

Doctrine - God

Sign Title: God

September 19, 2010

Good morning Faith! It is good to see everyone. My name is Kurt. I'm one of the pastors. Today we are starting a brand new series called *Doctrine*. It is based on Titus 2:1, where Paul tells Titus to make sure he teaches what is in accord with sound doctrine. I usually teach a smaller version of this in our membership class but as a church, we are looking to adopt the new Free Church Statement of Faith. Before we do that, I wanted to teach through this new statement for the next 10 weeks so we know what we were adopting. This also serves to fulfilling the theological prerequisites for our membership course in the church.

Today the topic is *God* and I am going to teach on the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine, an early church leader, said that *if you deny the Trinity, you lose your soul, if you try to explain the Trinity, you will lose your mind*. So this morning, it is my hope to avoid both of those pitfalls. Let me prepare you by letting you know that you will have to think today. The Trinity is a tough topic. If you flunked out of school, here is your chance to give it a second shot. I'm going to pray and then we are jumping right in.

Father, thank you that you are a great God. Jesus, thank you for coming to die for our sins and Holy Spirit, thank you for not leaving us alone. As we study today, I ask for wisdom to teach well and I ask for the people to understand and be changed. Amen

One thing everyone wants is relationships. We want communication. Much of our new technology is just new ways to speak and be spoken to. That is why cell phones, text messaging, the internet, blogs and e-mails are so popular.

Deep inside of us is a burning desire for intimate relationships. Why are we that way? Why aren't we content to be alone? It is because we are made in the image and likeness of God. God is all about intimacy and love. We will learn more about that this morning. If you like relationships, it is important we study about God.

Another reason we are doing this series on doctrine is because every problem we face in life is theological at its core. It really is. If we have a faulty view of God, it means we will suffer in absolutely every way because if we don't understand what God is like, we won't understand what we are to be like.

So as we approach the doctrine of the Trinity, we will discover who God is. We will study God's very essence, his very nature. When we discover who God is, it will help us understand who we are. Believe me, everything in life is connected to our understanding of God. The better we can understand God, the better our life will be.

My hope today is to work through a series of questions on the Trinity to explain a little of God's nature to you and then to apply it to our lives.

What is the Trinity?

As a young Christian, I met a guy who tried to shake my faith by telling me the word *Trinity* is not in the Bible. He was right, but it didn't shake my faith. The word Trinity is not in the Bible. It was first used by an early church father named Tertullian who lived from 155 to 220 A.D.. He used this word to summarize the totality of biblical teaching regarding God's identity. So let me begin with a definition of The Trinity as we begin to learn about God.

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

This is going to be exciting stuff this morning. Let's work through this.

There is one God

Your Bible is clear from beginning to end. There is one God. A lot of people will tell you there are other Gods. There are other religions, ideologies and perspectives but there is only one God.

To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him. Deuteronomy 4:35 (ESV)

“ ‘See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; ... Deuteronomy 32:39 (ESV)

...Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. Isaiah 43:10 (ESV)

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)

For there is one God,... 1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)

Now some of you will say, “What about other religions? Don't they have other Gods? What about them?” I like the way Jesus says it in John 17:3. He says, “the only true God.” The inference is there are false Gods out there but only one true God.

This was true in the Old Testament times where the nations who surrounded Israel had all kinds of false Gods. It's also true in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 17, Paul walks into Athens and sees there are altars to many different gods scattered throughout the city. What should we think about these different Gods people are worshipping? Are they just different ways of worshipping the one true God we are talking about this morning? I know that

for some of you, this will set your hair on fire, but you need to hear this.

Religions other than Christianity worship demons. Real, true, powerful spiritual beings that are in league with Satan. The Bible says they masquerade as angels of light and perform counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles

I talk to people all the time who tell me they are spiritual people. That may be good, it may be bad. If you are plugging into the one true God, that is a good thing. If you are plugging into anything else, you may be plugging into a demon for your spiritual experience. Let me show you what I mean.

They sacrificed to demons that were no gods,... Deuteronomy 32:17 (ESV)

Old Testament people, who did not believe in the God of the Bible, went through all kinds of spiritual rituals. They did so to demons, not to the one true God of the Bible. This is also true in the New Testament.

No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 1 Corinthians 10:20 (ESV)

I'm not saying other religions don't have powerful spiritual experiences. I am saying the origin of those powerful spiritual experiences is not the Trinitarian God of the Bible, it's a demon. I believe Allah is a demon named Allah. He is not the Trinitarian God of the Bible. Buddha is a demon named Buddha. He is not the Trinitarian God of the Bible. There are plenty of demons who pretend to be God. They want you to worship them. That is what Satan wanted when he rebelled. He wanted to be worshipped.

If you are just spiritual, not Christian, you are tapping into demons for your spiritual experiences. I fear for you if you think all spiritual experiences are good.

They aren't. I don't want you to tap into demons who desire to deceive and destroy you. There is *one* God.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are God.

While there is one God, the Bible tells us the one God exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is what we mean by Trinity. All three are called God in the Bible. Let me show you this from God's Word.

The Father is God.

...God the Father has set his seal." John 6:27 (ESV)

yet for us there is one God, the Father,... 1 Corinthians 8:6 (ESV)

So God, the Father, is God. I am not going to belabor this point because we have a lot to cover and virtually everyone agrees the Father is God. In the history of the world, there are many heresies and false teachings. I have yet to find one heretic that tried to deny God the Father is God. Even the heretics get this one right. It is that obvious.

The Son is God.

Here is where the debate begins. There are many heretics that say Jesus is not God. One of the great places to see that Jesus is God is John 1:1-2 where John is echoing Genesis 1 about the creation of the world.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. John 1:1-2 (ESV)

Whoever *The Word* is, was with the father in the very beginning and he is God. It would be great if we could discover who *The Word* is. A little later in the first chapter of this book, John tells us who *The Word* is.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (ESV)

Who is *The Word*?... Jesus, the Son of God! God the Father was with the Son and the Son became a man. Let me give you another one.

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

It says in the next verse that the religious teachers who were present took up stones to stone him for blasphemy. Why? Elsewhere, it says the religious leaders wanted to put Jesus to death because he, a mere man, claimed to be God. When Jesus said, “**Before Abraham was, I am.**”, he was claiming to be the God of the Old Testament. He existed before Abraham’s birth and in eternity past was with God the Father. So the religious leaders want to kill Jesus because he keeps claiming to be God. While the religious leaders got it wrong, many other people got it right, like Thomas.

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

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 (ESV)

...in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1 John 5:20 (ESV)

So there is one God. The Father is God and the Son is God. What about the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God.

The first thing you need to understand about the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is a *he*, not an *it*. If you think the Holy Spirit is an it or some kind of impersonal energy force from Star Wars, you’ve got it wrong. The Holy Spirit is not a force. He is not an it. He is a He. Let me show you what I mean

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,.. Ephesians 4:30 (ESV)

When we sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit. An impersonal force cannot be grieved. Can someone show me how you grieve the force of gravity? You can't. The Holy Spirit does personal things. He convicts us, leads us, guides us, instructs us, and empowers us. He can even be outraged.

...has outraged the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:29 (ESV)

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal energy field. Try to outrage electricity. It doesn't work. The Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is a person in the Godhead.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, ...this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (ESV)

The Holy Spirit is the Lord. This is giving Him the title of God.

Another example of where we see the Holy Spirit's identity as God is Acts 5. Peter is pastoring the church and Ananias and Sapphira are church members. They choose to sell a piece of property and give the proceeds to the church for the work of ministry. They lie and tell people they gave all the money they received for the property to the church.

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?...You have not lied to men but to God." Acts 5:3-4 (ESV)

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is God, and you just lied to Him. So the Bible says there is one God but the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God in the Bible. Let me come at this from a different angle.

The Trinity is the source and definition of love.

God is love. 1 John 4:8 (ESV)

This is one of the great verses people love in the Bible. It is so comforting. Think about this. To say God is love is to say God is Trinity. The very essence of the way God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit's interrelate with one another is what? Love!

Some religions teach God was lonely so he made us because he wanted somebody to love. The Bible says that isn't true. God lacks nothing. God doesn't need us. In the Trinitarian nature of God, there is love, friendship, harmony, unity and community that exists between members of the God-head. Our relationships with one another are to be all defined by and derivative of, the great source of love we see in action, the Trinity.

We see this love in the relationship Jesus had with the Father while on earth.

[The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. John 3:35 \(ESV\)](#)
[but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father... John 14:31 \(ESV\)](#)

The essence of the Trinity and the relationship between members of the Trinity is love. This is so important. You and I were made to love and be loved. Apart from God, we have no idea of what love looks like. We think love is sex. We don't even know what love looks like until we see the source of love in action. Remember, everything is theology. Until we begin to understand God and what love looks like between the members of the Trinity, we will never know how to love anyone else.

Does the Trinity appear in the Old Testament?

This is a good question. Let's start at the book of beginnings because that is where the Trinity begins.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Genesis 1:1–2 (ESV)

The word for *God* is important. It is the word *Elohim*. It's plural. There is plurality in the Godhead from the very first verse of the Bible. Who else was involved? The Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

Now I want to share with you something exciting. I am sort of a Bible geek and I ran across something this week that really tripped my trigger. This comes from something called the *Targum Neofiti*. It was written roughly 200 years before the birth of Christ.

Let me explain to you what a Targum is. A Targum is an accepted Jewish translation of the Old Testament. Jewish scholars in the ancient world did their research and wrote down acceptable translations of the Old Testament. Remember, this is from 200 years before Christ. This is what *Targum Neofiti* tells us is a good way to translate Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, by the Firstborn. God created..." Genesis 1:1 (Targum Neofiti)

Hold on here! Who is the firstborn? It is Jesus! This is 200 years before Christ comes on the scene and Jewish scholars see Christ in the Old Testament as the one who carried out God the Father's creative decrees.

In the New Testament, who does Paul say Jesus is?

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Colossians 1:15 (ESV)

So the opening lines of the Bible are Trinitarian. It says through the will of the Father, Jesus, the firstborn (that is Christ) carried out the Father's creative decrees. The Holy Spirit was involved too. The Trinity created everything! The Trinity is also found in many other places.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image,..." Genesis 1:26 (ESV)

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil..." Genesis 3:22 (ESV)

Many times the Old Testament speaks of God in plurality. There are many other places I could show this to you but for the sake of time, I am moving on.

Does the Trinity appear in the New Testament?

It is a Trinity party at the conception of Jesus.

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." Luke 1:35 (ESV)

The power of the Most High is God the Father. The Holy Spirit is the one who comes upon her. The son to be born to Mary is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. It is a Trinity party at the conception of Jesus.

It is also a Trinity party at Christ's baptism. Remember when Christ was baptized, who spoke from heaven? God the Father. What did he say? "**This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.**" Then the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. There we have it. God the Father speaking from heaven. God the Son coming up out of the water. God the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. There are many other footprints of the Trinity in the New Testament but because of time, we will move on.

When was the Trinity recognized?

Some of you, who know a little about church history, know the Trinity was not formally stated by the church until the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Some wonder why it took the church so long to recognize the Trinity. The simple fact is that while the Trinity wasn't stated until 325 A.D., it was recognized from the very beginning of the church. Tertullian was even using the word Trinity in the 200's. Why did it take the church so long to formally recognize this?

Prior to the 300's, Christians didn't have a lot of free time on their hands. They were being fed to the lions, run through with swords, burned alive and crucified. They didn't have time for church meetings until things died down. When things settled a bit, they gathered as church leaders to formally recognize things. Like the council of Nicea, which affirmed the Trinity in 325 A.D. and the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. which reaffirmed the Trinity.

As if the Trinity was not firmly anchored enough through those early church councils, a man named Augustine, who was one of the leading thinkers, not just of Christianity, but of the western world, spent from 400 to 419 A.D. studying the Trinity. Nineteen years studying the topic. If you think this is complicated, you're right, it is. Here is one of the greatest minds of the Western World who studied this topic for 19 years so he could publish a book called The Treaties on the Trinity. It is the definitive work on the Trinity has stood un-refuted for 1,500 years. In this book, Augustine is not able to get to the bottom of the Trinity, he is only able to begin to describe God's Trinitarian nature.



Conclusion

Along comes a book called The Shack. People read it and think they now understand the Trinity. It is a book about the Trinity. Michael W. Smith endorses it. Christians love it, but trust me, you don't understand the Trinity.

Here's the book. A guy named Mack gets a letter from God. God wants to meet Mack at the Shack. Mack goes to the shack and the book is about Mack having a conversation with the Trinity. God the Father is portrayed as an African-American woman named Papa. Jesus is a guy of middle-eastern descent. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as an Asian lady.

Many things the book teaches about the Trinity are heresy. Let me show you some.

1. **It creates an image of God the Father.** - One of the Ten Commandments is not to make a graven image of God. What is a graven image? It is taking the invisible God and trying to make him visible. The Puritans understood this to mean you can not try to picture God the Father as an image. To picture him as an old man is to make a graven image of him. To picture him as an African-American woman is to make a graven image of him. You can try to picture God the Son, because he took on flesh. You can try to picture the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, but to think you can picture God the Father in *any* physical form is to make him much smaller than he is. It is a violation of one of the Ten Commandments. It is heresy.
2. **It is goddess worship.** If God the Father is really God the mother, that changes everything. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven..." not

“Our mother in the shack...” Think this through. If God tells us to address him as Father, to think of him as a woman is heresy. It is to say we worship a goddess, not God.

3. **It commits the heresy of modalism.** I told you last week that Sunday morning is only half the story. There is a lot more to learn in small groups this year. One of the things you will learn in your small group this week is how to get the Trinity wrong. One of the ways to get the Trinity wrong is modalism. It is to say God the Father and the Son are really the same God, just appearing in different ways at different times. It is failing to recognize they are separate and distinct. Let me quote for you from this book. Papa at one point says, *“I am truly human in Jesus.”* That’s not true. The Father was not born of a virgin. The Father did not die on the cross. The Father did not rise from the dead. The Son did. Jesus is not God the Father with a mask on.
4. **It doesn’t recognize hierarchy in the Trinity.** Let me quote from The Shack again, *“They are in a circle of relationship, not a chain of command or great chain of being. Hierarchy would make no sense among us.”* That’s not true! The book says there is no deference in the Trinity. But there is deference! For example, Jesus says, **“The Father sent me.”** and **“I only do what the Father tells me to do.”** This is essential to understanding the Trinity: equality but deference. Out of this we get all kinds of practical teachings. For example, children are supposed to honor their father and mother. They are not less than their father and mother, but they are to listen to and respect them. Wives are to honor and submit to their husbands. Wives are not less

in person or identity than their husbands but they are to have deference to their husband and be a help and support to them. Christians are not less than their pastors but the body is to listen to its spiritual leadership.

Deference but equality is not sinful, it is the way the Trinity operates and the way God calls us to relate to one another.

The Trinity is a complicated and humbling subject but it is important for us to study. Until we understand love in the Trinity, we cannot understand what love is to look like between us on earth. Until we understand equality but deference in the Trinity, we cannot understand equality but deference in relationships here on earth.

I know some of you think I was unloving this morning toward *the Shack* and I was insensitive by telling you demons are behind other religions. I am not being unloving. I am being very loving. It would be unloving for me to let you party with demons and dumb down God.

Remember, this morning was only part one. There is much more to learn in part 2 material in your small groups this week.

Prayer

Father, Son and Holy Spirit; thank you for being more than our minds can bear. Thank you for teaching us how we are to relate to you and to one another. Thank you Father for having the plan to save us. Thank you Jesus for humbling yourself, carrying it out. Thank you Holy Spirit for not leaving us alone but empowering us and gifting us to fulfill the Father's will for our life today. Amen.



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