

Our Tri-Personal God

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. As you probably noticed, I am not Bill Story. I did not stay in a Holiday Inn Express last night, so I can't even pretend to be Bill Story.

But what a blessing it is to join with all of you this morning. James, thank you for all the prayers this week. I feel like an amphibian. And I tell you, the one I think is really enjoying this, I don't know if Bill and Delinda had a Riverside campsite.

But I bet they do now. So that's great. You know, as I was thinking about filling in for Bill this morning, you know, normally you'd pick something easy to preach about, right?

Revelation, we already went through, so I couldn't do that one. So something that's been on my heart for a long time has been the Trinity, and that's what I want to talk about this morning.

And kind of give you my journey on that. And it's fun. And it's absolutely critical to our faith. So I was a 10-year-old kid in South Carolina, which I know Debbie appreciates.

[1 : 1 2] And I was going to church with my parents. And I had a question for them. If the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all God, why do we spend so much time talking about Jesus?

And if Jesus was sent to point us to the Father, why don't we just skip to the end and focus on the Father and not on Jesus? As I got older, I had more related and confusing thoughts.

So I heard that Christ is God with us, but the Holy Spirit is God in us, and the Father watches over us. I also heard people speaking about the need to pray to and honor God and Jesus.

But Jesus is God, so that thought seemed duplicative to me. It's certainly acceptable to pray to the Father because that's what Jesus taught us to do. But is it really acceptable to pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

And as an engineer, and Dan's not here, but I'll lean on others who are math guys, how does 1 plus 1 plus 1 equal 1? Not tracking on that.

[2 : 2 5] So the answer to these and many other related questions are found in the doctrine of the Trinity. And this doctrine is supposed to be foundational to our faith, but the word Trinity is nowhere in the Bible.

There is no clear reference to the Trinity in the Bible that really points that out as a thing. And even more interesting, I thought, as an old guy, I have never heard one of my pastors preach on this.

The concept of a single God made up of three persons is odd. Are we polytheistic? No, we're not. The conundrum to the Trinity and the answer to that lies in the Shema, or saying, which is from Deuteronomy 6, 4 through 9.

And it's arguably the most important prayer in Judaism. So let's put this in context before you read that. Moses had just received the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5.

And the Shema was presented to the people of Israel. And guys bring up this. I'm trying to save you this morning from page flipping.

[3 : 47] Because one of the things you're going to find out really fast about what I'm going to attempt to do this morning. I'm not going to tell you what I think. I want you to read the scriptures and let the scriptures speak to you.

So let's see. Anyway, I'll just press on here and we can catch up. So Deuteronomy 6, 4 through 9. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way.

And when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

So let's put aside the temptation to explore frontlets this morning. We're not going to talk about that. We'll save that for another opportunity. But why would this all important prayer start with, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[5 : 01] It reinforces the fact that we worship one God. We are monotheistic. But having to point this out suggests that there may be some other factors at work.

And this is where we begin our study of the Trinity, or as D.A. Carson puts it, our tripersonal God. I've dabbled around this concept for years trying to study the Trinity and finally decided to dive in headfirst.

My plan this morning is to discuss what's been revealed to me about the nature of God. And in doing so, put our relationship with God in its proper perspective.

Deuteronomy 6.4 speaks about the Lord our God and the Lord your God. The critical question for us, though, is, is God ours to do with as we will?

Or are we his? Is God a cosmic vending machine with a desire to love and forgive us and provide us whatever we want to make life in this world easy?

[6 : 09] Or is God sovereign over his creation and sovereign over us? Worthy of our fear, praise, adoration, sacrifice, and obedience?

Do we love him to receive stuff? Or do we love him because of what we have received? A review of the nature of God helps us put our nature in perspective.

But we need to take care to carefully choose the lens that we look through to see God. Our default position is to look through God through mirrored glasses where we're really looking at ourself.

In other words, I'm tempted to see God for what he can do for me, not what I do to honor him. We are the center of our universe. And this perspective drives our behaviors in our view of God.

See if any of these thoughts resonate with you. And I'm just going to plop these up here and we're good. See if these thoughts resonate with you.

[7 : 15] God needs us for a relationship. God set up everything perfectly and stepped back. Man was responsible for messing up. If God was just, he would evaluate me based on the good I have done, not just the bad.

I can resist God's will with impunity. In other words, there's no consequence for my disobedience. I get to choose what sin is and grade the sins based on what I judge to be things that are worse than others.

I pray to God for what I want and I'm rightfully upset when I don't get what I asked for. God will always give me what I want if I just have enough faith.

God had to put on flesh so he could truly understand what it was like to be a human. He doesn't choose me. I choose him.

And I get the glory for my wise decision. Do any of those things resonate with you? I think we have a very puny view of God because it's referenced on how we view ourselves in the world.

[8 : 30] We don't see God as an infinite God. We see him as a man that we can ignore, reject, and disobey. In fact, we can't see or touch him in any way that we could confirm something or someone is there at all.

And if we disobey with him, disobey him and get away with it, that only drives us to gamble more. What we don't see is we're gambling with our eternity.

And betting against almighty God, we are guaranteed to lose. So it's critically important that we understand the Trinity. So the first thought there is we cannot fully and properly understand the doctrine of substitutional atonement without a solid understanding of the triune nature of our God.

And we're going to talk about that here in a moment. We can also not answer the question of how can one man, Jesus Christ, who died over 2,000 years ago, somehow atone not only for my sins, but for the sins of many throughout time.

So it's my prayer this morning as we go through this material. And I'm thinking about doing this over several sessions. This first discussion this morning is an overview of the Trinity. And then I would like to break that out into a detailed discussion of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 58] Well, I want to dive into the scriptures this morning and teach the truths of God. Isaiah 55, 11 talks about how God's word will not return void.

So being in his word and not in someone's interpretation like mine, I think is safe ground. We'll let the Spirit speak to you. So let's warm up our fingers.

And hopefully we'll get this up here in a moment. I know Roger is working diligently on that. And he always comes through. Yes, it will.

Always does. But warm up your fingers and we'll study the scripture together to learn more about the God that we worship. And as a result, again, I earnestly pray that we learn more about ourselves too.

So let's pray together. Lord God, we thank you for the word you've given us to teach us about you. We thank you for your spirit that reveals your truth hidden in plain sight.

[10 : 54] We thank you for your son who sacrificed to open the door to relationship with you and continually intercedes for us. You are our creator, teacher, and savior.

Please speak to your servants directly and get me out of the way so that these people who are known by your name can drink deeply of your wisdom and truth. In Christ's precious name we pray.

Amen. Amen. So as we begin to explore the Trinity, let's put some glasses on where we can really truly understand what God's character is so we can properly interpret the scripture that we have.

So let's start in the first place. Exodus 20, verse 3. And you'll recognize this as the first of the Ten Commandments. And it says, You shall have no other gods before me.

God does not tolerate someone who thinks they can compete with his glory or with him. We only need to look at Satan to see how that works out.

[12 : 00] Then just a couple of, then the next verse over, Exodus 24 through 5, we see the second commandment of the Ten Commandments. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

So worship of images other than God himself is intolerable to him and cheapens the image of the one true God.

God is zealous for himself. Then if you want to turn over to Deuteronomy 4, we'll look at verse 24. This kind of hammers that point home.

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. And jealousy on the part of God is something that always worries us because we're taught not to be jealous, right?

[13 : 08] So how is it that it's okay for God and not okay for us? Well, I think J.I. Packer puts this really, really well. God's jealousy is not a compound of frustration, envy, and spite, as human jealousy so often is, but appears instead as a praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious.

There's a reason for God's jealousy, and it's a right reason. The reason jealousy doesn't work for us is we're not God, even though we want to be.

Then let's look at Deuteronomy 6, and we'll look at verses 14 through 15. Oh. Okay.

Okay. I put it in direct. I just need to set up your computer. Yeah, go for it. Go for it. I don't know how to do it. Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. Roger, thank you so much for what you're trying to do here.

So Deuteronomy 6, 14 through 15. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the people who are around you. For the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God.

[14 : 26] Lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth. That's pretty straightforward, right?

Let's turn over to Proverbs 9, and we'll look at verse 10. This is one of my very favorite verses.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. I think after we read that last verse, we understand that we should fear God, and that really is the place that we need to start our relationship with him.

But as we'll talk about later, that is not the ending. Jesus Christ came to provide a path for us. He came to redeem us. He came to pay a price that we couldn't pay to relieve the enmity between a holy God and a sinful man.

So, so far, everything that we've just discussed are Old Testament verses. So, has the character of God changed between the Old and New Testament?

[15 : 40] No. God does not change. So, let's look over into James in the New Testament and look at James 1, 17.

This is also a familiar verse. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Then we look at Matthew 5, 17. You guys are going to get a workout today. I mean, we're going to be sword drilling here. So, Matthew 5, 17.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. This is Jesus talking. Jesus didn't change the law.

He just put it in much sharper focus. Anger is now equated to murder. Lust is adultery. Oaths, let your no be no, let your yes be yes.

[16 : 55] Retaliation goes to turning the other cheek. Hating your enemies, it's translated into loving your enemies. So, he's focused not on the letter of the law, but the underlying spirit of the law.

And that's where we need to focus. Let's look at Hebrews 13, verses 8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Wait a minute. This is a guy that only came on the scene 2,000 years ago. So, why are we talking about that? Spoiler alert, as we'll see in a minute.

Jesus is eternal. Jesus actively participated in creation. Jesus is God. So, in summary, Jesus is jealous for his name, reputation, and position.

God is jealous for his name, reputation, and position. He is intolerant of imitations or anyone that would usurp his authority. Those are the glasses that I would like for us to wear this morning as we look at the Trinity.

[18 : 12] So, keeping that in view, where's the scriptural evidence that God exists in three persons? Well, let's start at the beginning. Genesis 1, 1, which is a very easy verse to find.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void. And darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

So, God, which we assume in this verse is the Father, created the heavens and the earth. But more about that later. The spirit of God hovered.

So, we see two of the three. So, that's only, what, 67%. That's not very good odds at this point. What about the sun? Well, let's look at John 1, 1 through 3.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.

[19 : 16] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. This passage describes Jesus.

He was in the beginning with God. With God. So, he is a distinct and eternal person. All things were made through him.

And without him was not anything made that was made. The sun was not just a witness to creation. But was active in creation. Something only God can do.

Let's skip over a few verses to John 1, 10. He was in the world. And the world was made through him. Yet the world did not know him.

Again, we see the sun active in creation. Then we look over at John 8, 58. Jesus said to them.

[20 : 24] Guys, we don't need to work this problem. This is fine. I'll just motor on. So, John 8, 58. Jesus said to them. Truly, truly, I say to you.

Before Abraham was, I am. Before Abraham was, I am. That speaks to Christ's eternal nature.

And I am as familiar. Because we hear that back in Exodus 3, 4. At the burning bush. That was the first time God gave himself a name. It wasn't really much of a name, was it?

So, we're good to go with that. Colossians 1, 15 through 17.

He, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

[21 : 29] All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together.

This speaks again to Jesus' active role in creation. Creation was not just limited to the earth either. It was heaven too. All things were created by him and for him.

Let's make sure those glasses are on correctly here. For him can only apply to God because God's nature would not permit it to be otherwise. He is before all things.

Again, speaking to the eternal nature of Jesus. And in him all things hold together. That speaks to the fact that Jesus has an active part not only in creation, but maintaining creation.

God does not create and walk away. He plays a continuous and active role. Let's look at Hebrews 1, 2.

[22 : 38] Guys in the back, let me say this. Thank you for trying. This is spiritual warfare. So let's focus on that.

And besides, everybody needs exercise going through the Bible anyway. So no big deal. Absolutely. So please let God's word speak to you.

Hebrews 1, 2. So again, we see the son as a creator.

But we have this phrase here, heir of all things. That's a role exclusively reserved for God. We could go on, but the clear messages are Jesus is eternal.

Jesus was a partner in creation at the time the heavens and the earth were created. Jesus is God. So now, going back to Genesis 1, 1.

[23 : 48] We see all three persons of the Godhead from the beginning. So let's look at some other evidence of the Trinity. Let's skip ahead to day six of creation.

So let's look at Genesis 1, 26. Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

Let us make man in our image after our likeness. Those are all plural.

God demonstrates his relationship in his very being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God creates us for a relationship, but he doesn't need our relationship.

God is complete in relationship in his very being, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So let's move from creation to the fall. Let's look at Genesis 3, 22.

[24 : 59] Then the Lord God said, behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.

Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever. So we see us again. Then we move over to the Tower of Babel, Genesis 11, 7.

And we're seeing a pattern here. Come, let us go down there and confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech.

There's God in the plural again. Now, get ready. Big move. Psalm 110, 1. Which states, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

And we think of the Lord being the Father, says to my Lord, which we refer to as the Son, to sit at my right hand.

[26 : 09] Again, make sure those glasses are on. How is Almighty God going to permit someone to sit at his right hand, the seat of power, unless he is God?

Only God would be allowed to do that. Scoot over to Proverbs 8, 22 through 31.

This is an interesting passage and one I had a discussion with my oldest son about. This is Proverbs 8 is a wisdom chapter in Proverbs, and it speaks to wisdom.

And my son rightfully said, Dad, why are you talking about this with respect to the Trinity? Because it really is speaking to wisdom. Well, I have an answer for him, and I have an answer for you. But first, let's read the text.

Proverbs 8, 22 through 31. The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work. And me here is referencing wisdom. The first of his acts of old.

[27 : 13] Ages ago, I was set up at the first before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths, I was brought forth. When there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth.

Before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there. When he drew a circle on the face of the deep.

When he made firm the skies above. When he established the fountains of the deep. When he assigned the sea its limits, so that the waters might not transgress his command.

When he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was beside him, like a master workman. And I was daily in his delight. Rejoicing before him always.

Rejoicing in his inhabited world. And delighting in the children of man. So this is where the confusion came into. And this is where my discussion with my son came in, which I really enjoyed.

[28 : 14] Proverbs 8 is about wisdom. Wisdom is a thing, not a person. The Lord Father possessed me. The Lord, the Father, possessed me wisdom. Wisdom, but 1 Corinthians 1.24 states the son is the revelation of God's wisdom.

So I'm using that as a way to tie Christ back to the discussion of wisdom. And again, doing that, Jesus is not just a witness to creation, but a master workman.

How can wisdom, a thing, be a master workman? It's a thing. It's not a person. Yes, Diane. I'm sorry. You're going to get me in trouble because then I'm going to have to deviate from my script.

No, no. Go ahead. I'm sorry. May I have the site on 1 Corinthians 1.24? 1 Corinthians 1.24. You're welcome. So, again, from the start, rejoicing in creation and delighting in the children of man.

How can wisdom, this thing, delighting in the children of man? It can't. It's got to be a person. So that's how I'm interpreting what we have in Proverbs 8.

[29 : 26] I haven't had that discussion with my son yet, but I'm sure I will. It'll be fun. Let's look at Isaiah 6.8, or as one of my pastors used to call it, Isaiah.

Isaiah 6.8. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, here I am, send me.

Who will go for us? There's more plural us there. Then looking at Isaiah 9, 6 and 7.

This is all going to sound familiar to you. Every time I hear this, I hear Handel's Messiah ringing in my ears. For to us a child is born.

To us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[30 : 29] Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. And we sing that verse every Christmas, right? So child, that's the flesh of man.

That's a real human being. A son is a precious relationship with a father. Wonderful Counselor. This person speaks the truth.

They are a mighty prophet. And then we hit Mighty God. Whoa! Not just a man, but God incarnate. And then we speak about the Everlasting Father.

How can the son also be the father? The only answer is they're one. And the Prince of Peace.

[31 : 33] Peace between men? No. Peace between sinful men and a holy God. Let's look over at Isaiah 48, 16.

Draw near to me. Hear this. From the beginning I have not spoken in secret. From the time it came to be, I have been there. And now the Lord God has sent me and his spirit.

This is a prophecy of Christ. Where we look at the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all together. They're distinct and they're together.

Isaiah 63, verse 10. And please be like Diane. If I'm going too quickly here, make sure that you get where you need to go.

We need to take a break. We need to get up and stretch. Stretch our fingers. Yes, ma'am. So the just one you just did before is on your team. Isaiah 48, 16.

[32 : 44] 48, 16. Yeah, sorry. Spiritual warfare is reigning supreme here this morning. But we're going to combat it. We're going to continue to read God's word and learn from him.

So Isaiah 63, 10. But they were rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. Therefore, he turned to their enemy and himself fought against them.

I'd like to point out that grieving is an emotional act of a distinct person. In this case, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person too. Malachi 3, 1 through 2.

Or as Bill likes to put it, Malachi. It's the last book in the Old Testament. And we'll look at verses 1 and 2. Behold, I send my messenger.

That we now recognize as John the Baptist. And he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

[33 : 48] Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap.

So we have this distinction between the Lord of hosts, which we think of as the Father, from the Lord, which we think of as Christ, whom you seek.

And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. So Christ, God in the flesh, coming to the temple of God. So I'll stop there with the Old Testament.

We could go on. We could just keep doing this all day, basically. The concept of the Trinity is firmly established in the Old Testament. So now let's look at the New Testament.

And I think there the Trinity is much more obvious. So let's start in Matthew 3. We'll look at Matthew 3, 16 through 17.

[34 : 50] This is the baptism of Jesus. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water. And behold, the heavens were opened to him.

And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

Here, probably more clearly than any other place in the Bible, we clearly see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the same place at the same time.

And I bring that up because we're going to be discussing analogies in the moment, and that's going to become important. Then if we look at Matthew 22, 41 through 46.

Matthew 22, 41 through 46. Now, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What do you think about the Christ?

[35 : 53] Whose son is he? And they said to him, The son of David. And he said to them, How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put my enemies under your feet.

That's Psalm 110.1 that we just read a moment ago. If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

This is the Pharisees' first experience with the Trinity. And they're confused, and they are frightened. Who can sit at the right hand of God, again, putting those glasses on, except one who is fully God?

Interesting that the Pharisees should have understood this, but at this point, they didn't. And nobody wanted to ask any more questions. Another place that is absolutely crystal clear about the Trinity is the Great Commission.

So let's look at the end of Matthew, Matthew 28, 19. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[37 : 22] Matthew 28, 19. Yes, ma'am. So the Great Commission refers to all three persons of the Trinity, baptizing disciples in the name of all three persons of the Trinity.

Again, keeping those glasses on, the character of God would only permit that if the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all God. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 12, 4 through 6.

Let's look at spiritual gifts. Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of service, but the same Lord.

And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. Again, we refer to the Spirit, the Lord, which is the Son, and God the Father.

Sorry, we'll give you a break here. I know this is ripping through a lot of these things here, but this is important.

[38 : 32] We're almost done with the Old Testament. So Bill was really impressed that he could go through the entire Old Testament in about 10 weeks. We're going from Genesis to Revelation in the span of about 30 minutes.

So Bill would never do this. Yeah, so let's look at 1 John 5, 1 through 7.

1 John 5. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves what has been born of him, i.e. Christ.

But we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

[39 : 39] And this is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

And there are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood. And these three agree. So we see again the Father, Son, and Spirit referenced.

Water refers to Jesus' baptism that we just read in Matthew. Blood is the crucifixion, which we're going to talk about in a lot more detail here in a moment.

And the third is the Spirit who testifies that, revealing these things to us. Now, I know you're excited to get through with the New Testament, so we're going to go to Revelation 22, 3.

Revelation 22. So this is at the end of the book of Revelation. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city, also on one side of the river, the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.

[40 : 56] The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

The throne of God and the Lamb. And his servants will worship him. There is no way that God would permit the throne of a person being next to him.

There is the only way that that works is if Christ is equal to the Father. So as we clearly see, God is revealed to us in three persons from Genesis to Revelation.

All are distinct persons. All are eternal. All can be and are to be worshipped fully as God. All are in complete unity.

And we worship one God. This is the concept of a tripersonal God. But it's still difficult. It's still difficult to wrap our heads around this.

[42 : 10] So one approach that we take typically is to craft analogies to help us understand and explain difficult things. So let's look at that.

Now, let's look at that in context, too. I read a lot from a gentleman by the name of Wayne Grudem, who arguably is probably the best contemporary theologian, systematic theology guy around today.

And he states, in order for the Trinity to be accurate, or the analogy of a Trinity to be accurate, it must simultaneously satisfy three precepts of the Trinity that are clearly taught in Scripture.

One, God is three persons. Two, each person is fully God. And three, there is one God.

So here's some historical attempts at crafting these Trinitarian analogies. And we'll talk about some of the issues that they have with that. So the first is tritheism. Well, we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[43 : 16] They're all three gods, and we just worship three gods. But the Bible clearly states, as we talked about here before, there is one God, not three gods. That doesn't resonate with us today, but if you were back in the first century coming out of the Greek or Roman culture, where you had this pantheon of gods that you worship, man, that would sound good to you.

It doesn't sound good to us, because we worship one God. The second analogy is one called modalism. It's also sometimes called Sibelianism, after Sibelius, who lived in Rome in the third century.

And it claims that there's one person who appears to us in three forms. So modalism is helpful in that it focuses on the unity of worshiping one God, but it fails to acknowledge that each person of the Trinity to be eternal and distinct.

So that's an issue. I can either be this or I can be that, but I can't be all three at the same time. So it all fails when we see all three persons of the Godhead revealed simultaneously, like it did in the baptism of Jesus that we read a bit ago.

Modalism doesn't work anymore, because I can't be God that translates into one person, and God that changes a mode into another person, and a mode to another person, because I have to leave this mode to go to this mode.

[44 : 44] That doesn't work. The third one, and the one I really want to focus on, is Arianism. So Arius was an elder in the church in Alexandria in the fourth century, and he taught that the Son and the Holy Spirit were created by the Father.

Before that time, before the time of creation, there was only God the Father. There was no Son, there was no Holy Spirit. And it should be noted that today's modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses hold to this position, that Jesus is a created being.

Now, why is that important? Well, let's dig into that a little bit. Arius didn't do this in a vacuum, though. He had four verses that he cited. So let's look at those, and let's see where he got this idea.

So let's look first at John 1.14. John 1.14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Was made. That sounds like creation, right?

[46 : 00] It sounds like a created person. Let's look at John 3.16. We all know that one, right? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Only begotten Son. That sounds like something the Father created. And let's look at 1 John 4.9.

1 John 4.9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God had sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.

So there's that only begotten Son thing again. And then the last one I'll look at is Colossians 1.15. Who, which in this case is Christ, was the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

Firstborn of every creature. That sounds like a created thing too. Now one of the things that Wayne Grunin points out was as for the texts that say that Christ was God's only begotten Son, the early church felt so strongly that the force of many other texts, many of which we just read here, showing Christ was fully and completely God, that it concluded whatever only begotten meant, it did not mean created.

[47 : 33] But Grunin aside, instead of focusing on these one verse, single verses out of context, let's put them in context. So go back to John 1 again. So John 1, and verse 14 was the one that Arius was focusing on, and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

So let's look on either side of that to provide some content. Let's look at John 1.1 through 4. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God, and all things were made through him, and without anything, was not anything made that was made. We read that a moment ago. And we referred to that as clearly identifying Christ as God.

So in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, speaks to the eternal nature of Jesus. Jesus is God. Verse 3, all things were made through him. Jesus is a creator.

Now let's look a little bit farther down, starting in verse 9, and we'll read 9 through 13. So the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world, which we view as Christ.

[48 : 48] He was in the world, and the world was made through him. There's another reference to creation. Yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people didn't receive him.

So again, we see the true light of God, he was in the world, speaks to the eternal nature of Christ, and the world was made through him, yet didn't know him. The world was made through him, so Christ is the creator.

And then skipping down to verse 14, and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us. So this eternal word, the eternal Christ, was made flesh and dwelt among us.

So again, we have the word as eternal existence. The word was made flesh. God clothed himself in flesh and enabled man to see and touch him and not be afraid.

Because clearly in the Old Testament, when God came on the scene, everybody hit their face. And then in verse 15, he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me.

[50 : 01] Wow. Speaks to the fact that Christ came before John, but he's before John, even though John came to reveal him.

No one has ever seen God in verse 18. The only God who's at the Father's side, he's been made known to him. He's at the Father's side.

Again, there's no way. Put those glasses back on. God's not going to tolerate that. The only way that works is if Jesus is equal. God is revealed to us through Christ in a way that we can understand, but a danger comes with that.

And we'll talk to that when we focus on Christ because we see him as a man and it's easy to reject men. We do it all the time, every day.

So the second thing was John 3.16. God so loved the world. All that verse that we're very familiar with. And that comes out of Nick at Night.

[51 : 14] Right? So Nick at Night's talking to Jesus and talking about being born again. And Nick's like, how in the world can that happen? I'm not tracking.

You know, I see this physical world and I'm not seeing how that could possibly be. And so Christ is talking about him being born of water and the Spirit.

And then he says something to Nick that's really kind of would be hurtful to me. You know, you're the teacher of Israel and you don't understand these things.

Come on, Nick. But it's important because Nick needs to understand that his focus on the physical world is a fundamental myth on his part.

So taking this word at begotten that we see in verse 3.16, let me just take that out for a second because that's another way that we can examine things. If I take it out and then see how that fits with the rest of the text.

[52 : 13] So he's talking about in these verses here, I'm trying to go a little quicker. Belief in the Son protects us from perishing.

Belief in the Son gives us eternal life. A mere created man can't do those things. then if we look at the 1 John 4 passage that again is talking about a begotten son.

Let me back up to 9 through 12 on that one. So 1 John 4, 9 through 12. In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God had sent his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him.

So that's Arius' verse. But keeping on reading, here is the love, not that we love God, but he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to also love one another. No man has seen God at any time. And if we love one another, God dwells in us and his love is perfected in us.

[53 : 23] God sent his son. Why? To be the propitiation for our sins, the atonement, the payment for our sins. How could a created person do this?

As we'll see in a minute, only God can pay our sins. And then lastly, Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. So, man, Arius has got this one because this is the firstborn of every creature, right?

No. Let's put it in context. So, Colossians 1, and we'll look at verses 14 through 20. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation.

So, that's Arius' verse. for by him, all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers or things that were created by him.

How in the world could a created person create stuff? Only God can do that. Christ is the creator, not the created.

[54 : 39] And then this phrase, created by him and for him, put those glasses back on. How in the world is God going to permit a person, a created thing, be, had the glory of this being done for him.

And if you look at verse 17, he's before all things and by him all things consist. That's a direct opposition to what Arius viewed on that.

So, the fullness of God dwelt in Christ and he reconciled all things to himself, which he can't do unless he's God. So, the focus of Arius was that God was a created person.

Why is that important to us? Creating a person to die on a cross for our sins, I argue, is nonsensical.

Can the death of a man who's going to die anyway in any way pay the price for our eternal separation from God? And that's the other thing, is what is the consequence for our sin?

[55 : 54] Eternal separation from God. We are separated from him. We are put aside without him for all time. How in the world could a man do that for me?

Much less, how could a man do that 2,000 years ago for us? What really happened on the cross anyway? Jesus' human body was nailed to the cross.

Okay, we got that. That was painful, that was terrible, but you know what? The Romans did that all the time. When they had a slave uprising, they killed every single one of the slaves that survived the battle, and they crucified them on the Appian Way all the way to Rome.

So, this is really a picture of what happened, right? the physical body being nailed to the cross. The real sacrifice that Jesus made occurred behind the scenes, not his physical body being nailed to the cross.

He paid the eternal price of our separation from God. A man can't do that. Only a God, only God can do that.

[57 : 07] And again, we have this little snippet of a picture at the crucifixion of what's really going on when Christ is hanging on the cross and says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He was forsaken for us. Only God can do that. A man can't do that. He was truly despised and rejected.

And we hear that again in Handel's Messiah out of Isaiah 53. Only a perfect man was worthy of this sacrifice. But only God himself could pay the infinite price for our separation from him.

Walk away from this discussion this morning with no other thought. Understand what that means for you. This is an image. It's a valuable image.

It's one that's wonderful for us to embrace, that God sacrificed for us. But the real sacrifice is one that we didn't see. The real sacrifice is the one that only God himself can provide for us.

[58 : 19] So, it is absolutely critical to salvation that Christ not be a created person.

Christ is God. God, the Arian position back at the early church created this big controversy that was resolved in Nicaea back in 325 A.D.

and the council's refutation of this heresy and the answer to that was documented in a text. And since I don't have the computer bug, if you would, grab your hymnal and turn to the back to, I believe it's 717.

And I would like for us to read this together. Yeah, so this is the Nicene Creed. This is the answer to the Arian heresy about the Trinity.

Yes, ma'am. It's all the way in the back. It's not a page. I'm sorry. But you can see how close it is to the back of the book here. 717.

[59 : 34] Thank you. You're welcome. Yes, exactly. Does everybody have that? Okay, I'll give you a second here. Thank you.

Because this is going to be the participative part of our sermon today. Let me know when you have it or if you don't have it. The Nicene Creed.

Let's everybody stand. Christian, what do you believe? I 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, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

[60 : 57] He suffered and was buried.

And together is worshipped and glorified. Who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one Catholic and apostolic church and acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.

And I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen. Please be seated. Okay, we're almost done.

I just had a couple more thoughts to bounce off of you here. Interesting that this, if somebody asks you what you believe as a Christian, there's probably no better thing that you can pick up than the Nicene Creed to talk to them about.

This is made in 325 AD. Isn't that neat? So, back to analogies. We're left, so we're left with no analogies, right?

[62 : 19] Actually, I think we have one as I've been studying this, and it's in our own backyard. Aspen trees.

We see lots of aspen trees, don't we? You know that a grove of aspen trees is one organism? Yes. It's all the roots underground that we can't see.

And each tree that comes up in those clusters like that are genetically identical. They are the same in their substance. But you know what?

They look different. They have different branches. They have different sizes. So, each tree is an individual, but they're all the same.

And the reason they're the same is because what goes underground is what connects them all, what we can't see. Anyway, think about that and let me know your thoughts as you study this on the side here.

[63 : 26] I just thought that was interesting. Because I think it's important as analogies help us to put things in perspective. And you can go hug an aspen tree. And you can walk over and hug the aspen tree right next to it.

Okay. Well, one final thought on the subject of the Trinity. I wanted to share a story with you that I found online here to kind of round this out and put it in perspective.

Augustine. Anybody heard of Augustine? Or if you're in the Presbyterian faith, Augustine, St. Augustine? Augustine of Hippo lived a wild life.

Abandoning the faith, fathering a child out of wedlock, and rejecting the values, the Christian values of his mom, mother, Monica. Monica, however, prayed for her son that he would turn back to God.

And for 30 years, Monica prayed unceasingly for her son, who was eventually converted and became one of the church's greatest theologians. Although the church really didn't appreciate that he talked about all of the nasty things that he had done in his youth.

[64 : 38] He was named doctor of the church. And the story of his dramatic conversion gives hope to mothers who pray for their wayward children and hope to us all. So that's a nice thought for Mother's Day.

There's a legend about Augustine preserved by William Caxton based on a story he'd seen depicted on the altar of St. Austin in Antwerp, Belgium. It's the story of Augustine's encounter with a small child on the beach.

According to Caxton's 1483 edition of this book that he wrote called The Legend, St. Augustine spent 30 years writing his book, The Trinitate, which was about the Holy Trinity.

So he studied the Trinity for 30 years that we know about. And during that time, Augustine was once walking along the beach, struggling to understand how God could be three persons in one God when he met a small child who was using a seashell to scoop water out of the ocean.

And then he would run back on the beach and pour it into a little hole that he had dug in the sand. Augustine watched him for a while and then asked the child what he was doing.

[65 : 49] And the child responded, I'm putting the sea into this hole. The boy stopped for a moment. Augustine cried, but that's impossible. The hole is not big enough to contain the entire sea.

The boy stopped for a moment, stood and looked in the eyes of Augustine and replied, It is no more impossible than what you're trying to do.

Comprehend the immensity and the mystery of the Holy Trinity with your small intelligence. Augustine turned away in amazement. And when he looked back, the child was gone.

Augustine then understood that no mortal man can understand the Trinity because it's a mystery which only God can comprehend. God had used the child to teach him this valuable lesson.

So if you're still confused about the Trinity, you're in good company. So let's pray together. Lord God, your makeup is beyond our feeble comprehension, but your love and mercy and our need for them are clearly apparent.

[66 : 57] Help us to understand the magnitude of your power and authority. You alone are worthy of all praise. You alone are able to pay the price for eternity lost so that we might be covered in your sacrifice and be able to approach you for relationship.

Thank you for your cross and all that went on behind the scenes out of you to make our salvation possible. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.