

X Marks The Spot

*³Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.
(Jude 1:3. ESV)*

¹⁷I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. (Romans 16:17. ESV)

¹But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. (Titus 2:1. ESV)

Unity And Diversity Part 2

January 27th, 2013

2 Corinthians 13:13 (14)

Ephesians 2:17-19

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! We are at week 4 of a 14 week series called “X-Marks The Spot” in which we are exploring some of the real and seeming tensions within the immensity of God’s character and identity. Now I want to tell you off the top that I understand that some of you do not come to church for lessons in theology. I understand that and I know that the last 3 weeks have been far more intellectually demanding than most weeks here at this church. So let me tell you why we are doing this. First of all we are doing this because we just spent a year reading through the Bible from cover to cover and when you do that; when you are exposed to the fullness of God’s self-disclosure you become aware of these tensions – you see a passage where God is spoken of as Sovereign and electing and then you read another passage and God is spoken of as holding human beings morally responsible for their decisions and those truths, equally affirmed HAVE TO BE RECONCILED in some way – they have to be understood in relation to each other. If you don’t do that, then you will never be capable of a deeper reading of Scripture. Listen to me friends we are doing this work so that your next reading of God’s Word will be richer, deeper and more transforming than your last. Once you have grid for apprehending the majesty and immensity of God in Scripture, then you can go deeper and see more in each individual passage of the Bible. So that’s the first reason we are doing this.

The second reason is because the Bible teaches us again and again that right thinking, about God and about ourselves, is the pre-requisite for right living with respect to God and towards one another. You see many people today in our fast paced, drive through world want to skip the theology and move right on to the practical. Don't tell me how to think, just tell me what to do. Talk about personal finance and how to be happy even though married and skip all of this "Trinity" and "theology"; I'm not interested in that. But the Bible says that you can't live right before God and with your fellow man until you confront the truth of who God is and who you are. The Bible says theology precedes and predicts behaviour. You have to change your mind to change your life. So turn on your minds, take a big sip of coffee and strap in because we are going deep today and we make no apology for that.

First of all this morning we need to do a little bit of review. This is part 2 of our message on the Trinity and many of you were not here for part one. I am assuming that was due to the very bad weather we had last Sunday and not in response to our White Table conversation two weeks ago. Let me quickly review what we talked about last Sunday.

Reviewing The Trinity

The classic summary of what the Bible teaches about the Trinity is the statement: One God in three persons. We believe that the Bible teaches that God is one in essence or being or substance and three in persons or if you are talking to theologians, three in hypostases. There is a oneness or unity to God and also a threeness or diversity. Hence the word TRINITY. TRI – 3, UNITY – 1. TRI-UNITY or Trinity.

Now in order to put a fence around that to keep us from straying into heresy we have historically made use of 7 statements, let me read those to you again:

- 1. There is only one God**
- 2. The Father is God**
- 3. The Son is God**
- 4. The Holy Spirit is God**
- 5. The Father is not the Son**
- 6. The Son is not the Holy Spirit**

7. The Holy Spirit is not the Father¹

If you believe those 7 statements then you believe in the Christian conception of God. Catholics believe that, Protestants believe that, Eastern Orthodox Christians believe that and Coptic Christians believe that. This is a complicated doctrine but it is not a controversial doctrine.

Last week we ended our discussion by applying this doctrine to two specific contexts that are singled out in Scripture as being explicitly Trinitarian in nature. We talked about marriage and we talked about the church. A Trinitarian marriage – marriage that reflects the inner character of God - needs to manifest DIVERSITY – one man and one woman – and it needs to reflect UNITY – unity in body, unity with respect to mutual dignity and worth. A Trinitarian marriage also needs to manifest functional subordination – the wife delighting to submit to the husband just as the Son delights to submit to the Father and it also needs to manifest other exaltation – the Spirit delights to exalt the Son and so each member of the marriage must delight in lifting up and exalting the other.

We agreed that Trinitarian church needs to reflect unity in confession – we love to hold the same truths and doctrine - and diversity in membership. Male and female, old and young, rich and poor, black and white, tongue speakers and wisdom seekers are all welcome and needed in the household of God. Amen? Amen. That was last week, and last week I told you that this week we were going to talk about two common heresies and also about why this doctrine is good and how we should teach it to our children. That's not going to happen. As I began to write this message I got lost in my own delight in the inner character of God and I lost my taste for distortions. I am not going to talk to you about heresy today. I'll send you something during the week. As for teaching the truths we've just summarized to your kids, let me give you three guidelines:

1. Teach your kids what the Bible says about God.
2. Avoid analogies that are not in the Bible. They are all deeply flawed.
3. Embrace mystery. Your kids don't need a God they can fully understand.

¹ John Owen in *The Trinity Vindicated* said “that God is one; that this one God is Father, Son and Holy Ghost; that the Father is the Father of the Son; and the Son, the Son of the Father; and the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Father and the Son; and that, in respect of their mutual relations, they are distinct from each other.”

They need the God of the Bible. They need the immensity and the majesty of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So let me tell you about why we all need this doctrine. Let me tell you why this doctrine is good and leads to life. I want to spend our time this morning delighting in the Trinity.

Delighting In The Trinity

I said already that the doctrine of the Trinity is not controversial. Everybody who is truly Christian by any measure or standard has to believe in the Trinity. This is not what divides us from the Catholics for example and as a result of that the great reformers didn't talk much about the Trinity. They were concerned to rescue the doctrines of salvation from the hierarchy and ritualism of the Catholic Church so they didn't write a great deal about the Trinity because everybody agreed on the Trinity. But then our grandparents, the English Puritans who were themselves the children of the Reformers, they wrote an enormous amount on the Trinity – not so much to defend it, but rather to explain how it is the source of all Christian delight. You see doctrine is never to be separated from doxology – from praise and worship. We seek to know God so that we might love God and delight in him. Theology done right should result in praise. Now obviously, we don't have time to reflect at length on these things, I want you to think of today's sermon as like a Table of Contents to the topic of Delighting in the Trinity – I mean only to introduce things that I want you to meditate on in your times of quiet. Let me introduce you to the two primary reasons we delight in the doctrine of the Trinity.

We delight in the doctrine of the Trinity because...

1. It preserves the glory of God and the contingency of man

Let me explain what I mean by that. When the concept of Trinity fades in our mind – I don't mean that we reject it or deny it I mean only that we forget about it or fail to reflect on it – when that happens we inevitably begin to define God in relation to us. Let me give you a quick example. The Bible says that God is love; how do you hear that? See I'm guessing that if you are a typical 21st century Evangelical then you hear that in terms of God with respect to man. God is love in your ears means God loves people. But that isn't actually what the Bible means

when it says God is love. Listen to those words in the context in which they are given in Holy Scripture.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for **love is from God**, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love**. ⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and **sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. (1 John 4:7-10. ESV)

There is a development there that begins with the fact that love is an internal quality within God himself. Love is FROM God, God is LOVE. John is saying that God is love INSIDE himself and so any human experience of love is CONTINGENT – that is DEPENDENT upon some condescending work of God. Let me put that into plain English. The Bible is saying that INSIDE God’s character is the place where love is. God loves in himself. Inside the Trinity there is eternal love and community. If there is any love down here, it is because God condescended to bring something of his own internal character down into the realm of men. That is what John is saying. God is love. Inside the Godhead resides LOVE. God condescended to love us by sending his Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. The word propitiation means “favourable”. John is saying: God is love inside himself. He desired to lift us up into that love. So he sent down his own love in the person of his Son Jesus Christ to lift us up into the Divine Favour – into the Divine relationship of love. That is propitiation – the sacrifice that enables our communion with the God-head. Lifting us out from under wrath and catching us up into Divine Love and Favour.

Here is why that is important, when we forget the inner character of God we begin to define love in self referential terms. We begin to think that God was lonely – that he was all alone up there in heaven and that he was quite bored and unfulfilled and so he created us so that he could have LOVE. But that makes a Divine Attribute dependent upon a human response – that is to turn the universe upside down. On the contrary God needs nothing from humanity – God cannot need because he is all sufficient. He never needed you. He had loving relationship inside himself before any human being walked upon the earth. Love does not depend in anyway upon humanity – love depends only upon Almighty God. Let me bring this down to street level – you have no bargaining power with your Creator. He doesn’t need you. You cannot hold him hostage by withholding your love. You can only destroy yourself by withholding your love, you cannot destroy or in any way diminish God’s own love.

When we begin to forget the Trinity God shrinks in our minds and becomes a party to be negotiated with. A centre of gravity perhaps, but not THE CENTRE of GRAVITY. A SOURCE perhaps, but not THE SOURCE of all that is good in the world. We begin to speak of God as a human appendage – an idol that we can shape, carry and change. But that is not who God is. Theologians talk about God’s aseity. That is a big word we don’t hear much anymore, it means God’s self existence. God exists in inner, self contained, totally fulfilling community. You and I are totally unnecessary to God. Let that sink in. He can be all that he is without you. He doesn’t need you in order to be loving, true, merciful, kind, gentle, gracious, authoritative or just. He is all of those things inside himself. You lose that and you lose the glory of God. You lose that and you lose perspective on yourself. You lose glory for God and humility for man without which all of life is warped and ruined.

Secondly, we delight in the doctrine of the Trinity because...

2. It preserves the basis for all communion with God and the source of all enjoyment of God

You remember last week that I told you that the fullness of the doctrine of the Trinity is something that the Scriptures reveal progressively. There are very strong hints and indications of Trinity on page 1 of your Bible in the story of creation but the doctrine of the Trinity does not become explicit until the story of our redemption. Our grandparents believed very strongly that you could not understand your own salvation if you did not understand the Trinity. In the old Baptist Confession they said:

“This doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and our comfortable dependence on Him”. – The Baptist Confession, Chapter 2, Paragraph 3.

Let me try and show you what they meant. Our grandparents believed that it was the love of God the Father which initiated our salvation. Do you remember 1 John 3:1 from Sunday school?

¹Behold **what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us**, that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1. NKJV)

The starting place of your salvation is not your superior intellect in recognizing Christ, it doesn't start with the mercy of Jesus on the cross and it doesn't start with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your heart – it starts with the Love of the Father who chose you to be his child from before the foundation of the world! If that truth doesn't stop the beating of your heart then you are dead to all the things of God! God chose you – God loved you from before the foundation of the world. Listen carefully to what Paul says in Ephesians 3:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ⁵ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 3:3-6. NRSV)

Paul says that God the FATHER chose us before the foundation of the world to live before him in love. Do you hear that people? God chose you and loved you before the foundation of the world. Your salvation was born in the heart of a Father who loves you.

Our grandparents believed also that our salvation was effected by the GRACE of the Son – you can hear that in the verses quoted above. Paul blessed God the Father who initiated our salvation but he consistently ascribes AGENCY to the Son. The Father has blessed us IN CHRIST, the Father chose us IN CHRIST, the Father destined us for adoption as his children THROUGH CHRIST, to the praise of the Father's grace bestowed on us in CHRIST the Beloved of the Father. Our salvation was initiated by the love of the Father but it was executed by the grace of the Son. Now last week I introduced very carefully the Scripturally sanctioned analogy of marital intimacy and I need to call upon that again to make known to you the glory of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ. I did not invent this, this is as old as the church, this was the favourite analogy of John Owen our great Puritan grandfather and it requires of us a bit of maturity but if we can handle it there is no better way of making these truths plain. Owen says that the communication of God's grace through Christ is very much analogous to the conjugal love between a husband and wife. When a husband gives himself freely to the wife he communicates into her body the very seeds of life. So it is with Christ. When we communicate – or have communion with Christ he injects the seeds of life into our souls. Specifically he injects three graces unto life. Justification – the right standing before God – the reality and the awareness of our innocence before God in Christ. Adoption – the increasing awareness of our familial relationship with God. We come to understand that we are not God's enemies we are his SONS

and DAUGHTERS in CHRIST! And thirdly the grace of sanctification. In communion with Christ Jesus injects into us the grace of sanctification – that new profound impetus towards the holiness of God. The new, growing, powerful inclination in the direction of Jesus Christ and his own moral righteousness. These are the graces of life that are injected into us the Bride of Christ through conjugal communion with our husband. Do you see? When you are JOINED to Christ at conversion these graces flood your soul. Each time you renew that union through conjugal communion – worship, prayer, meditation on the Word – those graces grow into all the things of eternal life. Our salvation is initiated in the love of the Father and executed by the grace of the Son. It is mediated by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Look at 2 Corinthians 13:14:

¹⁴The **grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**, and **the love of God**, and **the communion of the Holy Spirit** be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14. NKJV)

Our grandparents believed that “the foundation of all our communion with the Holy Ghost consists in his mission, or sending to be our comforter, by Jesus Christ.” (John Owen, *Communion With God in Works 2:222*) Do you understand what he is saying? Do you remember when Jesus was telling the disciples that he would have to go back and leave them for a season in order to return to the Father? Put yourself in that place. The disciples had begun to glory in their communion in the things of God. Jesus the Son had begun to open to them all of the glory of God and now he is telling them that this season must come to an end, he must return to the Father and you can imagine their sense of loss. You can imagine their sense of desperation – they are desperate to remain in the Divine Community into which they have been introduced by Christ. And so what does Jesus promise them?

⁶But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.

⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. (John 16:6-7. KJV)

The Holy Spirit is sent by Jesus from the Father to be our Comforter, to maintain in us the experience of communion with the Godhead. How does he do this? Our grandparents used to speak of 9 ways that the Holy Spirit functions as our Comforter:

1. The Holy Spirit helps the believer remember the words of Christ and teaches us what they mean.
2. The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ.
3. The Holy Spirit pours out the love of God the Father in the Christian's heart.
4. The Holy Spirit witnesses to the believer that he or she is a child of God.
5. The Holy Spirit seals faith in the Christian.
6. The Holy Spirit is the earnest (or down payment or guarantee) of our inheritance.
7. The Holy Spirit anoints the believer.
8. The Holy Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in the believer's heart.
9. The Holy Spirit becomes in the believer the Spirit of supplication.²

By means of all these things, the Holy Spirit is the immediate agent of our fellowship with the Father and the Son. In the Holy Spirit the believer enjoys present tense communion with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit grows in us our awareness of and joy in the love of the Father and the grace of the Son.

Now obviously if we lose this we lose everything. If we lose the Trinity, if this doctrine fades in our thinking we lose the love of the Father, we lose all grace and power, we lose all comfort and joy. This is no mere doctrine, this is not mere theological gibber jabber, this is the root and marrow of Christian life! Please allow me one more quotation from one of our spiritual grandparents, I only do this because they thought more and taught more on this in their day than we do in our day and frankly I find my own thoughts too small for this topic. John Owen said this about why we must study and delight in the Trinity:

“This revelation (of the Trinity) is made unto us, not that our minds might be possessed with the notion of it, but that we may know aright how to place our trust in him, how to obey him and live unto him, how to obtain and exercise communion with him, **until we come to the enjoyment of him.**” (John Owen, *Pneumatologia* in *Works* 3:158)

We delight in the doctrine of the Trinity because it preserves the glory of God and the contingency of man – that's what we said first – and we delight in the doctrine of the Trinity because it is the basis of all communion with God and the source of all enjoyment of God. Now, let me ask you my friends: what is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. You can't do that if you lose your delight in the Trinity.

² John Owen, *Communion With God* in *Works* 2:236-49.

I talk to so many people today who have no idea what it means to glorify God and no idea what it means to enjoy him. Our grandparents knew about these things; J.R.R. Tolkien knew about these things. There is a story in the written version of the Return of the King that never made it into the movie. Peter Jackson is not a Christian and so I don't think he understood what Tolkien was trying to say in every instance. You have to understand Tolkien the theologian to understand Tolkien the writer and so several things that are quite prominent in the books never make it onto the movie screen. In the book The Return of the King when the hobbits return to the Shire after all their adventures they realize that they have grown a half size larger than all other hobbits. Having been caught up in the great things of Providence and history they themselves have grown in size and stature. That is never mentioned in the movies. What Tolkien was trying to say is that exposure to big things, being caught up into big things ENLARGES US; it shows that we ourselves have been part of BIG and WEIGHTY matters. This is what the Bible is trying to say. The Bible is saying that when we are caught up into the immensity of God through the ministry of the ENTIRE TRINITY – when we are included in the MAJESTY of God's person, when we are made partakers of his OWN GLORY we ourselves give evidence of enlargement. When we have been partakers of his Divine Nature our lives give testimony to God's own IMMENSITY and GRAVITY – WE GLORIFY GOD as we enjoy him forever.

Do you want to know how to glorify God? Delight in his own inner character. Explore, discover and immerse yourself in the eternal electing love of God the Father. Swim in it. Drown in it. Give yourself in regular and frequent conjugal communion to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Grow in your experience of your own innocence before God because of the propitiation of Jesus Christ on the cross injected into your soul. Let the awareness of that flow through your and change everything about how you feel about yourself. Do you live too much in guilt and self doubt? You need to have communion with Christ! You need to feel the warm seed of justification flooding the depths of your person. Delight in the reality of your adoption as God's precious son or daughter. Think upon your status in Christ, meditate upon your inheritance, glory in your security and belonging. Partner with the new found impetus in your soul towards the holiness of God. Actively reflect upon how you can work with the seed of this grace to mortify your old fleshly desires and grow in sanctification by one degree of glory to the next. Listen to the inner voice of the Spirit drawing you deeper into the Word of God, highlighting truths for application and reflection. Be led by the Holy Spirit into deeper contemplation and more soulful

worship and response. Do those things and you will glorify God. He will be the centre of your universe and you will grow. You will not stay a hobbit. You will be almost an entirely different order of being. And all will see and know that you have been with God.

Do you wish to know what it is to have joy? We talk about joy all the time and so many of us have no idea what it is. We think it is happiness, but happiness has to do with circumstances and true Christian joy is held by God's children in good times and bad. We quote verses that speak of joy without ever knowing what they mean. We say:

the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10. ESV)

But what does that mean? How is the joy of the Lord our strength? The joy of the Lord is the delight of God's inner person that we are lifted up into by the love of the Father, the grace of the Son and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In that place – the place of God's inner delight in himself - we are made strong. Caught up into that place, beholding the glory of the Lord we are transformed by one degree of glory to the next. This is the work of the Spirit in us. Taking us to that place. Holding us in that place and in that place we are hobbits no more. We are kings and joint heirs with Jesus. We were made for this place. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.