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## TRINITY: GOD IS

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### Part 1 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | March 30, 2008

You are listening to Doctrine, a sermon series where Pastor Mark Driscoll covers the basic beliefs of Christianity. This series also serves as a prerequisite for membership at Mars Hill Church. For more audio and video content, visit [MarsHillChurch.org](http://MarsHillChurch.org).

Well, howdy, Mars Hill. Good to see you all. My name is Mark, if you're new. I'm one of the pastors here. And we're starting a brand new series today called Doctrine, taken from Titus 2:1 where Paul says that we are to teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine. And it's interesting, when we started the church about 11 years ago we started a little class called the Gospel Class that initially met on the couch of my rental home. So it was a really big deal, all four of us really enjoyed it. (Laughter) And that was the basic theological doctrinal instruction for people that grew over the last decade, and thousands of people have taken that class to become members of Mars Hill Church. And this series is updating, refreshing, and building upon that content. And so we are very glad to have you with us. We're gonna spend 13 weeks following the storyline of the Bible, looking at the major truths of Christian Scripture. And for those of you who are not members of Mars Hill Church, this will serve as the theological prerequisite so that you might become a member of the church.

And today I am dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity. God is – Augustine says if you deny the trinity you lose your soul, if you try to explain it lose your mind. And so my hope today is to avoid both of those pitfalls and do a good job teaching for you. I'll go ahead and pray, and you will need to think today, okay? And you are today in a seminary-type lecture. For those of you who flunked out of school, you're officially back in. Welcome to Mars Hill. So I'll pray and we will just get to work.

Father God, we thank you that you are a great God. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are God come into human history to live, die, and rise to take away sin. And Holy Spirit, we thank you that you are the God who convicts us of sin, regenerates our hearts, and transforms our will, renews our mind so that we might live by the Spirit, through the Son, to the glory of the Father. And God, as we study today about your Trinitarian nature, I ask for wisdom to teach well and I ask for the people to understand as we seek to live, love, and know you. And we ask this in Jesus' good name. Amen.

I'll start by telling you that our world is filled with Christians and non who share some very intriguing deep longings. People want to be loved. People want relationships. People want communication. Much of the technological advancement in our day is trying to create portals by which people can be spoken to and speak to one another, everything from cell phones to text messages, e-mails, blogs, and the Internet is an example of this passionate, deep desire for communication. There's deep desire for peace. There's deep desire for unity within diversity among races and genders and classes and cultures and nations.

And all of these deep longings are rooted in the fact that we're made in the image and likeness of God, something that we'll examine in greater detail in the coming weeks. But let me begin by stating that no people can rise above their concept of God, that God is for us the highest ideal and the greatest example. And if we have a faulty view of God that means that we absolutely suffer in every way because we lack a correct understanding of what God is like, and subsequently, what we are to be like.

And so as we approach the doctrine of the Trinity today it is exceedingly important that you know that we are talking about who God is, in his very essence and nature. And that everything is inextricably connected to our understanding of God and there's nothing more important than answering this question: Who is my God? Who is my God? Who do I believe in? Who do I worship? When I die, who do I anticipate I will see?

And so my hope today is to take you through a series of questions on the Trinity. The first is what is the Trinity? The word was perhaps first used by the early church father Tertullian who lived 155 to 220 AD. And it was – this word was used, rather, in an effort to summarize the totality of biblical teaching regarding who God is. So we'll begin with a definition. My definition is this, that the Trinity is one God – okay, we'll deal with that – one God, monotheism, one God who eternally exists. There was never a time that the Father, Son, and Spirit didn't exist – who eternally exists as three distinct persons. By persons I mean they think, they speak, they feel, they act. We're not talking about human persons, all right? That God is not a man, the Bible says elsewhere – God became a man, God the Son did, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Spirit of God is not a person insofar as a human being, but he's a person insofar as he thinks, he acts, he feels, he speaks, all right? God is a person, not an impersonal force.

Three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Spirit who are each fully – meaning they share all the divine attributes of all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present – and equally – not one more God than the other – God. So the Trinity is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, who are each fully and equally God.

So we'll take these in succession. I'm really excited about this. (Laughter) And both you share in my joy. So I'll tell you that the Bible is clear from

beginning to end that there is one God. Now a lot of people will tell you there's other gods, there's other religions, ideologies, and perspectives. We'll deal with those in a moment, but here is what the Bible says. Deuteronomy 4:35: "The Lord is God. There is no other besides him." Deuteronomy 32:39, God says, "There is no God beside me." Psalm 86:10: "You alone are God." Isaiah 43:10, God says, "Before me no God was formed, nor shall there be after me." Isaiah 45:5 says, "I am the Lord" – this is God. "There is no other. Besides me there is no God." 1 Timothy 1:17, the New Testament says that God is "the King of the Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God." And 1 Timothy 2:5 couldn't be more clear. "There is one God." That's it. One God.

Now some of you would say, "Oh, but there are other religions and they have other gods and they have other ideologies and perspectives. What about those?" Jesus says in John 17:3 – he speaks of "the only true God." The inference there is that there are also false gods in addition to the true God. This was true in the Old Testament, where the nations who surrounded Israel had innumerable false Gods. It's true in the New Testament as well. For example, Paul in Acts 17 walks into Athens and sees that there are altars to all kinds of gods scattered throughout the city.

In the Old and the New Testament God's people were surrounded by religions who had all kinds of various gods and goddesses. What about those? This will be very controversial. Other religions other than Christianity worship demons – really, truly, powerful spirit beings, fallen angels created by God in league with Satan, the Bible says elsewhere masquerading as angels of light, performing counterfeit signs, wonders, and miracles. You need to be very careful that you are not just spiritual, but Christian because spirit means angel. And there are angels who love the God of the Bible, and angels who love Satan and join in his rebellion against the God of the Bible. Therefore to simply plug into the spiritual world is to potentially plug into a demon.

The Bible says this in both the Old and New Testament. I'll give you one example in Deuteronomy 32:17. We are told "they sacrificed to demons that were not God." They sacrificed to demons. Old Testament people who did not believe in the God of the Bible went through all sorts of spiritual ritual but they did so to demons, not to God. The New Testament declares in 1 Corinthians 10:20, "What pagan sacrifice they offered to demons and not to God, I do not want you to be participants with demons."

Again, I'm not saying that other religions don't have powerful spiritual beings they worship. And I'm not saying that they don't have powerful spiritual experiences. But I'm saying that its origination is not the God of the Bible, the Trinitarian God of the Bible, it is a demon. I believe that Allah is a demon with the name Allah. And he's different than Yahweh, the God of the Bible. When you see the bumper stickers that say, you know, "Love your Mother Earth," there is a demon named Mother Earth. There are demons who pretend to be God, want you to worship them as God, and if you're just religious or spiritual and not Christian you could be participating with demons.

And my fear is out of love for you some of you already are. You say, "But I have all kinds of spiritual power and experience." Yes, but the test the spirits, 1 John says, because not every spirit comes from God, and not every spirit honors Jesus as God. There is one God.

Now, the doctrine of the Trinity is the way that theologians have articulated two truths. One, that there is one God, and two, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are God. There is one God, and the Father, Son, and Spirit are God. Together that's how we arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity. I'll then explain to you where the Bible says that the Father, Son, and Spirit are God.

John 6:27, speaking of God the Father, simply says, "God, the Father," so the Father is God. 1 Corinthians 8:6 says, "There is one God, the Father." So my first premise is that God the Father is God. What I would say is this: I'm not gonna belabor the point because virtually everyone agrees that the Father is God throughout the Bible. In the history of the world there have been innumerable heresies and false teachings. I can't find one significant one that denied that God the Father was God. I mean, even the heretics get this one right. Even the cult leaders see it. It's that obvious, okay? So God the Father is God. And Jesus prays to God the Father.

Secondly, Jesus is God. Now, this becomes more debated. One of the great places we see that Jesus is God is John 1. "In the beginning," we hear – it's an echo of Genesis 1, "was the Word." You'll say, "Well, who is this Word?" "And the Word was with God." So he's back in the beginning. "And the word was" – what's the word? – "God. The Word was with God. The Word was God." So whoever the Word is, he's with God the Father and he is God.

It goes on to say in John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh" – became a human being – "and made his dwelling among us" – came to the earth. Who's that? Well, that's Jesus, God the Son. Jesus, God the Son, is with God the Father, and he is God, and he became a man.

Give you a few more. John 8:58 – this is Jesus speaking. "Truly, truly I say to you," he says, "before Abraham was born, I am." I am. Now, it says in the next verse that the religious leaders who were present took up stones to stone him for blasphemy. Elsewhere, it is said by Jesus' critics upon him asking them this question, "Why do you seek to put me to death?" They declare, "Because you, a mere man, claim to be God." The whole reason Jesus died? He kept saying he was God.

And in saying, "Before Abraham was, I am," he was saying that he was the God of the Old Testament, he existed far before his birth, he is from eternity past God. He says, "I pre-exist Abraham. I'm Abraham's God." And he says, "I am." That comes out of Exodus 3:14 where God showed up and spoke to Moses. Moses asked, "Who should I say has sent me?" And God says, "Tell them I am has sent you." Jesus says, "I am – I am God. I'm the God of Abraham. I'm the God of Moses." And they said, "We're going to kill you because you keep saying you're God."

Additionally John 20:28 – Thomas got it right. Seeing Jesus risen from death he fell down. Do you remember what he cried out? "My Lord and my God," Thomas says regarding Jesus. Romans 9:5 says, "Christ is God overall." Titus 2:13 speaks of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And 1 John 5:20 declares, "Jesus Christ – he is the true God."

There's one God. The Father is God. The Son is God. And so is the Holy Spirit, okay? Now, the first thing I want to say about the Holy Spirit – I've been studying the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for more than a year, and I'm looking forward to teaching a whole series on the Holy Spirit. And the first thing I want you to know about the Holy Spirit is this. The Holy Spirit is a he, not an it. If you think the Holy Spirit is in an it, you think it's an impersonal force, maybe that permeates creation like the pantheists and or the panatheists say. God is – the Holy Spirit is not a force. He is not an it. He is a he.

By person, here's what I mean. He can be grieved. Ephesians 4:30 says that when we sin we grieve the Holy Spirit. A force does not get grieved. Gravity, for example, is never grieved. People are grieved. The Holy Spirit is a person. He's grieved. Additionally he can be resisted – Acts 7:51. He convicts us of sin. He leads us, guides us, informs us, instructs us, enables, empowers us, and we can resist him. We can fight him. We can reject him. You only do that with a person. And Hebrews 10:29 says he can be insulted. He can be insulted. He's not a force. You can't insult electricity. You can insult a person with feelings. The Holy Spirit is a person with feelings and he is insulted when we tell lies and promote false doctrine. He's insulted.

So first of all, the Holy Spirit is not an it, he's a he, he's a person. And he's God. The Holy Spirit is God, third member of the Trinity, God the Spirit. I'll give you two places in the New Testament. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: "Now the Lord is the Spirit" – that title is very important. Lord is a title for God. So when it says the Lord is the Holy Spirit it's saying the Lord God is Holy Spirit. So he says, "The Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of God, are being transformed to the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from" – he says it again – "the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit." Who is the Spirit.

I'll give another example where the Holy Spirit is declared to be God – Acts 5. Peter is the pastor the church. There are church members, Ananias and Sapphira. They are a couple. They choose to sell a piece of property and they make a pledge, a promise, a vow to God that they will then give all of the proceeds to the church for the work of the ministry. They decide not to give all the money that they have promised and they keep some of it back. In a sense, they're stealing from God as Judas Iscariot did. Here's what Peter says to them. "Ananias" – chapter 5, verses 3 and 4 of Acts – "why has Satan filled your heart" – same thing he did to Judas Iscariot to steal – "to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourselves part of the proceeds of the land? You have not lied to men," Peter says. "You have lied to" whom? What's the line? God. Peter says, "You have lied to the Holy Spirit. You – it's bad enough to lie to a man. You have lied to God. The Holy Spirit is God and you've lied to him."

First point: there's one God. Second point: God the Father is God. Third point: God the Son is God. Fourth point: God the Holy Spirit is God. One God – Father, Son, and Spirit. Bring those together, you arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity.

Now let me explain this to you in another way. Let me come at it another angle. And again, I could teach for 20 hours I have so much material. This is absolutely mind-bending. By God's grace I had two Ph.D.s doing research for me on this – you should see the notes I have. They're stellar. I'll give you the best of what I got. And I think this is one of the great nuggets.

One of the great things that people love about God is the definition of God in 1 John 4:8. For some of you, you meditate on this all the time. It says, "God is" – what? Love. Think about this. That's another way of saying, "God is Trinity," because in the very essence, nature of God – God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, do you know what they have? Love. Do you know that God did not – some religions teach that God was lonely so he made us because he wanted somebody to love. The Bible says no, God lacks nothing. God doesn't need us. Within the very Trinitarian nature of God there was perfect love – relationship, friendship, harmony, unity, communication. That God is love – no religion and no ideology has any right to say God is love unless they believe in the Trinity. Only we who believe in the Trinity have any right to consistently declare that God is love, because in the essence of what it means to be the Trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Spirit is love.

We see this, for example, during Jesus' earthly life where God the Son goes from eternity past and enters into time as the man Jesus Christ. And what it says in John 3:35 is this: "The Father loves the Son." Jesus says, "The Father loves me." And then he declares this is John 13:41 – 14:31, rather: "I love the Father." The essence of the Trinity is love. Jesus says, "The Father loves me." Jesus says, "And I love the Father." That God is love, and when we're talking about Trinity we're talking about love.

And the reason this is so important is because you and I were made to love and be loved. And apart from God we have no idea what love is. We think it's sex. We think it's perversion. We don't understand love until we go to the source of love. God is love. And we see how the Trinity operates and then we know what true love is and looks like.

Moving on, couple of questions. Does the Trinity appear in the Old Testament? This is a common question. Well, we'll start in the book of beginnings because that's where the Trinity begins. The first line of the Bible, Genesis 1, I'll read it to you. Some would say – and the reason I bring this up – some would say, "The Jews in the Old Testament had no concept of the Trinity." And I would say, "Some did, who read the Bible and took it at face value."

"In the beginning" – we'll deal with this in a few weeks when we hit creation. But "In the beginning God" – and the word for God there is Elohim. It's a plural. "God" – Elohim – "created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep." And who was there? "The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water." So the opening line of the Bible, "In the beginning, God" – first things first, you have to know who God is. You say, "Well, what about life and love and nations and cultures and justice and \_\_\_\_\_ and family and friendship and economics?" First things first – God. Once you know who God is, then we can work on everything else. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and there at the beginning, before creation, assisting in creation is the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Now, what I want to share with you now is super exciting to me 'cause I'm a total – I'm kind of a geek. And I really like – I really like the Bible and I like learning things I did not know. And I learned something this week that I did not know. It comes from Dr. Gerry Breshears, who's a dear friend of

mine and my co-author on Vintage Jesus and some other books. He's the head of theology at Western Seminary in Portland. And what he showed me was – he sent this to me, it's called the Targum Neofiti. It's from roughly 200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me tell you what a targum is, okay? A targum was an accepted Jewish translation and reading of the Old Testament, okay? And the Jewish scholars would translate, read the Old Testament and they would write them down as accepted targums. Now this targum – again, think is through – is 200 years before the birth of Jesus, more than 200 years before the Christian church in its present form came into existence, 500 years before something we'll get to call the Council of Nicea where the Christian theologians officially declared the doctrine of the Trinity as true orthodoxy. Hundreds of years prior, here is the Targum Neofiti.

**Genesis 1:1. That declares the beginning of the New Testament. It says**

that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and he is the firstborn – that's preeminence. That's prominence. That's rulership over all creation. "In the beginning, by the Firstborn" – Jesus – "God" – that's the Father – "created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." I can show that there were Jews who were waiting for the coming of Jesus Messiah who loved and studied the Bible – 200 years before the coming of Jesus interpreted Genesis 1, the opening line of the Bible, and Genesis 2 to be Trinitarian. That the Father through Jesus Christ, the preeminent firstborn Son, along with the Holy Spirit created everything. Trinitarian.

Now, in light of that the rest of Genesis starts to make sense. And I think what was probably behind the interpretation and translation of the targum was trying to explain the plurality of God elsewhere in the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Genesis. And here's what I mean, just listen. Genesis 1:26: "Then God said" – we'll deal with this in a few weeks as well – "'Let'" – who? – "'us.'" "Then God said, 'Let'" – Genesis 1:26. "Then God said, 'Let us make man or mankind in our image, in our likeness.'" That makes no sense apart from the doctrine of the Trinity. Who's the "us" and the "our"? God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

I'll give you another one. Genesis 3, after sin enters the world. Genesis 3:22: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us.'" Trinitarian language. I'll give you the last one. There are many more, but for the sake of time I'll give you one more. Genesis 11:7, at the Tower of Babel, God says this: "Come, let us go down." The Old Testament echoes from Genesis 1 onward with Trinitarian language. At the very least in Genesis 1:1-2 – at the very beginning we have God the Father and God the Spirit. And we have Jewish tradition which says, "We see Jesus there as well – the firstborn, God the Son."

There are two other places I'll show you the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament. We could do hundreds, but for the sake of time, I'll give you two of my favorites. This one is one of my favorites. Isaiah 48:6, written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, foreshadowing, foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ, eternal God, God the Son coming into history as a man. "And now the Lord God" – that's the Father – "has sent me" – that's Jesus – "and his Spirit." That the Father would send the Son with the Spirit – you know what? This is exactly what Jesus says. He says more than 20 times in John's gospel alone, "The Father has sent me." And then Jesus says in John's gospel elsewhere, "When I leave I will send you" – the Holy Spirit. And it's all in fulfillment of Isaiah 48:6.

I'll give you another one, Isaiah 61:1. And this is God, here, speaking. "The Spirit" – there's the Holy Spirit – "of the Lord God" – the Lord God is the Father – "is upon me" – Jesus – "because the Lord has anointed me" – that's Jesus – "to bring good news to the poor." Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. Now if you remember the story in Luke 4, Jesus goes to the temple. He opens up the scrolls. He reads what? What does he read? Luke 4 – right after his temptation by Satan, at the inauguration of his public ministry, he opens up to Isaiah 61, and Jesus says this: "This Spirit of the Lord is on me to preach good news" – he quotes the rest of the section. He then closes the scroll and Jesus says this amazing statement. "Today this is fulfilled in me." Jesus knew. Jesus knew that he was, as the second member of the Trinity, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 61.

Moving on. What about the New Testament? Does the Trinity appear in the New Testament? The Trinity does appear throughout the New Testament. I can't deal with all of the occurrences – we're writing a book on all of this, Dr. Breshears and I are, and we'll put it all in there. It's gonna be a huge book – but I'll give you a couple today. First is the Trinity appears at the birth of Jesus. I'll read it to you, from Luke 1:35. The angel said to Mary this. First, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High" – that's the Father – "will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" – that's Jesus. We also know that his name is what? Emmanuel. Which means what? "God with us." At the baptism of Jesus the angel says that God the Father and God the Spirit are going to enable you to give birth to God the Son. The whole Trinity is involved.

I'll give you another one, Matthew 3, the baptism of Jesus. Remember the baptism of Jesus? Jesus goes down to the river, there's John the Baptizer. Jesus gets baptized in the water. Coming out – there's God the Son. Who speaks from heaven? God the Father. What does he say? "This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Holy Spirit descends at that moment upon Jesus in the form of a dove. And there we have it: God the Father speaking from heaven, God the Son coming up out of the water, God the Spirit descending on Jesus to anoint him for ministry. The whole Trinity is right there. God in his great affection for us gave us this portrait, this picture, this snapshot of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus.

I'll give you one third example. After Jesus went to the cross and died in our place for our sins, rose for our salvation, just prior to his ascension back into glory, he gave something called the Great Commission. And he said, "Go forth" – this is Matthew 28 – "into all nations making disciples and baptizing name in the name" – singular name, one name, one God, one name, the name – "of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." When we baptize new Christians at Mars Hill we do so in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit because Jesus told us to baptize in the name of the entire Trinity.

Perhaps one of the best ways in the New Testament to see the Trinity is to see the Trinity in its economic functionality. What I mean is this. The older theologians, the church fathers in all my readings, what I see is they distinguish between the imminent and the economic Trinity. The imminent Trinity is

how God is within himself. The economic Trinity is how God works in history.

Regarding our salvation, we can see the economic Trinity. We could see that God is one, and that God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, always work in harmony, unison – they work together, but that each has a role to play in various things that they are accomplishing. Regarding our salvation, here's what it says in 1 Peter 1:2: "The foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for the sprinkling with his blood." Here's what he's saying: that God the Father foreknew whom he would save. God the Son came and shed his blood in our place for our sins. And God the Spirit takes up residence in the Christian to sanctify us, to cleanse us, to transform us to be more and more like Jesus. The whole Trinity's involved in our salvation.

If you want to blow your mind this week read Ephesians 1:3-14, and remind yourself in the Greek text it's one thought. And what he says is that our whole salvation is Trinitarian. Father, Son, and Spirit are all spoken of in that one great unit of thought. He said that in love the Father predestined us to salvation before the foundations of the earth, and that God the Son entered into history, and that he died in our place for our sins. And he rose for our salvation, and that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the Christian, regenerating their heart, renewing their mind. And that the Holy Spirit is the seal upon us, guaranteeing the inheritance of eternal life. And so then he says, "To the praise of his glorious grace" – he says it repeatedly in Ephesians 1, that we now live by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. All of life, for the Christian, is Trinitarian.

This doctrine is so amazingly practical. And the early church fathers and mothers, they wrestled with this issue. This was an enormous issue. You and I are part of a history, a legacy, a lineage of faith. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He doesn't change. Furthermore, Jude 3 says, "We are to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." That God does not change, that Christian truth does not change.

Let me take you back more than a millennium and answer this question. What is the history of the doctrine of the Trinity? Well, early church fathers like Justin Martyr, Tertullian, \_\_\_\_\_, Basil, and Athanasius – they all taught the doctrine of the Trinity and defended it. Tertullian, as I said, he is one of the first to use the language of the Trinity to describe all that the Bible says about one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit eternally equal in every way.

The doctrine of the Trinity, I believe it was held to, but it was questioned by some. And there were heretics and false teachers. And so there needed to be clarification. Some say, "Well, it seems like it took a long time for the doctrine to develop," and my answer would be, "When the whole church is suffering persecution, people are being fed to lions, they've been run through with swords, they're being burned alive, they're being burned at the stake, they're being crucified one after another, the pastors are being beheaded, people are running for their lives – it's really hard to crank out a lot of systematic theology under those cultural conditions." When you're being persecuted and doing funerals all the time, you're just – you're trying to live and then you're teaching your people. But they're dying, too, and the whole church was suffering.

Once persecution died down, then immediately they started clarifying some of their doctrinal beliefs, including at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, where the Bible teachers got together and clearly articulated belief in one God, three Persons – the Trinity. And that has held ever since. Additionally then, too, there was another council, the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD where, again, the Bible teachers get together and they lay down the doctrine of the Trinity.

Things really were anchored, then, with a man named Augustine who was one of the leading thinkers, not just in the history of Christianity, but the western world, Augustine of Hippo. And from 400 to 419 – he spent 19 years studying the doctrine of the Trinity. So if you just walked in off the street and you're like, "This is complicated." Yeah, it is. 19 years for Augustine of Hippo to research, study so that he could publish his book *The Treatise on the Trinity*, and it was sort of the definitive work. And it has now held up for more than 1,500 years, the result being that today all Christians believe in the Trinity. Roman Catholics believe in the Trinity. Eastern Orthodox believe in the Trinity. Protestants believe in the Trinity. Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Anglicans all believe in the Trinity. All Christians believe in the Trinity.

Some people say, "Christians can't agree. We agree on this. We all agree that there is one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. There is no disagreement on that issue. It is among the distinguishing beliefs of what it means to be Christian.

That begs the questions, "Well, not everybody believes that so what are the major heresies that have contradicted the doctrine of the Trinity?" Well, there are basically three ways to contradict the doctrine of the Trinity. The first is we said that there is one God. Some would say there is not one God. That's called polytheism, where there's multiple gods, or tritheism, where there are three gods.

This would include Mormonism, which says that there are multiple gods and that Jesus was a man who became God, not God who became a man. It's a complete inversion and it's the following of the first line, the garden of Genesis, where Satan said to our first parents, "You could become God." Mormonism says that there are multiple gods and that men and women like Jesus have the opportunity to become God. And Jesus is not a man who became God, he's God who became a man. That's totally different. And Mormonism, as one example, is polytheistic: believes in multiple gods.

Number two. The other way you can error is to deny that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are not three distinct persons. This is called Modalism, otherwise known as, in some circles, Sabellianism or Monarchianism or Oneness or Jesus Only. And that is not that the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons, but that God sort of puts on a mask and plays a role. So in the Old Testament he acts like the Father, in the days of Jesus he acts like the Son, and then from Acts onward he acts like the Holy Spirit, and that he's always playing one role at a time. Well, the problem with this is texts like Matthew 3, at the baptism of Jesus. The Father speaks, the Son comes out of the water, the Spirit descends – he's not play – you can't play three roles at the same time. There are three Persons, not three roles being played.

The primary proponents of this heretical teaching today is the United Pentecostal Church. It's a whole denomination that claims to be Christian, but

denies the Trinity. They'll go by the name Jesus Only, that sometimes Jesus pretends he's the Father. Sometimes Jesus pretends he's the Spirit, but it's always Jesus. There is no Father, Son, and Spirit.

Third way to error is to deny that the Father, Son, and Spirit are equally God. Early on there was a heresy in the church called Arianism which said the Father is God but Jesus isn't. He's a created being. He's not eternally God. Today that is believed by the Jehovah's Witnesses, and they don't believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, either.

Some of you say, "Okay, but why does this matter? These are all old heresies." Well, truly they're not. I mean, the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the United Pentecostal Church – all big, you know, growing today. There's lots of people who misunderstand, misappropriate, misrepresent God because they fail to understand the Trinity.

I'll give you perhaps a more current cultural example. How many of you have read the book *The Shack*? If you haven't, don't, okay? But let me explain this to you. Christians today are going nuts on this book called *The Shack*. I saw it at Barnes and Noble, endorsed by Michael W. Smith – shook my head. Couldn't believe it. You know, the book is about the Trinity. I think this morning it was number 12 on Amazon.com, of all books. It's approaching 300 reviews and Christians are freaking out. "We love it! This is amazing! Now we understand the Trinity!" No, you don't.

Here's the book, right? There's a person named Mack that gets a letter from God. God wants to meet Mack at the shack. That's literally what's going on in the story, okay? (Laughter) So it's Mack at the shack. Mack goes to the shack, goes into the shack, and the book is about a conversation that Mack has with the Trinity. So the whole premise of the book is the Trinity. Now, God the Father is portrayed as an African-American woman named Papa. I'm not even making this up. Jesus is a guy of Middle Eastern descent, a typical Jewish-looking guy. And God the Holy Spirit is portrayed as an Asian woman named – I think it's Sarayu, I think is how you say it.

And Christians are, "This is amazing! Now we understand the Trinity!" No, you don't. I'll tell you why. And Christians are endorsing this. And Bible teachers are endorsing this. And recording artists and musicians – "Oh, this is amazing!" No, it's not. Regarding the Trinity, it's actually heretical. I'll give you some reasons why.

First of all, one of the Ten Commandments is, "Do not make a graven image of God." What is a graven image of God? It's taking the invisible God and trying to make him visible. It's taking the Creator God and trying to make him part of creation. Romans 1:25 says that by definition paganism is to exchange the truth of God for a lie and to worship and serve created things rather than the Creator God who is forever praised, amen. John 4, Jesus says that God is Spirit, right? He's talking about the Father. The Father is Spirit. He doesn't have a physical body. He's spirit.

The Puritans understood this to mean – this declaration against graven imagery, that you can't take God the Father and try and represent him in a picture. If you make him look like an old man, that's a graven image. God is not an old man. God doesn't sin and get old. Right? We can make a picture, perhaps, of Jesus 'cause God the Son came as a man so we can show Jesus as a man. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at the baptism as a dove, so to use the dove as a symbol of God the Spirit is not a sin because God himself does that in Scripture. But to make an image of God the Father, to show God the Father as a human being – the Bible says clearly God is not a man. God the Father's not a man. Now, God the Son became a man. Keep all this clear in our thinking. It's graven imagery.

Secondly it's goddess worship. If God the Father is really God the Mother, that changes everything. That means when Jesus prayed, "Our Father in heaven," he should've prayed, "Our Mother in the shack." (Laughter) Right? I mean, think this through! That God – now some would say, "But God's not male or female. He doesn't have, you know, anatomical structure." Understood. And he makes us male and female in his image in likeness, and we'll get into that in a few weeks when we get into the doctrine of *Imago Dei*. But the truth is if God reveals himself to us as Father we are to honor him as Father. And if we say that God the Father is a woman, now we're not worshiping God, we're worshiping Goddess.

Number three. It's Modalism. It's a heresy. Papa says at one point, "I am truly human in Jesus." That's not true. That's Modalism. The Father was not born of a virgin. The Father did not die on a cross. The Son did. Modalism says that the Father became Jesus and the Father became the Spirit. The Trinity says they're distinct. They work together. The Father sent the Son. The Son died and rose. And the Spirit was sent to indwell and regenerate us. They're all working together, but again, the Father was not born of Mary. The Father did not grow up as a Galilean peasant. The Father did not die on a cross. The Father did not walk away from the tomb. That was the Son.

And lastly, they say of the Trinity – the book says, "They are in a circle of relationship, not a chain of command or great chain of being. Hierarchy would make no sense among us." That's not true. What they're saying is that God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, though equal – which I believe, and the Bible tells that God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit are equal – that there's no deference within the Trinity. Yet there is deference within the Trinity. Jesus says, "The Father sent me." Jesus says, "I only say what the Father tells me to say." Jesus says, "I only do what the Father tells me to do." That's essential to the understanding of the Trinity: equality but deference.

Out of that we get our Christian doctrine that – well, that children are supposed to honor their mother and father. It's not that children are lesser than their mother and father, but they're to listen to their mom and dad. That wives are not lesser than their husbands, that they are to respect their husbands. That Christians are not less than pastor, but Christians are to listen to spiritual leadership like Hebrews 13 says. That citizens are not less than government officials, but we are to honor those whom occupy political office. That we are to honor good leadership.

And the book is arguing hierarchy only makes sense where there is sin. I would say, "No, 'cause there's no sin in the Trinity." Additionally there's no sin among the godly angels who have not fallen with Satan and demons, and there is hierarchy within the angels – those who rule and those who serve. Furthermore, for all Christian when we die and go to be with the Lord in heaven there will be an ordering of rewards and ministry.

It's just so amazing to me that there is this yearning, which I affirm, for the doctrine of the Trinity. And people say, "I want to understand the Trinity." And then a book gets written and Christians rush to its defense, and it's teaching Modalism and goddess worship and graven imagism, and even denies any sort of deference within the ontological Trinity. And Christians lack the discernment to even see that as a problem and sell it to the multitudes.

These are very important issues. Who is God? Might I submit to you, that's the biggest question there is? So that's a peripheral issue – God. God.

Now, some of you would say, "Why do we have to talk about all this? Can't we just love each other? Can't we serve each other? Can't we care for one another? This seems so doctrinal. This seems love the Lord your God with all your mind only." Here's my point, okay? I love you. The leaders of this church love you. Back to my original statement, that in each of us are deep, passionate, profound longings, and none of them can be satisfied apart from the Trinity. And who would think that you can just simply live your life without your doctrine have missed the verse that says to watch your life and your doctrine closely. Your doctrine informs the quality of your life. They are inextricably connected.

The last question is this, and I tell this one to you because I love you. Some of you say, "Well, you picked on the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses." No, I didn't. If you're here, you're Jehovah's Witness, you're Mormon, I love you and you've been lied to. And you're being encouraged to worship a demon. And I love you too much to let you do that. Truly, our battle is not against flesh and blood; it's against powers, principalities and spirits. That Satan and demons are at work in the world trying to get us to believe in, to worship someone or something other than the God of the Bible. And what we want for you, because we love you, is a Trinitarian life. See, sin separates us from God and Jesus reconciles us back into loving relationship with God, who is the source of all life and love. There is no life apart from connection to the Trinity.

First thing I'd say about Trinitarian life: it's Trinitarian. (Laughter) First thing I would say. See, as a Christian who repents of sin, trusts in Jesus, the division between me and God is removed through Jesus' death and resurrection. Where does the Holy Spirit now reside? In me. Now I'm brought into relationship with the Trinity. So now all of my life is Trinitarian: all of my worship, all of my prayer, all of my service, all of my ministry is by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. That's all of life. That's all of life. That means there is now a power source, a love source. God the Holy Spirit – he is in me enabling me to live a Trinitarian life, by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. All of life is Trinitarian.

Second thing I would say about Trinitarian life. Trinitarian life is loving. Those who would say, "We don't need the finer points of doctrine. We just need to love one another," I say, "Ugh." Unless you know who love is, where love comes from, what love is, how are you gonna go out and love? There's guys in this world sleeping with their girlfriend calling it love – that's not Trinitarian love. That's Satanic love. Trinitarian love is for the well-being, for the honoring, for the serving, for the cherishing of the other, not using. The Trinity loves perfectly, fully.

The early church fathers, they had a little word called perichoresis to explain this. The root of it is choreo – it's choreograph. We get our word choreograph from that. You think choreograph, what does that conjure up in your mind? Well, dancing. And they use the language of the Trinitarian dance of God, that God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit – that to some degree their life as one God is like a dance of joy and of life and of gladness. And the early church fathers used that word to say, "We are able, by the grace of God, to enter into the dance of God. God loves us. We love him. And we enter into the dance with God, and that's life on the earth."

Trinitarian life is Trinitarian. Trinitarian life is loving. It's loving.

Thirdly, it's communal. God says – again, we'll get there – before sin enters the world, one thing is not good. It's not good to what? It's not good to be alone. You know that loneliness is not what God intends. Isolation is not what God intends. Relationship, community, friendship, connection – that's what God intends. Why? Because that's who God is. God's a loving, relational community, and it's not good for us to be alone. Trinitarian life is communal. It is together, as the Father, Son, and Spirit are one – are one.

Additionally, number four, Trinitarian life is transparent. Do you know that the Father, Son, and Spirit, they have no secrets? Do you know that? They have hidden nothing. They have hidden nothing. They live complete, open, authentic, transparent lives. There's no secrets. Do you know that Trinitarian life is not duplicitous? It's not one thing with one group, and another thing with another group. Trinitarian life is holistic. It's one person all the time – open, honest. Trinitarian life practically, for those of us who are sinners, it means we're open and honest about our sin, and our folly, and our fear, and our failure, and our hopes, and our longings, and our dreams, and our dreams, and our expectations, and our struggles, and our doubts. We have nothing to hide. We're open. We're honest. We're transparent because that's Trinitarian. If you have secrecy and double-mindedness and two lives, multi-faced, you're not being Trinitarian. Do you see where the doctrine has so much intensely practical application?

Number four, Trinitarian life is humble. It is humble. Do you know that there has never been a day when Jesus was jealous of the glory and honor and praise that was being lavished upon the Father? Do you know that there is never a day when the name of Jesus is preached and worshiped in song that the Spirit stands back and covets that glory? Do you know that God is altogether humble, that the Father, Son, and Spirit, they live for the well-being of the other? They live to honor, to glorify, to cherish, to serve, to exalt one another. They do. Complete humility – that's why Jesus can make amazing statements like, "Father, not my will but your will be done." Unprecedented, unparalleled humility. Trinitarian life is humble. It's about the glory of God and the good of others. And it's about finding our joy in the fact that we are not the object of glory, but God is. And that life isn't all about us, it's about others. Like Jesus says, when we lose our life that's when we really find it.

Number six: Trinitarian life is submissive. We'll get into this when we get into marriage a little later in Genesis 1 and 2 and 3. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11 that the head of the man is the woman in marriage, and that the head of Christ is God. And what he is illustrating there is that Jesus Christ, though equal to the Father, is submissive to the Father. He respects authority. If you are defiant, you are not Trinitarian. Now, not all leadership is godly and good. But if you defy God's authority, you say, "I'm gonna do what I want to do. I'm not gonna obey the Bible." You know, you know what you are?

You're not Trinitarian, you're Satanic, because it was Satan who came to our first parents and said, "You know, I don't think you need to submit to God and his Word. I think you should do what you feel is best. You're pretty smart and you have your own opinions." That's Satanic. That's Satanic. Some of you are living a Satanic life because you're not submitting to what God says in his word. You're not obeying. You're not repenting.

If God should give you godly authority, parents who love you, honor them. Pastors who adore you, respect us. Listen to us. I'm not Jesus. I'm not perfect. But on behalf of the leaders of the church, our hope is to lovingly serve you. And if you disagree prayerfully, biblically, consider whether or not you're being Trinitarian or Satanic? If we're wrong, show us in the Bible, and we'll repent because we're sinners, too. But there is this Satanic spirit in our world that says, "I can't trust anyone other than me. And I won't listen to anyone other than me. And I won't follow anyone other than me because I don't believe that anyone is better than me." That's not Trinitarian. That's demonic. Jesus did not have that attitude. He went where the Father sent him. He did what the Father instructed him. And he said what the Father taught him. And he did so gladly.

Lastly, number seven. Trinitarian life, friends, is happy. If you come here today with some notion that God is a mean old man in the sky with a frown, you have been given a graven image. No one is happier than God. Do you know that within the Father, Son, and Spirit there is nothing but unprecedented, unparalleled joy? Do you know why? There's no sin. There's no jealousy. There's no conflict. There's no disrespect. There's no lying. There's no hiding. There's no blaming. There's just love: perfect love, perfect unity, perfect communication, perfect affection, perfect adoration, perfect connection. That in and of himself, what we call the imminent Trinity, God is the most happy person who has ever or will ever exist.

And you know what? Our sin does grieve God, and our sin should grieve us. But in great love and in great joy the Trinity chose to save us. The Father decided to send the Son. And the Son agreed to come and live and die and rise. And the Spirit was sent to be present with us and to do a work in us. And today you and I have a great opportunity to turn from sin and be reconciled to God as Trinitarian people who experience this kind of life: loving, communal, transparent, humble, submissive, and happy – and happy – and happy.

We love you. You need to trust me on that. With a love that God has poured out in his heart – our hearts, rather – through the Spirit whom he has given us, as Romans 5 says. Here's my concern, okay? This is not a fear, but it's a concern. My concern is that there are many of you who come to Mars Hill but not many of you who are Mars Hill. What I mean by that is this: You're totally disconnected, maybe from the Trinitarian God of the Bible, and first you need to become a Christian today, confess your sin, trust in Jesus, and be connected to the source of life and love that is the God of the Bible. And some of you are totally disconnected from us as a church.

There are three ways we want you to get connected. The first is we've created an online community called The City. It's an information network, a social network. First thing, you need information – we need to know who you are. You need to know who we are. We need to be able to tell you what's going on. We need to help you get plugged in, help you get connected to other people. So first thing is digitally we want to connect you through The City so we can get to know you.

Secondly, relationally we want to get to know you in community groups, and community groups are the outward expression of our Trinitarian conviction. People get together in homes and they love and know one another to live Trinitarian life together. Get into a community group. Get into one.

And thirdly – digitally, technologically we want you to be connected through The City. Practically and relationally we want you to be connected through community groups. And then formally we want you to be connected through membership. We want you to finish this series, become a member of the church, participate in the life of the church in a vital way as a member of this extended family. And if not, our fear is that you're isolated, you're lonely, you're not living Trinitarian life. You're not known. And people don't know you. And we're not in relationship with you. And we deeply love you and that's what we want for you. Trinitarian life is life together as God's people, the church.

I'll pray.

Father God, I thank you so much, Father, that you devised the plan by which we could be saved, and you sent the Son. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you came to live without sin, to die in our place for our sins on the cross, and to rise for our salvation. And Holy Spirit, we thank you that you have been sent to save us, regenerate us, transform us, to take the Trinity, and to some measure, bring that love, that life, that joy into the very center of our being. Father God, may we honor your Son by the power of your Spirit, together in community, living Trinitarian lives. God, we know this is only possible by the Spirit, so Spirit, we humbly request your enabling of our life. This is only possible through the Son. Jesus, we thank you that you are a living High Priest, intercessor, and advocate right now. And this should only be done to the glory of the Father, and Father, we glorify, honor, respect, adore, enjoy you today. In Jesus' name, amen.