

Ephesians 1:1-14
Blessed Be the Trinity
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I am going to begin today preaching a series of sermons based on the apostle Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. This is one of the four prison epistles which Paul wrote during his two year house arrest in Rome, which we read about in the last chapter of the book of Acts, Acts chapter 28. These four letters which Paul wrote from prison in Rome are the New Testament books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Two of these four letters were sent to churches in cities very close to each other, and these two letters are very similar. These two letters are the New Testament books of Ephesians and Colossians. Their structure is very similar, and there are many parallel passages in them. The main difference is that in Colossians, Paul focuses on the glory of the risen and ascended Christ, who is the Head of the church, and in Ephesians Paul focuses on the mystery of the church, which is the Body of Christ. Again, Colossians focuses on Christ as the Head of the Church, and Ephesians focuses on the church as the Body of Christ.

After the typical greeting and salutation, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians begins with an extended word of praise to God for the blessings of salvation. This word of praise begins in verse three and continues through verse fourteen. In the Greek, this consists of 202 words in one long, extended sentence. I want to examine these words in some detail, but I won't try to be as thorough as was Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones. Dr. Jones preached 26 sermons on

these first fourteen verses alone. That is almost two sermons per verse on average. I plan on going into some detail but not anywhere near that much detail.

As I have said, verses three through fourteen are an extended doxology, an extended word of praise to God. This is not a literary form which Paul originated. The Hebrew phrase "baruk Adonai," which means in English, "blessed be the Lord," occurs at least thirty times in the Old Testament, and is often used in the hymns of praise found in the book of Psalms. Here are some examples:

Psalm 28:6

Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplications!

Psalm 31:21

Blessed be the LORD, For He has shown me His marvelous kindness ...!

Psalm 72:18

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things!

This is an ancient form of worship in which the worshiper blesses God because God has first blessed him. The blessed bless the Blessor. God blesses us, and then expects us to worship Him in response and to express our gratitude and praise to Him.

Now there is a significant difference between the blessing the worshiper gives to God and the blessing which the worshiper has received from God. God blesses the worshiper by doing good things for him. The worshiper blesses God by saying good things about God. God blesses the worshiper in deed, and the worshiper responds by blessing God in word. God makes the worshiper blessed and the worshiper responds by pronouncing God blessed. God blesses concretely and the worshiper blesses verbally.

In a very real sense, there is nothing we can do for God. He is not in any way dependent upon us for His existence or His sustenance. He doesn't need us to deliver Him from His enemies or to provide Him with food or shelter or clothing. And yet God, who needs nothing, takes pleasure in our sincere words of praise.

John 4:23

23 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."

God seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and truth, and God judges those who refuse to acknowledge His goodness and refuse to give Him thanks:

Romans 1:21,24

21 ... although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, ...

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

As I have already said, God blesses us, and then expects us to worship Him in response and to express our gratitude and praise to Him.

Now the worship we find here in Ephesians chapter one is distinctively Trinitarian worship. This worship is directed first to the Father, then to the Son and then to the Spirit. These, of course, are the three Persons within the Godhead. There is one God with one divine nature, and that means one divine mind and one divine heart and one divine will. The oneness of God is not the oneness of three minds in intellectual agreement and three hearts in emotional agreement and three wills in volitional agreement. The oneness of God is much more profound than that. Any three of us can be in agreement about something and have this sort of oneness, but the oneness within the Godhead is beyond anything we have ever experienced. We simply don't know what it is like to have three persons sharing the life of each other within the oneness of one personal being. The life of the Trinity is beyond our experience, and that is one reason why the doctrine of the Trinity is beyond our full understanding. Again, God has one mind, one heart and one will. Yet within the oneness of God there are three persons. In this context, when we say three persons, we don't mean three individuals. The three persons of the Godhead are not separate individuals, and the word "person" is here used in a more restricted sense than that. The three Persons of the Godhead are an "I" and a "You" and a

"He" within in the oneness of God such that they can love one another and communicate with one another and share the life of each other and work together with a oneness that is beyond our own experience. The three persons of the Godhead are able to have a personal relationship with each other while together thinking through the one divine mind and while together emoting with the one divine heart and while together willing with the one divine will.

The Father, the Son and the Spirit are distinct from each other, and yet they are not separate individuals. If the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit were three separate individuals, then they would be three separate gods, and the unity of the Godhead would be the unity of a council of three or a committee of three or a family of three. No, there is only one living and true God.

Another mistake which some make today is to think that although all three members of the Godhead are divine, yet the Father is somehow more divine than the Son, and the Son is somehow more divine than the Holy Spirit. No, that too compromises the oneness of God. There is but one God, and each member of the Godhead is fully God. God the Father is fully God, and God the Son is fully God, and God the Spirit is fully God. No member of the Godhead is any more divine or any less divine than any other member of the Godhead.

As I have said, we mustn't explain the threeness of God in a way that compromises the oneness of God. Yet we must also take care not to err on the other side as well. We mustn't explain the

oneness of God in a way that compromises the threeness of God. Some compromise the threeness of God by saying that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are merely different forms which God takes or different offices which God performs or different attributes which God has. Let's take, for example, God the Father. God the Father is not a form which God sometimes takes on as when the Father declared from heaven regarding Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God the Father is also not an office or function which God sometimes fulfills as when God is our judge or our savior. God the Father is also not an attribute of God such as God's goodness or mercy. No, God the Father as a person within the Godhead is something more profound and mysterious than that.

The Father, the Son and the Spirit have distinguishing personal properties and authentic personal relationships with each other. There is only one God, and yet this one God is not a solitary deity, not an isolated deity with no peer, with no equal, with no companion of like nature with which to have fellowship. Within the oneness of God, there is a sociology. Within the oneness of God, there are personal relationships. Within the oneness of God, there exists love. This Trinitarian truth about God sets the living and true God apart from every idol of the human imagination. The living and true God is a unique sovereign God who is dependent upon no one outside of Himself, and yet also a personal God of love who needs personal relationships.

The temptation is to compromise one or the other, the oneness of God or the threeness of God, so that we can come up with an idea of God that we can fully understand. We do that when we

say that God is like an egg with a yolk, a white and a shell. No, that illustration compromises the unity of God. We can't divide God into three parts like the yolk, white and shell of an egg. We compromise the doctrine of the trinity when we say that God is like water which can exist as liquid water, solid ice and gaseous water vapor. No, that illustration compromises the threeness of God. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are not just different forms that God takes on at different times. The rule of thumb about the doctrine of the Trinity is that there is no good illustration of it within all of creation. An illustration we can completely understand would take away the eternal mystery of the trinity, and we can't take away the mystery of the Godhead without departing from God's revelation of himself in Scripture. The God of the Bible is one without compromise, and He is three without compromise, and this is beyond our full comprehension and unlike anything in all of creation. We can know the doctrine of God that is taught in Scripture, but we can't fully understand it. If we have an understanding of God where everything fits neatly together within the confines of our puny minds, then we have somewhere compromised what the Bible tells us about God. The God of the Bible is so awesome that we can't fully fathom him, we can't intellectually master him, we can't fully explain him. He will not fit totally within the limited confines of our creaturely ability to understand.

We need to recognize that we can't fully understand the doctrine of the Trinity, but we must at the same time take care not to misunderstand it. We must recognize the relevance and importance of this doctrine as it is rightly understood. Too many today view the doctrine of the Trinity as a rather philosophical

idea that doesn't really affect daily life. Perhaps this helps explain why some cults which deny the Trinity are growing so fast today.

The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Trinity and teach that the Son of God is the first creature created by God. The Mormons deny the Trinity and teach that the Son of God is the first spirit child begotten by the Heavenly Father at some point in time and then born of the Heavenly Mother. The United Pentecostals deny the Trinity and teach that God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are just three different offices that Jesus performs. These groups deny the ancient orthodoxy of the Trinity, and yet people are flocking to join them. Some people don't see a problem with this because they don't understand the importance and relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Let me try to explain this.

Let's say that a person accepts that there is only one God but denies the Trinity. Let's say that this person believes that God is a personal God of love who values personal relationships. Where would a solitary deity such as this find these personal relationships? He would have to find them in the creatures which He has created. Such a God is dependent upon His creation to meet His basic needs. The more personal He is, the more dependent He is. The more dependent He is, the weaker He is. Does this sound like the omnipotent Sovereign Lord God whom we read about in Scripture. No, not at all.

Let's say that another person accepts that there is only one God but denies the Trinity. Let's say that this person believes that

God is sovereign and omnipotent and totally self-sufficient and not at all dependent on His creation. If that is the case, then this God cannot be a God of love who values personal relationships. As a solitary deity, the only personal relationships available to Him are personal relationships with His creatures. As a sovereign deity, He is not dependent on His creatures to meet any needs. So He must have no need for personal relationships if He is indeed not dependent on His creation. The more sovereign such a God is, the more impersonal He becomes. Such a God is ultimately a detached divine force, an abstract philosophical ideal, a cold and unconcerned celestial being. Does this sound like the compassionate and faithful God whom we read about in Scripture? No, not at all.

The God we read about in Scripture is one but not solitary. The God of Scripture exists within Himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father loves the Son and Spirit, the Son loves the Father and Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father and Son. The God of Scripture is both self-sufficient Sovereign and loving Lord. This Triune God of Scripture, who values personal relationships, has voluntarily entered into covenant with us and established personal relationships with us. He is compassionate, faithful and true. Such is the God of Scripture, and such is the relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity.

What I have been discussing so far is basically God as God relates to Himself. Our passage for today is largely referring to God as God relates to us. Each person within the Godhead has a distinct role to play in our salvation. This hymn of praise praises each member of the Godhead for the distinctive role which He

plays in the work of salvation. To put it simply, God the Father administers the plan of salvation, God the Son accomplishes the work of salvation, and God the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of salvation. Yet no member of the Godhead works separately from or independent of the other two members of the Godhead. When any one member of the Godhead works, the other two members of the Godhead are also involved. Administering the plan of salvation is the distinctive work of God the Father, but the Son and the Spirit are involved in that work as well. Accomplishing the work of salvation is the distinctive work of God the Son, but the Father and the Spirit are involved in that work as well. Applying the benefits of salvation is the distinctive work of God the Spirit, but the Father and the Son are involved in that work as well. No member of the Godhead ever acts independently of the other two members. Whenever any person of the Godhead acts, all of God acts.

Our passage today says that we are to bless or worship the living and true God. The living and the true God is the Triune God of Scripture. We need to bless the triune God of Scripture for the distinctive saving work of God the Father, and that is the sovereign planning of our salvation. We need to bless the triune God of Scripture for the distinctive saving work of God the Son who came to this world not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. We need to bless the triune God of Scripture for the distinctive saving work of God the Spirit who worked faith in our hearts and thus put us into a vital saving union with Jesus Christ.

If you have not received Jesus and are not resting on Him alone for your salvation, I plead with you to do so now. You know what it is to believe and how to believe. You trust in someone everyday. I ask you today to put your trust in Jesus, the one who said,

John 6:37

37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

You might ask, "How can I know that I am one of those whom the Father has given to Jesus for salvation?" Come to Jesus, and then you will know. Come to Jesus, and then you will know that you are one of the chosen for salvation through the saving work of Jesus Christ.