

Father

John 17:1-8,20-25

We are swimming in some deep water today so everyone take a deep breath. If you want to make a youth pastor panic just ask a seventh grader to **have him explain the Trinity**. All that seminary learning goes right out the window - you break into a cold sweat with every eye on you waiting for the grand unveiling of this eternal mystery. And the youth pastor squeaks out something about an egg and that doesn't work so he says, water comes in three forms - "So the Holy Spirit is like a gas?" No, it's more like LIGHT - yeah, God is light, that has to work. And light has heat and color and waves, or something right? Now everyone is more lost than the seventh grader... **God is like an egg, in a cloud of gas under a bright light?**

So let me go on the record to say, "That's not it." The way the Bible describes God is with the words, "**Father, Son and Holy Spirit**." So if you must have an analogy it is a family. The Andersons are one family and yet we are distinct people. God is one God - not three separate gods. But God does have three separate PERSONS.

Tricky, right?

So why do we believe the Trinity? Isn't there a simpler doctrine to believe? Sure.

- Islam is much simpler.
- The Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses deny the full divinity of Christ in an effort to make it simpler (though they actually make it a lot more confusing).
- But in the end **do you want a faith that is SIMPLE or do you want one that is TRUE?** Because that is the choice here.

No Christian ever said, "**I wish theology was harder to understand** - let's see if we can really mess with people by inventing a doctrine called the Trinity." What followers of Jesus have said since the days Jesus lived and taught and then died and rose again is that **we believe Jesus is the Son of God**. His resurrection proved that once and for all. And if you study what Jesus taught, Him being the Son of God does not mean He is less than God but it means He is **EQUAL with God - even ONE with God**.

So why do we believe in a Triune God? Look at two passages in John 14.

"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that **the Father** may be glorified in **the Son**... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even **the Spirit** of truth." John 14:13,16-17

This is why we believe in the Trinity - it's how Jesus talked. He was constantly talking about His Father - and was explicit about being equal with the Father and One with the Father. And then He started talking about the Holy Spirit who would come - also in equal terms.

“The word that you hear is not mine but **the Father’s** who sent **me**. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things.” John 14:24-26

Passages like this - and dozens more like this - make reference to Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the same immediate context. You cannot escape the frequent teaching in the New Testament about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[to] the name of **the Father** and of **the Son** and of **the Holy Spirit**.” Matthew 28:19

You don’t have to look any farther than the Great Commission to find that we are to baptize new believers in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Your Bible has a footnote on Matthew 28:19 because the Greek grammar actually says “baptizing them INTO the name.” So becoming a follower of Jesus involves ENTRANCE INTO the divine life of our Triune God. That is the wonderful invitation of the gospel and it is our destination today. But first let’s dive into this beautiful and mysterious doctrine of the Trinity.

Four brief notes as we get started:

The Trinity is:

1. A **mystery** we will only begin to understand in heaven
2. Present in the whole Bible and clearly **presented** in the NT

First of all, the Trinity is a mystery. The whole point of God is that He is beyond our ability to comprehend. His thoughts are above our thoughts and His ways above our ways. If you think up **a God you can understand** then you can safely conclude - **that’s not the real God**. But oh how we love to fashion God into our own image. How people love to shave off God’s rougher edges and dress Him up so that He looks better to their frail, fallen minds.

The Trinity is a mystery we must believe by faith simply because God has revealed Himself as a Trinity. We believe God is One God in Three Persons because that is what Jesus believed. It is what the apostles taught. It is present in the whole Bible - starting in Genesis one when the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the deep. And it runs through all of it. But the Trinity is especially presented, taught and explained throughout the New Testament. We believe God is Triune because the Bible says so.

The Trinity is:

3. The test of right **doctrine** as confirmed at the Council of Nicea
4. A necessary perfection for a God of **love**

Third, our articulation of the Trinity dates back to the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. Christians were Trinitarian before that, of course, but that is where it was decided and expressed in the words that have endured for nearly 1,700 years. **“True God of true God,”** Jesus is **“of the same essence”** as God the Father. The villain in that story was a guy named Arius who denied that Jesus was fully God. He would be a pillar among the JW's today.

Finally, when we reflect on the glorious nature of our God, doesn't it make perfect sense that **God is defined - in His very being - by relationship? “God is love.”** How could God BE love unless God had distinct persons within His being to love one another? Don't we feel this truth in our hearts - knowing that WE were made for relationship? Every person knows this deep in our bones. The closest we come to knowing what God is like is when we truly love another person - a husband, a wife, a son or daughter. In that love we glimpse, ever so slightly, the true nature of God and how we are supposed to reflect that.

Ok, now join me in **John 17** and **let's study what the Bible says about our Triune God.** First we will see the Oneness of God, then we will explore the Threeness of God. This is what Scripture clearly teaches. God is ONE GOD in Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the High Priestly prayer of Jesus. He prays for his followers:

The LORD is...

- **One God - Jesus is One with the Father**

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” (17:11)

Jesus was clear that He was both equal with the Father and One with the Father. This is the explicit message of John's gospel from beginning to end. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word WAS God.” This is the Word that became flesh - and we have seen His glory! We chose that verse from John 1 to summarize our entire Open the Bible series for this year - showing how the Bible is one story and it all points to Jesus!

Jesus claimed but unity with God and equality with God. In the end this was the reason the Jews decided to kill him:

The LORD is...

- **One God - Jesus is Equal with God the Father**

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because... he was even calling God his own Father, *making himself equal with God.*” John 5:17-18

People today sometimes wrongly understand Jesus' title as Son of God to mean He was LESS THAN God. But the Jews knew better. They knew that claiming to be God's Son was claiming equality with God. After all, your son shares your DNA and is an equal being with you. The

offspring of a dog is a dog. The offspring of a camel is a camel. The offspring of human is a human and the Son of God is GOD. Jesus claimed both equality with God and UNITY with God:

The LORD is...

- **One God - Jesus is One and Equal with the Father**

“That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me **and I in you.**” (17:21)

This is the amazingly good news of the Gospel, that believers in Jesus **become ONE with Him** and through Jesus we are united with the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The phrase “in Christ” is used around 75 times in the New Testament to communicate the believer’s new POSITION. At the moment of saving faith you move from being dead IN SIN to being alive IN CHRIST. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 5:20

The LORD is...

- **One God - Jesus unites us with God and each other**

“You will know that I am in my Father and **you in me**, and I in you” (5:20)

United with Christ we become ONE with Him. Through our relationship with Jesus we are united with the Triune God because Jesus is eternally and inseparably united with the Father and the Spirit. He is IN the Father. We are IN HIM. He is IN US. The language is interchangeable because the union is complete. And as a result of our union with God **we are one with each other.** We are the BODY OF CHRIST, who is our Head.

So the first truth to remember regarding the Trinity is that the Lord is ONE GOD. This was the central declaration of the Jewish faith for millennia in what is called the Great Sh'ma.

The LORD is...

- **One God**

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, **the Lord is one.**” Deut. 6:4-5

We do not worship three Gods we worship ONE GOD - the Lord, Yahweh - the covenant keeping God of Israel who sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, the long awaited Messiah. It is vital to hold on to this truth. We are MONOTHEISTIC. Our God is ONE. And yet, what separates us from the Muslims is that our God is also Three. We hold this mystery in tension - both the Oneness and Threeness of God - as we saw in John 14.

The LORD is...

- **One God in Three Persons**
- **Eternally exchanging glory, love and life**

“That **the Father** may be glorified in **the Son**... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even **the Spirit** of truth.” John 14:13,16-17

That is the rest of our lesson for today. We have reflected on the unity of God. Now we will study the relationality of God. **In His very being, God is relationship.** This is why it is meaningful to say that God is LOVE. From eternity past to eternity future God is a never-ending exchange of glory, love and life. The Father loving the Son, the Son returning that love to the Father. The Spirit embodying and carrying that mutual love and glory from Father to Son and back again.

Let's look at this triple exchange. First:

The LORD is...

- **Eternally exchanging glory**

"Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you...I glorified you on earth... now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." (17:2,4-5)

Here is ***the center of Jesus' prayer*** before going to the cross: that the Father would glorify Him - the Son - through the cross; that Jesus would be lifted up and exalted as the All Sufficient Savior and All Sovereign Lord. "Glorify your Son."

Oh, has the Father answered that prayer! Every one of us is here because God answered that prayer. God did highly exalt Jesus through the cross and through his resurrection and through history and in our hearts. God continues to answer this prayer as we gather every Sunday to worship the Name of Jesus.

And as we sing praises to Jesus we fulfill the desires of God the Son by giving glory to His Father. "Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you." ***This is the essence of the Trinitarian exchange.***

It's not that the Father ADDS glory to the Son or the Son ADDS glory to the Father. Both are, in their divine nature, perfectly and completely glorious. But this exchange of honor - this back and forth from Father to Son in the Spirit is an expression of that perfection of glory.

Here is how John Piper explains it. Our purpose in life is to glorify God because that is God's purpose in life. ***God exists to bring glory to HIMSELF.*** If God had a higher purpose - if there were some thing or person that God existed to glorify then that person would be God and we would worship it. But there is no higher being than God so God can have no higher purpose except to glorify Himself.

The LORD is...

- **Eternally exchanging glory - pure delight**

"Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you...I glorified you on earth... now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." (17:2,4-5)

And the main way God brings glory from Father to Son to Spirit is by ENJOYING one another.

The height of worship is JOY. **You honor someone best by enjoying them MOST.** We know this in our own relationships. Duty, obedience and service bring a little honor to the one you serve. But enjoyment brings maximum honor, especially when your joy and delight is to serve and obey the One you honor. This is supremely true in a relationship with God.

But we experience the truth of it in all of our relationships.

- **A good marriage is like this.** The husband honors His wife by enjoying her supremely. He does not have any interest in other women because he delights in the wife of his youth.
- **A good friendship is like this.** It's not a burden to meet with your friend, it is a blessing. You look forward to your time together - it is your delight.
- **Parents know this about our kids.** In a healthy situation parents enjoy their kids and kids enjoy being with their parents. Kids obey mom and dad not because they have to and for fear of punishment but because they want to please mom and dad.
- **Our work relationships are like this.** A good boss does not just want submission and service from his or her workers. You want to see JOY in the work. Yes, you are a team player and you submit to the authorities over you - not begrudgingly or with resentment but with excitement that you're on the team, you're contributing to the cause.
- **And Church should certainly be like this.** You don't glorify God by moping around and fussingly showing up to a work day or to your place of service on Sunday. No one wants a grumpy greeter or an angsty usher. You glorify God by happily serving - especially when no one else knows what you're doing - because THAT is your joy. THAT is how you glorify God - you ENJOY those moments with Him that no one else knows about.

The LORD is...

- **Eternally exchanging glory - pure delight**

"The glory you have given me *I have given to them*, that they may be one even as we are one." (17:22)

One more point on glory. Just as the Father and Son are continually giving glory and honor to one another - **Jesus has given that very same glory TO US!** By placing His Holy Spirit in our hearts, by uniting us as ONE TEMPLE of the Lord - the glorious presence of the Triune God lives in us individually and corporately! What greater joy could there be?

Here is the wonderful mystery of the gospel! Through Jesus Christ, and now in the person of the Holy Spirit, believers are caught up into the eternal exchange of glory, honor, joy and delight that defines our Triune God. I often think of God as an overflowing fountain of life, love, joy and peace. God is eternally pouring Himself out - Father to the Son and Son to the Father. When you commit yourself to Jesus by faith you get drawn into that fountain of living water. The GLORY OF GOD is placed INSIDE YOU.

Do you remember when you first felt that? I do. I remember first feeling it at a big youth conference with thousands of students. And then I remember feeling the glorious, loving

presence of God even more personally with just a handful of people at camp a couple of years later. I remember sitting outside at camp with my Bible and a notebook and experiencing God's love for me just by myself with the Lord.

Do you remember moments like that? This is our incredible privilege as children of God! We don't need to wait for Sunday church. We don't need a priest to conjure up the presence of God. We don't need any magic words or sacred relics. We just need to direct our hearts and minds to the Lord in prayer. We just need to open our Bibles and invite the Lord to speak to us - to commune with us. "The glory you have given me I have given to them!"

Amen - thank you Lord Jesus! That is what God does - eternally giving glory and honor to one another, and drawing us into that joyful exchange. Secondly, God exists in an eternal and infinite exchange of LOVE.

The LORD is...

- **Eternally exchanging love - perfect communion**

"I desire that they also may be with me where I am, to see my glory... because *you loved me before the foundation of the world.*" John 17:24

God IS love. Our ideas of love are so polluted it's hard for us to even know what true love is. But we begin to glimpse the real meaning of love as we reflect on the Trinity. In this eternal exchange from Father to Son, we see perfect communion - absolute ONENESS. The Father, Son and Spirit have total knowledge of one another, total delight in one another and total commitment to one another.

Imagine experiencing that kind of love from another person!

- If someone REALLY KNEW YOU - and still said, "I love you."
- If someone REALLY ACCEPTED YOU - and more than that, DELIGHTED IN YOU...
- If someone FULLY COMMITTED to you - giving everything they had, their entire being to you...

Then you would begin to know what God is like. ***Why did Jesus die on the cross?*** Do you see that ultimately ***it wasn't about us at all.*** First and foremost the cross was not about saving sinners. It was about God the Son showing the full extent of His love for the Father. He said, "I will give myself fully, completely - FOR YOU."

This is the eternal message of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father - "MY LIFE FOR YOURS." I give myself to you. I am yours.

That, brothers and sisters, is love: giving yourself away. There is no greater demonstration of love than the cross. And yes, it was an act of infinite sacrifice for us. But at an even deeper level it was the ultimate act of self-giving love as the Son gave EVERYTHING for the Father and in the same act the Father gave EVERYTHING for the Son.

Love today is a parody of God's love - a twisted caricature. Usually when someone says, "I love you," what they mean is "I love how you make me feel." Which is actually not self-GIVING love it is TAKING. Which means it isn't love at all - it's a farce, a lie. True love does not take at all - it GIVES 100%.

That is perfect communion. That is true intimacy. That is the eternal love of the Trinity. Listen to verse 26:

The LORD is...

- **Eternally exchanging love - perfect communion**

"That the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:26

Again, the amazing wonder of the gospel is that this perfect love of God is placed in our hearts through Jesus. **Jesus Christ lives in us in the person of the Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit is not less than God but is fully God. ***The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force but is the third person of the Trinity***. He is eternally divine, equal with the Father and Son and one with Father and Son. So it is true to say - as the Bible frequently does - that He is the Spirit of Christ or the Spirit of God.

Again, there is mystery here but we see both the oneness of God and the threeness of God to the point that sometimes the distinctions have blurry edges. But isn't that exactly what happens with true love and intimacy? Haven't you seen that in **couples who are married 40, 50 and 60 years**? Their being, their identity blurs together as their intimacy grows.

Of course, just being married a long time is no guarantee of intimacy. Many couples grow apart and functionally have NO RELATIONSHIP, no communion - for decades. But healthy marriages filled with self-giving love grow in intimacy, grow in trust, grow in affection. And that kind of unconditional love and respect, that kind of mutually self-giving love unites people like nothing else in this broken, fallen world.

That's why ***husbands and wives do finish each other's sentences***, and sandwiches. You begin to know what the other will think of a certain choice. You begin to anticipate what they will say; what they will do.

My parents have an african gray parrot, appropriately named **Gandalf the gray**. He's been in our house almost my entire life. That silly bird knows about 100 words and has learned the rhythms of my parents' life. Dad will walk out of the room and Gandalf will go "huh, huh, huh" with Dad's low, funny laugh. Mom opens the sliding door for the dog and Gandalf chimes in to call "Penny!"

Gandalf does way more than that to show he knows mom and dad, but those are the safe stories I can tell in public. The point is - if a silly parrot can learn habits and behaviors after 40

years, how much more should we grow to know and love and accept and cherish one another? And how much more than that does God know and love and delight in us?

God is love. He eternally exists as a loving union of three equally divine persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are united in a continual exchange of glory - pure delight in one another. They overflow in an eternal exchange of love - perfect communion. And third, they are constantly pouring into each other the life that gives power to the sun, personality to our souls and existence to our entire universe. Look back at verse 3:

The LORD is...

- **Eternally exchanging life - the power of existence**

“You have given him authority... to give **eternal life** to all whom you have given him” John 17:3

The Son of God proved His perfect devotion to the Father by giving up His life on the cross. Through that act of sacrifice God the Father exalted Jesus to the highest place, giving Him all authority in heaven and on earth. By giving up His life, Jesus received the right to give life to everyone. By dying, Jesus defeated death and became the doorway to eternal life.

Do you see the self-giving exchange in this verse? The Father GAVE authority to Jesus so Jesus can GIVE eternal life to all of us whom the Father has GIVEN to Him. Notice how this was demonstrated in the resurrection:

The LORD is...

- **Eternally exchanging life - the power of existence**

“Because I live, you also will live... As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will” John 5:19,21

The universe exists because God is the God of LIFE. It is the power, and movement, the energy and vitality within God Himself that moved the Lord to say, “Let there be light.” You exist because God willed it before the creation of the world. He saw every moment of your life before speaking those first words of creation. And He smiled.

Oh, how we fuss and quibble about the days and hours of our lives. We are a morning mist. We are a blade of grass. At best you are a flower that blooms for a few days and then wilts and dies. Yet God looks at you and wills you to BE. You exist because God gave you life.

You are saved because the God who raises the dead breathed His life into your dead soul. God created you TWICE. First in your mother’s womb he breathed into you the breath of natural life. Then at the moment you put your faith in Jesus God breathed into your soul the SPIRIT of life.

God is the overflowing fountain of life. If you’ve heard me preach much you know I’m very influenced by C.S. Lewis and this is where his book - arguably the best single volume on Christianity ever written - ends up. Mere Christianity moves from Lewis’ early atheism to his

discovery of the truth of God's existence and the compelling claims of Jesus Christ to the depths of glory revealed in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

"Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of good infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near a fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone."

"They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united with God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?" C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Have you ever tried to explain to someone what the BEACH is like if they have never been to the beach? Have you ever tried to explain water skiing or snow skiing to someone who has never felt that kind of motion? Some things cannot be explained, they must be experienced. All of this talk about the Triune God is just words - empty words - notes on a page. The real MUSIC is God Himself. Once you hear that melody it will move your soul and you'll say, "THAT is what all the Sunday School teachers and preachers and Christians have been talking about!"

"Oh taste and see that the Lord is good!"

Every good and beautiful thing in this world points us to the goodness and beauty of our Creator. God is not the sunset but His glory is reflected in it. God is not the crashing waves, but His power is reflected in them. God is not the hurricane but His wrath is pictured in it. God is not the love of a married couple but that is one of the best reflections of His character to a watching world. God is not a dad wrestling with his 4 year old son. But of all the ways God could have made Himself known He chose to say, "Call me Papa."

And of all the ways God could have shown us His love He said, "Look at my Son. Listen to Him. He will show you what I am like. He will show you what love really is."

The Lord is ONE GOD in Three persons. The Lord is the eternal overflowing exchange of glory, love and life. And all who are united to Jesus by faith are drawn into that three-personal LIFE of God, drawn into His love and we begin to taste the glory that we will revel in forever and forever.