

Part 7 - Who is God?

A Study of God – The Trinity

Opening

- Our studies are based around “Secret Church” – David Platt

Why understand God?

One of my goals is that we as a church of believers in Christ, would become a soul winning church. All through the years, the church’s mission has been to propel forward the message of Christ and win converts through its life and activity – we do that through:

- Our service – the way we love our neighbours
- Our witness – the way we live our lives
- Our message – the good news of Christ and the Cross
- Our faith – prayers & petitions

In order to become a soul winning Church we need to:

- Have a biblically informed understanding of our faith
- A desire to reach the lost
- Know how to lead people to Christ (share the message)
- Know how to teach and disciple new believers



Just a quick show of hands:

Who believes that discipleship is a good thing?

Who here was discipled by another believer when they first believed?

Who here would honestly feel confident to disciple a new believer?

Aunt Ethel

You're Auntie Ethel is a Mormon and you and her are talking about God.

She challenges you about the Trinity. She says, "Did you know that the word trinity is not in the bible?"

And you say ... ?

The Mysteries of God

We talked some time about the exploration of Who God Is requires that we look at some of the mysteries of the person of God. One of those mysteries is the question of 'Why is there suffering in the world?' – the other topic was that of the **Trinity**.

So let's explore that today.

Simply put – the trinity is the existence of a single God who exists as 3 unique persons – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Have you ever heard sermons where its been explained as:

- An egg – a single egg comprising shell, yoke, egg white
- Water – ice, liquid, gas

None of these are really adequate to understanding the complex nature of the Trinity. It's probably one of the most profound concepts in the Christian faith.

 **Anonymous**

"Try to explain it and you'll lose your mind; but try to deny it, and you'll lose your soul."

3 Foundational Truths

- the word "Trinity" is never mentioned in the Bible
- yet the Bible teaches the Trinity from cover to cover

Let's explain the Trinity – 3 foundational truths (in an understandable form)

- how they fit together is the mystery
- we are focusing on what we do know - not what we do not know

1. God is 3 Distinct Persons

- Scripture refers to God with plural pronouns (e.g. us, we)

Check out just a few example scriptures:

 **Genesis 1:26**

*“Let us create man in **our** image, according to **our** likeness.”*

 **Genesis 11:7**

*“Let **us** go down” (tower of babel)*

 **Isaiah 6:8**

*“Whom shall I send? And who will go for **us**?”*

You have **plural pronouns** all over the Bible referring to God.

A Key:

- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit **are persons**

When we think about each member of the Godhead the Father, we should think of them as a person:

- God - the Father
- God - the Son
- God - the Holy Spirit

Is Holy Spirit a Force?

Is the Holy Spirit a person or a power? We think of the Spirit as some force, or energy, but the Spirit is actually a **person**.

It would be reasonable to think that a force was neutral – but not with the Holy Spirit! He is in fact referred to with masculine pronouns:

 **John 16:13,**

*“When **he**, the Spirit of truth, comes, **he** will guide you into all truth. **He** will not speak on **his** own; **he** will speak only what **he** hears.”*

When you look through Scripture, you see the Spirit doing what a person does.

- The Spirit teaches
- The Spirit testifies
- The Spirit intercedes
- The Spirit searches all things of God (which we talked about earlier in this series – “who knows the mind of God, but the Spirit of God...”)
- The Spirit knows
- The Spirit gives gifts
- The Spirit speaks - “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it’” (Acts 8:29)
- The Spirit can be grieved

So the Spirit is a person. (demons to are persons)

The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct.

Example of Distinct Persons

 **Matthew 3:18**

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”

Or you have the Great Commission that commands us to be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which reveals the distinction between them.

Consider the following scriptures and the way that the persons of God are uniquely spoken about:

 **Ephesians 4:4-7 (NIV)**

There is one body and **one Spirit**, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **one Lord**, one faith, one baptism; **one God** and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

 **1 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV)**

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, exiles scattered ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, through the sanctifying work of the **Spirit**, to be obedient to **Jesus Christ** and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

They're distinguished from each other

- The Son is distinguished from the Father
- The Spirit is distinguished from the Son
- The Father is distinguished from the Spirit

So, truth number one, **God is three persons** - that's foundational.

2. Each Person of the Godhead is Fully God

A. God, the Father is fully God

That's never really been debated throughout the history of Christianity.

 **Genesis 1:1 (NIV)**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

 **Matthew 6:26 (NIV)**

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

These affirm God, the Father, as fully God - not part God.

- God is not part Father, part Son, part Holy Spirit
- God, the Father is fully God

B. God, the Son is fully God

Probably one of the biggest areas of confusion amongst believers is this question '**Was Jesus God?**'



If I was to ask you, could you provide scriptures to prove why you believe this to be true?

It's important that we understand the deity of Christ - this is key in our faith.

The deity of Christ

Consider the truths that are contained in this little passage:

Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

*Who, being in very nature **God**, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a **man**, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is **Lord**, to the glory of God the **Father**.*

Paul understood the nature of Jesus very well – here he affirms that Jesus is:

- God
- Man
- Lord

Other Scriptures that affirm the deity of Christ:

Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the **exact representation** of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

Titus 2:13 (NIV)

*... while we wait for the blessed hope - the appearing of the glory of our great **God and Saviour**, Jesus Christ ...*

Colossians 1:19 (NLT)

*For God **in all his fullness** was pleased to live in Christ, ...*

Consider Thomas – he has determined that he will not believe in the resurrection of Jesus until he can actually feel his scars and place his hand into the wound on Jesus' side – this is his reaction when he sees Jesus face-to-face:

 **John 20:28**

“My Lord and my God.”

So:

- God - the Father is fully God
- God - the Son is fully God

Next, the Spirit is fully God.

C. God, the Spirit is fully God

Consider the scene – Ananias and his wife drop dead in the centre of the newly establish church after doing what? Check it out ...

 **Acts 5:4**

“You have not lied to men but to God.”

They lied to the Holy Spirit – but here, scripture is equating God with the Spirit of God. God, the Spirit is fully God.

So again:

1. God is 3 distinct *persons*
2. Each *person* of the Godhead is within themselves fully God

3. There is one God

Consider the Shema of Israel (their statement of faith) :
(Shema Yisraal, Adonai eloheynu, Adonai echad)

 **Deuteronomy 6:4**

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

 **Isaiah 45:5,**

“I am the Lord, and there is no other.”

God makes it very clear. There is no question that from cover-to-cover in Scripture, there is one God. ***We're not talking about many gods.***

Additional Thoughts

So, the three truths are:

1. God is three persons
2. each person is fully God
3. there is one God

A. Trinity is eternal

No one person of the Trinity came into being at some random time:

- The Father has always been and always will be God
- The Son has always been and always will be God
- The Spirit has always been and always will be God

B. The persons of the Trinity have different functions

While they are the same essence - they function in different ways at different times:

- at times the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father (Jesus obeys the Father)
- at times the Son is functionally dependent on the Spirit

Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit:

 **Luke 4:1**

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ...

Consider creation

- God, the Father, is speaking (“Let there be light...”)
- God, the Son, is implementing (Col 1 “In Him were all things created ...”)
- God, the Spirit is hovering over the waters (Gen 1)

Consider how salvation comes together.

- God, the Father, **plans** (Eph 1 - “before the foundation of the world”)
- God, the Son, **obeys** (Phil 1 - “he humbled himself in obedience”)
- God, the Spirit, **applies** salvation to our lives (John 16 – “He will convict..”)

Look at the different roles:

- The Father didn't come, and die on the cross.
- The Spirit didn't die on the cross.
- The Son died on the cross.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are:

- equal in their attributes
- equal in their essence
- no one is inferior in essence to another

C. Different in their Relationships

They relate to each other differently in time

- as we saw - the Son is subordinate to the Father
- the Son was dependent on the Spirit.

How Understanding Came to a Muslim

We as people belong to the human race – that's who we are, our nature, our essence is our 'human-ness'.

- We are equal in every way – yet not the same
- We all have different functions or roles to play in our societies
- Even though we are the same essence - we are unique from each other

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God – their nature, their essence is 'God'.

- They are equal in every way – yet not the same
- They have different functions or roles they play in the Godhead
- Even though they are the same essence – they are unique from each other

Three Dangerous Heresies

This doctrine has been debated throughout 2,000 years of Christian history.

Heresies usually arise from denying one of those foundational truths.

Modalism denies 1st foundational truth (God wears a mask or operates in **modes**)

- Consider the baptism of Jesus – man in river, Spirit as a dove, Father speaks

Arianism denies 2nd foundational truth (Jesus & Holy Spirit are not God)

- Islam – God would never come down as a man (blasphemous)
- Jehovah’s Witnesses – Jesus is a god, not **the** creator God
- Mormonism – Jesus and Satan are brothers (created beings)

Polytheism denies 3rd foundational truth (worship of more than one god)

- We worship one God in three persons – not 3 Gods

Practical Conclusions

1. **Our mind is finite** - we need to realise that the Trinity is divinely revealed, not humanly constructed.

 **Tertullian**

“This is definitely not humanly constructed, because nobody would be so crazy as to construct this kind of doctrine.”

2. **The Trinity is incomprehensible** - The reality is that Scripture doesn’t give us an analogy to describe the Trinity (like eggs, or water). Any analogy is ultimately going to break down.
 - Can we know the doctrine of the Trinity exhaustively? No.
 - Can we know the doctrine of the Trinity truly? Yes.

 **Tozer**

“Love and faith are at home in the mystery of the Godhead. Let reason kneel in reverence outside.”

3. **Our salvation is secure** - we are not saved by a creature; we are saved by the Creator
 - We are not saved by a mere man
 - We are saved by a man who is fully man, and fully God
 - The One who saves us completely is completely God

Additional Scriptures:

Gen. 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

Note: Angels do not create. We are not made in the image of angels. There is no place in the OT where a leader refers to himself with the term "us."

Gen. 3:22, "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.'"

Gen. 11:7, "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

Psalms 45:6-7, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You."

Isaiah 6:8, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

Isaiah 48:16, "Come near to Me [God], listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret. From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit