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Doctrine of God, Lesson 5

The Trinity: God in Three Persons

Read Jude 17-25

Our goal this semester is to walk through a basic, biblical summary of who God is. One of the most basic, fundamental beliefs that we have to deal with is the doctrine of the *Trinity*: or in other words, that the Bible reveals that there is *one God* who eternally exists as *three persons*: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Definition of the Word “Trinity”

The word “trinity” is used to describe the peculiar nature of God existing as three persons. It is an attempt to connote in a word the “tri-unity” or “three-in-oneness” of God. Though the word itself is not mentioned in the Scripture, the idea of God existing as a trinity indeed is. The doctrine of the Trinity is probably best understood in the following seven statements:

1. There is one God
2. The Father is God
3. The Son is God
4. The Spirit is God
5. The Father is not the Son
6. The Son is not the Spirit
7. The Spirit is not the Father

Each of these statements is crucial.

- Take away 1, and you’re a polytheist - three gods
- Take away 3-7, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not God, or even gods, at all
- Take away 5-7, and you’re left with *modalism* - where the three “persons” are not distinct
- But what we are arguing, and what Scripture argues is that there is indeed one God made up of three persons, with each person being of the one divine nature and yet distinct from one another.

So, this morning I want to lay out why we believe this doctrine and why it is important. First, let me make some preliminary notes:

Preliminary notes

First, the doctrine of the Trinity is progressively revealed throughout the Bible.

Therefore, you're not going to see as complete a picture in the Old Testament of the Trinity as you see in the New Testament. Now, yes, there are hints of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament, but it becomes much more complete in the New Testament.

- OT emphasizes that there is *only one God*
- NT reveals that God exists as *3 persons*: Father, Son, and Spirit

Second, there are really no analogies that work to describe the Trinity, and when we try them, we end up proclaiming some kind of heresy.

- Examples: the three leaf clover, or water, ice, and gas
- The problem, of course, is that the one substance is not in each of these forms simultaneously. Once you have water turning into a gas, for example, there is no longer any solid form. Illustrates modalism, not the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

Third, sometimes we tend to think that discussions about doctrines like this where we have trouble completely wrapping our minds around something are worthless and futile.

The Bible doesn't explicitly use the word "Trinity" - so why do we need to work through this? Because we are called to speak the truth of Scripture into a world that doesn't believe Scripture.

- Example: Jehovah's Witness friend says that the Jesus, the Son, is not God, that's a big deal - it's a denial of the gospel.
- Or when your Mormon family member says that the Father, Son, and Spirit are *three gods*, not one, that's also a big deal.
- We need to know how to put these things together in order to know who our God is and who we are to worship, trust for salvation, and obey. We need to know how to put these things together so that we can stand up for the truth against heresy and false teachings, and call the unbelieving world to know the true God and be saved.

So, let's turn to the biblical evidence for the Trinity.

Biblical Evidence of the Doctrine of the Trinity

1. There is one God

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.
(Isaiah 45:5-6)

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Timothy 2:5)

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! (James 2:19)

2. The Father is God

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:3)

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

3. The Son is God

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

I and the Father are one (John 10:30)

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, (Titus 2:13)

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: (2 Peter 1:1)

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:5)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

4. The Spirit is God

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” (Acts 5:3-4)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

5. The Father is not the Son

See again John 1:1-4

Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, “I am the Son of God”? (John 10:36)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. (John 17:1-5)

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)

6. The Son is not the Spirit

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7)

7. The Spirit is not the Father

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:27)

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17)

Conclusion of Biblical Data

Throughout history people have tried to come up with solutions but end up denying one or more of the seven statements to which Scripture testifies. They have said that there are three gods or that there are not distinct persons in the Godhead, but one person going by different names, for example. The problem is that these solutions do not work with Scripture. For if there are three gods, then we directly contradict multiple statements that there is one God. However, if we deny the distinction between the Father, Son, and Spirit, then they would deny that the Father sent the Son into the world, that the Son prays to the Father, and that the Spirit intercedes for us – all of which the Scripture claims. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity as expressed in these seven statements is the best way to put together the Biblical data.

The Trinity is God’s nature, he cannot exist other than he is and be God. There is only one God; and the one God eternally exists as three distinct, yet equally divine persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The Application of this Doctrine

But how should the mysterious, scriptural doctrine of the triune nature of God affect us? Many reasons, but the main one: *it should leave us to worship God and marvel at the glorious nature and uniqueness of God.* For example, we see from the doctrine of the Trinity that though God has given us sufficient knowledge in the Scripture to know him, we cannot fully comprehend who he is – his nature surpasses our comprehension. And this should cause us to worship him.