

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Trinity: Basic Truths Pt. 1
Selected Passages

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Sermon Audio Blurb: To understand the Trinity you cannot approach it via a few biblical texts. You must understand it in light of the history behind it as well. In this sermon Pastor Henry gives a bit of the background to the whole issue, describing some of the most common heresies related to the Trinity. He then begins to lay the biblical foundation by asserting clearly that there is but one God and only one God.

DISMISS

I. Introduction

- A. Last week I introduced to you the value of contemplating God.
 - 1. Nothing more high, nothing more beautiful, and nothing more worthwhile.
 - 2. Required if we are to obey the command, “whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God.”
 - 3. This requires an understanding of God, His glory, and how our actions, words, and thoughts can best reflect and express that glory.
 - 4. Frankly, too many give little thought to this. And I am more and more convinced that it is due to little thought about God.
- B. I encouraged you to spend much time simply considering/contemplating God. Allow yourself the freedom to ask hard questions and not look for a quick answer. True theology can be very messy at times.
- C. The whole goal of that sermon was to be a simple introduction to a specific issue that needs to be discussed, the doctrine of the Trinity.
 - 1. Very vaguely understood by too many.
 - 2. Churches fail to teach on it, or they actually teach an unbiblical understanding.

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3. Along with overt biblical teaching there needs to be a historical context as well so that we do not fight battles over and over that have already been done for us.
4. The result is when people ask questions regarding the doctrine we can become uncomfortable and purposely vague, simply because we don't know what to say.
5. Yet, a solid belief and understanding of the Trinity is key to the purity of the Gospel itself. In fact to have a wrong belief about the Trinity is to have a wrong belief about the Gospel.
6. Only when we see that Christ is fully God that we can begin to glory in the mystery and beauty of the gospel message.
 - a. That the One True God, creator and sustainer of all things, would come down, be a true man and die for you!
 - b. It is grace that God would decide to make a substitute die and absorb His wrath for your sin. It is even greater grace that he would actually provide that substitute. But it is amazing grace that He would be that sacrifice. That is the gospel.
 - c. The bible speaks of the crucifixion as the demonstration of God's love. And God, being infinite, loves infinitely. And if God's love is infinite then who, but God, can truly demonstrate, make known, reveal that love?
 - d. Col. 3:4 tells us that Christ is our life. Literally, it says that life is Christ and Christ is life. That is why when you are saved you have eternal life.
 - (1) Have you ever wondered why you are saved eternally? It is because you are "in Christ."
 - (2) And God alone is eternal and for us to be partakers of Christ, if He were not God would mean that our life would be something less than eternal.
 - (3) Get this clear in your mind. The doctrine of the Trinity is not some minor point that good Christians are able to agree to disagree upon. Jesus is either God or not. The Spirit is either God or not.

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- (4) And if they are not then there are serious repercussions that occur.
- 7. If the Trinity were not true then Jesus would be a liar.
 - a. In John 14:16 he told the disciples, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper that He may be with you forever.”
 - b. That little word, “another” is an important word. Greek uses two different words for “another.”
 - c. One, *heteros*, means another of a different kind. The one Jesus used was *allos*, which means another of the same kind or nature. If Jesus is God then he is calling the Spirit God as well. For there is nothing like God.
- 8. So this doctrine, though deep and complex, is beautiful and is very important. (We spend so much time trying to figure it out that we miss that grandeur before us.)

II. Basic Affirmation of The Trinity.

- A. First understand the problems that seem to arise when talking about this.
 - 1. Israel has a statement that is constantly uttered. It is found in Deut.6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”
 - a. This is part of what is known as the *shema*.
 - b. Every person growing up in Israel would have been taught it. It is like John 3:16 is to so many Christians. You just know it.
 - c. And that statement affirms one key and abiding fact, God is one.
 - 2. This seems to seal it for many people. But the O.T. is not just that one passage.
 - a. Throughout the O.T. was an ever-growing depository of revelation from God.
 - b. There were also promises of One called Seed, Branch, Wisdom, Shepherd, Son, Prophet, and King.

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- c. There were also many mentions of the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit.
 - d. And not just these, but many other passages, all of which should have caused the nation of Israel to slow down in their quick conclusions (a good lesson to all of us.)
 - e. This oneness of God is what was at the heart of the anger that the religious leaders of Jesus' day had. They rejected Christ for He did not fit their theology. Their hearts were hard.
- B. So there is the problem.
- 1. And alongside that problem comes the ability to faithfully describe the Trinity as it is revealed in Scripture.
 - a. It is fairly easy to prove that Christ and the Spirit are God. What becomes a challenge though is explaining how there are three who are God, yet there is only one God.
 - (1) Is three in one a contradiction or paradox?
 - (2) What does "oneness" mean?
 - (3) Are all three co-equal in every way?
 - b. And early in the history of the Church this became an issue that required much talk, study and prayer.
 - (1) I am convinced that there has not been a truly new thought regarding the Scripture in a long time. Solomon knew what he was saying when he said that there is nothing new under the sun.
 - (2) I think you will find that some things you may have heard, or even said about the Trinity, were said hundreds of years ago.
 - 2. So I want us to get a brief overview of Trinitarian history, primarily where there were errors or heretical teachings.

Monarchianism

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Chiefly, there were two varieties of monarchianism: [the name monarch comes from the understanding that God is indivisible and supreme, the sole authority] “modal” monarchianism and “adoptionist” monarchianism. Each tried to explain the relationship between God, the Father, and Jesus, his Son, in different ways.

“Adoptionist” monarchianism suggested that Jesus was a human being in every way until he was adopted by the Father to be his Son. Adoptionists often cited Jesus’ baptism as the moment at which he was adopted to be the Christ, claiming that the line “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt 3:17) was meant to signify precisely this event. Another scriptural passage used to support adoptionist monarchianism was Peter’s declaration in Acts 2:32-36: “God raised this man Jesus to life, and of that we are all witnesses. Now raised to the heights by God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit . . . For this reason the whole House of Israel can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified.” The third-century theologian, Paul of Samosata, was a proponent of adoptionist monarchianism. [This error is often seen in some of the eastern mysticism/new age type of religions.]

The more pervasive variety of monarchianism was modalism, the belief that the Father, Son and Spirit are numerically one and the same appearing at different times in history under different forms. Modal monarchianism was also called “Patripassianism,” literally meaning, “the father suffers,” since, if the Son is numerically one with the Father, then anything that happens to the Son must also happen to the Father. [Therefore, the Father suffered on the Cross with Jesus; because they were, in reality, the same person.] The doctrine is also called Sabellianism, after an obscure theologian, Sabellius, who held to this view.

The [most] impressive reaction against modalism came from Tertullian and was directed against the modalist, Praxeas. In his treatise, *Against Praxeas* (c213 CE), Tertullian noted that the Godhead consisted of three persons united in one substance. Furthermore, the Son, Jesus Christ, was a single person uniting two substances, one human and the other divine. This meant that the Son was distinctly different from the Father. Thus Tertullian wrote, “The property of each substance [in Jesus Christ] is so preserved that the spirit performed its own actions in Him, such as miracles and feats and signs, while the flesh carried on the affections proper to it, such as being hungry when He was tempted by the devil, being thirsty when He was with the Samaritan woman, weeping for Lazarus, being troubled at death, and at last, actually dying” (27,11). Tertullian’s response here is particularly noteworthy since it supplies the theological language that will be used to carve out the orthodox position in the Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries. (<http://cedar.evansville.edu/-ecoleweb/articles/monarch.html>)

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Arianism

Arius, in the 4th century argued that God is immutable and eternal and therefore indivisible. Therefore, anyone else was created. Therefore the Son was created first in creation and through the Son all other things were created (Col. 1:15, “And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.”) The Holy Spirit was essentially seen as a force or attribute of God, not a person.

As I said earlier, there is nothing new under the sun. What was the lie in the early church became the lie in the time of the Reformation (1500's), where the same error was called Socinianism. And later in the 17-1800's as Deism and Rationalism. Today the most prominent group arguing are the Jehovah Witnesses.

“Arianism became so widespread in the Christian church and resulted in such disunity that the emperor Constantine convoked a church council at Nicaea in 325 (see Councils of Nicaea).

Led by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, the council condemned Arianism and stated that the Son was consubstantial (of one and the same substance of being) and coeternal with the Father, a belief formulated as homoousios (“of one substance”) against the Arian position of homoiousios (“of like substance”).” (<http://mb-soft.com/believe/txo/arianism.htm>).

Nicene Creed

The heart of the Nicene Creed is very clear on how the Church finally landed on this critical doctrine. It goes like this:

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

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Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

C. Progressive Revelation.

1. (Explain in basic words the idea of progressive revelation.)
2. *O.T. References to God's Oneness.*
 - a. Exodus 15:11; 20:2-3.
 - b. Deuteronomy 3:24; 6:4.
 - c. Isaiah 43:10; 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21.
 - d. Jeremiah 10:6-7.
 - e. Micah 7:18-19 (Give gospel out of this).

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- (1) God here is described as being unique in His willingness and ability to forgive sin. That right, that prerogative, is His alone.
 - (a) It is here that we can see the anger of the Jews when Jesus forgave sins (Mark 2:1-12).
 - i) They were horrified by what they saw as blasphemy.
 - ii) Note how Jesus knew their hearts (cf. Jeremiah 17:9-10, "*The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.*")
 - iii) In fact, it were they who were blaspheming, and to prove it Christ healed the man.
- (2) (Back to Micah).
 - (a) God may show anger to those who are His, but it is never forever. There is a time when He relents. Why? His lovingkindness. He delights in it.
 - i) There is a joy that God has when He displays His grace and mercy on those not deserving.
 - ii) We have much hope in these words for the bible tells us that we are unrighteous, we are wicked, (give basics of our depravity).
 - iii) So where is our hope? It had better not be in ourselves!!!!
 - iv) Ah, the answer is to go to the God who alone forgives sin. Who alone will pass over our iniquity.

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- v) And He possesses the power to do so. The word for “God” here is *el*, which speaks of the fact that He is the Mighty God.
 - a) Oh beloved, if we could see how the forgiveness of sin is in many ways the greatest expression of God’s power.
 - b) Sin is the stain that remains. Sin is never just something external, something that can be “fixed.”
 - c) Sin stays, it destroys, it is the bringer of death and causes the wrath of God to abide upon us.
 - d) It is for your sin, my sin, that there is fear. We can rationalize all we wish that we are not bad sinners. Bujt that is simply an exercise of foolishness.
 - e) When we lay our lives before the Word of God, the light shines upon us and we see ourselves in horrid truth. Wickedness, evil, feet quick to run to evil, minds that devise evil (even if we never carry it out).
 - f) And it is here that we find true fear and dread. By God’s grace we begin to rise up and cry out, “what must we do to be saved?”
- (b) And it is here that we find our hope. That the very God to whom we are guilty before is also a God who delights in His faithfulness and grace.
 - i) God loves to forgive. God delights in showing mercy.
 - ii) All our days whether saved or not, we see His grace in so many ways.

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- iii) So many will stand before God in judgment think that they have done little bad and find out that their thankless hearts for the grace of ice cream and cool breezes carry more guilt than that bad lie they told to their wife.
- (c) But the fullest expression of God the Father's grace is seen in the sending of His Son to save sinners.
- (d) This is why He says "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" Because God delights in grace and Jesus Christ is the fullest expression of it.
 - i) I Timothy 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.
 - ii) Matthew 1:21 And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.
- (e) For the one who comes to God the Father through Christ for forgiveness of their sin there is always forgiveness to be found.
 - i) Notice Micah 7:19.
 - ii) Not just some of our sins, but ALL.
 - iii) Oh beloved, that is full forgiveness. That is the joy of salvation in the Lord.
 - iv) And it is through our blessed Lord Jesus that it is found and enjoyed.
 - v) Have you looked to Him for your salvation? Or are you still trying to go through the motions of godliness?
 - vi) O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

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- vii) Are you hiding in your goodness? Or are you hiding in Jesus Christ.

III. Conclusion.

- A. We will pick this up with some New Testament passages next week related to the oneness of God, but the bulk of the time will be considering another key aspect, the passages that show a plurality within the one God.
- B. So we come to an end today, having only begun. By God's grace we will see next week that though the Scripture upholds the oneness of God, it also speaks clearly of the plurality of God, especially in Triune language.
- C. What lesson can we take away with us today?
1. For the believer, it is to affirm and jealously hold to the oneness of God. We are to rebel and recoil in horror at the thought that there are more than one God. We must take great care to not say that there are.
 2. For the unbeliever, it is to see that this One God is the mighty God. That He alone can save. He alone forgives sin. And as we have seen already, that forgiveness is found in Jesus Christ alone.

Small Group Questions

- A lot of material was taught today, where are your questions at this point? (CGL, write them down and communicate them to Pastor Matt)
- Why is understanding the historical context important in Christian doctrine?
- Have you begun to see that there are a lot of subtleties in this doctrine? How are you being challenged?