

The Trinity

Series: These Things Never Change

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

As we continue in our series, *These Things Never Change*, I want us to pick up where we left off last week, and that is talking about and learning who God is. What we call “theology” – the study of God is so very important and so very foundational. It’s not wise to move on and talk about any other doctrines until we have a good understanding of the nature and character of God.

Illus. Miami Conference – Debbie and I took a walk. I had just crushed a cheeseburger and french-fries and on the way to our hotel we walked passed the condos that collapsed in 2018 killing 98 people (**show pic**). You may remember it. All you see now is a big hole in the ground.

What we know after an investigation was done is this building collapsed because major structural damage to the foundation.

When it comes to the essential doctrines of the faith, what we believe about God is foundational. If the foundation isn’t solid, the building will at best lean (think leaning tower of Pisa – leans because of unstable foundation – it’s an attraction alright, but for the wrong reason – **show pic**) or at worst if the foundation is unstable it can cause the building on top if it to tumble and fall just like the condos in Miami.

Foundational damage results in major catastrophes.

Now, as part of this introduction, allow me to make a spiritual parallel. Throughout history – MAJOR heresies...cults...false religions which lead to catastrophic results...damning results are all due to a bad foundation as it relates to defining who God is.

And for some...the reason your spiritual life is apathetic and impotent...the reason you’re leaning out spiritually– it could just be that the spiritual foundation of what you believe is weak and needs to be strengthened.

Right theology – properly understanding God – who he is – his nature and work can help solidify the foundation. And that’s why a series like this...and a message on the subject we are addressing today is so very important.

The title and message today, I’m simply calling: **The Trinity**

Now, I think it is very important to read the Great Commandment as we get started here today. Remember the context. A lawyer comes up to question Jesus (speaking of lawyer, didn’t Mark Lanier do great last week introducing this subject for us!) – what’s the greatest commandment of all the commandments?

Mark 12:29-30 – “Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Remember this! The Lord is ONE – and yet we are talking today of the Trinity – “tri = 3”)³⁰ **And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**”

Part of the Great Commandment is loving the ONE, triune God with all our mind – and we’re going to have to use our mind when it comes to attempting (operative word) to understand the Trinity.

Illus. St. Augustine – is considered an early church father. He lived from 354-430 A.D. He served as the Bishop of Hippo, a region in North Africa (modern day Algeria) for 35 years.

He was known for fighting for...contending for...defending fearlessly the doctrine of the Trinity.

In fact, in speaking of loving the Lord with ALL your mind, St. Augustine studied the Trinity (a word that is NEVER found or used in scripture – we’ll get there in a moment) – he studied it for 16 years.

This quote or something like it has been attributed to him although it’s not sourced – others have said it as well. It goes something like this:

“Avoid the subject (the Trinity), you will lose your soul. If you try to understand it, you will lose your mind.”

So, part of loving the Lord with all our mind is at least attempting – to the best of our ability – to wrap our mind around and try to understand the incomprehensible.

Echoing this sentiment, **John Wesley** – “**Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God.**”

So, fair warning, what we are talking about today – if we do it right, you may leave with a more clear understanding of God, but also...in a way, if we do it right, you may leave thinking, “I’m not sure I understand it at all!”

The scripture says in **Deut. 29:29a** – “**The secret things belong to the Lord our God...**”

And certainly, when it comes to God’s “three in oneness” – it is a divine mystery...a divine mystery that is extremely significant and carries with it some implications on how we relate to God – and we’ll see this in the “why it matters” portion of this message as we conclude today.

So, with that introduction of sorts, let’s get after it. And let’s begin with a working definition of the Trinity, and I am going to take this from what is called *The Baptist Faith and Message*.

If you look on our website under the heading “About” and click on “Our Beliefs”, we have a link to *The Baptist Faith and Message* – While the sole authority of faith and practice for us is the Bible, this confessional statement of beliefs is what binds us together as Baptists. Here’s its statement on the Trinity:

2000 Baptist Faith and Message: “The eternal triune God reveals himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.”

The ESV Study Bible has a doctrine section in the back of it and it gives four statements or affirmations regarding the Trinity:

- 1. There is one and only one true and living God (monotheism).**
- 2. This one God eternally exists in three persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.**
- 3. These three persons are completely equal in attributes (talked about that last week), each with the same divine nature.**
- 4. While each person is fully and completely God, the persons are not identical.**

Another way to lay the groundwork here and see what we are saying is to view it in this graph. While the ESV puts it in this graph, these statements actually originated with St. Augustine.

Illus. SHOW GRAPH

Now, as mentioned, the word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, and so why would we call it an essential doctrine? Why would people like St. Augustine and Athanasius from Egypt give their life to defending this doctrine?

This is just fun history. Athanasius nickname was the “black dwarf”. He was known as the champion and defender of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Athanasius was exiled five times for his stance regarding the deity of Christ and the eternal nature of the Son - Jesus wasn’t created. Just as the Father is eternal, he believed and debated using the scripture that Jesus was eternal with the Father, yet only one God. The Spirit eternal and equally God with the Father and the Son.

His tombstone reads: “Athanasius against the world”. This is how he felt fighting for this truth that while not mentioned in scripture IS scriptural!

There is an early church creed known as the Athanasian Creed...it’s also been called the Trinitarian Creed. This creed that bears his name begins like this:

Athanasian Creed: “Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic (universal – think Big “C”) faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.”

Think they were serious about this? Talking about WHY it matters? When it comes to thinking about God – WHAT we believe matters BECAUSE our eternity is at stake! If the foundation is bad, the whole building can collapse!

The creed goes on and out of the forty-four statements it makes the first twenty-eight all focus on and are about the Trinity. It shoots for clarification regarding the Godhead (three in one) – and every statement is based off scripture. Let's just read some of it!

“Now this is the catholic faith:

That we worship one God in trinity and the 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. What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal. And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being...

So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being...

Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords...

Nothing in this trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So in everything, as was said earlier, we must worship their trinity in their unity and their unity in their trinity.

Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the trinity.”

Now, I want you to stay with me! Again, we are loving God with our minds and we'll see at the end of our time together WHY this is so important! Let's work this out though...what do we mean when we say ONE God in THREE distinct persons?

The Bible is clear there is only one God. Old Testament and New Testament confirm and support this. The Schema in the Old Testament. **Deut. 6:4 – “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”**

We read multiple times in the New Testament where the idea of monotheism is affirmed (John 5:44, 1 Cor. 8:4-6, 1 Tim. 2:5, James 2:19). Jesus repeats this to the lawyer as THE greatest commandment! “The Lord our God is one”.

And so, we have the scriptural evidence of one God, but what does one, God in three distinct persons mean? Well, a person OR personhood can be defined a few ways. First, to have personhood means one:

- Can act volitionally – has a will!
- Can think, be creative and make decisions – has a mind!
- Can feel – has emotions!
- Can communicate - is relational!

This is what we mean when we say the Godhead, the Trinity, is one God in three distinct persons. Only one God, but three persons.

- God, the Father – can act volitionally, think, feel, and communicate!
- Jesus, God the Son – can act volitionally, think, feel, and communicate.
- Same with God, the Holy Spirit.

So, one God, three distinct persons. One God – same essence...same being...same nature, yet different roles and functions. In scripture, we read:

- God, the Father – initiates, plans, directs and sends
- Jesus, the Son – complies and completes, submits and surrenders to the will of the Father
- The Holy Spirit – executes and fulfills and applies the plans of God, the Father and the work of Jesus, the Son.

Now, let's look at scripture and back all this we just said up. Because while the word isn't in the Bible, we see the Trinity AND WHERE we see the Godhead MOST explicitly tells us SO much about God AND ourselves!

First, we see the Trinity in: **Creation**

Gen. 1:1-2 – “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.”

Job 33:4 – “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Gen. 1:26 – “Then God (the Father – plans, initiates, sends, directs) said, “Let us (here it is! “us” – Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

John 1:1-3 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

Col. 1:15-17 – “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

So, in these verses we see the Trinity at work – one God, three distinct persons – same in essence – never separated yet different roles and functions all in perfect unity.

Not only do we see the Trinity in creation, but we see it in: **Revelation**

And by that, I mean you would have no way of knowing God apart from the work of the Trinity. We see this in:

John 6:44 – “No one can come to me (Jesus says, “No one can come to me - he is the way to salvation) **unless the Father who sent me** (see the different role and function) **draws him...**”

And how does God, the Father draw someone to God, the Son? By God, the Holy Spirit!

John 16:7-8 – “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. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...”

See, a person that does not know God...is not in a relationship with God has no hope of knowing him in a personal way apart from the work of the Trinity.

And this leads to a third place we see the Trinity in scripture and that is in: **Salvation**

The Trinity reveals the work of God to someone (revelation), but the Trinity also accomplishes the work of God in someone (salvation).

God, the Father planned salvation. God, the Son accomplished salvation. God, the Spirit secures salvation. Perhaps the best place to turn and find this all in one place is:

Eph. 1:3-14 – (as we read, look at the Trinity – one God, three distinct persons – same essence, same being, different roles and functions) “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,**⁴ **even as he** (God, the Father) **chose us in him** (God, the son) **before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love**⁵ **he** (God, the Father) **predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,**⁶ **to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**⁷ **In him** (God, the Son) **we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,**⁸ **which he lavished upon us, in all**

wisdom and insight⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (Third person of the Trinity) ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Amazing! Our God – the Triune God doing what only he can do – SAVE. I could show you more verses that show forth the Trinity. We see the Trinity in the baptism of Jesus.

Matt. 3:16-17 – “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; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

When we baptize, we were commanded in the Great Commission:

Matt. 28:19-20 – “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.”

Paul closes out his letter to the church in Corinth:

2 Cor. 13:14 – “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Jesus in **John 16:13-15 – “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”**

We could go on and on – Eph 4:4-6, Heb. 9:14, 1 Pet. 1:1-2 and a plethora of other passages speak to the Triune God we worship.

But, let’s turn the corner and really talk about why this matters. Why does it matter? Well, go back to our introduction.

Spiritually speaking our lives will only be as strong as our foundation. And if what we believe about God is not accurate, it could be catastrophic...according to the church fathers, and I believe the scriptures, it could be damning – that’s worst case.

At best, a bad foundation about what we believe concerning the nature and character of God could cause us to lean out...be weak spiritually.

And so, in closing let me show you three specific areas where this doctrine of the Trinity is vital as it relates to our life.

1. Our Suffering

Illus. Cancer – I've talked with two families this week who have heard some not too great of news as it relates to a cancer diagnosis. What do you do...how does knowing that we serve a Triune God help us as we stare down not just of cancer, but of any trial we may find ourselves in?

Well, let's go back to last week and remember what we said about the attributes of God. The fact that the scripture says we have a loving Father...a sovereign Father...an all-powerful Father...an all-knowing Father...an ever-present Father.

When we suffer, it can help knowing that we are serving and trusting in a God who knows everything...can do anything! It can lessen the weight of the burden knowing NOTHING is outside his purview, his wisdom, his control. Man, that helps me as I walk through trials – I have a God that has seen the beginning and the end!

What about the second person of the Trinity, God, the Son – Jesus. I can go through a trial and know that Jesus, God in the flesh knows what a trial is. He knows what it is to hurt...to feel shame...to feel alone...to be betrayed. He knows pain.

I have a God, in Jesus that doesn't just know about the trial I am in, but identifies with me IN my suffering! He's been there!

Then take the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Serving a Triune God means I don't just have a God that knows about my trial, is over my trial...I don't just have a God who identifies with my pain, but through the Holy Spirit walks with me in my pain, will never leave me alone, and is with me to empower me, give me wisdom and counsel me through.

Romans 8 tells us it's the Spirit who intercedes for us, when we are weak and don't even know what to pray for (Rom. 8:26)!

Tell me, the knowing and understanding we have a Triune God doesn't matter! It matters in suffering. It matters secondly (this is application here!):

2. Our Sanctification

Now, we already talked a little about salvation. Brief salvation lesson here. There is a past, present and future to salvation.

- Past tense – justification – God (The Father) legally declares us righteous...we HAVE been saved.

- Future tense – glorification - we will see God, (the Son, Jesus) face to face – we **WILL** be saved.
- Present tense – sanctification – we are being made more and more like Jesus every day. We are being saved. **THIS** is the work of the Spirit!

So, we see that in our sanctification, God allows things into our lives...sends things into our lives that properly handled **THROUGH** the work of the Spirit will make us more like Jesus.

This is what his word is for – our sanctification. We read it and the Spirit of God applies it to our lives!

The goal of our life is to conform to Jesus. **Phil. 1:6 – “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”**

We can’t conform to the image of Jesus, and be all that God has created and made us to be a part from the work of the Triune God in our life.

We pray, God, our Father lead us not into temptation, and we pray the Spirit would empower us to say “no” to that sin and yield to his leadership and work in our lives following the example of our Savior Jesus and living and making decisions for the glory of his name.

Knowing we worship and serve a triune God matters! It matters when it comes to suffering – and we all suffer! It matters when it comes to our sanctification – we can’t be made more like Jesus apart from the work and influence of the Godhead.

And then, third and finally, knowing we serve a Triune God matters when it comes to:

3. Our Stances

I want to remind us all that we are in a battle not against flesh and blood. And when it comes to worldly ideologies, moral decay, heretical teachings...there is more to it than just what’s on the surface.

And understanding (to the degree of which we can) that we serve a Triune God...it helps us know where to draw the line theologically and morally.

False religions – that’s a line in the sand for us. Why? Well, how do we know they are false in the first place? They leave...they forsake the Triune God – line in the sand!

- Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses – they don’t believe the Son was co-eternal with the Father...host of other beliefs that stray from what the Bible teaches about our Triune God.
- Islam – they believe Allah is a single person god. He is not a Father. The Qu’ran states he is “far above having a son”. We don’t worship the same God – The God we worship can’t be defined outside the Trinity.

Whenever you talk to someone that believes differently, NEVER argue past the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – because I can guarantee you EVERY false religion redefines God or takes away from his triune essence and nature.

Take any worldly ideology...take the secularism we are seeing in our world today. Why don't we...why won't we EVER embrace LGBTQ and homosexual lifestyles as Bible-believing Christians?

It's NOT because we don't those living this way. It's because living this way is the exact opposite of what we know of the Triune God's nature and character.

Not every issue our culture deals with is a theological issue. How do we discern what is worth contending for from a faith perspective as opposed to just what is preference or patriotic?

When it comes to Imago Dei (image of God issues – male and female)...when it comes to issues of LIFE... it IS theological. And any attempt to take away from that means the spiritual is at play. What we are seeing as an all out assault on the Imago Dei is straight up demonic!

And when God and his reputation is at stake we make noise because we believe a Triune God is the Creator of life and therefore he defines WHO we are and HOW we live.

Now, that noise should always be done in a way that is loving and honors Jesus – because ultimately it's spiritual warfare – people made in God's image even if they are trying to take away from it are NOT our enemy!

But, it's knowing WHO our God is...this Triune God that shows us what issues we are to weigh in on...what issues are line in the sand issues – be it theological or cultural – the question we ask is what does this say of God?

If it redefines or takes away from the Triune God, spiritual warfare is at play because this is Satan's primary goal – take away or rob the glory of God!

St. Augustine studied for 16 years before writing his book, *On The Trinity*. We just did this in 40 minutes. What we did today in talking about God can be illustrated in this way (bottle of water).

We're just skimming the surface. But how beautiful is it? What a God we serve.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.