

What do we know about the Trinity? \* Q's from the Pews  
August 23, 2020 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

One of the things that I like about Q's from the Pews is that it allows us to touch on a lot of different ideas. Some are very practical, like retirement and grandparenting; some have to do with social issues like racism and COVID-19; and some get at the very core of what it means to be believers. And that's what we're doing today, looking at one of the very central tenets of our faith. Here's the question:

What do we know about the "TRINITY"? What roles do each of the THREE fill? Why is this an essential for Christianity?

That's a great question and I'm sure I could keep you until supper time answering it but I'll try to be a bit more concise. I'm going to answer each of these questions in turn because they really build on one another. I'll answer the first two questions briefly - What do we know about the "TRINITY"? What roles do each of the THREE fill? - and then I want to spend a little longer on the last - because that's where the rubber really hits the road. I want to give you a pastoral perspective on the Trinity this morning - why it's so essential to the Christian faith.

And just to give you a little teaser, I think that it really boils down to this - the Trinity demonstrates that God is all about relationship and that has huge implications for salvation. The fact of the Trinity means that our relationship with God is not transactional - like we do things to keep Him happy and He rescues in return - our relationship with God is truly relational - by grace He freely rescues us and invites us to walk with Him. Let me explain why I say that. We'll take one question at a time.

So first, what do we know about the Trinity?

Well, first off, 'Trinity' is the word that we use to describe the reality that we see in the Bible - that there is ONE God who exists in THREE persons. Deuteronomy 6 is the classic text on the 'one' side of things -

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deut 6:4)

and yet time and again, we also see that this ONE God exists in three persons. Think for example of the Great Commission - 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Mat 28:19 NIV). That puts Father-Son-HS on the same footing and assumes that they are each God.

2 Corinthians 13:14 is another example - 14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2Co 13:14 NIV).

These passages show us that there is one God and yet He exists in three separate yet equal persons - Father-Son-Holy Spirit. And so we use this word 'Trinity' - literally tri-unity - to describe that reality.

That means then that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each God and they are all God together. They are not roles that one God plays at various times - like sometimes God is Father, then later He's the Son, then He switches over to Spirit - no, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct persons who have spent all of eternity together being one God.

I was off last week and playing with the kids in the pool and floating around thinking – how do I explain how that works? (nice easy things to think about on vacation, right?) And it struck me – Neapolitan ice cream. It's one – in three. You've got chocolate, vanilla, strawberry – chocolate is not vanilla, vanilla is not strawberry and strawberry is not chocolate and yet they are all Neapolitan ice cream. Same with the Trinity. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, but each one is God and together they are God.

Now, the reason we know that there are three distinct persons - is that all three persons of the Trinity appear together from time to time. Like in Polka-Dot door, I always suspected that Polkaroo was really the guy host because they were never on screen together – but Father-Son-Holy Spirit appear together from time to time. Like at Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:16 – you've got Jesus in the water, the Spirit of God descending on Him and a voice from Heaven saying – this is my beloved Son.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."  
(Mat 3:16-17 NIV).

So the Trinity means that God is three unique persons and we also know that because they each do different things. That's our second question – what role does each play? Or what do the persons of the Trinity do?

A couple of years ago I used the language of architect, builder, mover and I still think that's helpful, because look at 1 Peter 1, especially verse 2 – Peter's talking about believers and he describes them as people chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father (architect of the plan), sprinkled by the blood of His Son (the builder of the plan) and sanctified through the work of the Spirit (the one that moves you in once the plan's accomplished).

NIV 1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,  
2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance (1Pe 1:1-2 NIV).

The Father knew that if He created us, we would rebel – we would love ourselves more than Him - and so He built into the plan a plan to save us. He knew we would never be 'good enough' on our own and so He asked His Son – in essence Himself – to stand in in our place. And so the Son died to forgive our sin and bring us back to God, just as the Father had planned. And the Spirit is the one who moves us into this new way of living – sanctifying us (ie. making us holy) and leading us day by day to walk in God-honouring ways. Father-Son-Holy Spirit/Architect-builder-mover.

So now this leads to the big question – why is that important? Why is it essential that our God is three-in-one?

Well, the fact that God is three-in-one means that He is all about relationship. From all of eternity, God existed in fellowship with Himself. God was not off twiddling His thumbs all alone before the Creation of the world; Father-Son-Holy Spirit existed in relationship with one another and it was good. Jesus describes it in John 17:24 - 24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to

see my glory, *the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.* (Joh 17:24 NIV). (He talks about being loved before the creation of the world).

You know when you're with good friends, and you're sitting around the campfire thinking, man I'm glad I know these people – that's the Trinity before the world began. And their relationship was so good in fact that God – who is love – wanted to share that goodness of relationship with others.

Michael Reeves has been very helpful to me on this, describing the Trinity in pastoral terms rather than strictly theological ones, and he writes "...the Father so enjoyed his fellowship with his Son that he wanted to have the goodness of it spread out and communicated or shared with others. The creation was [therefore] a free choice borne out of nothing but love" (Michael Reeve, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 49).

God created the world because He wanted us to be able to experience the love that existed within Himself, even before He created the world.

But then we, made to experience the love of God, went and loved ourselves more than God. We took the offer of fellowship with God and said 'nah, I'd rather just take selfies instead.'

But look what God did. Yes, He gave the Ten Commandments and the whole of the Mosaic law – rules to keep – rules to explain what relationship with a Triune God looks like – but He knew we could never keep them.

How do I know that? Because He had a Passover lamb shaped Saviour waiting in the wings for stage two of the plan. God made us, but He knew we'd turn away. So when we ran away from home, He sent His own Son to win us back. To skip the whole rule thing and bring us back into relationship with God by trusting in Him. And not only that, when we do that, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts so that life is not a constant checking of the rulebook – is this ok with God? Is this legit? – God, by His Spirit, dwells within us to tell us 'this is how to live in light of God's commitment to you.'

The fact of the Trinity means that God is all about relationship and not even rebellion will prevent God from sharing His love with us. And the fact that God acted – in all the persons of the Trinity – to redeem us shows that God isn't looking for us to earn His approval for salvation; He actively chose to save us – when we trust in Him. He didn't wait for us to earn His good will; He won us back so that we could enjoy fellowship with Him.

The Trinity means that our faith is not about rules but about relationship.

What does that mean really practically for us?

Well, first, I hope that that gives you some sense of confidence in God's unconditional commitment to you. I know that it's possible to think that you have to earn God's favour, but everyone else in the world wants you to earn theirs, but God has freely given it to us. The three persons of the Trinity act in such a way as to bring you into the unconditional love of God. If you have trusted in the Son, the benefits of the Father's plans are yours and the Spirit is living in you. Know that you are accepted and nurture that relationship with God.

And that was really one of the biggest takeaways for me this week – the doctrine of the Trinity should really motivate us to cultivate our relationship with God. If we come away from a talk about the Trinity knowing more about Him but not wanting to KNOW HIM more, then that’s a problem.

God IS relationship and He wants us to know the love that He experiences within Himself. He wants us to share in the fellowship that is Father-Son-Holy Spirit. He wants us to walk with Him, to talk with Him, to spend time in the Bible with Him, to pray to each person of the Trinity. He is always there, leading us by the Spirit, interceding for us as the Son and blessing us as the Father. He is not obsessively keeping track of rights and wrongs; He is simply eager to see us live in light of the gracious salvation that He planned and accomplished and moved us into – Father-Son-and Spirit.

The fact that God is trinity means that our faith is not one of rule keeping but of relationship.

#### BENEDICTION

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#### REFERENCE PASSAGES

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