



TRINITY: GOD IS

Part 1 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | March 30, 2008

TRINITY: GOD IS

So our first topic is the Trinity: God Is. We start with God. The Bible is all about God. It begins “In the beginning, God,” and so the subject of the Scriptures is God. And as Christians, we believe that God is Trinity, that’s what we believe.

Now this word *Trinity*, if you look for it in the Bible, you won’t find it. It was a word used by one of the early church fathers named Tertullian. He lived from about AD 155 to about AD 220 and it was shorthand for describing the very large and complicated teaching in the Bible about who God is. Historically, if you want to do some more work, this was codified at something called the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, and in about the 400s, a man named Augustine wrote a book called *The Trinity*, and it was sort of the definitive work by the early church fathers on this issue of the Trinity.

Today the Trinity is held by all Christians: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, the three major streams of Christianity. No cults and no false religions hold the Trinity. It is one of the distinguishing features of what we believe as Christians.

Now let me give you a definition. The Trinity is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—who are each fully and equally God. Read that definition again: the Trinity is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons—Father, Son and Spirit—who are each fully and equally God.

Now let me define some terms. By “persons,” I’m not saying that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are human beings. By “persons” I mean they think, they feel, they communicate, they act. We’re talking about persons, not things. They’re not impersonal forces. They’re persons—not insofar as we think of as inhabiting a physical body because the Father and the Spirit do not, though Jesus did.

Additionally, what we mean by “eternal” is that there has never been a time that there wasn’t the Trinity, that the Trinity precedes all that God has made, that the Trinity is God, and he, in fact, made everything. And so there’s never been a time, nor will there ever be a time that there is not the Trinity.

Now, this comes by pulling together some very distinct and important doctrinal truths. The first is that there’s only one God. Call this monotheism. This is what we believe. I’ll give you some Scriptures. Deuteronomy 6:4 (called the Shema) is something that the Orthodox Jews would say three times a day. “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is one.” There’s one God. And that word there that they would say three times a day means that the multiple become the singular, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are one God. It’s used, for example, of a cluster of grapes, multiple grapes form a singular cluster, that the Father, Son, and Spirit, they are one.

I’ll give you another one as well, Deuteronomy 4:35, “The LORD is God; there is no other besides him.” Psalm 86:10 says, quote, “You alone are God.” In Isaiah 45:5 God says, “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.” And additionally 1 Timothy 2:5 says it plainly, “There is one God.” So the Trinity is the belief that there is one God and that the Father is God and that the Son is God and that the Spirit is God.

Now insofar as God the Father being God, this has really never been debated, not in any significant way. Everyone who’s ever read the Bible with any objectivity understands that the Father is God, even the cults believe this, so there’s really never been a debate.

The question comes down to Jesus, is Jesus God? And that is the teaching of the Scriptures. John 1 says it this way, “In the beginning was the Word.” The *logos*. “The Word was with God, and the Word” what? “Was God.” It goes on to say, in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh,” a human being, “and tabernacled [or made his dwelling] among us.” That in eternity past, there was one who was with the Father and he was God, that’s Jesus, and then he became a man. That’s the teaching of the Bible, that the eternal God became a man. His name is Jesus.

Furthermore, Jesus repeatedly, clearly, and emphatically said he was God. He says this in John 8, “Truly, truly, I say to you,” Jesus says, “before Abraham was, I am.” In stating that he is “I am,” that echoes all the way back to Exodus 3, where God appeared to a man named Moses, and Moses asked, “Whom should I say has sent me on this mission?” He says, “Tell them that I AM has sent you.” Jesus says, “I’m older than Abraham.” Because he’s eternal and Abraham lived a few thousand years before. “Before Abraham was your father, I am. I’m the God who showed up and spoke to Moses.” Now, how did they respond to this? They picked up stones to stone him, to put him to death because he was claiming to be God. The reason why Jesus was ultimately put to death, he kept declaring himself to be God with statements like that.

Additionally, it says of Jesus in 1 John 5:20, Jesus Christ, “he is the true God.” The Bible says over and over, Jesus is God. And lastly, Jesus’ title is Immanuel, which means what? God is with us. God is with us. So the Father is God and Jesus Christ the Son is God. He says he’s God. He dies because he keeps saying he’s God. Were he not God, he would be guilty of blasphemy, but he is God, so he was not guilty of blasphemy.

What about the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit God? Yes. The Holy Spirit is not a force. The Holy Spirit is a person. Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, "He," not it, he, "He will convict you of sin and of righteousness and of judgment," Jesus declares. Now the Holy Spirit can be grieved, the Bible says, he can be resisted, the Bible says, he can be quenched, the Bible says. We're dealing with a person, not an impersonal force.

So the Holy Spirit is God, and what we see in Acts 5 is there is a couple, their names are Ananias and Sapphira. They promise and pledge to give a certain amount of money to God's work through the church. They fail to do so, they hold some back. In so doing, they steal. And Peter declares, "You have not lied to men, you have lied to God the Holy Spirit," God the Holy Spirit. Peter says that the Holy Spirit is God and that their sin was against God the Holy Spirit.

So taken all together, there's one God, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and they together form the one God we call the Trinity. Now the question is, do we see them together? Yes, we do. Genesis 1:26 then God said, "Let us," plural, "make man [or mankind] in our," plural, "image, after our likeness." In the opening chapter of the Bible we get an inference of the Trinity. Augustine, the early church father, said this was in fact, the Trinity. "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness."

Proceeding forward, the Bible does show God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit together working together in something we call the economic Trinity. They are working together for one mission and cause, and they each have different roles to play. For example, the Father predestines those of us who are Christians to be saved. The Son comes as Jesus Christ and dies on the cross. The Holy Spirit regenerates and transforms us. They all work together—this is found in Ephesians 1:3–14—for our salvation and they do so with different roles.

We see this as well at the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16–17. The Father speaks from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus comes up out of the water being baptized, and the Holy Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove. There's the whole Trinity. You hear the Trinity as well following Jesus' resurrection at the great commission. Jesus says, "Go forth into all nations baptizing them in the," there's one God, singular name, "the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." There's the Trinity.

Now let me tell you why this is so amazing, that this picture of God is different than every other picture of God and any other picture of God that any other religion or cult gives, that God has within himself love and relationship and communication, that our God is a living, loving, speaking, relational, personal God. God didn't make us because he was lonely. God made us as an overflow of his joy.

And when the Bible says this in 1 John 4:8, "God is love," that's another way of saying God is the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Spirit, they love one another. John 3:35 says the Father loves the Son. And John 14:31, Jesus says, "I love the Father." When the Bible says God is love, it is saying that God is Trinity.

Why do we value love, communication, relationship, community, honesty, intimacy, authenticity? Because our God is a Trinitarian God, and we want to—inasmuch as we are able—live a life patterned after his, and that is in total the doctrine of the Trinity.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.