

Delighting in the Trinity- Week 1

Discussion: What are the top 5 most important Christian doctrines?

“God is....*love*.” That sounds great, doesn’t it? Warm and fuzzy. How about, “God is....*Trinity*?” Does that sound cold and philosophical to you? It may, but consider this...God can only *be love* because He *is* Trinity. Thus it is with many other doctrines. God is Trinity. It is the basis for all He does!

Why are we saved?

John 17:3- “*This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*”

- What is eternal life? *That they may know you.*
- Who is the “you?” the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent?”

Salvation is much more than avoiding hell and going to heaven, it is about *knowing God* the Father, knowing His Son, and knowing His Spirit. And it is this knowledge that radically transforms our life.

“To know the Trinity is to know God, and eternal and personal God of infinite beauty, interest and fascination. The Trinity is a God we *can* know, and forever grow to know better.”¹

Why study the Trinity?

1. To know God.
 - We want to know God *as He reveals Himself in Scripture.*
 - But “Trinity” is not seen in the Bible, is it?
 - Church theologians also sought to express the truth of who God revealed Himself to be, using philosophical terms and words not seen in Scripture.
 - Paul, however, did not struggle to say, “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!” (Phil 2:11)²
 - Neither did Peter refrain from calling the Holy Spirit “God” in Acts 5:3-5
2. To worship God.
 - John 4:23-24- “*A time is coming, and even now has arrived, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*”
 - To worship God rightly, we must worship Him *in truth* (i.e. as He *actually* is!
 - If He is Trinity, we *must* worship Him as such!
3. To share God.
 - When we share or talk about God with people, which God do we describe?
 - The temptation in our western culture is to think we all have the same idea of “God.”
 - But we *must* share the *truth* about Him to represent Him rightly.
 - If God is triune, we must share Him as triune!

¹ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 13.

² Ibid., 12.

The Christian Distinctive

The Athanasian Creed (from the 5th or 6th century) reads,

“Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic [that is, the church’s traditional] faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally. Now this is the catholic faith:

We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence.

For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another.

But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.”

Notice the statement, *above all*. Some translations render it, “before all things.” In other words, the Trinity is the foundational doctrine of Christianity.

Is that an overstatement? Negative. Why?

- Jehovah’s Witnesses can believe in a sacrificial death.
- Mormons believe in Jesus’ resurrection.
- Muslims believe in a Creator God.
- Some Buddhists even believe in some forms of grace alone (in an odd, Nirvana-seeking) kind of way.

The Trinity, then, is what makes Orthodox Christianity distinctive. But not only that, the Trinity is the reason we can know and have communion with God. It is not a mere tertiary doctrine. We *cannot* do without it! To remove the Trinity from our Christianity is to remove God Himself from our Christianity.

“For it is only when you grasp what it means for God to be a Trinity that you really sense the beauty, the overflowing kindness, the heart-grabbing loveliness of God.”³

³ Ibid., 9.

Delighting in the Trinity- Week 2

Discussion: Describe “God.” How do you view Him? What is He like? Who is He at His core?

Who is God?

Some may say *The Creator* or *The Ruler*, but both of these require Him to have something in order to be who He is (creation, or people/things to rule over). Even Hitler referred to God as “The Almighty” as if He is purely and simply *power*. Mere might is not who God is. But who is He?

Seeing God through the lens of the Son

No one has seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made Him known. (Jn 1:18)

No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. (Matt 11:27)

Notice: *It is the Son who reveals GOD!* Jesus says, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father” (Jn 14:9) and “No one comes to the Father except by me” (John 14:6).

*Who does Jesus reveal God to be? First and foremost, a **Father**.*

The Loving Father

The most foundational thing in God is not some abstract quality but the fact that He is *Father*.

- God calls His people His children and uses fatherly language (Ex 4:22; Is 1:2, Jer. 31:9, Hos 11:1)
- God says He carries His people “as a father carries his son” (Deut. 1:31)
- God says He disciplines His people “as a man disciplines his son” (Deut. 8:5)
- God likens Himself to a father who has compassion on His children (Psalm 103:13)
- God expresses His disappointment as His people rejecting Him as “Father” (Jer 3:19)
- Isaiah prays to God, “You are our Father...you, O Lord, are our Father” (Isaiah 63:16)
- Jesus repeatedly refers to God as His Father and speaks to Him as His Father
- Paul & Peter refer to the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:16; 1 Peter 1:3)

Why does it matter? You cannot *love* a mere Creator, a Ruler, or absolute Might. But you can love a Father! All of His ways are *fatherly*- when He creates, He creates as a Father. When He rules, He rules as a Father. And this makes Him create and rule different than any other god would!

“It is only when we see that God rules His creation *as a kind and loving Father* that we will be moved to delight in his providence.”⁴

What Does it Mean that God is Father?

Not all names mean something, but *Father* does. A father is someone who *gives life*.

- If God the Father is eternally the Father, He is an inherently *outgoing, life-giving* God.

⁴ Reeves, 24.

- Thus, when He creates, it is not because He *needs it*, but because it is who He is!
- Similarly, God is *love* (1 Jn 4:7-8). Love comes *from* Him, because He is Father

The Father & The Son

- Who then, was God the Father loving from eternity past? His Son.
- In John 17:24, Jesus says to the Father, “*you have loved me* before the creation of the world.”
 - o Note: Jesus is the *eternal Son* (see Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:3, 10)
 - o “The light from the lamp is of the same nature of that which sheds the brightness (the lamp itself) and is united with it. You cannot have one without the other” -Gregory of Nyssa (4th C)
- In John 15:9 Jesus says, “As the *Father* has loved me, so I have loved you.”
 - o **Don’t miss this!** For eternity past, God the Father was *loving* the Son. Then, as we read in 1 John 4:9, the Father shows His love for us by sending us His Son who would love us with the same love!
 - o What kind of love? Fatherly love. Love that *gives life*. “I have come that they may have *life*” (Jn 10:10)
- Jesus the Son also loves the Father
 - o “The world must learn that *I love the Father* and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (Jn 5:20)
- Though the Father & the Son love each other, there is a definite shape to their relationship. The Father’s love is *primary*. He is the *loving head*.
 - o **1 Corinthians 11:13**, “Now I want you to realize that *the head* of every man is Christ, and *the head* of the woman is man, and *the head* of Christ is God.”
 - The Father is the lover and the head of the Son
 - Then Son is sent out to be the lover and the head of the church
 - **This is the beauty of the gospel:** Jesus’ love for us is *not* a response to us, given only when the church loves him; His love comes *first*, and then we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

The Spirit of Love

- Let’s go back to Jesus’ baptism in **Matthew 3:16-17**.
- Notice what the Father says: “This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased.”
- After He declares His pleasure in the Son, the Spirit rests on Him.
- Why? Romans 5:5- The Father makes His love known through *giving His Spirit*. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts *through the Holy Spirit*.”
- **Why is this important?** Because this gives us a glimpse into the inner workings of the Trinity: the Spirit stirs up the delight of the Father in the Son and the delight of the Son in the Father, inflaming their love and so binding them together in the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14).
- The Father, then, loves and empowers Jesus the Son by the Spirit. That is why He is referred to as the *Anointed One*. Priests and kings were anointed with oil for their work. Jesus is anointed by *the Spirit*.

- But is this *Spirit* an impersonal force?
 - o As a person, he speaks and sends (Acts 13:2)
 - o As a person, he chooses (Acts 20:28)
 - o As a person, he teaches (Jn 14:26), gives (Is 63:14), grieved (Is 63:10), and blasphemed (Mt 12:31)
 - o As a person, he can be lied to and tested (Acts 5:3, 9)

Discuss: How does this impact your view of God?

Delighting in the Trinity- Week 3

Text: Genesis 1:1, 25-28

Question: Why did God create the world?

Enuma Elish- one of the earliest attempts to answer this question. The *Enuma Elish* is a creation myth that describes Marduk creating mankind so that he and the other gods can have slaves. This is very similar to Greek gods and the pagan gods of antiquity.

How could a god like Marduk create for any other reason? If a creator god was solitary for all of eternity, how could he not be an inward-focused self-absorbed, self-glorifying god? How could he create for some purpose beyond serving himself?

The Trinitarian Creator-God

“Let *us* make mankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness” (Gen 1:26).

- The Triune God made us to be like *Him*: Father, Son, and Spirit- a God of love who is relational and communicative. He created *us* to share His relationship with us. To invite us into it- that’s why we made us in *his image (imago dei)*.
- The Father, Son, and Spirit have always enjoyed loving another, and so an act of creation by such a God seems utterly appropriate for Him.
- **John 17:24-26.** The Father has loved the Son for all eternity. The Son goes out from the Father in both creation and salvation *so that* the love of the Father for the Son might be *shared* (see also John 3:16).
- “God’s pleasure is rather a pleasure in diffusing and communicating to the creature, rather than in receiving from the creature.” – Jonathan Edwards⁵

How did the Triune God create?

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, “Ethical Writings,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 197-2008), 8:459.

- Irenaeus of Lyons (130- 200 AD) liked to speak of the Son and the Spirit as the Father's "*two hands*" in creation. He did not imply that they are less than persons, but that they were *agents* bringing about His will.
- In Genesis 1, we see God the Father creating through the Son and the Spirit.

Through the Son

- o The Father creates through His *Word*: "And God *said*, "Let there be light!" (Gen 1:3)
- o The Word is identified as the Son who created all things (John 1:3)
- o The Son is the "image of the invisible God...for by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created *through him* and *for him*" (Col 1:15-16).
 - Notice the "for Him"- it was the love of the Father for the Son, and the desire to share that love that motivated the Father to create. He made His Son the heir of all things, and tells us that we also are heirs with him! (Rom 8:17)

Through the Spirit

- o Ps 33:6- "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the *spirit* of his mouth"
- o Job 26:13- "By his *spirit* the skies became fair"
- o In other words, the Spirit *beautifies* the heavens and the earth.
- o In Genesis 1, the Spirit is seen hovering over the hearth as a mothering dove setting on her eggs. The Spirit vivifies- the Spirit *brings to life*.
 - o Job says that the Spirit of God is the one who made him (Job 33:4)
- o The Spirit revives and refreshes- He is referred to as the One who makes things *fruitful*
 - o Isaiah 32:15- "The Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes like a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest"
 - o Psalm 104:30- "when you send your Spirit, the creatures were created, and you renew the face of the earth."
 - o This is why the gifts of building, skill, creativity in the OT were referred to as gifts of the Spirit! (Exodus 31:1-5 for example)
 - o Are we surprised then to find the *fruit* of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23?

And It Was Good

- Creation was *good* because it reflected the love and unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit all throughout creation (have you ever heard a beautiful harmony? Why is it that the harmony is better than a single melody?)
- What was "not good?" Man being *alone*.
 - o If God wanted to create man in His image- and man was alone, was that *good*?
 - o So God created a companion, a helper, and though they would be *two persons*, they would become *one flesh*!
- This is why the fall into sin (Gen. 3) is such a travesty- because it disrupts this beautiful relationship between man and God, and muddies the image of God in man.

- Yet the way that God fixed it was for the Father to send the Son and *them* be separated at the cross- the Son bearing the judgement of our sin- that we might be brought *back in* to the relationship!

Discuss: How does this impact your view of God?

Delighting in the Trinity- Week 4

God created the world to share the love and relationship that the Trinity has enjoyed for all eternity. The Father created through the Son and the Spirit. God created mankind *in His image*, a relational creature capable of love, and declared His creation “good.”

What Happened in the Garden?

- In Genesis 3, sin enters the world. But what is the nature of this sin?
 - o Remember: if God is a singular God, he creates to rule and to be served. What goes wrong in the garden, then, is primarily *rebellion* and/or *disobedience*.
 - Thus, the issue is about *acting* and *behaving right* (possible even for demons! Lk 8:28)
 - o But if God has created us to know Him, to love Him and love others, what happens in the garden is the *rejection of God's love*.
 - We were created as *lovers* in the image of God. We cannot change that about ourselves.
 - But Adam & Eve, and we, *turned* our love on ourselves and on things other than God.
 - Eve's desired the fruit (and what came with it) more than she desired God.
 - **2 Timothy 3:2-4.** Paul describes sinners as “lovers of themselves, lovers of money...lover of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.”
 - o Now Adam & Eve, and the rest of mankind, instead of running *to* God, hides from Him. They perverted love and rejected God, the one who made them to love and to be loved by Him.
- This is why *death* entered the world- because the relationship between man and God that was life was *broken*. The brokenness of the world, the pain, the suffering, are symptoms of mankind's broken relationship with God, not punishment from God for misbehaving.

How Can We Fix What Happened in the Garden?

- We can't. We naturally follow Adam & Eve's example and reject God's love. In fact, Paul refers to sinners as “haters” and “enemies” of God (Romans 1:30, Romans 5:10).
- Only God can fix what happened in the Garden. But how? How does the Triune God respond to the fall in the Garden? What does He do with our broken relationship?
- We broke our relationship with God by loving *ourselves*. God is going to reconcile us (i.e. “fix” the relationship) by *loving us*.

John 3:16- For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

John 17:25-26- Righteous Father, although the world has not known you, yet I have known you; and these have known that you send me; and I have made your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Trinitarian Salvation

The Father sends the Son, anointed by the Spirit, to seek and save the lost by His perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection. The gospel is preached- "Be reconciled to God the Father through trusting the Son." Calling, drawing, regeneration, & faith come through the Spirit, who indwells us, and conforms us to the image of the Son, to the glory of the Father. All of this is rooted in God's *love* and desire to bring us back into loving fellowship with Him- the triune God!

Discuss: How does this impact your view of God?

Delighting in the Trinity- Week 5

God created mankind *in His image* to love and know Him as Father, Son, and Spirit. This relationship was broken by Adam & Eve when they became lovers of *themselves* rather than of God. But out of his love, the Father sends the Son, anointed by the Spirit, to save and reconcile humanity back into a loving relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As Loved as the Son

John 1:18- "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is in the *bosom* of the Father, has made him known." (Jarrett's translation). This word *bosom* means the area between the chest and the hips- it conveys closeness and intimacy, almost as if to say, "in the lap" of the Father.

- Why does this matter? Because the Son not only came to reconcile us back to God, but to take us with Him *there*- to the Father's lap. Close to His heart. As *sons* and *daughters* of the Father (John 17:24).
- This is why we are called children and *co-heirs* with Christ (Romans 8:17).
- We are loved *as the Son* is loved, because we are *in Him* (Paul uses this phrase "in him" 143 times).
- If there were no Trinity, and therefore no Son, we could not become sons and daughters of God.

A Relationship with the Father

- Also, if God is not a Father, He cannot be *our Father*. He could never give us the right to be children.
- If God the Father did not have eternal fellowship with the Son, there's no fellowship to share with *us*.
- But the Father *does* have a Son, and *has* loved Him for all eternity, and He sends Him so that we might be brought back into the Father's love.
- The Father & the Son then give us the Spirit by which we call God "*Abba, Father*" (Romans 8:15).

The Son Reveals the Father

- If God were just a singular God, he would have no one to speak to in eternity past. Why then, would he begin to speak? He would be a god who would largely remain *unknown* and *mysterious*, even if he did.
- And that is precisely what we have in Islam, a solitary God who gives us some *thing* – the Qur'an, a deposit of info about himself and how he likes things. In the Qur'an we find a ruler who must be respected and obeyed.
- By contrast, the triune God of Scripture has always been speaking- amongst the Father, Son, and the Spirit, and all of them speak!
- When God speaks to us- He gives us *Himself*. He gives us His Word- His *Son*, who reveals to us the heart and nature of the Father, and this is recorded in Scripture by the leading of the *Spirit* (2 Peter 1:21)
 - o Jesus is the *image of the invisible God* (Colossians 1:15)
 - o Jesus is *the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being* (Hebrews 1:3)
 - o Jesus said that if anyone has seen Him, they have seen the Father (John 14:9)

The Spirit Makes the Son Known

- **John 15:26-27**- Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, "the helper" *from the Father who will "testify about me,"* Jesus says (v. 26)
- In **John 14:26**, Jesus also mentions that the Father will send the Spirit "in *my* name" and that He will *teach you all things* and *bring to remembrance "everything I told you."*
- The Spirit also *carries along* the writers of Scripture, who's *ultimate theme* is the Son! (2 Peter 1:21)

The Trinity, then, is *absolutely necessary* for knowing God. The Father sends the Son, who reconciles us to the Father while making the Father known. The Father then sends the Spirit, who makes the Son known, so that we may walk with Him and the Father.

Discuss: How does this impact your view of God?

Delighting in the Trinity- Week 6

Recap: The Trinity is *absolutely necessary* for knowing God. The Father sends the Son, who reconciles us to the Father and makes the Father known. The Father then sends the Spirit, who makes the Son known, so that we may walk with Him and the Father.

The Spirit of Life

1. *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.* – Nicene Creed (325)
2. In **creation**, we saw the Spirit hovering over creation like a dove and giving life through breath (*ruach*) (Gen 1:2; 2:7). We see Him throughout the Old Testament *vivifying* and *beautifying* creation (Job 26:13).
3. In the **New Testament**, we see Him raising Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11) and giving life to believers through the *new birth* (John 3:6)

Redeeming What Was Lost

1. In the Garden of Eden, our broken relationship with God lead to **death**. We are naturally born dead in our sins with hearts that do not want God, but that want ourselves and anything else we think will satisfy us.
2. God the Father pursues reconciliation by sending the Son, but the Spirit comes to *give life*.
 - a. **Romans 8:2**- “The law of the *Spirit of life* in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and *death*.”
 - b. **Romans 8:11**- “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also *give life* to your mortal bodies through *His Spirit* who dwells in you.”
3. How does He give life?
 - a. By restoring what was lost in the Garden- a *relationship with the Triune God!*
4. How does He restore that relationship (i.e. regeneration)?
 - a. Opening our eyes to see our sin and need for the gospel.
 - b. Opening our hearts to see the beauty of the Son (and so be like the Father in loving the Son).
 - c. Conforming us to the image of the Son & giving us the mind of the Son (so we can be like the Son in loving the Father).

Knowing God- i.e. being reconciled to the Father through the Son *is life*. Jesus said so himself: **Now *this* is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent** (John 17:3).

The Spirit’s *primary role*, then, is to open our eyes to see the Son, stir up our affections for the Son and the Father, and seal/guarantee us as children of God- stirring up the cry of ‘*Abba, Father!*’ within our hearts (Romans 8:15). His role is that of stirring up and sustaining *familial love* between us and the Trinity.

Why? Because God, as Trinity, is after *relationship*. Not rules or service. He wants us to know and love Him, and to serve Him out of that love. And that is precisely the Spirit’s role!

How does He sustain and grow our spiritual lives?

1. Through the Word, worship, fellowship with other believers (including giving gifts to the church)
2. Through our conscience (conviction)
3. Through conforming our minds to think and act like the Son
4. Through comforting us- reminding us of God the Father's love for us in Christ based *on* Christ

Remember, He is not a *force*, He is a *person*, and He is with YOU! And He can accomplish all these things in us because God is Triune- the Spirit has eternally known and loved the Son and the Father, and knows how to stir up *your* love for them!

Discuss: Is this how you have viewed the Holy Spirit? How has this confirmed/changed your view about the Holy Spirit?

Delighting in the Trinity- Week 7

Which *God* are we talking about? The singular ruler-god of Islam? Or Aristotle's unknowable "Unmoved Mover"? Or one of the impersonal "gods" behind New Age, Wicca, and neopaganism?

For those who reject God, which *God* are they rejecting? Too often it is a manufactured idea of a singular God who functions as the Mighty Ruler. Christopher Hitchens writes,

I think it would be rather awful if it was true. If there was permanent, round the clock divine supervision and invigilation of everything you did, you would never have a waking or sleeping moment when you weren't being watched and controlled and supervised by some celestial entity from the moment of your conception to the moment of your death. It would be like living in North Korea.⁶

Could the same be said, not about the type of God that Hitchens imagines, but the **Triune God** of the Bible? Certainly not! To demonstrate this, consider these three attributes of God in light of the Trinity: *Holiness, Wrath, and Glory*

Holiness

1. Holiness means *to be set apart*. In other words, God is not like us!
2. What primarily sets Him apart?
 - a. A *single person god* would be primarily set apart *away* from others. He would be *distant*.
 - b. But the *Triune God* is set apart primarily by His attribute of eternal love.

"The holiness of God consists in his love, especially in the perfect and intimate union and love there is between the Father and the Son." – Jonathan Edwards (18th C)

3. This is precisely why *this God's* two greatest commandments are "Love the Lord your God" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." For in so doing, we act *like Him*! God's love is the heart of His Holiness. **1 Jn 4:7-8.**

Wrath

⁶ Christopher Hitchens, interview on *Hannity & Colmes*, Fox News, May 13, 2007.

God's wrath is often seen as an attribute of His that we merely have to *stomach* or *accept* even though we don't want too because we think of it in the context of a single-person God who acts like the big kid in school who must get his way or else he pours out his anger on everyone else. But this is not the biblical God, nor is it biblical wrath!

1. The wrath of God, from Genesis 3 onward, is a loving God's *response to evil*. God is angry at evil because He loves
2. "God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful *because God is love*." – Miroslav Volf
3. The wrath of the Triune God is proof of the sincerity of His love, proof that He *actually cares*. When we look around at the brokenness and evil in our world, do we want God to turn a blind eye to it? No, we want Him to eradicate it forever, and in fact, that is exactly what He promises to do.

Glory

1. Glory – "heaviness" or "weight." It is what *makes up* something. What something (or someone) *is*.
2. God's glory is often referred to as *radiant light* (Ezek 10:4, 43:2; Isaiah 60:1-2; Lk 2:8-9)
3. God's glory is in Him *shining out*, giving life, warmth, and love. In essence, giving *Himself*.
4. **Ezekiel 1:26-28** explains a vision of God's glory that likens it to *a man* and *radiant light*.
 - a. This is why we see the Son of God described as the *Light* of the World in Christ?
 - b. **Hebrews 1:3** says that *the Son- Jesus- is the radiance of God's glory*
5. The *Glory* of God is not Him getting things for *Himself* (i.e. praise, service, worship, etc.) but in Him *giving Himself*, which is precisely *how* He demonstrates His holiness, wrath, and glory, all rooted in *love*, by sending His Son!