



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Person of the Holy Spirit, Part I

The Trinity

John 16:5-15

May 14, 2006

BACKGROUND

- ❑ There is likely more confusion concerning the Holy Spirit than any other Person of the Trinity.
- ❑ However, any thorough study of the Holy Spirit **MUST** begin with an understanding of the Trinity.
- ❑ The term Trinity, although never found in Scripture, simply means “Tri – Unity”
- ❑ Most Christians will say they believe in it, but could they defend, not only its foundation in Scripture, but its application in our lives today?
- ❑ This is, most certainly, a doctrine that we should not only defend, but *contend* for.

I love the Trinity. Does that sound strange to you? For most people, it *should* sound strange. Think about it: when was the last time you heard anyone say such a thing? We often hear ‘I love Jesus’ or ‘I love God,’ but how often does anyone say, ‘I love the Trinity’? You even hear ‘I love the cross’ or ‘I love the Bible,’ but you don’t hear ‘I love the Trinity.’ Why not?

Someone might say, ‘Well, the Trinity is a doctrine and you don’t love doctrines.’ But in fact we do. ‘I love justification’ or ‘I love the second coming of Christ’ would make perfect sense. What’s more, the Trinity isn’t just a doctrine any more than saying ‘I love the deity of Christ’ makes Christ just a doctrine.

So why don’t we talk about loving the Trinity? Most Christians do not understand what the term means and have only a vague idea of the reality it represents. We don’t love things that we consider very complicated, obtuse, or just downright difficult. We are more comfortable saying ‘I love the old rugged cross’ because we *think* we have a firm handle on what that actually means and represents. But we confess how little we understand about the Trinity by how little we talk about it and how little emotion it evokes in our hearts.

James White, *The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief*, pp. 13-14

The doctrine of the Trinity is the most immense of all the doctrines of religion. It is the foundation of theology. Christianity, in the last analysis, is Trinitarianism. Take out of the New Testament the person of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and there is no God left. Take out of the Christian consciousness the thoughts and affections that relate to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and there is no Christian consciousness left. The Trinity is the constitutive idea of evangelical theology, and the formative idea of the evangelical experience. The immensity of the doctrine makes it of necessity a mystery; but a mystery which like night enfolds in its unfathomed depths the bright stars – points of light, compared with which there is no light so keen and so glittering. Mysterious as it is, the Trinity of Divine Revelation is the doctrine that holds in it all the hope of man; for it holds within it the infinite pity of the Incarnation and the infinite mercy of the Redemption.

William G.T. Shedd

- There are three primary tenets of the Doctrine of the Trinity that we will analyze:

“Within the One Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” White, p. 26

1. **There is One God**
2. **There are Three Persons within the one Being that is God**
3. **The Three Persons are Coequal and Coeternal**

1. One God

- In the Old Testament, Judaism was, arguably, the only monotheistic religion in the world.
 - This is clear all the way back to Creation in Genesis.
 - This is equally clear in the Exodus (Exodus 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”)
 - This is, possibly, the clearest in the *Shema*: “**Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!**”
 - In Isaiah 44:6, the LORD says, “there is no God besides Me...”
 - Also in Isaiah 44, the prophet records the condemnation of the false, created gods, revealing that ONLY YAHWEH is the ONE true God.
- The New Testament is equally monotheistic in its teaching.
 - In the teachings of Jesus:
 - In Matthew 23:9, Jesus states, “for One is your Father, who is in heaven...”
 - In Mark 10:18, He says, “no one is good, except God alone.”
 - In Mark 12:29, He repeats the *Shema*: “Hear O Israel! The LORD our God is one LORD.”
 - In John 5:44, Jesus says, “the glory that comes from the only God...”
 - In John 17:3, Jesus says [to the Father], “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God.”

- In the teachings of the Church:
 - In Romans 3:30, the Apostle Paul says, “the God who will justify...is one.”
 - He also says, in 1 Corinthians 8:4,6, “there is no God but one...there is one God.”
 - In Galatians 3:20, “God is one.”
 - In Ephesians 4:6, Paul says, “one God and Father of all...”
 - In 1 Timothy 1:17, he says, “the only God”
 - In 1 Timothy 2:5, he says, “there is one God”
 - In James 2:19, “God is one”
 - In James 4:12, he says, “[there is] one lawgiver and judge...”
 - In Jude 25, “the only God our Savior.”

2. Three Persons

- Whereas there is perfect unity in the Godhead, for God is ONE, there is also an eternal plurality of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - In Four texts in the Old Testament, the writers use Plural Pronouns for God:
 - Genesis 1:26: “let **us** make man in **our** image...”
 - Genesis 3:22: “man has become like one of **us**...”
 - Genesis 11:7 [Tower of Babel]: “Let **us** go down and see...”
 - Isaiah 6:8 [Isaiah’s Vision]: “who will go for **us**?”
 - In the Psalms, the writer uses language that describes “My Son” and “My Lord”
 - In Psalm 2:7, it states, “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”
 - The New Testament quotes this Verse in defense of the full deity of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5)
 - Psalm 110:1 states, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’”
 - The Lord Jesus uses this Verse in defense of His own deity (Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)
 - In the New Testament, there is also a clear distinction in the Persons of the Trinity:
 - Jesus refers to God the Father as someone other than Himself.
 - Jesus prays to the Father in John 17.
 - Jesus commends His spirit to the Father when He dies.
 - Jesus is addressed and acted upon by God the Father throughout His earthly ministry.
 - Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” (denoting both unity in essence and purpose as well as distinction in Persons)

- We get a glimpse of the equality of the Persons of the Trinity in certain phrases in the New Testament.
 - The Baptismal Formula in the Great Commission:
 - “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19)
 - The Benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14
 - “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [the Son], and the love of God [the Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”
 - Certain Affirmations or Confessions of Faith
 - Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit [Holy Spirit], just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord [the Son], one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”
 - 1 Peter 1:1-2: “Peter, and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those ...who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit [the Holy Spirit], to obey Jesus Christ [the Son] and be sprinkled with His blood...”

- Likely, the most well-known Trinitarian formula in the New Testament is the one in the Great Commission: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, some may think that this indicates, at least to some degree, an order of importance: The Father is greater than the Son; the Son is greater than the Holy Spirit. However, this order (F, S, H.S.) is not the most common order in the New Testament.

- In fact, every combination of Father and Son and Holy Spirit is present in the New Testament.
 - God [Father] – Son – Spirit [Holy Spirit] (Romans 1:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-14)
 - God [Father] – Spirit [Holy Spirit] – Christ [Son] (Titus 3:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2)
 - Christ [Son] – God [the Father] – Spirit [Holy Spirit] (2 Corinthians 13:14)
 - Christ [Son] – Spirit [Holy Spirit] – God [Father] (Romans 8:1-4; 1 Corinthians 6:11)
 - Spirit [Holy Spirit] – Christ [Son] – God [Father] (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Ephesians 4:4-6; Ephesians 5:18-20)
 - Spirit [Holy Spirit] – God [Father] – Christ [Son] (Jude 20:21)

“The fact that within the Godhead the three designations occur in various order implies their ontological equality...The absence of a fixed order of persons...suggests the essential coequality of the Father, Son, and [Holy] Spirit.” (Lewis and Demarst, *Integrative Theology* I: 265, 269)

- Throughout the New Testament, there are events which can clearly be classified as “Triadic”, thus reflecting the Trinity:
 - The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2:21-38; especially 27-28)

- Simeon came “in the Spirit” [the Holy Spirit]
- Simeon took Jesus into his arms [the Son]
- Simeon blessed God [the Father]
- The Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1-9-11)
 - Jesus [the Son] was the one in the water being baptized by John the Baptist.
 - The Spirit [the Holy Spirit] descended as a dove upon Jesus.
 - The Father speaks from heaven to/about the Son.
- The Upper Room discourse (John 14:16, 26; 15:26)
 - Jesus [the Son] speaks of His return to the Father
 - Jesus also speaks of the sending of the Holy Spirit
- The Atonement

“how much more will the blood of **Christ**, who through the eternal **Spirit** offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living **God?**” Hebrews 9:14

- Christ [the Son] offers Himself
- The Offering is made through the eternal Spirit [the Holy Spirit]
- The Offering is made to God [the Father].
- The Resurrection
 - It is attributed to the Father (Acts 2:32)
 - It is attributed to the Son (John 10:17-18)
 - It is attributed to the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:4)
- The ‘Sending’ of the Son and the Holy Spirit
 - The Father sends the Son in His name, and the Son is **functionally** subject to the Father
 - The Father sends the Spirit in the name of the Son, and the Spirit is **functionally** subject, or subordinate, to the Father.
 - The Holy Spirit is sent by the Son, and is **functionally** subordinate to the Son.

✳ With respect to ontological equality within the Godhead, it is essential to note that each person possess every divine attribute in equal measure. In other words, when we say that God is sovereign, we mean that the Father is sovereign, and the Son is sovereign, and the Holy Spirit is sovereign, and neither one is *more* sovereign than the others.

⇒ **Yet, why is the Trinity an essential element of the Christian faith – why is it so important?**

1. Knowing God

It makes no sense whatsoever in human relations to say ‘I love my wife’ while doing our best to remain ignorant of her personality, likes, dreams, etc. And even worse, if my wife has put forth the effort to make sure that I can know these things about her, and I go about *ignoring* her efforts, what does that say about how much I really love her?

White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, p. 16

- If we, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, desire to *truly* know God, we will desire to know Him **as He has revealed Himself to us: as Trinity.**

2. Understanding Perfect Love

Within the triune Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), God has been uppermost in His own affections for all eternity. Therefore, God has been supremely happy in the fellowship of the Trinity.”
 John Piper, *Desiring God*, p.33

- If the Trinity did not exist, then God would be **dependent** upon His creation for the exercise of one of His attributes: Love.
- The reason for this is because the Bible says “God is Love.” Love requires two objects: (1) the one who loves; and (2) the one who is loved.
- If there were not eternal Persons in the Trinity, then God would only be able to say that He is love after Creation.
- Yet, since God eternally exists as three distinct persons, then He we can say that God is eternally Love.

3. Understanding Perfect Humility

- When we begin to study and understand the Trinity [although we will never *fully* understand it], we begin to see what true humility is.
- In the Incarnation, Jesus, who, “although He existed in the form of God” [i.e. He is fully God], “emptied Himself” [i.e. gave up the voluntary exercise of certain divine attributes in accordance with His human nature] “taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:5-11)
- Therefore, if Jesus Christ, who is fully God, equal in essence with the Father, voluntarily submitted Himself to the will of the Father, what does this say about our human relationships and the humility that we should exercise?

4. Marriage / Family Relationships

- The Bible states that wives are to submit to their husbands – yet they are equal to their husbands.
- How can we see what this type of ontological equality; yet, functional subordination looks like? – The Trinity.
- Only in marriage do two persons become one in body, mind, and spirit (1 Corinthians 6:16-20; Ephesians 5:31)

- This is why 1 Corinthians 11:3 states, “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God [the Father] is the head of Christ.”
- This is why I believe every biblical study on marriage should begin with a study of the Trinity – it is the basis of every human relationship!

5. Relationships in the Church

- Also in the church, there are “many members of one body” (1 Corinthians 12:12).
- How can the church ultimately know how to be diverse, yet one? – The Trinity.
- As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have gathered together in this local assembly, with each of us possessing certain gifts.
- All of us are ontologically equal, yet there is to be, biblically, a certain level of functional subordination.

6. Salvation

- Our salvation depends directly on the existence of the Trinity. In other words, if there is no Trinity, there is no salvation.
- As Wayne Grudem notes, “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. Jesus speaks of the ‘Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name’ (John 14:26), but also says that He Himself will send the Holy Spirit, for He says, ‘If I go, I will send Him to you’ (John 16:7).”
- Also, in order to satisfy the justice of God [one of His eternal attributes] there had to be an [substitutionary] object of God’s wrath [the Son].
- Further, that object had to be fully God, in order to satisfy the requirements of a Holy God, as well as bearing His wrath to the end. He also had to be fully man in order to be our substitute/representative.

7. Understanding the Gospel

The Gospel is the means by which the Father, in eternal love and mercy, saves men through the redeeming work of the Son, Jesus Christ, and draws them to Himself by the power and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel, as it is proclaimed in Scripture, is Trinitarian. Remove the Father and you have no Gospel. Remove the Son, and the Gospel ceases to exist. Remove the Spirit, and the Gospel has not existence.

There is no separating the work of the triune God in salvation from the truth of the Trinity itself. White, *Forgotten Trinity*, 195

Today – as in every generation – it is stunning to watch the shift away from God as the all-satisfying gift of God's love. It is stunning how seldom God himself is proclaimed as the greatest gift of the gospel. But the Bible teaches that the best and final gift of God's love is the enjoyment of God's beauty. *God is the Gospel*, John Piper

- Since the Trinity is necessary for our salvation, there is no Gospel apart from it either.
- Yet, one of the tragedies of evangelism today is that we ignore the greatest gift of God, which we receive on account of the Trinity: God Himself.
- Too many of us view the Gospel and the salvation that comes from it as eternal life – with *or without* God.
- In other words, many professing Christians would rather commune with deceased loved one in heaven than God Himself.

8. Worship

...God has appeared glorious to me on account of the Trinity. It has made me have exalting thoughts of God, that he subsists in three person: the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced, have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate, but in a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel. Jonathan Edwards

- How does our knowledge of God – as Triune in His nature – transform our worship?
- Is our worship Trinitarian?

To know this God, who both condescends to share all that we are and makes us share in all that He is in Jesus Christ, is to be lifted up in His Spirit to share in God's own self-knowing and self-loving until we are enabled to apprehend Him in some real measure in Himself beyond anything that we are capable of in ourselves. It is to be lifted out of ourselves, as it were, into God, until we know Him and love Him and enjoy Him in His eternal Reality as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in such a way that the Trinity enters into the fundamental fabric of our thinking of Him and constitutes the basic grammar of our worship and knowledge of the One God."

Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, p. 155