

Scripture Reading: I John 4

1 “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, & is now already in the world. 4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, & His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. ”

Why is God Love?

This morning is celebrated as Trinity Sunday: The last of the three Sundays we focus on at this time of year in the church calendar. Two weeks ago was Ascension Sunday where we asked & answered the question: Where is Jesus Today?

Last week was Pentecost Sunday where we asked & answered the question: “Who is the Holy Spirit?”

- Now we come to the beginning of ordinary time with a Sunday where the focus is on the Triune Nature of our Almighty God & Savior.

If I were going to ask another simple question for this week, it would be... “Why is God Love?”

My message this morning will focus on the Trinity, but I hope to do so in a way that not only brings a better understanding of this important doctrine, especially to our children, but also helps us see the practical implications of this truth in all of our lives! Giving a proper answer to the question “How is God Love?” requires that we consider who God is & why the Apostle John in our text could plainly state that “God is Love,” not once but twice!

- We should notice John did not say only that God can love or God is loving or even that God loves.
- John says, “God is love.”

It is easy to let that move across our lips with lots of sentimental feelings... Even the most ardent atheist would say that IF a god existed he would want him to be a loving god. When the ancient pagans sacrificed their young to the gods, it was so the gods would look favorably on them: encouraging these gods to love them. Even the Beatles announced to the world of rebellion in the 1960’s, “All you need is love.”

- So what does the Apostle John mean when he declares “God is Love?”
- He means, “God is Love!”

To help us understand this, I want to use some simple illustrations *[encouraging more of that child-like faith!]*

First, I need some object, so let us focus on this glass...What if I said, ‘The glass is love?’

Would you agree? Why not? What if I tried to argue that the glass just sits here and does not hurt anyone, isn’t that loving?

- But the truth is this glass is simply not capable of loving & thus it is nonsense to say the glass is love!

That brings us to the next step in our illustrative journey: We clearly don’t see the glass as love and that same principle would eliminate all inanimate objects: Rocks, trees, suns, moons, etc. This would also include all man-made idols made of such things, which is why God declares that they have eyes but cannot see and ears but cannot hear!

- God also says that those who do not understand this simple concept WILL be like them, fools who worship the creation rather than the Creator!

So, I want us to now imagine a simple creature like an amoeba or if it helps, you could think of a snail or slug or some other very simple creature. So what would you think if I said, “The amoeba is love” or “the slug is love!” The slug can eat and move around, but has no capacity to love, right?

IF I moved up the line with more & more complex animals, asking the same question, I don’t think I would get any takers... The snake is love, The turtle is love, The porcupine is love, The coyote is love,

Now thanks to the work of Walt Disney and the rest of Hollywood in our modern world when we get to bears or dogs or cats and certainly dolphins some might begin to think there could be some capacity to love there. Still to say that any of these creatures IS love is a nonsensical statement.

- But then we come to man who the Bible declares was made in the image of God...
- And who even the most ardent evolutionists consider to be the pinnacle of life on earth.
- But can I say, “man is love?”

Now stay with me on this, because it is a very critical point: Job, could you come up here for just a moment... See, we went from an amoeba to Job: Remember, THIS is what the world wants you to believe when they ask you to have faith in the evolutionary theory!

Now that we have Job here by himself, I want to again ask about love:

- Most of us know Job, & as one made in the image of God, He is capable of showing great love and being loving in his relationships.

But, IF we put Job on Mars all by himself, would he be able to love? I think we can all agree that it could not be said: “Job is Love!” Think about how we found Adam after his creation in the Garden in the Book of Beginnings... There God declared, “It is NOT good that man should be alone!”

- As one made in the image of God, man was made to love!

So now I would like Katie to come up here and join Job... Now we have two people made in the image of God who are married.

- The Braun marriage certainly demonstrates love because the two can now love each other.

Job and Katie are a loving couple who love one another, and love others. However, we still would not be able to honestly say that the Braun marriage IS love! We could add little Violet to the group and we would see even more potential for love! Lord willing Job and Katie will one day have married children who also have children for an extended, and growing family that can demonstrate more and more love, but it will NOT reach a point where we could say, The Braun Family is love! *[have Job & Katie sit down]*

My next object in our journey in search of love is all of us! Look around the room brothers and sisters and see a local congregation of the Church: The Body of Christ! Because of what Jesus has done for us we have all been baptized into His name, identified with Him and we are now capable of loving one another in a very sacrificial way!

- This was John's great challenge in our text this morning!

We as a local body are also part of the broader Church that exists throughout the entire world which means even greater love!

- But even as we, Lord willing, grow into the glorious bride that was promised to Jesus, there will not come a day where it would be right to say, 'The Church is love!'

I hope by now that you can see my point in all these illustrated lessons... The Bible declares that God is Love and on this Trinity Sunday I want us to see clearly that this statement can in reality ONLY be made regarding the Eternal Triune God as He revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures!

- He is not like the idols of wood or stone that have no capacity to love.
- He is not like the god of the Mormons or Muslims which would need someone to love.
- He is certainly NOT just the material stuff of the universe.

When we see God as the eternal Triune God who He truly is, then we can declare with John,

- "God is Love"... AND we can see that all of the true love in His creation is a reflection of God's very nature!

Because a proper understanding of God's true nature is so important for so many areas of our lives, I want to take a moment to review the first part of the Athanasian Creed that we will recite before communion this morning as our confession of faith.

- The first part of the Athanasian Creed covers the great truth and great mystery of the Trinity.

As we do this I want the children and all of us to keep a simple illustration that C.S. Lewis gave to help understand why it is mysterious to us. Many have tried to explain the Trinity and many illustrations are used in popular Christian books and Sunday school lessons that are just plain wrong and unhelpful.

[discuss the egg & water examples]

In Mere Christianity, Mr. Lewis devotes an entire section of the Book to these mysteries of God's character and His relationship to us as sons of God and at the beginning shows why much of it is difficult to put our arms around. *[use the lines, squares and cubes illustration]*

So we must remember that when the Eternal, all-powerful, and everywhere present Triune God gives us the revelation about Himself in the Bible; it should not surprise us that some of it is difficult to understand. We are not capable, as mere creatures, of having an exhaustive knowledge of God, but what He has revealed is true knowledge and knowledge that can have a major impact on our lives; as we shall see in a moment.

- The fact that creatures cannot have exhaustive knowledge is true in MANY areas of life!
- For example, how many of us here this morning have an exhaustive knowledge of today's automobiles? [That is a much tougher question today than it might have been in the 1960's!]

And yet, we all have true knowledge about automobiles and with that knowledge automobiles were able to bring all of us to church this morning!

- Anyone who demanded exhaustive knowledge before they would use a car would still be sitting at home this morning!

The Athanasian Creed does not give us exhaustive knowledge of God's nature but it gives us a good summary of the true knowledge of God's nature that has been revealed to us in the Bible!

We are expected to believe and act upon the truth that has been revealed and that is how the creed begins: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. [universal faith not Roman Catholic faith, [and we also know this to mean, we all believe with the capacity that we have, in faith, and not in rebellion.]

"And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance."

- **We must believe this because this is how God has revealed Himself to us... This creed declared what the Bible teaches, it did not change or add to what the Bible teaches.**

"For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal."

- **This is why we baptize in God's name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit!**
- **Each person of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is referred to as God in the Bible!**

"Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, & the Holy Spirit eternal."

- **Each person of the Trinity is revealed to have these attributes of God in the Bible!**
- **At the same time the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God.**
- **So after saying that each person of the Trinity has God's attributes, the Creed goes on to affirm that there is but one God...**

"And yet they are not three eternal, but one Eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one Uncreated, & one Incomprehensible. The creed goes on to describe how some of the relationships between the persons of the Godhead are revealed: "The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits. And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal."

- **This is why the usual illustrations trying to use created examples like eggs or water fail so miserably!**

"So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity."

- **Not only is this basic concept of Trinity in Unity important for our salvation, but it provides us with an understanding of the many so-called philosophical problems of the one & the many! [a sermon for another day]**

For this morning, I trust we can now see why the Apostle John can declare that God is Love, not once but twice. Job on Mars would have no one to love, but this is not a problem for the Persons of the Trinity!

- **Love is God's very nature and what He has been from all eternity!**

Now I want to go back to the examples that we discussed earlier and consider some of the practical implications of this understanding of the Trinity in our everyday lives.

We decided that inanimate objects or animals could not love and that even men or women would need an object for their love. So if love is not alone, then we come face to face with the issue of who is more important: For example, if we think again about Job & Katie as a married couple, what is more important:

- Them as individuals or their marriage?

IF this world was not created by the Triune God who is love, then you have a dilemma that simply cannot be solved. From a human perspective we need to decide which is more important: If we attach more importance to the individuals, then the marriage suffers. We don't have to look very far today to see evidence of this. If we put all the focus on the marriage with no concern about the individuals then it is the individuals who suffer which we can certainly see in the way that many women are treated around the world. Now there have been thousands of books written trying to find the right balance from a human perspective... And sadly this list can even include many Christian books.

- This is why we must affirm that marriage is God's institution: His plan for the lonely man!

It was not good for man to be alone and thus God created woman and established marriage...

- And it is in marriage where we most clearly see the Triune nature of our God who is love, demonstrated in the creation.

With this proper understanding of the Trinity we do not have to bring down the marriage to highlight the individuals or ignore the individuals to focus on the marriage!

Just as we need NOT diminish the Godhead in order to focus on the Father the Son or the Holy Spirit nor must we ignore the persons of the Trinity to see the majesty of the one true God.

So IF we truly believe that God is love, then we can properly understand the institution of marriage and appreciate the glorious love it can show forth.

- The same is true if we add the children for a family and then on to an extended family.

We don't have to say that the family or the individuals are the most important, they are BOTH important and we can rightly affirm this because God has revealed His own nature which the family reflects in some small way.

And finally, we can return to the picture of the Church:

- Paul declares that we are the Body of Christ but that we are also individual members of that body.
- Again we see the one and the many!

Rightly understanding God's nature helps us to rightly understand how we all work together as a local church AND how all the local churches should and can work together as the world-wide Body of Christ...

- Yes, we do have much work to do on that front!

I think it is also good to mention in the context of some of today's discussions & battles, that we must see the same principle when we consider how families also make up a local church.

Some say that all the emphasis should be on the family which God has established as the nurturing ground for our children and others say that we must see the Church as central, where we come only as individuals who have been baptized into a new family.

- Again, when we rightly understand God's nature we see that BOTH the body and the families, or individuals, that comprise that body are important!

There are many other examples I could use but I hope you can better see why all of this “doctrine” about the nature of God is so important in practical ways for our lives AND our witness to the world!

[mention Reeve book]

Let me close with some encouraging words from the Apostle Paul given long ago to the Saints at Colossi that were an encouragement to me as a young Christian and have only become more and more important as I have matured in Christ:

Colossians 2:1 “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Communion Meditation: Michael Reeves

“Astonishingly, it was this very rejection of God that then drew forth the extreme depths of his love. In his response to sin we see deeper than ever into the very being of God. “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” [I John 4:8-10]

The God who is love definitively displays that love to the world by sending us his eternally beloved Son to atone for our sin. And so, through the sending of the Son for our salvation we see more clearly than ever how generous and self-giving the love the Triune God is.”

Delighting in the Trinity, page 68