

MODELLING THE TRINITY

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Today is Trinity Sunday worldwide, or wherever the Lectionary or the Christian calendar is followed. The Lectionary is readings that have been put together to cover the entire body of scripture over a period of three years, and enables us to look at different aspects of scripture and not get caught in just one area when we preach or we put our services together. Today happens to be Trinity Sunday, the day when we look at God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Even as we look at the Trinity today, I want us not so much to try and understand the Trinity, because that is like trying to wrap our finite minds and thinking, over such an infinite process that belongs to God. That is such a futile exercise. But I think it would be more relevant to look at the Trinity and then ask the question: How does the Trinity help me to live my life? As I look at this Trinitarian concept of God, how does it inform my living, or change my living or guide the way that I think?

I don't know how many of you have read the book, "I Dare to Call Him Father", but in that book there is a little section where the author talks about Sadhu Sundar Singh. In his autobiography, there are many encounters that Sadhu Sundar Singh had with Jesus – visions of Jesus. And in one of them, he is talking to Jesus about the Trinity, saying that he didn't understand it. He says that Jesus told Him in these words, "Just as in the sun there is both heat and light, but the light is not heat, and the heat is not light, but both are one though in their manifestation they have different forms. So, I and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father bring light and heat to the world. Yet, we are not three but one, just as the sun is but one." Well, that's one way of looking at the Trinity.

But the doctrine of the Trinity states this: it means that there is one God, who eternally exists as three distinct persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Or stated differently, God is one in essence and three in person.

These definitions express three very crucial truths:

1. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct persons.
2. Each person is fully God.
3. There is only one God.

That is the doctrine of the Trinity.

What is a doctrine? A doctrine is a principle or a foundational statement that, in this instant, is gleaned from scripture, that becomes a tenet of fact or truth that is non-negotiable for us who believe in that particular section of theology. It's not something that is taken verbatim from the Bible, but it is gleaned from passages of scripture that give us truth that we keep as non-negotiable in our understanding as a tenet of the faith. The doctrine of the Trinity is one such doctrine that we hold very dear. One God in three persons, co-exist together, exists eternally.

The question that I want us to look at today is this: How does a Trinitarian God affect or influence my life? What does it mean to have a Trinitarian God or a God in three persons? Why is that important and how must that influence my life? There must be some meaning to that aspect of God because we are made in His image and are called to reflect Him. So, let's try to understand that. Of course, I know that the answer to such a question is huge, and it might take a lot of time to try and fully unpack it. But whatever we are able to unpack in the time that we have, I believe is going to be crucial. I'm trusting the Holy Spirit right now to give me the right words to speak, so that the Father

and the Son are exemplified along with Him, to help us to live our lives within the understanding and framework of three in one.

To answer this, we must look at these three persons of the Godhead and try to understand them individually as well as inter-relationally as they co-exist in the Godhead. While acknowledging it is a huge task, I want to look very briefly at God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

God the Father – the epitome of love.

John 3:16 captures it. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, shall not perish but will have eternal life.” God loved the world and continues to love the world. He is the object of our worship. As the One who created the world, we worship Him for who He is.

He is also the vine dresser. He is the One who made us, placed us here and expects us to bear fruit, and that is something that we ought to do as we live our lives. So, as we look at God:

- Love personified.
- The object of our worship. We come and we worship Him. ‘Crown Him with many crowns,’ is what we sang earlier today.
- Having endowed us with so many things to be fruitful, God expects us to grow and be fruitful with our lives.

God the Son – Jesus the Sacrificial Mediator and our Advocate

Jesus bridged the gap between us, the sinful world, and God the Holy One. Our sin prevented us from every being together with God, for holiness and unholiness cannot coexist. But Jesus came and paid the penalty for our sin. Now, God sees us as righteous, for we are holy when we accept the penalty that Jesus paid on the cross for us. How? God sees His Son’s holiness or the imputed righteousness of His Son, on us. Jesus mediated between God and us, between the Holy God and a sinful world, by coming in here, living a life without sin, and being the unblemished sacrifice for us.

Further, He now is in heaven advocating with the Father. He is our advocate. He fights for us because of the blood that He shed for you and for me. So, Jesus is the bridge between heaven and earth, between God and humanity; the High Priest, the unblemished lamb that was slain for us.

We go to God the Father in His name, in Jesus’ name, because He is the High Priest who went before us, paved the way and it is through Him that the Father hears our prayers. He is the only way to God the Father. Why the only way? Because He’s the only one who offered Himself as the unblemished sacrificial lamb to take care of our sins.

God the Holy Spirit – the ongoing seal of God’s Ownership

The Holy Spirit empowers us for every eventuality. Jesus said, “I will go, but I will send the Holy Spirit.” Last Sunday, we looked at the Holy Spirit and how He came at Pentecost Sunday. He continues to empower us. He is God’s seal, letting us know that one day, we will be together with Him. He empowers us for every moment of the day. He gives us the power we need to live lives of holiness, to live our lives according to the tenets of scripture. He guides us into all truth and He reflects the Son to us. He shows us the things that the Son said and did while He was here on earth.

Apart from being the ongoing seal of God's ownership, He connects us with the mind of God. We've seen that before – who understands the mind of God but the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is in my heart and in your heart.

So, we see the three persons of the Trinity:

- God the Father, the epitome of love.
- Jesus the Son, the sacrificial mediator, and our continuing ongoing advocate.
- The Holy Spirit, the ongoing seal that we belong to God Almighty, the eternal seal that is stamped upon our hearts with His beautiful presence.

This is what scripture tells us about them. Now, we need to look at what we have just seen and ask what conclusions we can draw from these facts about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let me give you four conclusions that I think are important for us:

1. They exist in community – three persons coexisting together in perfect harmony, in a loving harmonious relationship with each other, without any rivalry and fully supportive of the work that each one is doing.

2. They have different roles.

- i) God the Father, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1. God the Creator, but not just a creator who walks away, but continues to sustain the world, the universe with His incredible power.
- ii) The role of Jesus, Savior and advocate for the world. "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross." That was His role – to come down to earth and save humanity, you and me, to save us from the shackles and the bondages of sin that we couldn't get out of ourselves. He paid that penalty so that we could then stand before a Holy God with the imputed righteousness of His Son.
- iii) The role of the Holy Spirit as the empowerer and surety for the world and the world to come. the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is in you and me, the Bible says.

3. They support each other in their functions.

Jesus supporting the Father in creation. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We know that! The spoken Word was the word that Jesus spoke, and the Father visualizing His entire Creation, and Jesus bringing it into existence.

We see the function of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation – "For the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Almighty shall overshadow you," – at the birth of Jesus, words spoken to Mary and Joseph to take care of their fears and also to let them know that God was being birthed in humanity - the work of the Holy Spirit.

Then the Father supporting Jesus through His earthly sojourn. Every now and then, we read in the gospels, Jesus went away into the mountains to pray, spending time with the Father, constantly asking the Father for direction, for guidance, for sustenance, for help to make sure that everything that He did was in perfect alignment with the Father. He said, "Nothing that I do is not of the Father's will."

4. They work together for the ultimate good.

All of them working together for the ultimate good, which was to bring creation back into a loving, trusting and worshipping community in perfect relationship with a Triune God, God who made humanity to be able to walk and talk and have fellowship. Then sin came and broke it, but they didn't let us go. In the different roles that they had, they functioned, supporting each other to make sure that there was a way for us to come back to Him.

One God, three persons and three beautiful roles, living in a community, coexisting together, supportive of each other to fulfil such a beautiful plan that one day, you and I can be with God in heaven.

How does this knowledge guide or influence my life. I am going to try and answer that from four different perspectives.

1. Faith
2. Worldview
3. Relationship
4. Everyday existence

1. Faith.

- a) What I can glean from my understanding of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is this: that my life must be lived out in community. I am not an island by myself, that I must be part of the whole, that I respect all people and desire for them their highest good, that I must love them and serve them not with any sense of inferiority or subservience, but in love through equality, modelling Jesus, who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbled Himself as a servant and did what He needed to do. Or even the example of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. So, my life must be lived out in the community, respecting people, loving them, serving them and giving to them the best that I can.
- b) I also must model the principles and behaviors of the Godhead which are love, truth, kindness, patience, and goodness – all those beautiful things that we know are the aspects of the Holy Spirit that come to us – the fruit and the evidence of God's Spirit in our lives. All of those must be behaviors and attitudes that the world sees, that I need to showcase.
- c) That I make it my goal to fulfil the purpose behind my existence. As the Father created and continues to sustain the world, Jesus saved and continues to advocate for His people, the Holy Spirit birthed the church and continues to empower and guide the church. So too, must I find out my reason for living every day. What is my reason for being and my continuing purpose in living? Could it be that I am called, that I become a believer, and then I continue to grow in being a disciple? The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, they did something, and then they continued to sustain it. I too, as I become a believer, I believe in Him – I cannot stay there, because that is a once in a lifetime moment. Then I need to continue to grow, to grow as a disciple of the most High God. That must be what characterizes my faith. That's what the Triune God brings into my faith.

2. Worldview.

How does it inform my worldview? What is the worldview? It's the part of us that interacts with the world. Anthropologists tell us that our worldview is how we engage with each

other. Our worldview is influenced by our values and our values are influenced by our beliefs. Beliefs are known only through the worldview, as are our values. What the world sees is our worldview.

How does the Triune God influence my worldview? It is influenced by the values that I have and the truths that are given to me by God's word. What does the world see? The world must see that my light so shines before people that it brings glory to my Father in heaven. That must be the worldview that I have, that in everything I do, my light will so shine that it brings glory to God. Or that I will be like a shining star in this evil and perverse generation.

Beloved, if ever there was a time to shine like stars, it is now. Just reading some of the horrific things that are happening in our world, behoves us to stop and say, "Lord, shine through me, that the people who are so drawn to evil may see good, Your good shining through me." My worldview should exhibit Jesus' thoughts on the Sermon on the Mount – to be merciful, and pure, and righteous, and meek. This must be my disposition as I engage and interact with the world at home, at work, on the road, in a train, on a bus, wherever I am – my worldview must exhibit the qualities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that have been given to us.

3. Relationship

How does my understanding of the Triune God impact my relationship? Mutual respect is what we see between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And mutual respect must be given to my spouse, to my parents, to my children, to my friends, to my community, to my neighbors. I need to treat everyone as equal, from whichever strata of society they may come. I must understand that different roles don't mean lesser human beings, that we are all equal, and that I submit to others just as Jesus did. We are asked to do the same in Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence to God." We need to live in that kind of relationship with each other.

Mark Ballenger says "One common lie that ruins relationships is that different roles between men and women means that one gender must be getting mistreated by the other. This, in this view, the only way to ensure equality is sameness. Any difference between the sexes is seen as discrimination. This is un-biblical, and will sabotage the health of a relationship between a man and a woman."

We can see from the Trinity, that roles in relationships do not devalue one person over the other. There are different roles in human relationships because there are different roles in the Trinity. This is a large topic, so for the sake of summary, the Bible teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equal in deity but they function differently in relationship to one another.

So, as I look at the relationships that I have with people around me, I need to bring in all that I understand about the Triune God into those relationships as well.

4. Everyday Existence

The Trinity must influence my everyday existence. The decisions that I make must be governed by the principles exhibited by the Trinity. How is that? This is motivated by love. God so loved the world that while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. Have this attitude in you. He didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped. No pride. If we

confess our sins, He is faithful and just. We need to live lives of forgiving, to be able to forgive one another. Micah asked the question: What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

Beloved, I submit to you, that even as we have a limited understanding of how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit may coexist, or be able to articulate it, we know from the way they have exhibited their love, their graciousness, their kindness to us, the roles they played. If we are made in the image of God, then we too are to exhibit those functions, those roles, to showcase all the attitudes that they have – that we are able to coexist in community, to want the greater good for each other, to be able to enhance one another, to offer love even when love is not offered back, to be able to forgive even when the other person hasn't forgiven. But to be able to live our lives the way that the Triune God models it for us.
