possesses a mind, emotions, and will (or divine intelligence, emotions such as desire, love, and joy, etc.).

1. **Coequal:** The Father, Son, and Spirit are coequal in a unity of one substance or essence as God without any inequalities. There are three Persons, yet not three gods, but *one* God.
2. **Distinctions:** Distinctions exist among them that are based upon their unique relationship to each other. The Father relates uniquely as a father to the Son and the Spirit. The Son relates uniquely as a son to the Father. The Spirit relates uniquely to release the works of the Father and Son to the earth and to apply the benefits of salvation to the believer.
3. **Forever:** For all eternity, the Father has functioned as the Father, and the Son as the Son, and the Spirit as the Spirit. God is unchangeable (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). Therefore, these distinctions are eternal and not something that began at creation or redemption. Jesus was already the Son when the Father so loved the world that He sent His Son (Jn. 3:16).

E. **#3. *Each Person fully possesses all God's attributes—infinite in measure and eternal duration.***

Each Person possesses all God's attributes (love, wisdom, power, etc.) in fullness. They possess them in an infinite measure and in eternal duration. Thus, they never increase or diminish.

- F. **#4. Each Person enjoys an eternal, voluntary, mutual relationship of love, humility, and unity.** They have a deeply satisfying and fulfilling relationship in the fellowship of the Godhead. Imagine how enjoyable fellowship in the Trinity is and how we will enjoy it.
1. **Love:** The Son loves the Father, and the Father loves the Son (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 14:31).
 2. **Humility:** They deeply delight in using their authority to serve and honor each other freely (Jn. 5:23; 8:49-54; 12:26; 13:31-32; 14:12; 17:1, 4-5, 22, 24).
 3. **Intimate:** They know each other in a deep and personal way (Mt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:10).
 4. **Voluntary:** God relates in unity by free choice and by nature. Each Person eternally chooses to be Himself in relation to the others. Each one acts by nature in relationship.
 5. **Mutual:** Each Person is equally yoked in mutual love and wholehearted commitment. Each is fully involved, fully focused, and fully committed to each other.
- G. **#5. Each Person is different in function and authority in their relationship and work.** There is equality in the Godhead, but differences in the way they relate to each other and function or work in the world. Their work includes creation, redemption, and providence (leadership over the nations). The Father's role is to direct and send. Jesus' role is to obey, pray, and do the Father's work. The Spirit's role is to apply the work of salvation to us and to anoint us for service. These differences in roles are not temporary but will last forever (1 Cor. 15:28).
- H. **#6. Each Person's work is unified, inseparable, and interdependent on the others' work.** The three Persons are one in purpose and in agreement in all that they do. They are each fully involved with every work of God (creation, the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, etc.)
- I. **#7. Each Person mutually dwells in the other Persons.** God, as three distinct Persons, is deeply united through their mutual indwelling (Jn. 10:38; 14:10-11, 20; 17:11, 21-23). This explains how three Persons can be one in heart, thought, and action, so that God acts as one and as three.
- ¹⁰**Believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me...The Father who dwells in Me does the works.** ¹¹**Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me...** (Jn. 14:10-11)
- ¹⁸**The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.** (Jn. 1:18)
- ¹³**He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.** (Jn. 3:13)
- ²¹**They all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they may be one in Us...**
- ²²**The glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one as We are one:** ²³**I in them and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one...** ²⁴**Father, I desire that they whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory...** (Jn. 17:21-24)

Note: Some of these notes were influenced by Grudem's *Systematic Theology*; chapter 14 on the Trinity