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Matthew 28:19 “The Triune God”

Intro. Today I am going to do something that I have never done in 40 years of ministry. I am going to preach an entire message on the subject of the Trinity. That’s the belief that the one true God is three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. To meditate on the three Persons of the Godhead is to walk on holy ground, yet let us do so this morning.

Some conclude that it is impossible that God could be One and at the same time be three Persons, so to speak. Yet just because our finite human minds cannot figure out the mysteries of God doesn’t make them not true. Science has learned much about the mysteries of the physical world, but science cannot fathom the depths of Deity. In Job 11:7 the question is asked, "Can you search out the deep things of God?" God said in Isa. 55:9, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” Deut. 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever....” Romans 11:33-34 says, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (see also 1 Cor. 2:16). The concept of a Triune God is more than difficult to comprehend—it’s impossible to comprehend, for the simple reason that we are talking about God, and we have nothing in our world that has a corresponding existence. The closest would be man himself, for he is made in the image of God. Though I will attempt to demonstrate and explain the Trinity this morning, it is a doctrine that ultimately must be accepted by faith. The doctrine of the Trinity is truth for the heart. As A.W. Tozer said, “Love and faith are at home in the mystery of the Godhead. Let reason kneel in reverence outside,” that is, outside God’s holy presence. So when I speak of the Trinity today, I am speaking of truth that is revealed by God in Scripture, and not something invented in the mind of man.

Now let’s delve into this subject by considering first of all:

I. THE EVIDENCE FOR THE TRINITY

The word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, so how can we say it is a biblical doctrine? The Church has not hesitated to teach the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a doctrine that has been consistently held with few exceptions from the earliest days of the church. For example, Tertullian (160-215) wrote, "We define that there are two, the Father and the Son, and three with the Holy Spirit, and this number is made by the pattern of salvation . . . [which] brings about unity in trinity, interrelating the three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” This was the first use of the term found in the writings of the church fathers. It is a theological word used to describe the scriptural revelation that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one God.

During the Arian controversy of the fourth century, the Church fathers (many of them maimed and scarred by the physical violence suffered in earlier persecutions) met at Nicaea and adopted a statement of faith, one section of which runs:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, The Only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten of Him before all ages, God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made,

Being of one Substance with the Father, By whom all things were made.

I believe that the one self-existent, infinite God has revealed Himself in Scripture as being three distinct persons. It is possible for God to be a tri-personality even though He is one in essence and unity.

The primary problem with the doctrine of the Trinity is the clear fact that the Bible consistently teaches that there is but one God. Dt. 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one," and Jesus Himself quoted from that verse (Mark 12:29). How could one God be at the same time God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? Even though the doctrine of the Tri-unity of God is difficult to comprehend, it is taught in Scripture and it must be accepted by faith. Let's look at some of the scriptural evidence that God is three and one:

A. All Three Persons Are Mentioned Together - The Scriptures mention the three in association with each other in the same verse or text. My opening text was Mt. 28:19, where Jesus says one aspect of making disciples is baptizing them "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Note that the word "name" is singular, for there is one God. 2 Cor. 13:14 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." The apostle Paul said in 1 Tim. 3:16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit...." The triune God is clearly seen at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:1-17). When God the Son was baptized, the Heavenly Father spoke from heaven and the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ as a dove.

When St. Patrick was seeking to convert the people of Ireland, they had trouble accepting the doctrine of the Trinity. So he used the clover to help them understand. As three peddles are one plant, so God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One God.

B. All Three Persons Work As One - In the Scriptures the three Persons are shown to act in harmonious unity in all the mighty works that are wrought throughout the universe. The Persons of the Godhead, being one, have one will. They work always together, and never one smallest act is done by one without the instant acquiescence of the other two. Every act of God is accomplished by the Trinity in Unity. Jesus said in John 5:17, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

Let me give you some examples of all three persons of the Trinity working as one. All three were active in creation. Gen. 1:1-2 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." The word translated "God" is *Elohim*, which is actually a plural form of the Hebrew word for God, which fits the concept of the Trinity. Here we see both God the Father and God the Spirit working in creation. Likewise, Job 26:13 says, "By His Spirit He adorned the heavens...." What about God the Son? Jn. 1:3 says of God's Son, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." Likewise, Col. 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, All things were created through Him and for Him." Evidently God the Father created all things through the His Son.

All three were involved in the work of redemption. Probably the most beautiful description of the work of atonement is found in Hebrews 9:14, where it is stated that "Christ, ... through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God...." and there we behold the three Persons operating together. Another example is 1 Peter 1:2, where Peter says we were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience

and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” It is been said that God the Father planned our salvation, God the Son purchased our salvation, and God the Holy Spirit applies salvation to our hearts.

The resurrection of Christ is likewise attributed variously to the Father (Acts 2:32), to the Son (John 10:17, 18), and to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:4).

We normally think of the blessed truth that God dwells in His people by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:17). Rom. 8:9 says, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you....” Yet the rest of that verse says, “Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” Yes, Christ indwells the believer as well (Jn. 14:18, 20). So does the Heavenly Father. Jesus said in John 14:23, “If anyone loves Me, ... My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”

We can contrast such unity in purpose and work with the reality of marriage. When a couple marries, Gen. 2:24 says, “they shall become one flesh,” the two become one. Yet how often do two people in a marriage work together in complete harmony as one? Two separate individuals cannot achieve the kind of unity that exists within the Godhead, for God is truly One.

So we must conclude that the three persons of the Godhead are truly one.

C. All Three Persons Are Identified As God - The doctrine of the Trinity is also a deduction from the fact that on the one hand, God is One. Yet all 3 persons of the Godhead are divine, sharing equally in the attributes of deity.

There is no argument that God the Father is God. He is called “God the Father” 16 times in the New Testament (John 6:27; 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:24; Gal. 1:1; etc.)

What about Jesus Christ? He is God Incarnate, God the Son. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father....” In His incarnation the Son veiled His deity most the of the time, but He did not void it. Jesus said in John 14:9, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father....” He does the works of God, such as creation (v.3), and giving life (v.4), and many other works that only God could do. He has the attributes of deity, including the fact the He is eternal. Jesus said in John 8:58, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” The apostle Thomas was certainly convinced of the deity of Christ. He said to the risen Jesus in Jn. 20:28, “My Lord and my God!” In Tit. 2:13 Paul called Jesus “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Based on a rule of Greek grammar, it is highly likely that Paul was saying the Jesus is indeed our great God and Savior.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is God. In Acts 5:3-4 Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit You have not lied to men but to God

So to me the evidence is clear that the word of God teaches there is one God, that He is also three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

II. SPECIFIC TRUTHS ABOUT THE TRINITY

I want to share to trues about the Trinity that I believe are important to understand:

A. The Trinity Is an Eternal Reality - The distinctions of the personalities of God are eternal. Though the Son of God became incarnate in a moment in time, He did not come to be at His conception. Nor did He become part of the Trinity at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit came upon Him. He has always existed with God the Father. Jn. 1:1 says, “In the beginning was

the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In v.2 John says He possesses the attribute of eternity as God, for he says, “He was in the beginning with God.” We have already seen that Jesus was the agent of creation (see John 1:3). In Jn. 17:5 He spoke of “the glory which I had with You before the world was.” As for the Holy Spirit, He was active in creation (Gen. 1:2) and Heb. 9:14 calls Him “the eternal Spirit.”

This rules out a modal concept of the Trinity which teaches that God reveals Himself to be Father or Son or Holy Spirit at different times according to His purpose. In fact, some believe that God manifested Himself as Father during the Old Testament period, as Jesus the Son during the New Testament period, and only as Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension. Yet that is absolutely wrong. In the book of Revelation John has visions of God. In chapter 4 he has a vision of God the Father on the throne. In chapter 5, v.6 he has a vision of God the Son, pictured as “a Lamb as though it had been slain....” In that same verse we read of “the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Seven is a symbolic number of completeness and perfection. Likewise, note how John begins his book in Rev. 1:4-5, “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ....”

This is the reason one illustration of the Trinity falls short. Water, or H²O, is always H²O whether it is a solid, liquid or gas. We find it in three forms, but it is still the same essence. The problem is water always appears in one form at a time; never all three at once. Yet God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit co-exist as Persons of the Godhead at the same time, as we have seen.

So throughout eternity we will worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

B. The Persons of the Godhead Are Equal - That is true because they are the same essence. After all, Jesus said in John 10:30, "I and My Father are one." Php. 2:6 indicates that Jesus was “equal with God” before His incarnation.

However, there are differences in roles, and submission within those roles. Jesus said in Jn. 14:28, “I am going to the Father, for My Father is greater than I.” The Heaven Father is not greater in essence or attributes but in position, especially at the time of Jesus' incarnation when He “emptied Himself” (Php. 2:7, HCSB). Paul said in 1 Cor. 11:3, “the head of Christ is God.” In Jn. 16:13-14 we see that the Holy Spirit take a subordinate position in relationship to God the Son. There Jesus says, “He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak.... He will glorify Me....” Here we see that being under someone in authority does not make them better than you. It is simply a matter of function.

So let us not in any way diminish the honor, glory, and worship that belongs to the Son and the Spirit.

III. THE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY

The three persons of the Godhead who are revealed to be fully God are the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I want to briefly share with you a little about each person of the Godhead, including the saving and sanctifying work of each.

A. God the Father - Father is much more a New Testament concept than an Old Testament idea. Father is seldom used for God in the Old Testament, and each time the use is corporate, God being the Father of Israel the nation or people; never is Father used in the Old Testament to refer to an individual personal relationship. Thus, the Trinity appears more fully in

the New Testament, even though all three Persons appear in the Old Testament. Jesus, in clear and intentional contrast, taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father." This new relationship of God the Father became part of the evangelistic message of the early Christians, so much so that the word Jesus used, Abba, was used even with Greek-speaking converts (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

What does the fatherhood of God convey to us? It pictures God as a loving father who is Our Provider, Protector, and guides us with His wisdom. And yes, as a loving Father, He disciplines us when we go astray.

So let us look to our Heavenly Father in faith to provide for our needs, to be our shield and defender, to guide us by his wisdom, for our heavenly father truly knows best.

B. God the Son - God the Son fulfills many roles in our lives. We have already seen the fact that He is our Creator. He came to reveal God to us in the best possible way. The exalted one took on human flesh and actually lived among us. He said in John 14:9, "he who is seen me has seen the father." He demonstrated the love of God, the mercy of God, the compassion of God, and yes the power of God. His greatest work was to save us from our sins by offering himself as a sacrifice upon the cross. He said in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." His present role is to be the Lord of His church, and someday He is coming again to reign upon this earth.

So let us give our thanksgiving and praise to our Lord and Savior. If you have not placed your faith in him as Lord and Savior, I plead with you to do it today!

C. God the Holy Spirit - He is referred to occasionally in the Old Testament, as we have already noted, such as in Genesis 1:2: "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." He is also spoken of during later Old Testament times, particularly the prophecies concerning His coming in great power in the days of the Messiah. Contrary to the belief of some, the Holy Spirit is a person and not an impersonal force. Rom. 15:30 mentions, "the love of the Spirit." Ephesians 4:30 says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...." Heb. 10:29 says that some have "insulted the Spirit of grace." Clearly, the Spirit possesses attributes of personhood, including possessing emotions.

The Holy Spirit fulfills vital roles in our lives. He convicts us of our sin, opens our blinded eyes to see the glory of Christ, enables us to believe, and causes us to be born again. He indwells every true believer to lead us, to sanctify us, and to strengthen us. He enlightens our understanding of God's Word.

Sources: Roy T. Edgemon, *The Doctrines Baptists Believe* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1999); Stephen F. Felker, *Basic Bible Doctrine* (Training Course); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1971). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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