

The Holy Trinity – An Introduction

Series: The Holy Trinity

2 Corinthians 13:14

January 10, 2021

Welcome again to worship.

Now before I begin, it will be very helpful for you today to have the worksheet for today. For those of you in the parking lot or have received a bulletin by email, you have a diagram with a lot of arrow shapes around a central triangle. For those of you online, I hope you have already downloaded the Holy Trinity Worksheet from our website, but if you haven't, there is a link in the Facebook comments, which we will give to you again, or you can go to www.germantownchurch.com/glorify/sermons. Down in the description for this sermon series under January 10 date is a link to the worship. Grab that, and it will help a lot today.

Last week, we talked about beginning the New Year on the right foot, by being new people, new creation. Even if people in Washington can't seem to do that, we are striving for it with the help of the Lord. Susan Miller posted a meme on Facebook that I just had to share:

SUSAN'S MEME.

Now, I didn't say it last week as we began the New Year, but I have some goals for us during for 2021, which may be a decisive year in our denomination. And to prepare for what might be in the future, I thought that at least a couple of times during the year, we would focus on some of the key, fundamental tenants of the Christian faith. We are going to need to know what we believe as we go forward.

So, for the next few weeks, we are going to look at one of the fundamental tenants of the Christian faith: the theology of the Trinity.

Our Scripture starting point today is 2 Corinthians 13:13:

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*¹

Yet for most, $1+1+1=1$ is a hard concept to understand.

So, let's look at what the Bible has to say.

Examine the Old Testament, and you will find many verses commanding the Israelites to be a people of Monotheism – the belief and worship of one God. The first of the Ten Commandments states:

*"You must not have any other god but me."*²

Yet in the midst of the creation story is this verse:

*"Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves...'"*³

By the 26th verse of the Bible, with the usage of the plural "us", we see the first clue to deeper understanding of the complete nature of God.

A basic tenant of Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. Does that mean Christians have three gods? In short, no!

¹ 2 Corinthians 13:13 (NRSV)

² Exodus 20:3 (NLT)

³ Genesis 1:26a (NLT)

Christians believe there is one God, and He reveals Himself in three different persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. All three are God and all are one. God is a Trinity, or tri-unity, three persons in one. The Bible says:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”⁴

The Early Apostles – themselves Jews – quickly declared the notion of the Trinity. In Acts 2 and the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter references each Person of the Trinity as equal, divine, and involved in the salvation of humanity. Likewise, Paul, a learned and devoted Jew before his conversion, wrote to the church in Rome,

“And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.”⁵

All three members of the Trinity are involved in salvation. The Father loved us so much that He sent His Son to bridge the gap between us. John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.⁶

And according to Acts 1:8, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to fill our life with love and to enable us to live by His power.

The doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to our faith, and yet, it is mysterious and difficult to comprehend in all its fullness.

Gregory of Nazianzus, 4th century Archbishop of Constantinople, saint of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, who made a significant impact on the shape of Trinitarian theology, and is remembered as the “Trinitarian Theologian,” wrote this:

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illuminated by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three, I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me.

We try to explain the Trinity in simple terms. For example, we use the analogy of H₂O. While H₂O can exist in three different states – solid, liquid, and gaseous – it is still the same: water. These three states share the same essence, but are different forms of that essence. However, like most analogies, this too is not enough, because H₂O does not exist in its different states at the same time. Yet God does.

Mark 1:9-11 says:

“One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, ‘You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.’”⁷

Western Christians struggle trying to explain the Trinity because we tend to understand and explain it from only one side. We look at the Trinity from the perspective of 1 God in 3. Eastern Christianity does not see the Trinity that way. They focus on community, 3 in 1.

⁴ Deuteronomy 6:4 (NIV)

⁵ Romans 5:5-6 (NLT)

⁶ John 3:16 (NIV)

⁷ Mark 1:9-11 (NLT)

Eugene Peterson, pastor, scholar, author, poet, and translator of “The Message Bible,” wrote, “God exists in personal relations (in the Trinity) and therefore cannot be known in any other way except by relationship.”

Ultimately, we should understand that God is in community, from the very beginning. John 1:1-2 says:

“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.”⁸

We understand the persons of the Trinity to have Unity and Diversity, the One and the Many, which is also called Differentiated Unity.

Here’s where you will begin to need the diagram. This is an adaptation of what historically has been called the Trinity Wheel. It was often put on soldiers’ shields as they went into battle. Here is a picture of it, but of course, it is in Latin, and though I don’t speak Latin, I know what the words are, so I’m going to translate and add additional detail to the diagram you have. I will tell you how to fill it out.

The first thing to do is write “God” in the middle of the triangle. We are talking about God here, and so God needs to be in the middle. But of course, God needs to be in the center of all our lives, right?

So, write “God” in the center.

Above the #1 at the top of the triangle, write “Father”. See that 1 there? Write “Father.”

In the bottom left-hand corner of the triangle is the #2. Outside that point, write, “Son”.

And finally, where the #3 is in the bottom right-hand corner of the triangle, write outside that point “Spirit.”

So, #1 is Father, #2 is Son, and #3 is Spirit. Got that?

Ok, now between the word “Father” and the word “God”, write the word “is.” Because the Father is God.

Between the word “Son” and the word “God”, also write the word “is.” Because the Son is God.

And finally, you got it, between the word “Spirit” and the word “God”, write the word “is.” Because the Spirit is God.

Now, between the word “Father” and the word “Son”, write “is not.” The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father.

Between the word “Father” and the word “Spirit”, also write “is not.” The Father is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father.

And, I am sure you are ahead of me, between the word “Son” and the word “Spirit”, wrote “is not.” The Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Son.

Ok, got that. Let’s review.

The Father is God. The Son is God. The Spirit is God. But the Father is not the Son, as the Son is not the Father. The Father is not the Spirit, as the Spirit is not the Father. And the Son is not the Spirit, as the Spirit is not the Son.

This is called Differentiated Unity.

Now, some of you may be glossing over like Myra right now with all this triangle stuff. You see, she was never good at geometry. But this is important stuff, because there are many Christian pastors and teachers who totally eliminate the Father, and say

⁸ John 1:1-2 (NLT)

“God” to refer to that part of the Trinity. But the Son is also God. And the Spirit, people don’t even what to talk about Him.

So we must understand that all three are God, but they are not each other. Confusing? A little. But God’s understanding is always higher than ours.

Okay, let’s keep going.

See the arrows outside the triangle. I want you to write inside those as you did in the triangle.

See the arrows labeled 1a and 1b? Those are arrows from the Father toward the Son and the Spirit. Inside arrow 1a, write the word “sends”. The Bible says the Father sent the Son to earth for us. So, write the word “sends.” In the 1b arrow, write the word “precedes.” The Father “precedes” or goes before the Spirit.

So to recap the top part of the triangle, the Father is God, but not the Son or the Spirit. The Father sends the Son and precedes the Spirit.

Now find arrows 2a and 2b. These are arrows from the Son. In arrow 2a, write the word “submits.” The Son submits to the Father. Jesus said over and over again that He was doing the will of the Father. In arrow 2b, write the word “sends.” Jesus sent the Spirit to us as a Comforter, an Advocate, a giver of gifts, plus some other things.

So, to recap the bottom left-hand portion of the triangle, the Son is God, but not the Spirit or the Father. The Son submits to the Father and sends the Spirit.

Finally, the bottom right-hand section. Arrows 3a and 3b are Spirit arrow. In arrows 3a and 3b, write the word “glorifies.” Write “glorifies” in both. The Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son.

So, to recap the bottom right-hand portion of the triangle, the Spirit is God, but not the Father or the Son. The Spirit glorifies the Father and glorifies the Son.

So, now that we have established the God-head, the Holy Trinity, let’s talk about the nature of God. Remember, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God.

Here’s what the Bible says about the nature of God. And you will see that I will quote three Scripture for each characteristic: one from each God-head perspective. I’m going to go through these quickly.

1. God is Eternal.

“But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him.” (Romans 16:26, NLT)

“[Jesus said,] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” (Revelations 22:13, NLT)

“How much more is done by the blood of Christ. He offered himself through the eternal Spirit as a perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will make our consciences pure from useless acts so we may serve the living God.” (Hebrews 9:14, NCV)

2. God is Holy.

“Indeed, he loves his people; all his holy ones are in his hands. They follow in his steps and accept his teaching.” (Deuteronomy 33:3, NLT)

“It was almost time for the Jewish Passover Feast. Jesus knew that it was time for him to leave this world and go back to the Father. He had always loved those who were his own in the world, and he loved them all the way to the end.” (John 13:1, NCV)

“But you are not like that, for the Holy One has given you his Spirit, and all of you know the truth.” (1 John 2:20, NLT)

3. God is Love.

“My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can’t know him if you don’t love.” (1 John 4:7-8, MSG)

Jesus said, *“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me.”* (John 15:9, NLT)

“... for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.” (Romans 5:5, TLB)

4. God is True.

“While Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he called out, ‘Yes, you know me, and you know where I come from. But I’m not here on my own. The one who sent me is true, and you don’t know him.’” (John 7:28, NLT)

“Jesus said, ‘I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me.’” (John 14:6, MSG)

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. This is the message from the one who is holy and true, the one who has the key of David. What he opens, no one can close; and what he closes, no one can open.” (Revelation 3:7, NLT)

5. God is Omnipresent, everywhere.

“‘Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?’ says the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:24, NLT)

“And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.” (Ephesians 1:23, NLT)

“I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!” (Psalms 139:7, NLT)

6. God is Omnipotent , all-powerful

“Dear GOD, my Master, you created earth and sky by your great power – by merely stretching out your arm! There is nothing you can’t do.” (Jeremiah 32:17, MSG)

“The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.” (Hebrews 1:3, NLT)

“The angel replied, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.’” (Luke 1:35, NLT)

7. God is Omniscient , all knowing.

“That is what the Lord says, who reveals his plans made from the beginning.” (Acts 15:18, TLB)

“A third time he asked him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Then feed my sheep.’” (John 21:17, NLT)

“But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 2:10-11, NLT)

8. God is Creator.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1, NLT)

"Christ himself is the Creator who made everything in heaven and earth, the things we can see and the things we can't; the spirit world with its kings and kingdoms, its rulers and authorities; all were made by Christ for his own use and glory."
(Colossians 1:16, TLB)

"The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (Job 33:4, NIV)

9. God is Sanctifier. He makes things holy.

"You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine." (Leviticus 20:26, NRSV)

"Jesus, who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters." (Hebrews 2:11, NCV)

"God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy..." (1 Peter 1:2a, NLT)

10. God is Author of all spiritual operations.

"May he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen." (Hebrews 13:21, NLT)

"That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me." (Colossians 1:29, NLT)

"One Spirit, the same Spirit, does all these things, and the Spirit decides what to give each person." (1 Corinthians 12:11, NCV)

11. God is Source of eternal life.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23, NLT)

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me." (John 10:28, NLT)

"Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit." (Galatians 6:8, NLT)

12. God is Teacher.

"This is what the LORD says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow.'" (Isaiah 48:17, NLT)

Jesus said, *"Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* (Matthew 11:29, NLT)

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26, NIV)

Okay, that was a 12-point list of the nature of God, and now you have a better understanding of the theology of the Holy Trinity. You can add 1+1+1 and get 1.

For the rest of the month, we will take each person of the Trinity and learn about them.

Ok, that was a long sermon. Thankfully, we are virtual, otherwise I would have seen you sleeping or leaving. Rest assured, this will be the longest one of the series, so without any further ado, let's pray.