

# A BELIEVING PEOPLE

## Part 3

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### The Mystery of the Trinity

**We Believe... “In one God eternally existing in three persons; namely, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”**

**2 Corinthians 13:14** (NKJV), “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen”

#### Touching Base

This week we will consider what it means for God to exist as "three persons in one Godhead?" This is known as the doctrine of the Trinity. Simply put, the Trinity is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but at the same time, we confess that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.

The idea of God being one is at the heart of the faith of God's people, as we see revealed in the Old Testament. Known to the Jewish people as the Shema, the prayer found in Deuteronomy 6:4- "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!"—is a very important declaration. This was a major factor in distinguishing the people of God from the surrounding people with their many gods. This same belief is true for New Testament Christian believers as well. We serve one God! This is called monotheism.

But at the same time, Scripture, particularly in the New Testament, causes us to reckon with the truth that Jesus is also God, as is the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:19** that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" **Romans 5:5** tells us the "love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."

The teaching that God is three and God is one seems like a contradiction. But it is not a contradiction, because a contradiction cannot be true. It is, however, a paradox, which means it may seem to be a contradiction, but upon closer examination it proves to be true. One way to help understand all of this is by considering two mistaken ways of resolving the paradox. The first is called modalism. This is the view that God has three distinct modes which do not exist at the same time. Instead, only one mode manifests at a time. In other words, the modalistic view would say, for example, that God is Father in the Old Testament, Son in the New Testament, and Holy Spirit in the church age. But the Bible teaches us this is not so! One biblical passage we see this illustrated is at the baptism of Jesus by John. In that moment, the Son was in the water, the Father spoke out of Heaven, and the Spirit descended on the Son (**Matthew 3:16-17**). All three persons of the Trinity manifesting at the same time and in perfect unity!

A second mistaken view is known as tritheism. This is the mistaken teaching that we serve three gods-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This could not be further from biblical truth as revealed in both Old and New Testaments! We have already seen the Shema, but we see the same idea of the 'oneness' of God in such scriptures as **1 Timothy 2:5** which says, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."

Christians believe in the unity of God, but in His inseparable unity, He exists in three distinguishable persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each are coeternal, coequal, and of the same substance. One way of approaching this idea is to say that God is "one What (essence) and three Who's (persons)."

One final word on this topic before we begin. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery to us. But in this context, a mystery is not something to be solved and done away with. When we talk about the mystery of such things as the blessed Trinity, it is not a mystery to be solved in this way. It is a mystery into which we enter and live. But we should not be troubled by this mystery. Paul said in **1 Timothy 3:16**, "and without controversy great is the mystery of godliness." As we continue learning about and reflecting on the blessed Trinity, we need to respond with hearts of worship and submission as we look into the mystery that is the God we worship.

**Matthew 3:16-17** (NKJV), "When He had been baptized, [Jesus] came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

## Yielding to the Spirit

### —Know—

It is often pointed out in discussions of the Trinity that the word "trinity" is actually not found in the Bible, and that is true. However, that does not mean the Trinity is not found in the Bible! The passage of Scripture just read (which is paralleled in Mark 1 and Luke 3) is one of the clearest pictures we have of the Trinity. Here we see the Son being baptized in water, and, as He emerges, the Holy Spirit descends on Him and the voice of the Father speaks His approval of the Son.

Believers today experience something similar in our baptism. As by faith we become one with Christ (**Galatians 2:20**), and we identify with Him in His death and resurrection in baptism, we too are able to experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And we also hear the voice of our Father in heaven calling us His beloved children.

### —Be—

As rational people, we struggle to understand the concept of the Trinity. It makes no sense for God to be at the same time both three and one! But the purpose of using the language of Trinity is not for us to comprehend God. It is for us to commune with God—to have fellowship with Him. We must come to Him as He is. And we do so in humility, acknowledging that we are unable to comprehend Him in His rich fullness, yet lovingly worship Him because He has taken the initiative to make Himself known to us.

### —Do—

As you begin another week of learning how to "live your faith" use the following prayer as a guide for your time with the Triune God today.

## Offer a Prayer

Lord, I come before You in worship and amazement. You are so far beyond my ability to comprehend, yet You are near to me. I confess that I don't completely comprehend You or Your ways. But I also know that I don't have to completely understand You to be able to trust You. I don't understand how You can be one God in three persons, but I do know that You are good,

and loving, and just, and trustworthy. I know that You have done all that is necessary to save me and bring me into loving relationship with You. As I seek to love You with all my being, including my mind, help me to be at peace with mystery. And when I encounter those things I don't understand, let them bring me back to a place of worship, trust, and prayer before You, my Lord and my God. Amen.

## **Article 2** **We Believe in One God**

**Isaiah 42:8**, "I am the Lord; this is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images."

**1 Timothy 2:3-5**, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

### Yielding to the Spirit

#### —Know—

The basis for talking about the Trinity is the statement that we believe in one God, not three! To use a term we read earlier, Christianity is monotheistic (one God).

This means we do not believe there are different gods for different people groups. There is one God and Father of all (see Ephesians 4:6). This belief in one God for all creation drives our heart for missions—to tell all people groups of the world about the one true God.

The belief in one God also impacts our worship. Unlike some pagan religions, we do not have a god for different aspects of our lives. We do not worship one god to see to it we are fed, and another god to see to it that we are kept safe, and another god to guide us in making decisions about careers, and yet another god to ... you get the idea. We have one God. One God to whom we entrust all aspects of our lives. We worship and obey Him and Him alone, which means, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

#### —Be—

Perhaps you are reading this far today and are saying to yourself, of course there is only one God. I have no problem believing that! And that may be so. But belief about there being one God and belief in that one God can be deceptively different.

Belief in the one true God means we do not give our worship to another. But worship is more than just a service we attend on Sunday morning. It is more than a set of songs we sing. It is every aspect of our lives lived to honor and glorify God. When you look at your worship in this way, does it reflect a belief in the one true God?

Do you trust and obey Him completely for all things? Do you acknowledge and obey His will in all your relationships? Your finances? Your vocation? Or do you from time to time offer your "worship" to other sources that promise to help you in these areas ... just in case God doesn't come through?

#### —Do—

Take a moment to do an inventory of your worship. One way to do this honestly is to take a look at your calendar and your bank account to see what they say about your priorities, your use of God-given gifts and resources, and where you place your trust. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you about those areas of your life where He may be asking you to take a new step of faith and trust in the one true God.

### **Offer a Prayer**

Father, I come to You in worship and adoration. I confess You are the one true God and Father of all. I ask You to show me those ways where my life does not measure up to that confession. Help me not to deceive myself by mere outward expressions of worship that are not matched with a heart of devotion and a life of obedience. Transform me by Your grace into a person who truly puts all my trust and hope in You. You are good and You are worthy of all my worship. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.

## **One God...Three Persons**

$$1 + 1 + 1 = 1$$

### **Searching the Scripture**

**Genesis 1:26**, "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."

**Matthew 28:19-20**, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

### **Yielding to the Spirit**

—**Know**—

God has never been lonely. Before anything was created—angels or humanity, either one—the blessed Trinity was in dynamic, loving relationship. We see a hint of this in the wording of **Genesis 1:26** where God says (presumably to Himself!) "Let US make man in OUR image, according to OUR likeness."

The New Testament, however, certainly sheds more light on the doctrine of the Trinity. In the scripture, we see the instructions that Christ gave when He commissioned the apostles. Based on this passage of Scripture, Christians baptize disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is important we see the word name is singular. One name; one God, not three Gods, or one God and two lesser Gods, or one God and two created beings. One God—namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

Biblical math tells us that  $1+1+1=1$ . The Father is father because of His relationship to the Son. The Son is the son because of His relationship to the Father. The Spirit is the bond of love in relationship with the Father and the Son. From eternity, they share the same nature, the same equality, and the same will. God didn't create humanity because He was alone. As we will soon see, He created humanity to share in the overflow of His divine love.

—**Be**—

Human beings are made in the image of God. If that is so, and if God is relational in His very triune essence, what does that say about us? It says a great deal, actually, but for our purposes of this study, it should tell us that, like God, we are inherently relational people. God is one, so we

were called to live in unity with one another and with God. But God is one in three persons, so we see our unity does not require uniformity. We can enjoy the diversity in the family of God. Among those who are united by a common faith in Jesus Christ, there are different backgrounds, different ethnicities, different experiences, different gifts, and talents. Our worship of the triune God helps us to celebrate this unity which exists in beautiful diversity!

Looking back to our previous discussion of the worship of one true God, we learn something very important. This one God that we worship is fundamentally relational. We are to worship no other. And if we are to worship the one true God, we must embrace the fact that His nature is one of relationships among the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As humans made in His image, one way we worship is by reflecting his loving, joyful, relational nature with one another.

—Do—

Prayerfully reflect on the topic of discussion and consider the following.

1. What does your relational life look like?
2. Are you experiencing joy and fullness in your relationships with other people, not just your immediate family, but also your church family?
3. Are you comfortable with diversity among those who share your faith in Jesus Christ?
4. Does your life reflect the inherently relational nature of the one true God we worship?
5. What steps do you need to take so that this area of your life is more reflective of His nature?

### **Offer a Prayer**

Triune God, I come before You today still learning to embrace the mystery of who You are. Help me to know You, Your will, and Your ways more fully. Let my life be an accurate reflection of Your relational nature. Help me to be quick to forgive, slow to anger, and always abounding in love toward those around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Unity, Equality, and Submission**

### **Searching the Scripture**

**John 14:13**, “**13And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.**”

**John 14:16**, “**16And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—**”

**John 16:13-15**, “**13However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. 15All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.**”

### **Yielding to the Spirit**

—Know—

Another important aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity is the characteristic of unity, equality, and full submission of each person of the Trinity to the other persons of the Trinity. These passages taken from the "farewell discourse" are just one place in Scripture where we see this illustrated.

We see full equality of Father, Son, and Spirit in these passages and others like them. The Son is equal to the Father, because Jesus says, "all things the Father has are Mine." Also, we see the Spirit as "another Helper," but the language Jesus uses tells us this is not a Helper of a different kind; He is a Helper of the same kind. The Son and the Spirit are equal in essence: thus, the Spirit and the Father are equal as well.

At the same time, we see submission of the Son to the Father, because He desires the Father to be glorified in the Son. We see the submission of the Father to the Son, as the Father sends the Spirit to glorify the Son. We see the submission of the Holy Spirit to the Son and the Father, because He will speak only what He hears; and He will glorify the Son by taking what the Father and Son have and declaring it. No matter if we speak of equality or willing submission, we know at all times and in all things God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are always working in perfect unity.

—Be—

We have already seen "being made in the image of God" means being relational. But through scripture we understand even more about the nature of those relationships as we reflect on the equality and mutual submission which exists in the Trinity. Let's consider implications for the family to help understand how this might look practically.

As in the Trinity, there are distinct persons in the family. The husband is not the wife, the wife is not the husband, the child is not the father or the mother. What does equality look like in this setting? It doesn't mean that power is shared equally in the family. Typically, mom and dad will hold the majority of decision-making power. But even then, the child is fully human even though he/she is still immature. What equality means is that each person is valued and recognized as a unique person formed in the image of God with equal standing before God.

Furthermore, a healthy family will consist of each family member sacrificially caring for and willingly submitting to every other person in the family rather than thinking they are the center of gravity in the household. In addition, rather than one person always making decisions for the family, the husband and wife willingly defer to one another in various situations based on wisdom and experience. At all times, input from all members of the family is valued and accepted.

—Do—

Think about the relational structures in your family/church family. Has your family demonstrated a structure that is informed by Trinitarian relationships, specifically equality and willing submission to one another? What are some practical things you can implement with your family/church that would develop healthier relationships which better reflect the nature of God?

### **Offer a Prayer**

Father, I thank You for the relationships in my life. I ask that You help me see those aspects of my relationships that are unlike You. Show me where I may have failed to recognize and value the God-given uniqueness of each person with whom I am in relationship. And help me to learn to value the strengths and wisdom of those around me regardless of how they are different from me. I pray my relationships will reflect Your nature rather than the broken relationships of the fallen world around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.