

Learning Unity from the Trinity

John 17:20-26 | **MBC** | Sunday PM, August 4th, 2012

Introduction

We all think highly of how easy it is to get along with ourselves until that myth is exposed when what we want isn't the same as what others want. **We** all think we have unified marriages, families, workplaces, and a unified church, until the myth of unity is exposed when we don't get our way. **See** unity isn't about what happens when everybody is just as I want them to be—unity is what happens when we live at peace in the midst of diversity. **There** is a vast difference between a unified church and a uniform church. **If** you want your fellow church members to be just like you, then you will never be properly united with them. **Unity is only truly expressed out of diversity.**

As it turns out, this is the very fabric of the universe. **We're** not just talking about marriage or church. **We're** talking about the most fundamental stuff of the cosmos—we're talking about God.

Most of us don't like to think about the Trinity. I know we don't like to think about it, because we're always quickly saying things like, "It's a mystery." **But** God's love for man expressed in Jesus is equally a mystery, but we sure like to talk about that a lot, don't we? **As** it turns out, God's love for man expressed in Jesus has a lot to do with the Trinity!

So we might not choose to have sermons on the Trinity, but thanks to our method of preaching consecutively through the Bible we don't have an option, we have to think about the Trinity tonight because that's what this passage is ultimately about.

So think with me for a moment about the difficulty of the concept of the Trinity: **It** has been said that "Unless God were three in one, no great feat would be accomplished by calling him 'One.'"

(Markus Barth). **My** wife loves math. **She** knows math well. **She** even knows about things like imaginary numbers. **But** she doesn't know any math where $3 = 1$. **And** that is what makes the Trinity so practical for us. Let's rewind the tape and play it back in slow motion to make sure that registers. **The Trinity is practical. Rather** than a piece of useless trivia, the truth of the Trinity is useful for the Christian's everyday life. **The Trinity is practical!**

Let me try to show you this up front.

- **We** can't figure out how $2 = 1$ in marriage—it takes couples years to grow into their oneness, and they never finally arrive there. **I'm** not going to ask for a testimony from my wife. **But** somehow, her desires aren't always my desires.
- **We** can't figure out how $3 = 1$ in our pastoral staff—I know it is hard to believe, but Joey and Pastor don't always see it the way I do... **Short** of my marriage, there has been nothing that has made me work harder for unity and see my sinful selfishness, than working on this pastoral staff. **I** see jaws dropping. **You're** all thinking, "Pastor is the easiest guy in the world to get along with!" Right, what do you think that says about me!
- **We** can't figure out how $10 = 1$ with our deacons or trustees.
- **It** is even harder to figure out how $240 = 1$ in our church membership. **Let's** face it, we often resemble 240 individuals more than we resemble 1 body, right? **Have** any of you ever despaired of truly being 1 with a local church? **We** might as well try to become one with universe like Yoda, right?

We never did any math in school that prepared us for these mysteries. **See**, God intended for us to learn these truths from the most elementary school of all—himself. **Some** of the most profound and mature lessons of the Christian life really doesn't get learned fully without serious meditation on the Trinity.

Central Question: What's the practical use of our doctrine of the Trinity? **This** sermon will unfold 3 practical uses of the doctrine of the Trinity.

But before we move into the text, I want to assure you one more time that it is a mistake to dismiss the doctrine of the Trinity as impractical. **And** I'm going to do so in the most powerful way I know how. **I'm** going to use the "Jesus" trump card. **If** we could prove that the Trinity was something Jesus found to be intensely practical, then we would be well on our way to being convinced of its practicality. **Right? Who** can argue with Jesus? **Well**, that's a setup, if you've ever heard one. **Look** quickly at your Bible's heading for John 18. **What** do you see happens right after this prayer? **Jesus** is betrayed! **Jesus** does say a few other things beyond this point in John's gospel, but these are really his last words before his crucifixion. **And** with this last prayer before his betrayal he decides it would be worthwhile to talk to the Father (in our hearing) about their triune relationship! **And** not only that, but to pray that our relationships within the membership of Maranatha Baptist Church, would resemble the relationship between God the Father, Son and Spirit within the Trinity.

John 17:20-26 *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

Let's pray—Father we stand before the mountain of this text, before this, the holy of holies—this grand and mystery-filled prayer, this transmission of the heart of your Son to you his, and our Father. **And** we pray for your help. **We** ask you to open our eyes to see your glory anew. **We** ask you to convince us and convict us. **We** ask you to comfort and encourage us. **Above** these we ask that you would unite us. **That** you would, by the glory of your own union and for your own glory, would draw our hearts together, uniting our marriages, our families, and our church in the kind of fellowship that can only be attributed to your miraculous work in our midst.

We're going to get to the practical lessons of the Trinity, but let's quickly notice that each of these lessons is going to be about unity because that's what this passage is about. **That** is the first request Jesus makes in this section (v. 21). **He** repeats that request again in v. 21, and also in vv. 22 & 23.

So what makes the Trinity practical?

From the Trinity we learn that...

1. Unity arises out of giving glory to someone different from me.

We become one in the church when we set aside glory for ourselves and seek it for each other. **In** the Trinity the Spirit doesn't prefer glory for himself above the Father and Son and the Son doesn't exalt himself above the Father, and the Father happily confers glory on each.

But Jesus says something really shocking in v. 22. God gave Jesus glory—we know this from many texts, like Philippians 2. But then Jesus says he gives the church that glory! **Though** this point is debated, I think this is a bit of circular argumentation on Jesus' part. **The** glory of God is the summation of all that he is. **The** fruit of the Spirit is nothing less than God's nature being manifested in our lives. **As** fruit bearing trees, we get to wear the glory of God's moral attributes that we reflect!

This is how it supposed to be in our church body. **We** are supposed to be full of glory-giving commendations for each other. **No**, we're not supposed to worship each other—but we're supposed to adorn each other with affirmation of God's work. **Next** time you read through Paul's epistles take note of how many commendations he gives. **Think** of it—the Apostle Paul, the one chosen by God to bring the church so much inspired Scripture. **The** one chosen by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles. **The** author of Romans! **Talk** about being a celebrity author, missionary, and theologian. **And** what does he do over and over again in his letters? **He** confers glory on others. **He** commends Phoebe as a worthy servant to the Roman Church in Romans 16. **Time** and again Paul does this—he delights in God's grace in other's lives. **To** be sure, we must guard not to give glory to man apart from God. **That** would be idolatry. **Many** a church has fallen in this ditch, exalting their pastor to a place above Scripture. **But** in seeking to avoid that error, let's not be so careful that we fail to do what God himself modeled for us.

I'd really like to practice this for a moment. **I'd** like to name names like Paul. **I'd** like to take the rest of the night making a parade of church members who are models of God's grace in one area of their Christian walk or another. **Do** you see what I would be doing if I did that? **I** would be coming to recognize that I don't have everything I need to have. **I** see the glory of my wife particularly clearly in those areas in which we are different. **I'm** far too-easily moved emotionally. **When** I'm rocked by trials and frustrations, she's unmoved. **And** the more I see that the more I praise it. **And** the more I praise it, the more I become like it. **The** opposite is sadly true. **The** more we focus on our strengths, on how good we are with children, or how wise we are with money, how mechanically inclined we are, how good we are at teaching, or how whatever we are better than others, the more glory we seek for ourselves the less united we are.

Your homework this week from this point is to highlight, to revel, to praise, to glory in the grace of God in your spouse, in your family, and in your church members. **Find** something God is doing in someone else, and point it out to them in praise to God. **Be** united by glorying in God's work in others.

Book: Practicing Affirmation by Sam Crabtree

From the Trinity we learn that...

2. Unity arises out of serving someone different from me.

The mission of Jesus was to unveil or make known the character and nature of God. **The** suffering servant, the humble Savior who set aside his heavenly glory did so *in obedience* to the Father. **In** service to the Father. **The** world measures servitude as a mark of lower status. **We** world views humility as a mark of weakness. We world view obedience as a mark of less greatness. **But** this is contrary to the very fabric of the universe. **Within** the Trinity there is both full exaltation, full being and full obedience, submission, and humility.

So the cross is not simply a manifestation of God's love to man, it is actually a window into the heavenly relationship between God the Father, Son, and Spirit. **Without** any division in their being, God the Son willingly received the mission of the Father. **We** could not have known God apart from the cross which simultaneously shows God's just character and his love. **If** his wrath was poured out on us, we would have never seen his love. **If** he never punished our sin, we would have never known his holy justice against evil. **The** triune work of God on the cross, complete with the humble service of Christ, is the full display of God's character.

Jesus did the will of the Father. He made know the Father who sent him. **And** as he calls us to be united together in him, he calls us to follow his example of service. **Being** in Christ is the most important thing about us. **Having** that in common is more important than our national allegiance, our common

interests, hobbies, vocations, ethnicities, personalities, and family ties. **Our** union in Christ calls us to a unity that images the Trinity. **And** that image that we must reflect involves the active and intentional pursuit of service for one another.

So then our homework is to identify someone in our church family this week who is very different from you. **Maybe** they're married and you're not. **Maybe** they're young and you're not. **Find** someone who is different from you and find a way to serve them. **Share** a meal. **Provide** a service. **Have** a conversation. **Drink** some coffee. **Whatever** the case, reflect the image of our triune God by serving one another. **Set** a target. **Make** a plan. **And** execute it.

Book: Humility by C.J. Mahaney

From the Trinity we learn that...

3. Unity arises out of loving someone who is different from me.

“Scripture defines love by nothing less than the cross.” **That** is the ultimate expression of God’s love for man. **But** it is connected to the love that the Father has for the Son, as expressed throughout this text. **That** love comes out in vv. 23, 24, and 26. Don’t miss this—the Father loves the Son. **This** love is a love that existed before the world began. **This** love is that which holds the Trinity together. **The** Trinity is a unified community of 3 in 1, complete in love and harmony. **Take** away the Trinity and you remove the love of the Father for the Son. **The** love of the Father is linked to the Son’s obedient love to the Father. **God** lavished glory upon the Son in love for his cross-work.

The point of all of this, of course, is that without the love of God we would be nowhere. **The** unity of the Trinity is built on the love of the Trinity. **And** so, Jesus prays that we would be an image of the Trinity. **We** can’t do that without the same

purposed self-giving of the Father for the well-being of the Son and the Son for the well-being of the Father.

So your homework this week for this point is more intangible. Love will be expressed outwardly by the two homework assignments I've already given. **But** these acts will not necessarily generate love. **So** your homework in this regard is to journal, journal your activities this week. **Capture** just 5 things you did each day. **And** then identify who those activities were an expression of love to in your heart.

Book: Relationships: A Mess Worth Making (Lane & Tripp)

Conclusion

In conclusion, we observe the commitment that Jesus articulates in v. 26. Jesus begins by a look to the past. **He** observes that he has effectively done what John described in the first chapter of his gospel—the only begotten who has been in intimate fellowship with God from eternity past, has unveiled, revealed, or made known God the Father to us who have believed. **This** unveiling includes the life Jesus lived, the teaching that he spoke, the death that he was about to die, and the death that he was about to conquer. **But** Jesus doesn't just speak of this in the past tense, he says that he will continue to make it known. **At** this point the cross and resurrection haven't happened yet. **Jesus** looks forward to that as the continuing, ongoing revelation or "making known" of God's name, or the summation of all that God is. **This** future verb, the only future verb in the entire chapter, stands as the crescendo to this, the summit of all prayers prayed by men. **Realize** that this is prayer of Jesus, in his boundlessness in time, is continuing. **This** future tense "will continue to make known" promises us that God's character will continue to be displayed through the unity of the church. **Jesus'** prayer here thus serves both as a call and a comfort. **Our** unity will be how we make God known to the world. **How** well can the world see the wonder of our triune God in our marriages and in our church?