The Trinity and the Bible

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[0:01] We're in a course on the doctrine of the Trinity, and I'll pray for us as we get started. And I've got two prayers tonight, one at the beginning and one at the end, and both are written by folks! during the time of the Reformation, and both have highlights of praying to God the Father, Son, and Spirit, the Triune God. And so I'll lead us in this prayer, and this one comes from a man named Martin Macronius, who was a pastor in London from the Netherlands. So let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, whose law is perfect, converting the soul, assure testimony, giving wisdom to the unlearned, and enlightening the eyes, we humbly implore you, through your boundless goodness, to enlighten our blind intellect by the Holy Spirit, so that we may truly understand and profess your law and live according to it. Since it has pleased you, most merciful Father, to reveal the mysteries of your will only to the little ones, and since you look to Him alone, who is of a humble and contrite spirit, who has reverence for your word, grant us then a humble spirit. Keep us from all fleshly wisdom, which is enmity against you. Bring to the right way those who stray from the truth, so that we all may unanimously serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. We ask this from you, most merciful Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. All right, we are working our way through this series on the doctrine of the

Trinity, and last time we were together a few weeks back, we said that delighting in God is not the icing on the top of the Christian life, but the main course of the Christian life, that delighting in the Trinity is the very thing we were made for. So God made us and put us into the Garden of Eden, and the word Eden actually means delight. We were put in a space of delight to delight in God, and so last time we talked about the word affection being the word that our forefathers used to talk about how to relate to God, to have affection for God, affection for the triune God, and we said that that's not the word emotion, which is different. Emotion is a word, emotion, that doesn't really arise in the English language until the 18th century, and it said the word affection is something deeper than that, bigger than that, and affection is a state of mind, a conviction, where you settle to what you believe and then allow your heart to be driven more and more in affection toward what you believe, and so affection for God is using the whole of yourself, the whole person, to long for God more and more over time, and so it really begins with the intellect. It begins with truth. It begins with knowing God more and more and thinking about God more and more, and so one of the things I finished with last time is knowing God more clearly is the fuel for delighting in Him more deeply. So you were made to delight in the Trinity, and knowing God more and knowing more about God is actually fuel for delighting in Him more and more. It raises your affections over time for God, and so we enter tonight a little bit more into building the doctrine of the Trinity, and the question before us is, does the Bible actually teach the Trinity, and why does that matter? So you might come tonight and think, I'm fairly settled on the idea that the Bible does teach the Trinity, but it's actually really important to ask this question because a lot of people are not settled, and so there's an apologetic element of our reflection on this, but also it's important to us to actually look through the Bible, and one of the things I'd invite you to do tonight is think about how does what we believe, our theology, what we say about God actually take shape. So what do the theologians do when they look at the Bible and try to draw truths from the Bible? And all of us here, every believer is a theologian, and so this is a work that all of us are called to be a part of, and so that's the work that we're trying to get up to tonight. So let me see if I can get a bit of participation tonight, and that's to ask the question, who are some of the cults or alternative religions or anyone in the contemporary culture, any type of group that says the Bible does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity? And if you could name one, maybe a word or two about what they what they say otherwise about it. Unitarians. Okay,

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Unitarians, which say? They say the Trinity does not come from the Bible. Okay, exactly. The Trinity does not come from the Bible. Yeah, nailed it. Hamish, I think you said one as well. Jehovah's Witnesses.
Yeah, in any sense of what they think about the Trinity? They don't. No, you're right. Yeah, right. Yeah. Yeah, Jesus is a creature for, yeah, the firstborn of creation and actually made by God, a creature, yeah. Anybody else? Maybe one more? Mormons. Yeah, absolutely, and Mormons are effectively tritheists. They believe that the Son and the Spirit were also created but then elevated into the divine life and made gods, right? So, they're tritheists. So, those are a few great examples. So, just next slide here, if I can get this to work. Oh, sorry. I'm still learning this new system we have here, so bear with me. There we go. Yeah, so a few examples. Some were mentioned. Jehovah's Witnesses say that the Father alone is God and the Son is a creature and the Spirit is a force who was also created. Or the Mormons, the Latter-day Saints, there's many gods, but the three principal deities, Father, Son, and Spirit, two of them are also creatures that were invited into the divine life. Or Islam, Islam says that God is one, Allah is one, and has no son. So, in Islam, God is monadic, we might say. So, radically, a radical unity that can never be thought of in tri-personality like we in Christianity say.
[6:06] Or in pop culture, some of the things that you might see is that the Emperor Constantine invented the doctrine of the Trinity when he called the Council of Nicaea in 325. Or even some Roman Catholic apologist today, right now as we speak, are saying things like the Bible does not actually teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Now, why would a Roman Catholic apologist, defender of Rome, say something like the Bible doesn't get you there? Why? Because they want to uphold the magisterium of the church, the Pope.

And so, it's actually the church that brings you to a place of believing in the Trinity, not primarily the Bible. So, one of the things to say tonight is, can we actually go to the Bible and defend the doctrine of the Trinity and believe in our God who is triune? And the way that works is there's no singular final proof text in the Bible, though there are some that come pretty close to declaring the doctrine of the Trinity as we declare it today. But the way that we come to our beliefs as Christians is we look across the whole Bible, Genesis to Revelation, the whole canon of Scripture, and then derive from that collectively what we are to believe about God. And so, the Westminster Confession of Faith has this great line in chapter 1.6 that the things we believe about God come to us through the Bible and then by good and necessary consequences. And what they mean by that is basically, when you read the Bible carefully, you can ask the question, what must be true if what the Bible says is true is true? And that's what comes about by good and necessary consequence. And so, the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one in essence, three in person, is something that we come to by necessary consequence of all that we see across the Bible.
So, here's what you need to have a biblical doctrine of the Trinity. So, if we're going to say the Bible actually teaches the Trinity, these first three things are the things we would have to look for. Number one, that there is one God. Number two, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each fully God. And number three, that the Father, Son, and Spirit are not the same. So, the distinctiveness of the Christian doctrine of God is that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God, and the Father, Son, and Spirit are not the same as each other. They're distinct. So, one of the ways this gets talked about is the fourth thing there. The persons of God, Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct, but they're undivided. The Father, Son, and the Spirit are God, and yet there's a distinction of persons. Now, if you say, I don't quite know what that means, and that's what we talked about last time we were together, that's okay. You're not really supposed to, in a sense, because there's no way to get your arms all the way around that idea. So, comprehension is a word that comes from another language that means to give something a hug and get your arms all the way around that thing. That's to comprehend. And you can't comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity because you can't comprehend God. God is not a creature like us. He's not a subject of mathematics and number. He's not a subject of space and time, and so that means that there's no comprehension of the Godhead. There's only an attempt by us to listen to what God has said about Himself in human speech and try to do our best at describing Him faithfully as He's taught us. So, we can say that we speak of God truly, but not comprehensively. And so, that's what we have when we talk about the triune God. So, I've got a few passages for you. You're very welcome to turn in the Bible to them if you'd like. We'll move through them fairly quickly so that we don't use up too much of our time. But in them, what we're trying to do is say, well, does the Bible actually teach those three things that we

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just listed on the previous slide? So, the first is famous Deuteronomy 6, what's often called the Shema. It's called the Shema because in Hebrew, hear, O Israel, is the Hebrew word Shema. So, this is the Shema. And it says, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And just note a couple things that the word Lord there is Yahweh. It's the revelation of the divine name in Exodus chapter 3. And remember that Yahweh means I am. And I am is just the to be verb. It's just God says, I am, I be, I exist. Whatever being is, is what God is. God is necessary being. We're not necessary, but God is necessary being. And so, the necessary being that is God, who's also our God, the God of Israel, is one. So, there's a grand statement before Moses kicks off into this covenantal speech in Deuteronomy. And he says, hear, O Israel, the first thing you got to know is the Lord Yahweh that revealed himself at Sinai is one. Now, what does that mean, one? And it's quite simple, actually, I think, here. And that's that these were people who were former slaves in Egypt. And in Egypt, they were forced at times to worship a pantheon of gods, polytheists. And in Egypt, they are polytheists. And so, what is this saying?
[11:16] This saying, the God you worship, the God who brought you through the waters of the Red Sea, is not a pantheon, is not many gods, but one God, one and one only. So, this is a denial of any sense of a multiplicity of gods. There is but one God, and you're to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. So, we learn there that God is one. That's one of the great claims of the Bible, that we are monotheists, that God is one. But then you flip over to the New Testament, and you have this astounding passage that we've all read many times but can never really be exhausted, and it's John 1, 1-3. And what does it say? It says, in the beginning, and what is that connecting us to there? Genesis 1, right? And associating whatever it's going to say next with the God who created the world. That's why that first clause is there. And it calls the Son of God, Word, Logos, and says, in the beginning from Genesis 1 was the Word. And those two B verbs that are all over this passage, it's connecting the Word, the Logos, who is the Son of God, with the idea of Yahweh who just is. He was, the Son was, just like Yahweh is, in the beginning.

And He was there, He was the Creator. And we get this incredible distinction here. The Word was with God. So maybe just a slight, another request for a little bit of participation. If John tells us here, the Word was with God, so the Word is the Son, who do you think in the three persons of the Trinity the Word God is standing in there for? The Word, the Son, was with God. Who is God there? Any? Sorry? The Father. Yeah, absolutely. So it's, John is saying, the Son in the beginning was with the Father. That's the way God is often used in the New Testament, simply as a stand-in for the Father.
And the Word not only was there with the Father, but was God. So now all of a sudden, you see this striking thing John does. He says, the Son who was with the Father, God, is God. And remember that thing we said in the slides, that to establish the doctrine of the Trinity, you have to say, there's one God, and the one God is Father, Son, and Spirit, three persons, distinct, yet also one.
And there, in those two clauses, that's really what John says, that the Word was with God, the Father, and yet was God at the same time. And as humans, we say, well, how could that be? But that's the profoundness and the mystery of the God that we worship, of the doctrine of the Trinity.
[14:05] And then, by the way, this is where the Jehovah's Witnesses ground their whole theology. They say that right here, there's no V in Greek, and they mistakenly read the text to need to include the little letter. Sorry, sometimes this is not working for me. A. So they write in the Jehovah's Witness translation, the Word was a God. And that means that they say that the Son was one of many deities that was created by the Father, and that's the great heresy that was committed, that has thrown the entire Jehovah's Witness community off track. So there's a striking evidence of the Son being both God, yet a distinct person in the Bible. But then you come to the Shema again, because it's restated in the New Testament. This is so significant that, remember Deuteronomy 6, 4?

But then here in 1 Corinthians 8, 6, notice, yet for us there is one God. And you say, well, that's what the Shema said. That's what a Jewish believer of the New Testament is going to say. I remember that from Deuteronomy 6. But then how does it define, how does Paul define the one God? The Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. And so in the New Testament, the writers start to explain the oneness of God in a multiplicity of persons. They do this very naturally, picking up on Old Testament passages.

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Just a few more. This is another striking example. In the Old Testament, we're told that every knee shall bow and every tongue swear allegiance to God alone in the eschaton, in the time of the end of the world. But then in the New Testament and Philippians 2, what do we learn? Who is that God that we're to bow the knee to? And we learn that we're going to bow the knee to Jesus. Every tongue in heaven and on earth, every knee bow, every tongue confess. And so that's picking up on the one God of Isaiah 45, and Jesus is being attributed as that one God of Isaiah 45 here.
So we've seen already that there is one God, and that the New Testament associates the Son, Jesus Christ, as God. So there's the Father, and there's the Son, and there's a unity yet a distinction at the same time. And then just one passage on the Holy Spirit. There's hundreds we could go to, but I think this is an interesting one. And it's this moment in Acts 5 when Ananias and Sapphira commit a great sin against the church and against God by hiding money. And look at what it says.
Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? To keep back for yourself part of the proceeds. And then just jump down a little bit. And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?
[17:09] You have not lied to man, but to God. And here it's the Holy Spirit that is the subject that's then referenced later as God. So the Holy Spirit is called God multiple times in different places in the New Testament. And this is just one of the examples. Okay, so to jump back to the Old Testament, in Exodus 3, we've got this incredible moment. And this is how we read the whole Bible all together and then go back and read the Old Testament. And we could do this with lots of different passages. But this is the burning bush story in Exodus chapter 3. And the angel of the Lord, the angel of Yahweh, who first gives his name there in the story, appears to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. Now, if you've ever seen depictions of the burning bush story, Exodus chapter 3, oftentimes what do you see? You just see a bush of some kind, a thicket, and there's fire, and there's Moses. But that's not exactly what the text tells us.

What does it say? It says that from within the flaming bush came the angel of Yahweh out of it to speak in a form, in a physical form. And so who did Moses encounter? He actually encountered the angel of the Lord. And if you were to read on, it's the angel of the Lord who actually gives the divine name. So who is it that speaks to Moses? It wasn't just some voice from heaven coming down Charleston Heston style. No, it was actually the angel of the Lord saying, I am who I am. Yahweh is my name. Now that is so significant because the Christians of all the centuries have understood by reading the New Testament that the angel of the Lord is the Son of God. The Son of God condescended before His incarnation. So the very Son who condescended in the Old Testament as the angel of Yahweh would condescend again as a human being in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. Here, the fire from heaven that even comes down onto the top of the mountain is regarded by so many of the Christians of our history as the Holy Spirit. Where do we see fire come down again in the New Testament as the Holy
Spirit? The day of Pentecost, which is a redoing of Exodus chapter 3. And so here we've got the fire, the Holy Spirit, and out of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the glory cloud who is the Holy Spirit, comes the Son of God. And the Son of God speaks the name of God, the Father Yahweh, who is God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And so we have this incredible moment back in Exodus chapter 3.
And so lastly, we highlighted this as a theme for this whole course last time. Matthew 28, the Great Commission, summarizes it. This is probably the closest thing we have to a one-stop shop proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity, because we're told to go and make disciples and baptize them. And remember, if you were here last time, in the one singular name. So there's just a singular name, not a plural names, but a singular name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. So you see that how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct, but they are all the one name, God, at the same time. So the theologians of the past are taking that information and saying, well, then how do we speak about our God? And what they said is this, we say our God is one in essence, one in being, and three in person, undivided in unity, yet at the same time distinct in person.
[21:06] How can it be? And the confession we have is because that's who God is. That's who God is, and that's who God has revealed himself to be from the very beginning, and that we see in full revelation when we come to places like Matthew 28 in the New Testament. Okay, now let's wrap up with some application. To be able to say that our God is the triune God, we need all three of these.

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There is one God. I think we saw that. The Father, Son, and the Spirit are each fully God. We just had little samples of dozens and dozens of passages in the New Testament that teach that, and the Father, Son, and Spirit are not the same. There is a distinction in the Godhead. The persons of God are distinct, but undivided. So if you were to take any of those away, you would lose the Christian doctrine of God. And so it's so important that we uphold all of those statements about the God we worship. So let me draw this to application by taking you to the last passage we'll look at, and that's Galatians chapter 4. Just like we said last time, where does the doctrine of the Trinity really come home to us or hit us and stir our affections and drive our hearts more, I think, towards thinking of God as he is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? And it comes to us through a passage like this. When the fullness of time came, the middle of history, God the Father sent forth the Son,
Jesus Christ, born of Mary, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters. And because you are sons and daughters, God has sent the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, into your heart so you could say, Abba, Father. You see where the doctrine of the Trinity really comes home to us? It's in the gospel. It's that when you become a Christian, you start to realize more and more that the triune God is present with you because the Spirit is present with you. And if the Spirit is present with you, that means the Spirit has united you to the Son, Jesus Christ, fully, finally, and forever, legally. And that means that you now have access to God the Father forever and that your prayers matter. And so you can cry out, Abba, Father, and God listens.
And so, in other words, to say, the more you enter into the gospel, the more you have to enter into the fact that your God is triune and have affection for the triune God and grow in saying, the Father, Son, and Spirit, I am to meditate on and think about how much it matters that my God is three in one and not simply monadic or something else. No. And so it's in the gospel where we really encounter this. So I love a little bit of a mess up there at the bottom, but I love this quote from Herman Bavinck that could maybe be something that you could take away tonight and think, how does the triunity of God affect the way I think about everything? So that's a question I'd love for you to ponder over the course of this semester. And Bavinck says this, the Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all of existence is referred back to the triune God and until the confession of God's Trinity functions as the center of our thought and life. So does the confession of God as triune function for you centrally in your life? And so there are ways of talking about, and we'll have to do this another time, of how it matters so much that God is triune for the way you think about your work life, the way you think about your family life, the way you think about relationships, the way you think about the church, all of it, the Christian doctrine of the truth of God's triunity has to function at the center of our thought and life. So I'll finish with just an example of that. How does the Trinity matter for you as you relate to the gospel? Well, every one of us have these basic desires.
We want to be loved. And so you might ask, am I loved? Am I lovable? Does anyone love me? And the gospel says that God the Father loves you.
[25:15] And so God the Father, in His love for you, sent God the Son for you. And then you can say, but what do I do with my guilt and my shame? And you can say, well, because God the Father loves me, God the Father sent God the Son to give grace and pour grace upon my life. And then you say, but today I don't feel that way. I feel rather alone. And you can say, but because God the Father loves me, that He sent God the Son to give grace and pour grace upon my life. I can say today, no matter how I feel, that it is a fact that I'm not alone. The presence of God is with me by the presence of the Holy Spirit. So now, today, right now, you commune with the triune God who is the one God because the Holy Spirit is with you. So that's a statement of your identity. And then we could say a statement of your mission. So what does the Trinity say to our self-centered hearts, my self-centered heart, to be sure? Well, it says something like this, because God delights in God, the Father, Son, and Spirit delight and love one another forever.

You, we saw last time from John 15 and 17, you actually have been invited by being united to Jesus through the Spirit to delight in God and glorify Him forever. So you've been invited to delight in God in a creaturely way like God delights in Himself. And so the doctrine of the Trinity actually draws you out of yourself in an age where we are always being beckoned to turn back in on ourselves, hold our phones in front of our faces, and curl over in front of them. The doctrine of the Trinity invites you to get out of yourself and say, my mission is actually to delight in the Trinity and then turn and love people like God has loved me, the Father, Son, and Spirit have loved me.

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So these are very simple gospel applications, but they are true because God is triune. So I just wanted to take, we have three minutes left, I just want to take one or two minutes to ask a question that was brought up last time at the end by somebody after, can we pray to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit? And the answer is yes, we can. So I don't have time now to walk through these passages, but I've just noted a few passages there of moments in the Bible where the Father is prayed to specifically. Of course, Matthew 6 is the Lord's Prayer. Or the Son is addressed in prayer in Acts 7, 1 Corinthians 1, Revelation 22. Now in Acts 5 and 2 Corinthians 13, it's not as much that the Spirit is addressed in prayer, but that the Spirit is worshiped. And so what the Christian theologians have said is when you address the Father, you speak and pray to the one God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

When you address the Son, you speak and pray to the Father, Son, and Spirit. And when you pray to the Spirit, you speak and pray to the Father, Son, and Spirit, because our God is one God with one mind, one consciousness. And that means that you absolutely can pray to the Spirit, to the Father, to the Son.

But of course, it's our normal pattern to pray to the Father by the advocacy of the Spirit through the mediation of the Son. And so I'll say this as the last word. Why do we say at the end of our prayers, I pray in the name of Jesus, right? In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. And that's not a magical formula that we attach to the end of our prayers or anything like that. What are we saying when we say we pray in the name of Jesus? We are saying, I recognize to the one God in my prayer that I cannot approach you on the basis of my own merits. That's what you're saying. So when you say, I pray in the name of Jesus, you're saying, I pray to you and can be heard because I stand within him, united to him. I approach you on the basis of his merit, not my merit. If I was left to me, I couldn't approach you. You wouldn't hear my prayers. I couldn't enter into your presence, but I approach you in the name of Jesus because he has given me full access to you. And so that's why we say that when we pray. All right, so I'm going to close now. I want to invite you to something, and that's as we work through this course, we only have three more times in it, but to invite you to actually meditate on the doctrine of the Trinity in your prayer life. And as you work through the Bible, and this is something that we see Christians doing throughout the centuries is having time to really meditate on the triunity of God. And so I'll close our time tonight with a prayer also from the [29:55] Reformation that I think highlights this from a German man named Johann Habermann, just some guy really. He wrote a book of prayers, and so a lot of his prayers are famous, but we don't know anything about them. I don't think so. But here's one of his prayers, and I'll pray it for us and pray it to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Your glorious majesty, O God, surround us. The blessed Trinity protect us, and the eternal Godhead preserve us. Your unlimited mercy support us. Your loving kindness encompass us.

Your favor make us to rejoice. The eternal truth of God be our delight. The saving knowledge of Christ strengthen us. The all-prevailing grace of God be sufficient for us, and may the grace of God the Father lead us. The wisdom of God the Son be our consolation, and the power of the Holy Spirit enlighten us.

Our Lord and Creator stand by us. Our Redeemer save us. Our Comforter dwell with us forever and ever. Amen.

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