

Who Is Like Our God?: Trinity – Week 6

HOOK

Jimmy Needham – (paraphrase) “In the beginning there was the Hero. And the Hero was the Father. And the Hero was the Spirit. And the Hero was the Son. And if this hurts your head already, welcome to the kingdom.”

A.W. Tozer – “**What comes into our minds when we think of GOD is the most important thing about us.**”

- Our view of GOD shapes our words, actions, and thoughts, and purpose.
- So Far: He is **Aseity, Eternality, Self-Existence, Creativity, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent**. Today: He is **Trinity**.

God is transcendent, existing apart from the physical universe, above and beyond the range of our understanding.

Humanity is finite, corrupted, and fundamentally incapable of knowing transcendent God. Therefore, we can only know what He has chosen to reveal about Himself to us. This leaves us with a staggering amount of mystery.

BOOK

John 1:1-4 - *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. 4 In him was life, [a] and the life was the light of men.*

Augustine of Hippo: He was taking a walk along the seaside trying to wrap his mind around the Trinity. He was currently working on his book explaining and defending the doctrine of it. There he met a boy. “I’m emptying the ocean into that hole.”

- We will not arrive at understanding today or in our lifetimes. In fact, we’ll have more questions at the end than we’ll have answers.
- **BUT Truth is not limited to what we can understand. It’s not that small.**
- So the question is not, “Can I understand the Trinity?” But, “Is the Trinity Biblical?” **If it’s Biblical we can find rest and awe** because (A.W. Tozer) “*Love and faith are at home in the mystery of the Godhead. Let reason kneel in reverence outside.*”

The N.T. writers were given a truth, not a theory, but a mystery. “Jesus IS the Son of God” was a mysterious truth they couldn’t deny that forced them to revisit the sacred scriptures and redefine all they knew of God’s nature. Our early church Fathers, some who were trained by Jesus’ apostles, worked tirelessly - not to solve the mystery of God, but - to define His mystery. The goal; not solve, but define.

LOOK

Let’s turn our telescope toward the subject of the triune Godhead. He is three in persons and one in being (essence). Yet, He’s neither a three-headed monster nor suffering from multiple personality disorder. **Where to start? We must start here.**

ONE GOD - YHWH

Deut. 6:4 – “Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is one!”

Isaiah 45:20-24 – “...there is no other God besides Me...”

Ex. 20:3 – “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

- Christianity is monotheistic. We worship ONE God. **So, is the trinity Biblical?**

FATHER

This ONE God created the universe, formed man, founded the Israelite family, and Fathered them into a nation. This image of God showing Himself as a Father is ever-present throughout the scriptures.

Isaiah 64:8 - *O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our Potter...*

Malachi 2:10 - *Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? ...*

New Testament Passages:

Matthew 6:9 - *“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven...*

Romans 8:15 - *...you received God’s Spirit when He adopted you as His own children.*

Now we call him, “Abba, Father.”

1 John 3:1 - *“See how very much our Father loves us, for He calls us His children...*

- God is consistently understood as God, the Father. This is undebated.

SON

Possible sightings of the Son in the Old Testament:

- **Gen.3:8** - God walked with Adam and Eve.
- The “Angel of the YHWH” acting in God-like authority, spoke to YHWH, was called YHWH, and was sent by Him – unified with & seemed distinct from Him.

- Even the Shema gives room: “One” is not specifically one, but can speak of plurality in unity. (e.g. **Gen.2:24** – man and woman became “one”)
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the 4th Man in the fire.
- The foretold Messiah would do God-like works.

Ps. 110:1 – (The verse Jesus used.) *YHWH said to my Lord, sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool.*

Mal. 3:1 – *Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the LORD, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. ‘Behold, He is coming,’ says YHWH of hosts.*

The New Testament writers, the apostles, were confronted with the fact they had personally known Jesus who claimed to be God’s Son. They saw Him do miracles which only God can do, fulfill the Old Testament prophecies which God promised to fulfill, then raise Himself from the grave, which only God can accomplish. God had revealed Himself in the person of the Son.

1 Corinthians 8:6 - *Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

Jn. 1:1,14 – *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. [...] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father....*

Col. 1:15-20 - *He is the image of the invisible God [...] ...all things were created through him and for him. ...he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [...] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...*

HOLY SPIRIT

Gen.1:2 – *The earth was without form, and void; and the darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

Judges 14:6 – *And the Spirit of YHWH came mightily upon him (Samson)...*

Joel 2:28 – *...it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..*

Is. 32:15 – *(God will punish...) ...until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high...”*

And New Testament Passages:

John 14:16-18 - *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever...*

John 20:22 – (to the disciples) *“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”*

Gal 4:6 – *“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”*

TRINITY

Gen. 1:26 – *“Then God said, let Us make man in Our image...”*

- **“Elohim”** – The Hebrew divine name for “God” is plural but used in singularity.

Isaiah 61:1-2 – (YHWH, Spirit of the Lord, the speaker – Messiah) - *“The (1) Spirit of the (2) LORD God is upon (3) Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...”*

Isaiah 48:12,16 – (God speaking) *“I am He; I am the first, and I am the last. [...] And now the Lord YHWH (1) has sent (2) Me, and (3) His Spirit.*

And New Testament Passages:

Mark 1:9-11 – Jesus’ Baptism: Father speaking, Son being baptized, Spirit descends.

John 15:26 - *“But when the Helper (1) comes, whom I (2) shall send to you from the Father (3), the Spirit (1) of truth who proceeds from the Father (2), He will testify of Me (3).”*

Matt. 28:19 - Great Commission – *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the (1) Father and of the (2) Son and of the (3) Holy Spirit...”*

Acts 2:32-33 – *“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, (1) He has received from the (2) Father the promised (3) Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”*

Where do we begin? Behind creation and the work of salvation lies one God and one God only. **Within our 1 God we see at work three distinct roles: personas.**

(Watch St. Patrick’s Bad Analogies by Lutheran Satire)

Trinitarian Heresies [“A belief contrary to orthodox Christianity”] (What it’s not.)

Tritheism (Polytheism) - confesses the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three independent divine beings; three separate gods who share the 'same substance'. This is a common mistake from the misunderstanding of the term 'persons' in defining the Trinity.

- *Bad analogies: Spoon, knife, fork = same substance, silver **OR** the different oceans are made up of water, but none of them make up all of the water.*

Christian Response:

- **Deut. 6:4** – “Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is one!”
- **Isaiah 45:20-24** – “...there is no other God besides Me...”

Modalism (i.e. Sabellianism) - Adherents believe that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not distinct personalities, but three different modes of God's self-revelation. They usually regard God as the Father in creation, the Son in redemption, and the Spirit in sanctification - an actor changing masks. In other words, God exists as Father, Son and Spirit in different eras of chronology, but never as triune = 1 person, 3 names.

- *Bad analogies: a man can be a son, a husband, and a father **OR** water can be a solid, liquid, and vapor **OR** a person is a soul, spirit, and body.*

Christian Response:

- **John 17:5** – Jesus isn't praying to Himself.
- Denies that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
- Removes God's Fatherhood of the Son since they are the same person.

Arianism - is the idea that the Son and Holy Spirit are creations of the Father and not coeternal and coequal. It's sometimes taught that the preexistent Christ was the first and greatest of God's creatures, but inferior and denies His fully divine status.

- *Bad analogies: The sun is the star which gives light and heat **OR** Father speaks the Word (Son), and His breath is the Holy Spirit.*

Christian Response:

Jn. 1:1-5,14 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word **was** God.

The fact Jesus was sent by the Father & was submitted to His will (**John 5:19**) does not make Him inferior to the Father. **Phil. 2:6-8** – Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God...

- Not inferiority, but temporary submission by role for a purpose.

Partialism - taught that Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are components of the one God. This led them to believe that each of the persons of the Trinity is only one third of God, perhaps only becoming fully God when they come together.

- *Bad analogies: An egg, apple, or a three-leaf clover **OR** a three headed monster.*

Christian Response:

John 14:7-10 - *“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him. Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?”*

- Looking at Jesus, you also see the Father (and implied, Holy Spirit). When you are looking at an egg yolk, you are not also looking at the other parts.

Our poor analogies have a tendency to downplay the majesty of God in an attempt to make Him accessible. We must teach Christians to find joy and peace in an incomprehensible God. It is better to stand in awe of His mystery than to cheapen His image.

The Theology of the Trinity

In obedience to Jesus’ great commission, Jesus’ apostles trained disciples (notably **Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement of Rome**). For 300 years, their writings affirmed the deity of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but the doctrine of the Trinity wasn’t well defined yet. There arose major heresies in the church (**Gnosticism, Modalism, Arianism**) which forced the next generations of disciples to study, debate, work out, and unite around a common understanding of scripture on the mystery of the Trinity. Some of the heroes who defined the trinity for us were **Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, and Augustine** (who wrote an extensive volume defending and explaining orthodox trinitarianism).

Tertullian – developed the term “Trinity” meaning “three in unity.” He further defined God as “three personas, one substance (being, essence).”

- **Persona** – acting out a role or purpose
- **Substance** – all that they hold in common and unites
 - **(Insert the triangle pic: “Father is God, Father is not the Son....”)**

Irenaeus (worked to define the roles) – “God the Father uncreated, who is uncontained, invisible, one God, creator of the universe; this is the first article of our faith. [...] And the Word of God, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, [...] who, in the fullness of time, in order to gather all things to Himself, He became a human being amongst human beings, capable of being seen & touched, to destroy death, bring life, and restore fellowship between God & humanity. And the Holy Spirit [...] who, in the fullness of time, was poured out in a new way on our human nature in order to renew humanity throughout the entire world in the sight of God.”

- Emphasis of Father as Creator and Ruler
- Emphasis of Son as Redeemer, Destroyer of sin, Restorer of relationship.
- Emphasis of Spirit as Cleanser/Empowerer and expanding His Kingdom

By the **Councils of Nicaea (325AD) and Constantinople (381AD)** – the theology of the Trinity had been well established and the heresies identified and rejected.

- The **Nicene Creed** puts the roles of Trinity theology into finalized thought.

Athanasian Creed (best defines of the Trinity) – **“We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither blending the Persons nor dividing the Substance.”**

- In the trinity there is both unity and distinctiveness. They are diverse, but they are not divided. Complexity in perfect oneness.
- There is no contradiction within the Trinity. God is in perfect harmony. Not because He’s a perfect balance of three parts. He’s the absence of parts.

The Trinity is summed up well in the **11th Council of Toledo (675AD)**.

“This is the way of speaking about the Holy Trinity as it has been handed down: it must not be spoken of or believed to be “threefold” (triplex), but to be “Trinity.” Nor can it properly be said that **in** the one God there is the Trinity; rather, the one God **is** the Trinity. [...] While they are called three persons in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance.”

Confusing? Augustine - “If you can comprehend it, it cannot be God.”

- God’s awesome complexity and majesty in mystery compel us to worship.

APPROPRIATION – **the work of the Trinity is in unity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in every outward work of the Godhead.** (Tozer) “All of God does all that God does.” “God cannot so divide Himself that one Person works while another is inactive.” There is mystery here, but not confusion. **Three examples:**

1. It is appropriate to see **CREATION** as distinctly the act of the Father, but not the Father alone. All three are equally involved. The Father (**Gen 1:1-3**), the Son (**Col.1:16; Jn.1:1-2**), and the Spirit (**Job 26:13; Ps.104:30**).
2. **INCARNATION:** To become man, the Son was not divided from the Father.
 - a. **John.14:7-9** - *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.* (cf. **Jn.1:18**)
 - b. **All three: Luke 1:35** - the angel answered her, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”*

- i. **Important Note:** Jesus did not become less than the Father or empty Himself of divinity. Divinity added to itself humanity. (Tozer) “The unity of the Godhead made it impossible that He should surrender anything of His deity. When He took upon Him the nature of man, He did not degrade Himself or become, even for a time, less than He had been before. God can never become less than Himself.”

3. **REDEMPTION:** Hebrews 9:14 – “...the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God...” (cf. 1 Pet.1:2)

4. **RESURRECTION:** The Father (Acts 2:32), Son (Jn. 10:17-18), & Spirit (Rom.1:4).

5. **In WRITING SCRIPTURE and building the church:** All three (Jn. 14:15-23)

Within the Trinity, all is shared, united, and mutually exchanged **because of...**

MUTUAL INTERPERMEATION – each person, while maintaining their distinctive identity, permeates the others and is permeated by them. All three are completely permeating all three. This allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two.

- “If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.”
- “I’m going away and sending the Helper.” “I will be with you always...”

When did God become Triune? Eternity past. He is unchanging. **Why is it important?**

- If He loves, who was He loving before creation?
- If He speaks, who was He speaking to before creation?

Before there was creation, there was already relationship within the Godhead. There was communication and affection contained in Him before the beginning. If God is not ‘diversity in unity’ (Trinity), then He is not capable of relationship. If He is not Trinity, then there was a time when He was not loving OR He needed to create so as to love someone. This denies His self-sufficiency and immutability. But, He IS complete within Himself. Therefore, the God of the bible must be ‘triune.

Karl Barth – “The trinity is not the final revelation of God, the final Word spoken, BUT the first before revelation is even possible. Its subject matter makes everything else we know about God possible.”

- Christianity is the only faith on the planet where love precedes life.
- And the God of love (inexplicably) wants relationship with you.

We haven't explained the mystery of God, but defined it. "If you can comprehend it, it cannot be God." (**Augustine**) "Love and faith are at home in the mystery of the Godhead. Let reason kneel in reverence outside." (**Tozer**) If you feel confused, pray that God would turn confusion into faith, awe, and worship.

- **Anselm** – Let me seek Thee in longing. Let me long for Thee in seeking. Let me find Thee in loving, and love Thee in finding."

RECAP

- We must approach God with the understanding He is greater, deeper, and more complex than we can comprehend.
- We worship ONE God.
- He's revealed through scripture that He is one God in three Persons – Trinity.
- His triune nature is the foundation for understanding the God of the bible and how He's at work in His creation and our salvation.
- His triune nature is the foundation for our relationship with Him.

TOOK

Challenge 1: Google and read the Athanasian Creed.

~ Soli DEO Gloria