

Trinitarian Unity and Definite Atonement

Selected Scriptures

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Introduction

There are few things more sad than a wasted inheritance, or an ignored inheritance. I'm sure you've heard the sermon illustration of the young adult who stood to receive a large inheritance from a dying rich relative. The young man expects that upon his grandfather's passing he is going to be bequeathed the keys to the sports car they had gone to shop for together, or a boat they had talked about, or even just a huge cashier's check that he can spend as he likes. And then, to the young man's great dismay, as his grandfather's lawyer reads the last will and testament, all that he receives is his grandfather's old Bible, with a note attached that says, "My dear boy, this is my most treasured possession. May you find your own treasure in its pages." And the young man is just livid. How could his grandfather do this to him? "Just a Bible?" And he snatches the Bible from the lawyer and storms out of the room, goes home and throws the Bible into a corner of his room and doesn't think about it again for years.

And the young man grows up to resent his family and becomes isolated, or he falls on hard times and winds up living alone on the street. And for *years* he suffers. And his difficulties eventually remind him of his grandfather's dying gift to him, and so he finds some way to get a hold of that Bible, and he seeks for comfort in its wisdom. And to his great shock, he finds that in each page of the Bible there is interleaved a one-thousand dollar bill. Or some variation of that—a large check, or a key to a safe deposit box taped to one of the pages. And, oh, if only this young man had read the Scriptures, he would have received his grandfather's inheritance and could have avoided all of his troubles!

I'm sure at least some of you have heard some variation of that story before. And it *is* a sad story. All the misery that could have been avoided if it weren't for an inheritance that was ignored! But change some of the details. Imagine it *was* a key to a safe deposit box that was taped to one of the pages of a young woman's Bible. And imagine that safe deposit box contained family heirlooms that were passed down through the generations—even as far back as two thousand years. Priceless treasures that this young woman was to enjoy and to steward and to pass down to the next generation. And not just heirlooms! Deeds and titles to lands in an exotic country! I mean, just bountiful, unsearchable riches. And imagine that these heirlooms and treasures have been passed down through the generations at great cost to the family. Predecessors and ancestors have endured imprisonment, and exile, and torture, and even death in order to preserve this inheritance and pass it down to this young woman. And yet there it sits, in a safe deposit box, unknown and unenjoyed by the one to whom it was bequeathed upon a sea of her family's blood,

because the key to her inheritance sits ignored in the pages of Scripture. What a terrible, terrible waste.

It is my judgment that the contemporary Christian church finds herself in just such a scenario—neglecting a priceless inheritance that our forebears have given their lives to safeguard and bequeath unto us—a treasure that has been preserved and passed down to us at the cost of, literally, the imprisonment, exile, torture, and even death of our spiritual ancestors. And that treasure isn't a windfall of money, or a family heirloom, or even a deed to a vast land or kingdom. That treasure is the doctrine of the Trinity. The Triunity of God is *the* fundamental doctrine of Christianity.

It is the doctrine that there is one and only one God—the God of the Bible; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Yahweh, the God of Israel, who brought His people out of slavery in the land of Egypt; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that Yahweh, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other” (Deut 4:39). And yet in unexplainable mystery, this one God exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Father is God, and that the Son is God, and that the Spirit is God; and yet that they are not three gods, but one God. Each person is fully and truly God. And yet, no one person is another person. The Bible also teaches that the Father is not the Son; nor is the Son the Spirit; nor is the Spirit the Father. And it is these strands of biblical teaching that are captured in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, again: that there is one God, who subsists in three co-equal, consubstantial, co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

That doctrine is the heart of the Christian faith. There is no Christianity without it. Because there is no Christianity without God! And the Trinity is *who God is*. The great theologian Charles Hodge called the Trinity “*the* fundamental doctrine of Christianity” (2 *Corinthians*, 690). The commentator Philip Hughes says that the Trinity is “the foundation of all [man’s] knowledge of the being and mind of God” (2 *Corinthians*, 489). William Shedd said, “The doctrine of the Trinity ... is the foundation of theology. Christianity, in the last analysis, *is* Trinitarianism” (as in White, 21). The Dutch Reformed theologian Wilhelmus a Brakel wrote, “The entire spiritual life of a Christian consists in being exercised concerning this mystery” (1:176). Herman Bavinck captured it well when he wrote, “The doctrine of the Trinity is of incalculable importance for the Christian religion. The entire Christian belief system, all of special revelation, stands or falls with the confession of God’s Trinity. It is the core of the Christian faith, the root of all its dogmas, the basic content of the new covenant. ... At stake in [the historical] development [of the Trinity] was not a metaphysical theory or a philosophical speculation but the essence of the Christian religion itself. ... In the doctrine of the Trinity we feel the heartbeat of God’s entire revelation for the redemption of humanity” (2:333).

And yet that glorious inheritance—which men like Augustine, and Athanasius, and Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea gave their lives for—stands for the most part neglected by the contemporary church through the ignorance of Scripture. “One essence? Three persons? Consubstantial? Substance and subsistence? That’s for the pastors and the seminary students! That’s for the philosophers and the theologians! That’s for the professors and the scholars!” No, dear friends: that’s for the *Christians*. That’s for the *children of God* who want to know their God. That’s the cornerstone and heartbeat of the Christian faith that has sailed down as your inheritance on a sea of tears and blood.

The Athanasian Creed is a liturgical document likely composed in the 500s AD, well after its namesake, Athanasius, had died, but so-called because it so resembled the marrow of Athanasius’s teaching on the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity against the heresies of early Christendom. Listen to the Athanasian Creed on the immense, fundamental importance of the Trinity. It says, “Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the [universal] Faith. ... And the [universal] Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [or essence]. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. ... So that in all things, as aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.” Whoever will be saved must confess this doctrine of the Trinity! *This* is the universal faith once for all delivered to the saints! If we want to stand in the stream of historic Christianity, we must receive and confess and understand our glorious inheritance that is the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is impossible to overstate its importance. So much so that Herman Bavinck said that “Every [theological] error results from, or upon deeper reflection is traceable to, a departure in the doctrine of the Trinity” (2:288). And that is how what I’ve been talking about so far this morning connects to the study we began last week. Some of you are thinking, “Mike, that all sounds great, but what are you doing talking about the Trinity? I thought we started a series on the extent of the atonement last week.” Well, that’s true. Last week I introduced a series of sermons that I’ve entitled, *O Perfect Redemption!*—a series that seeks to answer the question: “For whom did Christ die?” Did Christ die on the cross for every single individual who has ever lived throughout human history, or did He die on the cross only for those whom the Father chose and gave to Him—those who will eventually come to faith in Christ and be saved? You say, “What does the Trinity have to do with the extent of the atonement?”

Well, the reality is, you can’t speak of the one doctrine without the other! The atonement is *what* the Savior *does* to save sinners. But the Trinity is *who* the Savior *is* who saves sinners. The Savior who saves by the atonement is the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel is essentially and fundamentally Trinitarian, because the God who saves is Trinitarian. And all that God does is grounded in who God is. All of God's saving acts are rooted in His Triune being. And so we have texts like Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 to 6: "But when the fullness of the time came, *God*"—that is, the Father—"sent forth His *Son*, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law,"—there's the atonement: redemption—"that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God"—the Father—"has sent forth the *Spirit* of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" So you see, the Gospel is inherently Trinitarian. The Father sends the Son into the world. The Son takes on a human nature—"man's Maker made man," as Augustine said, so that He might stand in man's place and redeem those who because of their sin were bound to suffer the curse of the Law. And then the Spirit is sent to apply what Christ has accomplished by transforming our hearts in regeneration and putting us into possession of the adoption as sons, along with the rest of the blessings of salvation. The Father plans and sends the Son; the Son comes and lives and dies and rises again to atone for sins; and the Spirit renews and regenerates and applies what the Father has planned and the Son has accomplished. Salvation is Trinitarian!

But what does all that have to do with the *extent* of the atonement? How does this bear on the question of, "*For whom* did Christ die?" Well, in our introduction to the series last week, you'll remember that I spoke of a common stalemate in this discussion. Mark 10:45 says Jesus gave His life as a ransom for *many*, and 1 Timothy 2:6 says He gave Himself as a ransom for *all*. And I mentioned that if all you do is stack up commentators who say "all" means "many" against the commentators who say that "many" means "all," you're going to go nowhere. Taking isolated proof texts and volleying them back and forth—"Many!" "All!" "Church!" "World!"—fails to move the discussion forward in any helpful way. If you take those texts in isolation, what basis could there be for deciding whether we ought to interpret "all" to mean "all without exception" or "all without distinction"?

The key to breaking that stalemate is to set those isolated texts in the larger *context* of *all* of Scripture's teaching concerning not just the **extent** of the atonement, but also the **design** and **nature** of the atonement. If Scripture is clear that (a) God **designed** the atonement not merely to *provide* a salvation that could be accepted or rejected but actually to *save*, and if Scripture is clear that (b) the **nature** of the atonement was not that Christ's death merely made salvation *possible* but actually *accomplished* the salvation of those for whom He died, then (c) when we come to two virtually identical texts where one says "all" and one says "many," we have sound, biblical reasons for believing that "all" means "all without distinction" rather than "all without exception." The clear biblical teaching on the **design** and **nature** of the atonement helps us interpret the less clear teaching on the **extent** of the atonement.

And so this morning, we're going to begin considering the **design** of the atonement. And that means that we must consider the *Designer* of the atonement, and the Designer of the atonement

is our Triune God. And I want to state my argument right at the beginning, so you know what I'm setting out to prove this morning. The argument is: because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are perfectly united in their *essence*, the three persons of the Trinity must be perfectly united both (a) in their saving *intentions* and (b) their saving *acts*. What the Father wills must be what the Son wills, and what the Son wills must be what the Spirit wills. Those whom the Father intends to save must be the same exact number as those whom the Son intends to save, and those whom the Son intends to save must be the same exact number as those whom the Spirit intends to save.

And since Scripture teaches (a) that the Father has chosen to save a particular people and not all without exception, and since it teaches (b) that the Spirit will regenerate that same particular people and not all without exception, it also teaches (c) that the Son has atoned for that same particular people and not all without exception. To say otherwise is to strike at the heart of the unity of the Triune God. It is to undermine the doctrine of the Trinity, the most fundamental doctrine of Christianity. Unity in the Trinity demands a particular redemption. That's the argument. And in our remaining time together this morning, I hope to prove to you that that's *biblical*. And we're going to take **three points** to do it. First, we'll consider the **Triune Savior**; second, we'll examine the **Triune plan**; and third, we'll see **Triune particularism**.

I. The Triune Savior

Point number one: **The Triune Savior**. And we've said it already this morning: the God of the Bible—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—the only God who exists—is one God, who subsists, or exists, in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And these three persons are co-eternal—that is, God has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; there has *never* been a time when one of them was not. They are coequal—that is, no one person is greater than the others, because all three are *fully* God. And God cannot be greater than God. And the three persons are consubstantial—that is, they are of the same substance, the same essence, the same being, the same nature. And what is that nature? It is the divine nature. It is Godhood.

And that Godhood—that divine nature—is not *divided* among the three persons, such that the Father has a piece, the Son has a piece, and the Spirit has a piece. No, that would be to say that each person is merely a *part* of God. But all three persons of themselves are fully and truly God. And yet they are not three gods but one God. Another way of saying this is that each person of the Trinity fully subsists in the undivided divine essence. And that means that, though the persons of the Trinity can be *distinguished* from one another, they can never be *divided* from one another. There is *Tri-unity*. The being of God is indivisible.

Well, one of the implications of the indivisibility of God's *being* is the indivisibility of God's *actions*. All of God's acts are grounded in the Trinitarian life of God Himself. In other words,

God does what He does because He is who He is. And so if God's *being* can never be divided, neither can God's *works* be divided. This is what's called the doctrine of inseparable operations. And what it means is: in every act that God performs, all three persons of the Trinity are directly involved. Because they share an identical being, an identical essence, no one person of the Trinity ever acts without the other two. They are always indivisibly working together in perfect harmony.

So for example, Scripture identifies the Father as the Creator of the world. Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth." 1 Corinthians 8:6 says, "There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist." The Father is the one from whom are all things. And yet, Scripture also identifies the Son as the Creator of the world. John chapter 1 verse 3 says of the Son, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Colossians 1:16 speaks of the Son of God and says, "By Him all things were created." And further still, Scripture identifies the Spirit as the Creator of the world. Psalm 33:6 says, "By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth"—or literally, by the spirit of His mouth—"all their host." The Father creates by speaking, the Son is the Word spoken, and the Spirit is the breath by which the Word goes forth. Glorious Triunity! So: the Father created the world, the Son created the world, and the Spirit created the world. And the point is: these are not three separate acts of creation! There are not three worlds! The *one act* of creation is performed *by* the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit. Three distinct persons acting, but their acts, like their essence, are perfectly united and inseparable.

Now, that doesn't mean that the acts of the Father, Son, and Spirit can never be distinguished from each other. Remember: the persons can be distinguished but not divided. And so, while their works cannot be divided, they can be distinguished. Distinguishing the acts of the persons from one another came to be known as the doctrine of appropriations. The doctrine of inseparable operations must always be complemented by the doctrine of appropriations. That is to say, while no person of the Trinity ever acts apart from the other two, each divine act is properly appropriated, or attributed, to one of the persons in particular. And so, to use our previous example, while all three persons are involved in creation, Scripture most often identifies the Father as the Creator. For another example, it is the Son alone who is the subject of the incarnation. The Father and the Spirit do not take on human nature like the Son does. John 1:14: "And *the Word* became flesh and dwelt among us." Philippians 2:5–7: "*Christ Jesus* nullified Himself by taking the form of a slave." Nevertheless, it was the Father who sent the Son into the world, 1 John 4:19, and it was the Holy Spirit who conceived the holy Child in the womb of the virgin, Luke 1:35. Even though the Son alone is the subject of the incarnation, even the act of the incarnation is not without the participation of the Father and the Spirit.

Think of it this way: the persons of the Trinity work in neither unison nor in discord, but in harmony. The doctrine of appropriations ensures that they do not work in unison, because different acts are attributed to different persons. But the doctrine of inseparable operations ensures that they are never in discord, because their undivided acts are rooted in their undivided essence. In every act of God, all three persons of the Trinity must work in perfect harmony, or they are not one God.

And that is no less true for the work of the Triune God in salvation. As I said, He is our **Triune Savior**. And I could go to a lot of texts to illustrate this, but turn with me to Titus chapter 3. In Titus 3:4, Paul says, “But when the kindness of *God our Savior* and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us.” And that reference to God, there, is a reference to God the Father. Verse 5: “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by *the Holy Spirit*.” So, our saving Father saves us by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. And verse 6: “the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through *Jesus Christ our Savior*.” So within a span of three verses, we’re told that the Father is our **Savior**; the Son is our **Savior**, and that the Spirit is our **Savior**. And these are not three Saviors, but One Savior. There are not three salvations, but one salvation. Salvation *planned* by the Father, who sends the Son; salvation *accomplished* by the Son, who bears our sin; and salvation *applied* by the Holy Spirit, who renews and regenerates us.

We saw this already in Galatians 4:4–6: The Father sent forth His Son according to plan; the Son redeemed those under the Law; the Spirit is sent into our hearts and imparts to us the adoption as sons. But it’s perhaps nowhere clearer than in that glorious hymn of praise of Ephesians chapter 1. Turn there with me. Paul writes, Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as *He chose us in Him* before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.” The plan of redemption begins with the Father’s saving election of His people before time began. Before we had ever existed, the Father chose a people for His salvation. How’s He going to save them? Verse 7: “In Him”—who is “Him”? It is, end of verse 6, “the Beloved”—the Father’s beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. “In Him we have *redemption through His blood*, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” And then verse 13: “Having...believed, you were *sealed* in Him with *the Holy Spirit* of promise.” And so the Father chooses, the Son redeems by His blood, and the Spirit seals and sanctifies. Redemption planned, redemption accomplished, and redemption applied.

Our **Triune Savior** works neither in *unison* nor in *discord*, but in perfect, glorious *harmony*.

II. The Triune Plan

Second, this Triune Savior saves us according to a **Triune plan**. Number two: the **Triune plan** of salvation. One of the greatest causes for confusion and misunderstanding concerning the nature and extent of the atonement stems from abstracting the Son's saving mission from the eternal Trinitarian plan of salvation. You see, when the eternal Son took on flesh to dwell among man and accomplish our salvation by His atoning death, He was not acting as a rogue agent, haphazardly embarking on a mission of His own devising, divorced from the intentions and actions of the other persons of the Trinity. We've learned from the doctrine of inseparable operations that that would be impossible.

But that's not just an implication of orthodox Trinitarianism. It's also explicitly biblical. In John chapter 6 verse 38, Jesus says, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Jesus says, "I'm not acting independently, here." He says that He self-consciously conducted every aspect of His ministry in strict accordance with the will of the Father. And that will of the Father was made known to the Son in the eternal council of the Trinity, in which the Father, Son, and Spirit devised a **Triune plan** to rescue fallen humanity from sin and death.

And we see Scripture testify of this **Triune plan** of salvation in several ways. In the first place, several passages speak of the saving work of the Son as being divinely predetermined. Turn to Ephesians chapter 3. Here, Paul is speaking of the Gospel that was accomplished in Christ's life, death, and resurrection. In verse 11, he says that Gospel was accomplished "in accordance with *the eternal purpose* which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord." That is to say, Christ's redemptive work was carried out according to a predetermined plan, namely, the Father's purpose which He designed in eternity past. Flip back two chapters to chapter 1. There in verse 11, he says that we have been "predestined according to His *purpose* who works all things after the counsel of His will." So this eternal purpose was the counsel of God's will. There was a predetermined eternal **plan** according to which Christ carried out His saving mission. And so at the Last Supper, when Jesus was telling His disciples that He would soon be betrayed, He said in Luke 22:22, "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined." Determined by whom? By the Father's eternal purpose. In Acts 2:23, as Peter preaches his Pentecost sermon, he says that Jesus was "delivered over by the *predetermined plan* and foreknowledge of God." In Acts 4:28, the church confessed that those who conspired to crucify Jesus did only "whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." And so Scripture makes clear that all of the Son's atoning work was carried out according to this eternal divine purpose or **plan**.

Secondly, there are a number of passages that identify Jesus' mission as a matter of obedience to His Father's will, which clearly implies that this will had been made known to the Son in a prior agreement. We've already seen John 6:38: I've come not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. In John 10:18, when He speaks of laying down His life as a sacrifice for sin, He says, "This commandment I received from My Father." In John 4:34, Jesus says, "My food is to

do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” The Father who sent Me has given Me a work to accomplish, and that’s why I’m here! That’s what I’m doing!” We see the same truth at the close of Jesus’ ministry in John 17. As He prepares to return to the glories of fellowship with the Father, He prays to the Father in John 17:4: “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.” So, whatever the Son intended to accomplish on His saving mission, it was precisely that purpose for which the Father had sent Him.

Third, there are a number of passages of Scripture that outline the *roles* that the Father, Son, and Spirit would take on in the enactment of this **Triune plan** of salvation. But for the sake of time, let’s just turn to Isaiah 53. We’ve already seen in Ephesians 1 that this **plan** begins with the Father’s choice to rescue certain sinners from damnation. If we had time, we could turn to Isaiah 42, where the Father says He’s going to send the Son into the world to accomplish salvation, and that He’ll anoint Him with the Holy Spirit. But in Isaiah 53, we find that the Father will send the Son into the world, verse 12, specifically to *intercede* for the transgressors, by *bearing* their sins, which He will do by pouring Himself out to death. And after all of this, the Father promises to *reward* the Son for His work. Verse 10: “If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days. And the good pleasure of Yahweh will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied.” Verse 12: “Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong.” So the Father anoints the Son, sends the Son to die for sinners, and promises to reward the Son for His work.

From this, we also see the Son’s role in this **plan**. He will take on human nature; He will live in the weakness of human flesh; He will suffer; and He will bear the sin of many by dying in their place. And the Spirit’s role is to beget the Son in Mary’s womb, Luke 1:35, and to empower the Son throughout His life and ministry. And so at Jesus’ baptism the Spirit descends on Him as a dove (Luke 3:22). We’re told in Luke 4:1 that Jesus was “led around *by the Spirit* in the wilderness.” Luke 4:14 says that after He emerged from His temptations He “returned to Galilee in the power of the *Spirit*.” Matthew 12:28: The Spirit empowers Christ to perform miracles. Hebrews 9:14 says that, in His death, Christ “offered Himself without blemish to God ... through the eternal Spirit.” Romans 8:11 says the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. And then, apart from supporting the mission of the Son from His conception, to His death, and even through to His resurrection, the Spirit then applies the salvation that the Son has accomplished through His regenerating work.

So, to summarize: in this plan, the Father appoints the Son to be the Mediator for those whom the Father has chosen, and He sets the terms for the Son’s Mediation: He will have to bear man’s nature in order to bear man’s curse. The Son voluntarily accepts His role as Mediator and carries out His entire saving mission according to the Father’s will. The Spirit agrees to be the agent of

conception in the incarnation, to support Christ throughout the execution of His saving mission, and then to apply what He has accomplished to those for whom He accomplished it (cf. Trueman, 214).

Now, what does all this teach us? These realities demand a perfect and complete unity of purpose and intention in the saving *will* and saving *work* of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Though the three persons have distinct roles—the Father electing, planning, and sending, the Son living and dying and rising to accomplish salvation, and the Spirit empowering the Son and applying His accomplishments to sinners—nevertheless, the external works of the Trinity are undivided. No person of the Trinity works or wills out of accord with the others. No, they do not work in unison; but they do work—indeed, they must work—in harmony, and not in discord. The slightest rift in the saving will of the Father versus the saving will of the Son versus the saving will of the Spirit would undermine the consubstantiality of the persons of the Trinity.

And that means: the election of the Father, the atonement of the Son, and the regeneration of the Spirit must be coextensive. They must extend to the very same number of people. The extent of the Father’s election is identical to the extent of the Son’s atonement, which is itself identical to the extent of the Spirit’s regeneration. If any one person of the Trinity acts to save more or fewer sinners than any other person of the Trinity, they could not be said to be united in their saving will. And so the Father elects unto salvation; the Son redeems those same people whom the Father has chosen; and the Spirit gives life to those same people whom the Father has chosen and whom the Son has redeemed.

III. Triune Particularism

So what is the question that must be asked, then? If the Son redeems all those and only those whom the Father has chosen, whom has the Father chosen for salvation? Has the Father chosen all without exception to be saved? Or has He chosen a particular people to be brought to Himself in salvation? Is the Father’s election universal or particular? The answer is: it is particular. In the inscrutable wisdom of the Triune God, the Father has chosen to save some, and not all, from the just punishment of their sins. That brings us to our **third point**. We’ve seen the Triune Savior, and just now the Triune plan. Now we come to **Triune particularism**.

How do we know that the Father has chosen only *some* for salvation, and not all? Well, turn to Romans chapter 8. Romans 8:29: “For those whom He foreknew”—that is, those on whom He set His electing love—those “He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.” “And,” verse 30, “those whom He predestined He also *called*”—that is, effectually called to saving faith through the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. “And these whom He called, He also justified”—declared righteous through faith in Christ. “And these whom He justified, He also glorified.” There are no missing links in that chain! *Everyone* who was foreknown, chosen,

and predestined, is called, justified, and glorified! Now, are all without exception justified? Is every individual who ever lived throughout history glorified? No. Hell will not be empty. Jesus says in Matthew 7:13 that “the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are *many* who enter through it.” So, (a) if everyone who is predestined and chosen is justified and glorified, and (b) *not* everyone is justified and glorified, then (c) not everyone has been chosen by the Father for salvation.

The following chapter makes this abundantly clear. Romans 9:13: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” Verse 18: “So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.” Verse 21: God is the Potter and man is the clay. And *as* the Potter, verses 22 and 23, the Father has fashioned both vessels of *mercy* whom He prepared for glory, and He has fashioned vessels of *wrath* fitted for destruction. And there are a lot of issues those passages bring up, but my only point here is that the Father has not chosen to save all without exception.

So if (a) the Father’s election is particular and not universal, and if (b) the Father and the Son are perfectly united in their saving will and purpose—indeed, since the Son’s saving mission is nothing other than the Father’s appointed *means* to save those whom He’s chosen—then (c) it is impossible that the Son’s atonement should be universal and not particular. The Son’s incarnation and atonement are birthed out of the Father’s choice to save a particular people! I love the way theologian Robert Reymond captures this. He says, “It is unthinkable to believe that Christ would say: ‘I recognize, Father, that your election and your salvific intentions terminate upon only a portion of mankind, but because my love is more inclusive and expansive than yours, I am not satisfied to die only for those you have elected. I am going to die for everyone’” (*ST*, 678). And yet that is exactly what you must confess if you deny particular redemption!

Said another way, if the atonement is universal, then either (a) election is also universal (which we’ve just established is not the case), or (b) the Father and Son are at cross purposes with one another. But: “Cross purposes with one another”? The Father and the Son? Those who subsist in the single, *undivided* divine essence—*divided* from one another in their saving purposes? *Contradicting* one another? It simply cannot be! Not only does Jesus Himself say, “I have come down from heaven *not* to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me,” but you would sooner divide the Trinity than find the Father and the Son with different wills trying to accomplish different things! A universal atonement—when you think about it carefully enough and tease out its implications for the rest of Christian theology—fatally undermines the doctrine of the Trinity. It is to introduce dissonance and discord where there can only be harmony. It is to strike at the very heart of the Christian faith itself. Unity in the Trinity demands a particular redemption.

The saving will of the Father is expressed in His particular election—He has chosen some, not all, to be saved. And the Son explicitly states that He has come to do the will of His Father who

sent Him. The reason Jesus believes He is on earth is to accomplish the specific mission His Father gave Him. Again: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” “I have come down from heaven, ... to do ... the will of Him who sent Me!” Well, if the Father’s will circumscribed and conditioned every aspect of Jesus’ saving work, what was the Father’s will as Jesus understood it? And here I want you to turn with me to John chapter 6. Verse 38: I’m here to do the will of Him who sent me. Verse 39: “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that *of all that He has given Me* I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.”

Jesus does not say that the will of the Father is that He go out and try to save as many people as possible so long as He’s a gentleman and respects their free will. He does not say that the will of the Father is to pay the for the sins of everyone who ever lived in order to make their salvation possible. No. He says that there exists a group of chosen individuals whom the Father has given to the Son. Remember Ephesians 1:4: “He chose us in Him.” The Father chose His elect *in* the Son. To choose to save someone in the Son is to appoint the Son to be their Savior. For the Father to choose to save individuals by appointing the Son to be their Mediator, Jesus says, is for the Father to give those individuals to the Son. And Jesus says, “Of all that He has given Me, I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.” Jesus is not providing the possibility of salvation for everybody. He is effectually saving all those and only those whom the Father has given to Him, ensuring their resurrection unto life on the last day.

There exists a group of chosen individuals whom the Father has given to the Son. And it is on *their* behalf, He says, that He accomplishes His redemptive work. And Jesus talks about this all over the place! Just two verses earlier in John 6:37 he says, “All that the Father *gives* Me will come to Me.” Who’s going to believe in Jesus? You say, “Well, anyone who decides of their own free will to believe in Him.” Not what Jesus says! Jesus says the ones who will come to Him in faith are the ones the Father chose before the foundation of the world and gave to the Son!

Turn to John chapter 10. In John 10:14, Jesus says He is the good shepherd who knows His sheep. In verse 15, He says He lays down His life for the sheep. Then, just a few verses later in verse 29, He says, “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” So here, Jesus identifies “those whom His Father has given Him” as His sheep. This is the same group. And John 10:15 says, “I lay down My life for the sheep.” “I die for the *sheep*—for those whom the Father has *given* Me.” Jesus is telling us, as plain as He possibly can, “I die for those whom the Father has chosen.”

And don’t miss this: in verse 26, He looks at the Pharisees and says, “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.” Note that. Not: “You are not My sheep because you do not believe.” Not: *faith* turns goats into sheep. No. Being a sheep is what causes faith! “The reason you don’t believe, Pharisees, is because you’re not among those whom My Father has chosen from before the foundation of the world. You’re not among those whom He has given Me.”

Now, for Jesus to say that He lays His life down for His *sheep*, and then for Him to immediately identify certain people as those who are *not* of His sheep, is to say, almost as plainly as could be said, that He did not lay down His life for those Pharisees. And even if those Pharisees whom He was talking to on that day were the only ones for whom He didn't die, it still means He did not die for all without exception.

But one more text. Go to John chapter 17. This is the text of Jesus' high priestly prayer. On the eve of His crucifixion—as He prepares to undertake the capstone of His work as Mediator—He prays to the Father concerning those on whose behalf He performs His priestly ministry of atonement. In John 17:2, He says to the Father, “You gave [the Son] authority over all flesh, that to *all whom You have given Him*, He may give eternal life.” Now that's interesting, isn't it? If Jesus believed in a universal atonement, you might have expected Him to say, “You gave [Me] authority over *all flesh* that to *all flesh* I may give eternal life.” But no. In distinction from all flesh, the Son exercises His authority to give eternal life only to those whom the Father has given Him.

Verse 6: “I have manifested Your name to the men *whom You gave Me* out of the world.” So again, in distinction from “the world,” but to those the Father gave Him *out* of the world. The disciples were part of this elect number that the Father had given to Him. Then He says explicitly: “They were Yours”—a clear reference to election, as this group belonged to the Father in a special sense, in a way the rest of the world did not. God set His love on His people and made them His own from all eternity. “They were Yours, and You *gave them* to Me.” And then, in verse 9, He once again explicitly distinguishes “those whom the Father had given Him” from the rest of the world. He says, “I ask on *their* behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for *they* are Yours.” Do you hear this? The Great High Priest, interceding before the Father on behalf of those for whom He would offer Himself as an atonement for sins, explicitly denies praying for the rest of the world! “I'm not praying on behalf of the world, but only for those whom the Father has given Me.” How could Jesus refuse to pray for those for whom He's going to the cross? He couldn't! He would be a terribly faithless High Priest if He did that! No, when it comes to those for whom He lays down His life as a priestly offering of atonement, He does so not for the world, but only for those whom His Father had given to Him.

And so if (a) the Son has come to do the will of the Father, and if (b) the will of the Father is that the Son should give eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him, and if (c) the Father didn't give Him the world but only some out of the world, then the redemption accomplished by the Son is particular, not universal. This is **Triune particularism**.

Conclusion

By virtue of their own unity of essence, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly united in their saving will and purpose. Christ has been sent by the design of the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit to save no more and no fewer people than the Father chooses and the Spirit regenerates. The Father has elected some, and not all; the Spirit regenerates some, and not all. To suggest that Christ has atoned for all, and not some, is to put the Persons of the Trinity entirely at odds with one another. It is to be forced to say that the will of the Son is not the will of the Father and the Spirit. That not only threatens the consubstantiality of the Persons of the Trinity, but it flatly contradicts Christ's own explicit statements that He had undertaken His saving mission precisely to do the will of His Father. As the Father has given to the Son a particular people out of the world, it is for these—His sheep, His own, the church—that Christ lays down His life. Unity in the Trinity demands particular redemption.

Dear friend, if you are here this morning, and you are trusting in Christ as your only hope for the forgiveness of your sins, do you understand that the reason for your salvation runs so much deeper than a decision you made? In fact, the reason you are saved is because of a decision that the *Father* made, before the foundation of the world! Before you and I had ever existed, before we had done anything good or bad, the God of perfect holiness set His love upon you, and chose to save you from your sins! He chose to appoint His own dear Son to stand in your place as your Mediator! And His choice had nothing to do with you! It was not based on what you might do, what you might believe, how you might respond to His grace. It was sheer, unconditional, undeserved love. If you're a believer in Christ this morning, you can rest in the truth of sovereign election—that, as Jesus says, "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me*"—that He gives *eternal life* to His sheep, and they will *never* perish; and *no one* will snatch them out of His hand! He is the Good Shepherd, who will lose *none* whom the Father has given to Him, but will raise you up on the last day!

And to those outside of Christ, you who may be wondering, "Did Jesus die for *me*? Has the Father chosen *me*? Am *I* one of those whom the Father gave to the Son in eternity past?" I want you to focus on the second half of John 6:37. The first half says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." But the very next words are, "And the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out." Dear sinner, God does not call upon you to peer into the eternal counsels of the divine mind. God calls upon you to come to Christ in repentant faith—turning away from all of your sins, abandoning all trust in yourself for righteousness, and trusting in Christ alone for all of your salvation. Jesus promises that the one who comes to Him in simple faith, He will certainly not cast out. Come to Christ! And what He has accomplished on the cross will avail for you, just as it has for us.