

“The Trinity”
Ephesians 1
(Preached at Trinity, February 23, 2014)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Before we leave **Chapter 1** I want to explore one final topic. It is one of the most difficult subjects in all of Christendom and one of the most important. We find it throughout Scripture and we find it throughout this chapter of the Bible. Of course, I’m speaking of the Trinity—that the one living and true God exists in three distinct and separate persons.
2. Regarding the Trinity, Chapter 2 of the 1689 Confession states that the “doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.”
By “communion with God” we are to understand all that God has done for us and how we respond to it.
As one reads this first chapter of the Book of Ephesians it is hard to miss how all three persons are displayed before us.
 - We read in **Verses 3-6** of the work of the Father in electing us and adopting us as His own children according to the purposes of His own will.
 - But this chapter is also permeated with the work of Christ. In **Verse 3** we find that the spiritual blessings that the Father has bestowed upon His elect people are founded upon and accomplished through Jesus Christ.
The phrase “in Him” is found six times in verses 6-13. The name Christ is used eight times in Chapter 1 and Jesus is found 6 times.
 - And then in **Verse 13** we find the all important work of the Holy Spirit:
“you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance”
3. This is a subject that is not often preached on and a subject of which many Christians lack clarity. It should be of particular interest to our congregation since we have chosen Trinity as the name of our church.
4. The Trinity has always been viewed by the church as a great mystery. It has always been seen as a truth revealed in Scripture, yet unknowable through human reason.
 - How can God exist in three persons but not be three Gods?
 - How can Jesus be begotten but not created?These truths are beyond the understanding of natural man and forever remain a mystery, yet revealed to us by the Holy Spirit as the truth of God’s existence and being. The early Church had to fight against many heresies on this subject until it was finally clarified by the early church councils.

The Council of Constantinople of 381 – an expansion of the Nicene Creed

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made . . . And we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver-of-Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified who spake by the prophets.”

5. There are many passages that present the threefold pattern of the Trinity. For example:
 - Matthew 28:19 NAU** - “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”
 - 1 Corinthians 6:11 NAU** - “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”
 - 1 Peter 1:1-2 NAU** - “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”
 - 1 Corinthians 8:6 NAU** - “yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.”
 - 2 Corinthians 13:14 NAU** - “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”
 - 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NAU** - “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.”
 - Ephesians 4:4-6 NAU** - “*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”
7. When approaching the Doctrine of the Trinity we immediately come face to face with a couple problems.
 - A. First, in spite of the verses that present a three-fold pattern in the existence of God, there is the lack of a single objective verse in the Bible that tells us that God exists in three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nor is the word Trinity found in the Bible. The word “Trinity” is from the Latin word *trinitas* which is a compound word formed from the two Latin words, *trinus* meaning three or threefold and *unitas* meaning one.
 - B. Second, language and experience is insufficient to describe the Trinity. We have nothing in our experience to relate to a plurality of personhood. We only know of individuals and individual personalities. We have no reference point to describe the Trinity. Because of this language is insufficient. For example when you describe the taste of a new food you use the taste of other foods to describe it. What do you do if there are no other foods to describe it? We have no comparison or analogy by which to describe the Trinity. God is infinitely unique. We cannot say, “The Trinity is like . . .”

I. The Doctrine of God

A. God is one.

1. At the heart of the Bible is monotheism – that there is but only one God
Deuteronomy 6:4 KJV - “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD”
2. Catechism question #6 – Are there more gods than one?
Answer: There is only one God.
3. Scripture continually affirms that God is the only God who reigns supreme and who will not share His glory with another.
 - a. The first commandment – “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”
 - b. God declares in **Isa. 48:11** - “My glory I will not give to another.”

B. God is a person –

1. He bears all of the qualities of personality
2. He is an intelligent, rational, moral being – He has self-awareness. He is a reasonable being capable of determining His own course of life.
Anthropomorphically He is described as possessing anger, joy, grief
3. God is indivisible - He does not consist of parts.
LBC 2:1 – “The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions.

II. Although God does not consist of parts there is plurality with God

A. God is Triune

1. God is a person but He consists of three persons – not three beings. Each person of the godhead possesses personhood, each possesses personality - The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
2. These three are one God. Each of the persons of the Godhead possesses all of the attributes of God, not each one possess 1/3 of the Divine essence. They are the same in being, identical in nature. They are co-equal, co-eternal, of one essence, of one action, of one will.
3. The three persons of the Godhead have always existed in perfect harmony and communion with each other

B. We can see this plurality in creation

Genesis 1:26 NAU - “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness”

1. We find that creation was a work of God
Genesis 1:1 NAU - “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
2. In Genesis 1:2 we find the Holy Spirit active at creation
Genesis 1:2 NAU - “and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”

3. But we also find Jesus active at creation

Colossians 1:15-16 NAU - "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him."

John 1:3 NAU - "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

C. God's plurality is seen clearly in **John 1**

1. In **Verse 1** we find the eternity of Christ – imperfect: continuing action in past
2. We find the relationship of the Godhead – The Son was eternally with God – the preposition $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ carries the idea "face-to-face"
3. We find the deity of Christ – the Word *was* God.

John 1:18 NAS - "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*."

The Bible is filled with declarations of the Deity of Christ

Isaiah 9:6 NAU - "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

John 20:28 NAU - "Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Hebrews 1:6 NAS - "And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him." ⁷ And of the angels He says, "Who makes His angels winds, And His ministers a flame of fire." ⁸ But of the Son *He says*, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom."

Titus 2:13 NAU - "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,"

Acts 20:28 NAU - "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

John 8:58-59 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." ⁵⁹ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him,"

4. Again, the Bible teaches monotheism throughout. Jesus is God as the Father is God as the Holy Spirit is God.

Ephesians 4:30 NAU - "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

- III. The Economic Trinity - The persons of the Godhead are the same in being (ontological) but different in function
- A. Difference in function does not imply difference in nature
1. Being fully God does not mean the persons of the Godhead do everything exactly the same way. They can have different functions and still be fully equal and fully God.
 2. Difference in function does not imply inferiority of nature
 3. While there is subordination to the Father in His incarnation also called His humiliation it doesn't mean there was an eternal subordination between the Father and the Son. The Bible only speaks of an earthly, temporal subordination tied to His human nature.
- B. Each Person of the Godhead was active in our salvation but with unity of will and unity of purpose
1. The Father elected us unto salvation – He is the Author of our salvation
Ephesians 1:4-6 NAU - “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”
 2. These elect people were given to the Son in eternity past
 - a. Jesus Christ came as the only begotten of the Father, in obedience to the Father and became a man but never ceased being God
 - b. He offered up Himself as a sacrifice upon the cross as our substitute
Ephesians 1:7 NAU - “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace”
 - d. He was raised on the third day and later ascended to His throne of majesty where He sits as our Mediator
 3. The Holy Spirit became the agent of our new birth, the source of our conviction of sin, and the provider of our faith and repentance. Paul says in **Ephesians 1:14** that He is the “pledge of our inheritance.”
 4. This is why baptism is “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”

Conclusion

1. Each person of the Godhead is active in our lives. We pray and worship by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father
2. Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father, which art in heaven”
3. The Father keeps us as His own dear children sending forth the Spirit enabling us to cry out Abba Father
4. The Son is our Mediator providing access to the Father and sends forth the His Spirit teaching us of His ways
5. The Holy Spirit is God's active presence in our lives equipping us, empowering us, sanctifying us, protecting us
6. This glorious triune God has invited us to have a relationship with Him in His fulness. We worship Him in the fullness of His triune being.