

Our God is Triune

I. What that Means

II. Why it Matters

¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All God's people here send their greetings.

¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Tell me, if someone asked you, “Who is God? And what is he like?” What would your answer be? Maybe that question comes from your four-year-old son or grandson, “Daddy, tell me about God.” Or maybe it comes from your college roommate who wasn't raised in a Christian home. Maybe she's the one who says to you, “Who do you believe God is?” Or maybe it's your atheist coworker or family member who is always giving you a hard time about your religious beliefs. Maybe he's the one who says to you, “Why would anyone believe there's a God in heaven? What can you know for sure about this so-called Supreme Being?” In fact, maybe there have been times when you found yourself wondering, “What can I know for sure about God? I mean, if I had to define who God is and what is he like, what would I say?”

Fortunately, we don't have to guess about God's true identity. We don't have to have a little seance to conjure up a revelation from God. Rather, God reveals his true identity to us in his holy, inspired Word. In fact, for centuries, the Christian church has set aside one day of the church year to focus on what the Bible has to say about who God is. We call it Trinity Sunday, or the Festival of the Holy Trinity. And unlike so many of the other festivals that focus on events, like the birth, or the death, or the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or last week, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, this festival focuses not on a historic event, but rather a doctrine, a teaching, truth. And in this case the truth is simply this:

Our God is Triune.

Today we'll see I. What that means,
and II. Why it matters.

I expect that you've heard it said that the word Triune is found nowhere in Scripture. It is basically a man-made word combining the prefix tri, meaning three, with the Latin word unus, meaning one. But even though that word is found in scripture, the concepts which form the basis of those words are clearly revealed in the bible. For example, in Deuteronomy 6:4 we read, *Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* In other words, the true God is not made up of many parts. God is not like a pie that can be divided into thirds. No, God is one unit, one essence. God is not just one in essence; he's also one in number. You might say that he's one of a kind. How did St. Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 8:4? *We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.* In other words, the God of the Bible clearly says that he is not one of many gods in our world. While the ancient Greeks and Romans believed that there were many different gods, like Zeus and Jupiter, Poseidon and Mercury. And while the Hindus say that there are many gods, the primary ones being Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. And while pantheists believe that God is in everything and everything is God, the fact is, Christians confess that there is only one God. That means that we are neither pantheists nor polytheists; we are monotheists.

Or maybe more accurately, we are Trinitarians. On the basis of what God has revealed about himself in his Word, we believe that our one God is made up of three distinct persons. Now when I say that God is three persons, I don't mean three human beings. Someone doesn't have to be a human being to be a person. An angel is a person. Satan is a person. The only person of the Trinity who was also a human was Jesus. But all three persons in the Trinity are distinct. They are not merely three different names for the same person. You've maybe seen it illustrated this way. While it's true that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. The fact is, the Father is not the Son. The Father did not die on a cross. The Son did. And the Son is not the Spirit. It was not the Son who was poured out on Pentecost. It was the Spirit. And the Spirit didn't speak from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love." That was the Father speaking. In fact, at Jesus' baptism, you have all three persons in action, right? The Son is standing in the Jordan river, the Spirit is descending in the form of a dove, and the Father speaking as a voice from heaven. And yet there are not three Gods there. There is one God in three persons.

Now, I realize that sometimes people try to illustrate the Trinity by saying it's like an egg. You have the shell and the white and the yolk. And together, they form one egg, just like the Trinity, three in one. But that illustration is not accurate. Because in the case of an egg, the shell is not 100% of the egg. But in the case of the Trinity, each person is 100% God. In fact, chances are, the more you think about that idea of one God in three persons, the less sense it makes. I mean, can you explain to me how Jesus Christ can be God and still offer a prayer to God without being guilty of praying to himself? Or how Jesus can be God and die on a cross without changing the fact that God is both eternal and immortal?

You see, there are some things about our God that we simply cannot fully comprehend. I mean, my brain can fathom that there is only one God. And my brain can also fathom that there are three distinct persons called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What my brain cannot comprehend is that both of those are true at the same time. In fact, that's why there are a lot of people who have rejected the idea of a Triune God altogether. I think of a lady I had in one of my very first adult instruction classes. She dropped out about halfway through the course. I followed up on her and basically asked, "What happened? Did I say something that offended you?" She said, "Yeah, it was that very first lesson, when you talked about one God in three persons. That made no sense at all. Why would God be so confusing? If I can't understand God, I can't believe in him"

My friends, do you realize what that lady was doing? She was making her reason her god. She was saying that if she couldn't fit the concept of God, as he reveals himself in the Bible, into her brain, she would reject the concept all together. Do you realize how foolish that is? The minute a person can fully understand God, he isn't God anymore. If God is no bigger than our brains, then we're all in big trouble. Why do I say that? Because the fact is, we all have problems that are bigger than we can solve. And therefore, we need a God who is bigger than we can comprehend.

No matter what the problems are. Whether they're mental issues like depression or anxiety. Or they're physical problems like the pain that just doesn't go away. Or they're relational problems that divide husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and co-workers. In each of these cases, what do we so often do? We cry out to God. We say, "God, help me. Grant me some relief. Please, fix this problem I'm having." And there's nothing wrong with crying out to God.

But if God is no bigger than what our brains can comprehend, what hope do we have that he can solve our particular problem? That's like a D+ student asking another D+ student to solve the calculus equation for him. What good is that? Or to put it another way, what if God really is who Hollywood depicts him to be? What if God is George Burns in the movie "Oh, God." Or Morgan Freeman in Bruce Almighty or Octavia Spencer in The Shack. How disappointing would that be? That's who God is? Are you kidding me? Man, I could be that guy. No, the fact is you and I need someone bigger, much wiser, much more incomprehensible than any of us can fathom. We need a God who is, in a word, Triune. And fortunately, that's exactly who the true God is. He is the God who is beyond our ability to comprehend. How did Saint Paul put it? *Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out. (Romans 11:33-34).*

So that's who our God is. Our God is Triune. But now someone might say, so what? Does the fact that our God is Triune have any relevance for everyday lives? Is the Trinity simply a doctrine that we dust off once a year on Trinity Sunday? Or is it something that impacts our lives for time and eternity? Or to put it another way, now that we've seen I. What it means that our God is triune, let's consider, II. Why it Matters.

Just a minute ago we said that we need a God who is bigger than we can comprehend because our problems are bigger than we can solve on our own. Well, if that's true about our mental, physical and relational problems, it's even more true of our spiritual problems. I mean, think about it. How do you solve the problem that in order to be right with God, you must be without sin? How do you fix the fact that your sins rightly separate you from a just and holy God? Oh sure, the human mind may try to come up with ways to solve that problem. You know, try harder to live a good life or by make some kind of sacrifice for God or insist that everybody goes to a better place when they die. But, in the end, none of those man-made remedies solve our problem, they don't get us right with God. In fact, unless we know that God has done something to bridge the gap between his holiness and our unholiness, unless we know that God has done something to make us right in his eyes, the fact that God is wise and powerful and incomprehensible, is not comforting to us; it's terrifying!

But you see, that's why the Apostle Paul ends his letter to the Corinthians the way he does. After speaking very frankly about some of the sinful attitudes and actions that Paul saw in the Christians in Corinth, the apostle concludes his letter with this beautiful description of who

God is and what he's done for us, what he gives to us. It's sometimes called the Apostolic Benediction, the blessing which the Apostle Paul penned by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A blessing which we still use at the conclusion of many of our worship services today. You're familiar with the words. *May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* Just for a minute, think about all that Paul packs into that statement. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our relationship with God begins with the undeserved love that Jesus has shown to sinners like you and me by offering up his life in our place, so that we can have life with God forever. You might say that Jesus is the ultimate gift from God. And that gift was motivated by what? By "the love of God", in this case, the love of God the Father. Literally, the Agape of God. God's love for the unlovable. That calls to mind the fact that not only did God so love the world that he gave his only begotten Son, but also that also continues to love us by giving us life and breath and food and clothing. In love, God gives us beautiful sunsets, mouth-watering meals and medicines that extend our lives. And it's that God who not only created us in love and redeemed us by his grace, but it's also brought us into fellowship with himself, when the Holy Spirit worked saving faith in our hearts through the means of grace, the gospel and word in sacraments.

And what's really amazing is that Paul says that that's the God who is with you. The God who is bigger than you can comprehend, the God who has already solved your greatest problem, the God whose glory fills the universe, that God is with you. No, he doesn't fit into your brain. But that's okay. Because faith is not here (in the head); it's here (in the heart). It's not a logical conclusion we draw. It's a gift that God gives. By God's grace, dear Christians, you have that gift. You know who the true God is. It's God, in three persons, Blessed Trinity. In his name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.