

If I were to ask you how important is the doctrine of the Trinity, what would be your response—would you or I give this truth its proper value, and if we did could we sufficiently define it—Herman Bavinck [a Dutch theologian who died in 1921]—“...the doctrine of the Trinity is of immense 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...”

It’s because of this importance, that the enemies of the church have opposed it—in fact we have seen within 1John, various tenets of this truth were already being denied within the first century—its for this reason that throughout the 2nd, 3rd, and especially 4th centuries, the church authored carefully worded confessions that described the Bible’s teaching of God as being Triune—three in one, and one in three...

If you recall last week I mentioned the controversy that surrounds 1John 5:7—the question concerns whether or not this verse is genuine to the original letter that John wrote—as many of you know there are basically two Greek manuscripts that have been collected over the years—one is called the received text and the other the revised text—the received text is the Greek text used by the Old and New King James translations, while all other translations [NAS, NIV, ESV] use the revised text—the differences between these two are relatively small—on occasion one may have a different word or on rare occasions [like here with 1John], there is a larger discrepancy—thus the controversy comes down to which of these two Greek manuscripts is more accurate, for the received text contains this verse while the revised text does not—now personally I don’t know which of these two is superior...

Yet, I have to confess that by far the larger share of contemporary authors deny its genuine character, and claim that this verse was probably a commentary on v8, written in the margin, and over time found its way into the text—and yet the more I have considered the issue the more unsure I become—and it is for this reason I have decided not to skip it, but to cover the topic of the trinity from a more topical perspective, my reasons are basically two—[1] I have no way of being certain it was not originally a part of John’s letter, and thus the actual inspired word of God—this of course has been the opinion of every English translation, beginning with the first one in 14th century until 1901 [American Standard Version]...

[2] Its teaching harmonizes with the rest of the NT Scriptures—if this verse would be in any way unique to the overall teaching of the NT, then perhaps I would be more hesitant to consider it—but as we shall see, the doctrine contained within this verse is in perfect harmony to the overall tenor of Scripture and especially that of the NT writings...

In fact it’s in keeping with the whole of this letter—for example, the word Father is used 11 times, Son 18 times, and Spirit 7 times [this does not count the many times when the Son is referred to as Christ or Word, the Spirit to the Anointing, and the Father to God]—but just considering the terms Father, Son, and Spirit we find that this letter is a Trinitarian letter—in other words all I’m saying is, we don’t need verse 7 to prove the trinity, for John bears testimony of it throughout the whole of the letter...

Now if you recall last week in considering v6 and v8, we saw that the Spirit bears witness of the water and the blood—that is of the person and work of Christ—this He does through the written record of Scripture as He applies this individually within our hearts, this takes place upon earth, v8—“and there are three that bear witness on earth...” thus in v7 [if it’s original], John begins this testimony in heaven—“for there are three that bear witness in heaven...”—this is to say—all that takes place on earth, in the historical accomplishment of redemption, is in perfect harmony to the eternal purposes of the Triune God—the Spirit bears witness on earth to that which is testified to in heaven...

Notice John speaks of three who are one—“there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one...”—that is they are one in testimony because they are one in essence—there is one God who exists in three distinct persons—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit—thus we find a tri-unity within God—“and these three are one...”—and this is perhaps the simplest definition of

the Trinity I know—there is one God who exists in three persons—which might be enlarged slightly—there is one God who exists in three distinct, yet coequal persons, as Father, Son, and Spirit...

Now at this point, due to the intense controversy that surrounds this text, I want to turn you to another text, that will serve as our primary focus this morning, that does well to teach much of what v7 teaches—if I were to ask you to think of a single text that teaches the doctrine of the Trinity with absolute clarity, what would come to mind—well I hope that after today Matt.28:19 will forever be etched within your minds with reference to this topic...

I. The Trinity Explained

II. The Trinity Applied

I. The Trinity Explained

A. There is oneness within the Godhead

1. This is where we must begin in seeking a Biblical understanding of the nature of God in general, and the doctrine of the Trinity in particular...
2. From the book of Genesis to the book of the Revelation of John, the Scriptures repeatedly affirm there is only one God...
3. Notice our text, v18—“and Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. God therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”
4. Notice the phrase—“baptizing them in the name...”—not names, but name [singular]—we are to baptize converts in the name of God...
5. By “name” is meant God Himself—His nature or essence—the prepositional phrase is literally —“baptizing them into the name...”
6. Which refers to the close fellowship that water baptism signifies as it intimates the closest possible relationship...
7. But the point I’m here emphasizing is that the name of God is singular as there exists a oneness or singleness concerning God’s essence or nature...
8. What is here implied is expressly stated elsewhere, Deut.6:4—“Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one...”
9. 2Sam.7:22—“Thou art great, O LORD God; for there is none like Thee, and there is no God besides Thee...”
10. We have the same testimony throughout the prophets, for example, Isa.44:6—“I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God...”
11. Thus it shouldn’t surprise us when this testimony is continued into the NT, for example, 1Cor.8:4—“... there is no God but one” and again in James 2:19—“you believe that God is one. You do well...”
12. Wayne Grudem—“Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God. The three different persons of the Trinity are one not only in purpose and in agreement on what they think, but they are one in essence, one in their essential nature. In other words, God is only one being. There are not three Gods. There is only one God...”

B. There is plurality within the Godhead

1. By plurality I mean more than one—that is, while there is but a single God, He exists in a plurality of persons...
2. Notice our Savior identifies who these three persons are—“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”
3. While these three can never be separated, they can and must be distinguished—historically we refer to them as individual persons in that they each possess individual personality...
4. This is to say that the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and the Spirit is not the Son—they are distinct yet coequal persons...

5. Calvin—“By person, then, I mean a subsistence in the Divine essence—a subsistence which, while related to the other two, is distinguished from them by incommunicable properties...”
6. This is a very precise and yet admittedly technical way of saying, that while the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct from one another they are yet all of the same single divine essence...
7. Notice again the text—“baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit...”—a single name which exists as three, distinct, yet coequal persons...
8. We find a hint of this plurality within Gen.1:26-27—“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...and God created man in His own image...’”
9. Notice two things within this statement—[1] we find a plurality—notice the use of plural pronouns—“let us make man in our image, according to our likeness...”
10. Who is God speaking to—some would have us believe He is speaking to the angels, which is not possible for at least two reasons—[a] angels don’t create but are created, and [b] man is not created in the image of angels...
11. Thus the only possible option is that God was speaking within Himself—something that is only true if there exists a plurality within the Godhead...
12. Notice [2] we find singularity, v27—“so God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them...”
13. Here we expressly find that God alone created man—“He [God] created them [man]...”—thus we find a plurality within a single essence...
14. The plurality of God is further hinted at within the High Priestly blessing, Num.6:24-26—“the LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace...”
15. What we find here in a more generic form, we find more clearly in the new covenant blessing of 2Cor. 16:14—“the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen...”
16. John provides us with a similar benediction at the beginning of the Revelation, 1:4-5—“Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the Kings of the earth...”
17. We find it throughout the epistles, for example, Eph.4:4-6—“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all...”
18. At this point I think it’s necessary to distinguish the truth of this plurality from what has typically been referred to as Modalism, which describes the Father, Son, and Spirit as three modes of the same Person...
19. That is—during the OT God revealed Himself as the Father, in the gospels He revealed Himself as the Son, and now He reveals Himself as the Spirit...
20. This is the official belief of the United Pentecostal Church, for example—“There is only one God. He is the creator of heaven and earth, and of all living beings. He has revealed Himself to humanity as the Father, as the son, and as the Holy Ghost...”
21. Another man from this same denomination writes—“Jesus was a man, but what dwelt within him was the Father. He was human, yet He was divine. He was man, and yet He was God. He was the Son, yet he was the Father...”
22. But in contrast to this, the historical and Biblical teaching of the Trinity is that God eternally and simultaneously exists as three distinct yet inseparable persons—Father, Son, and Spirit...
23. For example, we read in Matt.3:16 concerning our Savior’s baptism—“when He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased...”
24. Here we find sufficient evidence to refute all forms of Modalism, as all three persons of the Trinity are simultaneously present—the Spirit, the Father, and the Son...

C. There is equality within the Godhead

1. It is here where things become more difficult to grasp—while God’s single essence is comprised of three persons each of these persons is equally and fully God...
2. This is to say the Father, Son, and Spirit are not three parts of God, that if put together would make a whole—but each person is fully and completely God...
3. Thus if we took the time we would find that divine names such as God and Lord are applied to the Father, Son, and Spirit...
4. Likewise, divine works are all attributed to each of the three persons—creation, redemption, and providence...
5. Furthermore, we find that divine attributes are all applied to each person within the Godhead—they are equally eternal, powerful, truth, love, light, holy, and wise...
6. Let me illustrate this—in Eph.2:5 we read that “God made us alive” while our Savior said in Jn.5:21—“the Son gives life” and then in Jn.6:63—“it is the Spirit who gives life...”
7. Well who is able to impart spiritual life to dead sinners but God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit...
8. Accordingly, the Son and the Spirit are no less God then the Father, but they are all three equally and eternally God...
9. Larger Catechism [Q.11]—“How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father? *A.* The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only...”

D. There is perfect unity within the Godhead

1. Here I want to underscore that the three persons of the Godhead, while being distinct, are never in disharmony or disunity among themselves...
2. All that God does is done as a Triune being—because the Father, Son, and Spirit possess a single will or purpose, they act in perfect harmony and unity...
3. Let me illustrate this by briefly considering two works of God wherein we clearly see the harmonious and unified work of all three persons...
4. Notice [1] creation, Ps.33:6—“by the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth...”
5. Here we find all three persons actively and harmoniously involved in the work of creation—consider [a] the word of the Lord...
6. This of course is echoed in Jn.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 nothing was made that was made...”
7. Consider [b] the breath of His mouth—repeatedly the Scriptures use this phrase as descriptive of the Holy Spirit...
8. For example, Job 33:4—“the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life...” Jn.20:22—“He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit...”
9. Gen.1:1-3—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light...”
10. Notice [2] redemption, Eph.2:18—“for through Him [Christ] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit to the Father...”
11. Here we find like original creation, the Scriptures describe redemption as a collective and unified work of the Triune Godhead...
12. Notice [a] we have returned unto God the Father—“we both have access by one Spirit to the Father...”—we have access to a reconciled God...
13. Notice [b] we have access to the Father through the Son—“for through Him we both have access...”—we have access through Christ...
14. Notice [c] we have access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit—“for through Him we both have access by one Spirit...”

15. Thus while various aspects of salvation are unequally applied to each person within the Trinity, these three persons act in perfect and absolute harmony...
- E. There is eternal order within the Godhead
1. This is perhaps the most difficult and yet blessed aspect of the Trinity—within the Trinity there exist an eternal and fixed order...
 2. This is again found in our text—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”
 3. Here we find a certain and purposed order—Father, Son, and Spirit—the Father is first, the Son is second, and the Spirit is third...
 4. This doesn’t imply any superiority or pre-eminence among the persons, but a purposed and consistent order with the relationship and thus function of the Godhead...
 5. Notice [1] there is a relational order within the Trinity—by this I mean, there is a certain and distinct order in the way the three persons relate within themselves...
 6. Stuart Olyott—“...within the Godhead there is a certain definite order. The Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third. This does not mean that one has existed before another, for each Person is eternally God. Nor does it mean that one Person is senior, the second lesser, and the third junior—for each Person is God in His own right, and the Persons are equal. It is simply a recognition of the eternal relations which exist between the Persons of the Godhead...”
 7. To put it simply—there are certain things true of the Son that is not true of the Father and there are things true of the Spirit not true of the Son...
 8. These differences do not concern the essential nature of the persons, but the relational functions of the persons as they relate one to another...
 9. Wayne Grudem—“...the distinction between the persons is not a difference in ‘being’ but a difference in ‘relationships’...”
 10. These differences are historically referred to as “divine properties” in distinction from the divine attributes—attributes are equally true of each person properties are unique of each person...
 11. Larger Catechism [Q. 10]—“What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead? *A.* It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity...”
 12. Notice [a] the Son is eternally begotten of the Father—this means that the Son has always sustained the relationship as Son to the Father...
 13. Notice [b] the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and Son—this means that the Spirit eternally exists as the Spirit of the Father and Son...
 14. Jn.5:30—“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me...” (Jn.14:10)
 15. Jn.16:13-14—“however, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you...”
 16. Notice [2] there is a functional order—by which is meant, there is a definite order in the way the three persons act outside themselves...
 17. Stuart Olyott—“Everything that God does springs from the Father. He is first. It comes to pass through the Son. He is second. And it is effected by the Spirit. He is third. All God’s works are works of the three persons jointly...yet there is this harmonious order of the persons when the Godhead acts. This is the way God works...”
 18. 1Pet.1:1-2—“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied...”
 19. Notice [a] the Father plans salvation, v2—“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...”—the Father is the originator of redemption...

20. Notice [b] the Son purchases salvation—notice the phrase—“for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...”—the Son is the mediator of redemption...
21. Notice [c] the Spirit applies salvation—consider the phrase—“in sanctification of the Spirit...”—here “sanctification” refers to that initial setting apart that’s simultaneous to regeneration, and so we learn that the Spirit is the applicator of redemption...

II. The Trinity Applied

A. The Trinity is a truth to believe

1. This of course is where we must begin—we must get our minds clear concerning what this truth teaches and what it does not...
2. How important is it to have a correct understanding of the Holy Trinity?—there might be some here this morning wondering what all the fuss is about...
3. The Athanasian Creed [4th century]—“He who wishes to be saved, must before all things hold to the catholic faith [universally accepted], which if anyone does not preserve entire and pure, he will undoubtedly perish forever; now the catholic faith is this, that we reverence one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity...”
4. This of course does not mean that a person must have a complete understanding of the Trinity if he or she is to be saved...
5. Thomas Watson—“Our narrow thoughts can no more comprehend the Trinity in Unity, than a nut-shell will hold all the water in the sea...”
6. But it is to say that no person was ever saved who openly opposed the doctrine, or denied any essential tenet relating to it—that there exists but one God, and the divinity of the Son and Spirit...
7. But doesn’t it seem logical that if God has revealed Himself as Triune, we should make every effort to ensure we have an accurate understanding of who He is...
8. For it may be very possible that a person claims to believe in God, but in fact believes in an imaginative god...
9. For example, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, United Pentecostals, and Muslims, all believe in a god of their own imagination...
10. Perhaps I could put it like this—Do you think God is concerned that we believe, serve, and worship Him as He has revealed Himself within Scripture...
11. Ex.20:1—“and God spoke all these words, saying: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me...”
12. If the Triune God of Holy Scripture, the Father, Son, and Spirit, has delivered us from sin, then we better make sure we have no other gods beside Him, even if it’s an imaginary one...
13. And where do we find the truth of God’s triune nature but within the pages of the Old and New Testaments...
14. The truth of the Trinity is not found within creation or mere reason, but is only found within the special and written revelation of God...

B. The Trinity is a truth to adore

1. The more we understand the nature of God as being Triune, the more our hearts will be filled with adoration and praise for the entire Trinity...
2. Rev.4:8—“...and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come...’”
3. Here we find that the praise offered unto God in heaven is a Trinitarian praise—praise for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...
4. Each person within the divine Trinity is worthy of our hearts love and adoration—we must love the Father, Son, and Spirit...

C. The Trinity is a truth to live by

1. Here I mean our understanding of God as a Triune Being ought to have a practical effect upon our Christian life...
2. What a blessed thought it is that the entire Godhead—Father, Son and Spirit, who exists with one mind, heart and purpose—has vowed to do us good...
3. Jn.10:27—“My sheep shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. 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. I and the Father are one...”
4. There’s a sense in which the Christian’s salvation is as secure as the relationships between the Divine persons...