

Series: “Discipleship Essentials”

The Three-Person God

Pastor Carl Lodico

July 8, 2012

Good morning everyone! It’s great to be here. I’m always happy when Pastor Ralph asks me to come and preach. He told me that you guys are currently in a teaching series on the essentials of discipleship and today’s topic is “The Three-Person God.” I thought, “Wow! I get to preach about the doctrine of the Trinity - the Three-Person God.” I felt honored to preach on such a deep theological subject. The Trinity is foundational to the purity of Biblical Christianity.

So, it was only natural for Pastor Ralph to call in one of the brightest theologians to tackle such a heavy doctrinal issue. Yes sir, he tried...but most theologians are on vacation in July. So, Ralph sent out a few text messages and, well, here I am. Seriously, folks, this is the best you get in July.

But, I’m going to give it my best shot because the Apostle Paul says in **Titus 2:1** that we are to **“teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine.”** That’s a heavy statement and holds a ton of responsibility for preachers.

To quote an incredible theologian, **St. Augustine**, he says **“If you deny the Trinity you lose your soul and if you try to explain it you lose your mind.”**

So, my prayer is to avoid both of these pitfalls and do a good job teaching for you.

The Trinity is an unfathomable, and yet unmistakable doctrine in Scripture. As Jonathan Edwards, one of the great preachers of the 18th century Great Awakening in our country noted, after studying the topic extensively, **“I think [the doctrine of the Trinity] to be the highest and deepest of all Divine mysteries”**

Folks, the fullness of the Trinity is far beyond human comprehension, especially since you got me today, but it is unquestionably how God has revealed Himself in Scripture—as one God eternally existing in three Persons.

I think it be best to begin with prayer. Join me.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, I ask that you open our hearts and minds to your word. Teach us through your Spirit. Our desire today is that people would be drawn to your Son, Jesus, and conformed into his image. We acknowledge the Trinity is a great mystery but thoroughly biblical. Ultimately, is how you revealed yourself in Scripture and our prayer is know you more. In Jesus' name, amen.

Why are we exploring the Trinity today? Well, I believe that our world is filled with people, Christian or non, who share a deep longing to be loved. We are created for relationships. We want communication. We want contact with one another and, ultimately, we want contact with God. We want to know God.

If you consider all the technological advancements in our day - e-mails, text messages, blogs, Facebook, Twitter or whatever else is on the Internet these days - they are all examples of creating portals by which people can be spoken to and speak to one another. We have a deep passionate desire for communication that brings about unity among people regardless of race, gender, age, culture or nation.

And all these deep longings are rooted in the fact that we're created in the image of God and we long for contact with Him.

Since this is true, if we have a faulty view of God, in every way, we suffer in our relationship with Him.

So, as we approach the doctrine of the Trinity it's exceedingly important that you know who God is, in his very essence and nature. Everything is connected to our understanding of God. Therefore, it's important to answer questions like - Who is my God? Who do I believe in? Who do I worship? And when I die, who do I anticipate I will see?

I certainly can't cover the topic exhaustively in 30 minutes (I could take 30 hours) and that's why, as Pastor Ralph has invited and challenged you to participate in a discipleship triad or quad, I echo that challenge. I'm finding so much joy in my triad developing transparency, delving into God's word and growing through mutual accountability.

Let me begin with where the word Trinity originated.

The word was used by the early church father Tertullian, the son of a Roman centurion from North Africa, who lived 155 - 220 A.D. And it was this word that used to summarize the biblical understanding of who God is.

You won't find the word in the Bible, it's not a biblical word but it is a description of a biblical reality.

Let me give you two other definitions.

First, the Trinity: *The Trinity is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons, Father, Son and Spirit, who are each fully and equally God.*

By eternally, I mean there was never a time when all three didn't exist.

By persons, I mean three distinct persons, Father, Son and Spirit - each who think, speak, feel, and act.

And they are each are fully divine - all knowing, all powerful and all present equally - there is not one more God than the other.

Let me also define Trinitarian.

Definition: *A Trinitarian is one who believes in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.*

Are you a Trinitarian?

It's an exceedingly important question because in our culture people will tell you that there are many other gods, religions and perspectives. So, I want to give you **three considerations**.

First consideration...

- **There is only one true God and many false gods.**

You see, in **John 17:3** Jesus speaks of *“the only true God.”* And the inference is that there are false gods in addition to the true God. Other verses describe this one true God and they are listed on note sheet.

Scripture is clear that there is only one true God.

In the Old Testament, when you read of the nations that surrounded Israel, they had innumerable false gods.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, in **Acts 17**, walks into Athens and sees that there are altars to all kinds of gods scattered throughout the city.

In both the Old and New Testament, God’s people were surrounded by religions that had all kinds of various gods and goddesses. With that in mind, we’re told in...

Ephesians 6:12 *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

Second consideration....

- **The serious reality of Scripture is that if you are not worshipping the only true God, you’re worshipping a false god.**

You’re worshipping the rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

I know that it’s not a popular idea today and it’s certainly not politically correct but it is true and it is biblical.

Here’s an Old Testament example. In **Deuteronomy 32:17** we’re told *“they sacrificed to demons that were not God.”*

In the New Testament, **1 Corinthians 10:20** we’re told *“...the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.”*

Today, we have those who worship everything from Allah to Mother Earth to the god of the Mormon religion to the god of Jehovah Witnesses. They may have powerful spiritual experiences, I'm not denying that, but it doesn't mean that they are worshipping the only true God of the Bible - and they're not.

I share this because I love you and this church loves you.

This is why we have to get serious about understanding God.

If people aren't in a personal relationship with the only true God, if they haven't made contact through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, then at the moment of their last breath they enter a Christ-less eternity which the bibles calls hell.

You say, "Well, I don't want to offend anyone." Folks, can we agree that hell is a lot more offensive.

Third consideration...

- **Therefore, know who you worship!**

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons, Father, Son and Spirit, who are each fully and equally God. I listed many verses on your note sheet you can study further that teach the Trinity.

But let me illustrate how each member of the Trinity fulfills His specific role, and how those three roles interrelate. We see it in the way of redemption.

The Father creates a plan, Jesus Christ implements the plan, and the Holy Spirit administers the plan.

God, the Father, designed and organized how mankind would be redeemed in **Galatians 4:4-5**. He set into motion a complex set of events, actions, and prophecies which culminated in the life and death of the Savior.

God, the Son, carried out the plan in **John 6:37-38**. He followed the Father's instructions to come to earth, even though that meant He would have to die.

And God, the Holy Spirit, sees to it that every person feels a call toward God's saving grace in **John 14:26, 16:8, Romans 1:19-20**. Furthermore, God the Holy Spirit transforms the lives and hearts of those who receive salvation through Jesus Christ.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in their divine attributes. Yet each relates to mankind in a different way because He has a specific role. It's very important to understand this distinction: We don't have three gods; we have one God in three persons functioning uniquely and perfectly.

I hope you haven't lost your mind.

Because now, I want to build on the truth of the Trinity with **four practical applications for the life of a Trinitarian**.

First, a trinitarian will...

1. Model the unity of the Trinity.

In the creation of the world recorded in **Genesis 1:26**, it says, "*Let US make man in OUR image.*" It doesn't say, "Let ME make man." It says, "Let us!" God is involving the other members of the Trinity in the creation of mankind. You may ask, "How do I know he's not referring to the angels?" Because in **Genesis 1:1**, you have God creating the heavens and the earth with a spoken word. And in **verse 2**, you have the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. And in **Colossians 1:16**, we're told that Christ made the heavens and the earth.

The Trinity working together in unity is a beautiful picture of how things can be in the Church - that's church with a capitol 'C' which is the universal church and church with a lower case 'c' which is the local church.

I've had the privilege of serving the Lord in different parts of the world - Romania, Mexico, Denmark - and I've been to many different churches representing different

countries and denominations. One of the most beautiful expressions of unity is when I've celebrated communion with those across denominational, generational, ethnic, or racial divides and we unite around the solitary goal of winning the world for Jesus Christ. The unity in the Church should be a reflection and model the unity that already exists in the Trinity. Disunity never reflects the image of God whether it's in the church, in your family, or in your marriage.

Question - Is there disunity in your church, your family or your marriage that needs to be resolved? A trinitarian models the unity of the Trinity.

Second, a trinitarian will....

2. Appreciate the diversity in the Trinity.

The members of the Trinity work together, but they don't always do the same things. Look at salvation. God the Father governs the world. God the Son redeems the world on the cross. And the Holy Spirit gives us the power and grace to change the world. Three very different roles. But all for the one purpose of manifesting God's glory in the world.

I'm learning how much God loves diversity. Just look around the church. Have you ever been discouraged that you couldn't do some of the things that other people could? True confession: I really want to be able to sing like Keith Urban - I'm a big country fan. I hope you are too because it's the music you're going to hear in heaven. I can try to sing like him but I my guess not many of you would stick around.

But you know what? Even though I can't do some of the things that others can do, that's exactly the way God wants it. He deliberately made us different so that each one of us can contribute something unique to the church and the world.

It works the same way with the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity contributes something unique to our lives. **Romans 8:28** says that God works for our good. **Verse 35** says that Jesus prays for our good. And **verse 27** says that the Holy Spirit helps US pray for our good. This shows the diversity of the Trinity in our lives. We're told in **1 Peter 4:10** *"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."* Or in its diversity.

Question - Are you using your gifts to serve others? Are you helping to administer God's grace in this church? This world? A trinitarian appreciates the diversity of the Trinity by using their gift to serve others and administer God's grace.

Third, a trinitarian will...

3. Experience the intimacy of the Trinity.

In **John 3:35**, it says that the Father loves the Son and has given Him all things. And in **John 14:31**, Jesus says that *"I love the Father and I do exactly what my Father has commanded me."* This tells me that our God is personal, He's made contact and He's intimate. He's a God who exists in relationship.

And the beautiful thing is that God wants to have the same intimacy with you that he has within himself.

There's an old movie called "When Harry met Sally."

At the end, Harry and Sally are separated. But Harry runs all the way across town on New Year's Eve and crashes a party to see Sally. And Sally says, "What are you doing here?" And he says, "I'm here to say that I love you." And Sally says, "You expect to barge in here on New Year's Eve, say "I love you," and expect to make everything ok? And Harry says, "Yes!"

And Sally says, "Harry, how do you know that you love me?" And Harry says, "I love how your nose wrinkles up every time you ask questions like that. I love how you can't make up your mind what to order in a restaurant. I love how you're the first person I want to talk to when I get up in the morning.

And you're the person I want to be with when I go to bed at night." It's a great beautiful scene in the movie.

And that's how our loving, Three-Person God feels about you. Harry just traveled across town to pursue a relationship with Sally, God traveled through heaven and time and space to pursue a relationship with you.

Question for you - Have you made contact with God? Do you have intimacy with God? It's a question for all people and I'll get back to it in just a moment.

Lastly, a trinitarian will...

4. Stand firm on the divinity of the Trinity.

Remember what St. Augustine said, **“If you deny the Trinity you lose your soul, try to explain it you lose your mind.”**

The Trinity is exceedingly important to the Christian faith. If we're not careful it's very easy to fall into the trap of heresy, which is belief inconsistent with Biblical Christianity. And if we have a faulty view or heretical view of God we suffer in every way in regards to our relationship with God.

I want to make you aware of three major heresies and I've listed them in your notes for you to study further.

What's at stake is not just a fancy theological terminology, but our understanding of God himself. Remember, if we have a faulty view of God, in every way, we suffer in our relationship with God.

Therefore, we must stand firm on the biblical definition that upholds the divinity of one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons, Father, Son and Spirit, who are each fully and equally God.

The baptism of Jesus is beautiful picture of this reality. We're told in **Matthew 3:13-17** that all three Persons at once but uniquely distinct were simultaneously active - God the Son being baptized, the Holy Spirit descending, and the Father speaking from Heaven.

Now, I hope you haven't lost your mind. This is a tough topic. If you ask me, the best I can say it is that the Trinity is like the Trinity.

I figure that I'm in pretty good company if I simply echo the words of Jonathan Edwards when he declared that the doctrine of the Trinity is the highest and deepest of all Divine mysteries.

I don't always understand how it works. But I accept it. Not because I can completely understand it. But because I can see that it is taught in the word of God. The word of God doesn't stop being true just because there's something in it we don't understand. The word of God is true whether we understand it or not. And I don't have a problem with this anymore. I'm perfectly alright with the fact that there are mysteries and puzzles in the Bible. Things that I won't understand on this side of eternity. I'm ok with that. I've got enough on my plate with things that I do understand. I'm more concerned about doing what God says, than I am with my peanut sized brain trying to figure out all who He is.

But listen, I am completely convinced that the Trinity is an essential doctrine of Biblical Christianity that I must accept.

And I'm also convinced that the Trinity is essential for me to experience.

I mean, what good is it to believe in the Trinity if you've never felt the power of the Trinity? Or experienced the love of the Trinity?

Let me close with a story of a 12 year old boy who became a Christian at a worship service, actually more like a revival service. The next week he told his friends that he was saved, his sins were forgiven and he was excited about his new relationship with Jesus Christ. But his friends questioned him about the experience. One friend asked him, "Did you see a vision?" The boy said, "No." Another friend asked, "Did you hear God speak?" The boy said, "No." So they said, "Well, then how do you know you were saved?"

The boy searched for an answer. Finally, he said, "It's like when you catch a fish. You can't see the fish. Or hear the fish. You just feel him tugging on your line. I just felt God tugging on the line of my heart. And the message was a message of love just for me."

Here's a boy who experienced the transformational work of the Three-Person God in his life.

Maybe today, after gaining a better understanding of Three-Person God, you sense the Lord is tugging on your heart. Maybe he's saying, "I want to have an intimate relationship with you. I want contact with you. I want to communicate with you in the deepest part of your soul. Like the one I have with this 12 year old boy. And like the one I have within the Trinity. And like the one I have with millions of people around the world."

Perhaps today is the day you make contact with the Three-Person God, the one and only true God, through the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. And if you receive Christ as your Lord and Savior He will make His home in your life.

[Prayer]

Do you sense today, a tug on the line of your heart, to make contact with the God the Father who loves you through the redemptive work of Jesus, God the Son, and the regenerative power of the God the Holy Spirit who will then dwell in your life and help you bring glory to God's name. If so, ask. Simply pray, "Father God, thank you for Jesus' redemptive work on the cross for me. Come into my life through the power of the Holy Spirit and help me live for you. Amen."

If that's your prayer please let us know so we can encourage you and help you to grow. But let me speak to others here today.

Some of you here today need to make contact with God because there is disunity in your life that needs to be resolved. God's committed to helping you take the next step towards unity.

Some of you here today need to make contact with God because you're not appreciating the diversity of the Trinity by using your gift to serve God and administer his grace in this church and world. God's committed to equipping and empowering you to serve him. Make a commitment to discover your gift and use it serve others today.

And finally, some of you need to make contact because you're not experience the intimacy of the Trinity because of a particular sin. The bible says confess your sin and you'll be healed through the forgiveness and grace of God. Confess that to him today and allow him to bring people in your life to help you grow.

Father God, thank you again for this church. Empower them in their commitment to Biblical Christianity and administering your grace in this city and our world. Pour out your blessing in order to bring glory to your name and help more and more people make contact with you. In Jesus, God the Son's, name we pray. Amen.

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The Three-Person God

Titus 2:1 "Teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine."

"If you deny the Trinity you lose your soul and if you try to explain it you lose your mind." St. Augustine

"I think [the doctrine of the Trinity] to be the highest and deepest of all Divine mysteries" Jonathan Edwards

Origin: The word, Trinity, originated with the early church father, Tertullian, who lived 155 - 220 A.D.

Definition: The Trinity is ONE GOD who eternally exists as three distinct PERSONS, Father, Son and Spirit, who are EACH fully and equally God.

Definition: A Trinitarian is one who believes in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Three considerations:

● There is only one true God and many false gods.

John 17:3 Jesus speaks of "the only true God."

Deuteronomy 4:35 "The Lord is God. There is no other besides him."

1 Timothy 1:17 "The King of Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God."

1 Timothy 2:5 "There is one God."

The Apostle Paul, in Acts 17, walks into Athens and sees that there are altars to all kinds of gods scattered throughout the city.

Ephesians 6:12 "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

● The serious reality of Scripture is that if you are not worshipping the only true God, you're worshipping a false god.

Deuteronomy 32:17 "they sacrificed to demons that were not God."

1 Corinthians 10:20 "...the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons."

● Therefore, KNOW WHO YOU WORSHIP!

Deuteronomy 6:4 - teaches that three distinct Persons together are the one and only one God.

John 10:30-33 - explains that the Father and the Son are one.

1 Corinthians 3:16 - shows that the Father and the Spirit are one.

Romans 8:9 - makes clear that the Son and the Spirit are one.

John 14:16, 18 and 23 - demonstrates that the Father, Son, and Spirit are one.

Genesis 1:26 - describes God with a plural pronoun where it says, "Let us make man in our image."

Isaiah 48:16; 61:1 - all three divine Persons are seen at work.

Matthew 28:19 - designates all three Persons of the Trinity through baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14, Galatians 4:4,5; John 6:37,38; 14:26; 16:8; Romans 1:19,20 - showcases the different roles in the Trinity.

Four practical applications for the life of a Trinitarian:

A trinitarian will...

1. Model the UNITY of the Trinity.

Genesis 1:26; Genesis 1:1,2; Colossians 1:16

2. Appreciate the DIVERSITY in the Trinity.

Romans 8:27, 28, 35; 1 Peter 4:10

3. Experience the INTIMACY of the Trinity.

John 3:35; 14:31

4. Stand firm on the DIVINITY of the Trinity.

Matthew 3:13-17

Be aware of three major heresies that is inconsistent with the Biblical definition:

Partialism - teaches that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each a component or part of God.

Modalism - teaches that God is one distinct person but that he changes modes or as some have said "puts on different masks" at different times.

Trithesim - teaches that there are three Gods who share in the substance of a single essence.