

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines  
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24  
 7 | Doctrine of God - Beholding Who God Is, cont.

## BEHOLDING WHO GOD IS: More on the Trinity

### Review from Last Week

#### 1. Key Ideas in the Doctrine:

1. Substance vs. Persons - Christ is "*homoousion*" (of one essence or substance) with the Father
2. Equal in Power and Glory - there is no hierarchy
3. Distinct in "personal properties" or "relations" - yet there is no Father without a Son, no Spirit without a Father and Son, etc.
4. Begotten - as opposed to "created" like the rest of creation or humanity
5. *From the Nicene Creed:*
  1. Lord Jesus Christ - "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."
  2. Spirit - "Lord, the Giver of Life, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified"

#### 2. Key Truths from Scripture that Lead to Understanding God as Trinity

1. God is One - The "Shema" (*Deut. 6.4-5*)
2. Jesus is worshipped by monotheistic Jews!
3. Jesus does things only the God of the Old Testament would/could do - forgives sins, walks on water, calms the storm
4. The NT ascribes to Jesus and the Spirit actions and prerogatives that belong to God alone, yet there are also distinctions within the unity (2Cor. 3.17-18; John 1.1; 1Cor. 8.6; Heb. 1; 2Cor. 13.14; Matt. 28.18-20; Rom. 10.9-13)
5. Jesus is opposed and condemned for claiming to be God
6. Jesus claims eternal and unique communion with the Father and the Spirit
  1. See especially John 14-17

## Common Misunderstandings of the Trinity

### 1. The Trinity is not an attribute of God; it describes God's personhood as a being.

1. We don't say "God is Father, Son, and Spirit" in the same way that we say God is loving, just, wise, etc. The Triune God is loving, just, wise, and every person of the Trinity is fully His attributes. It's not like the Father is righteous, and His Son convinces the Father to also be loving!

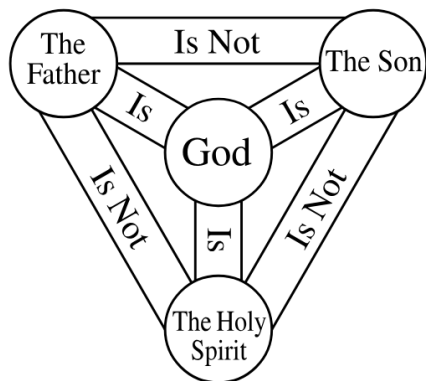
### 2. Avoiding both Tritheism or Modalism

1. Tritheism - 3 gods, as if they're not really united or equal in divinity
2. Modalism (or, Sabellianism) - as if they're not distinct enough, but merely "modes" of one God. They have to be distinct because of the way Scripture describes their actions, most clearly seen in the Incarnation.
3. *Proper orthodox understanding of the Three in One* - "No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of anyone of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light." - Gregory Nazianzen (c.390)

### 3. Overemphasizing one or the other

1. "It is not surprising that **liberalism** reduced the Trinity to the **Father** (as in... "the universal fatherhood of God and universal brotherhood of man") and therefore has had little interest in redemption by a divine Savior...The tendency to focus on **Christ** apart from the Father and the Spirit has also led to a **reductionistic** view of redemption that is disconnected from creation and consummation. Placing the **Spirit** at the center—often in reaction against these other tendencies—one can easily treat the Spirit as a **freelance operator** rather than the one whose mission is to shine the spotlight on the Father's word concerning his Son's work."  
- Michael Horton

This may be a helpful picture, but what's one clear way in which this picture lends itself to a heretical understanding?



### Why We Should Love the Doctrine of the Trinity!

1. **Guards how to properly understand that *salvation* is by God, in God, and through God** [we'll expand on this when we get to the Person of Christ]
2. **Expresses how we can, literally, say "God is love"**
  1. "The Father... Son... and Holy Spirit glorify each other... Self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt, commune with, and defer to one other... Each harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance each person envelopes and encircles the others. [So] Creation is neither a necessity nor an accident. Instead, given God's interior life that overflows with regard for others, we might say creation is an act that was fitting for God... In creation God graciously made room in the universe for other kinds of beings. God's splendor [glory] becomes clearer whenever the Son of God powerfully spends himself in order to cause others to flourish... Jesus Christ's pattern of life in the world reproduces the inner life of God." – Cornelius Plantinga
  2. "What we have, then, is a picture of God whose love, even before the creation of anything, is other-oriented. This cannot be said (for instance) of Allah... There has always been an other-orientation in the very nature of God... We are the friends of God by virtue of the intra-Trinitarian love of God that so worked out in the fullness of time that the plan of redemption,

conceived in the mind of God in eternity past, has exploded into our space-time history at exactly the right moment." – D. A. Carson

3. **Expands our view of worship as communion** - We worship the Father, in Christ, by the power of the Spirit; in other words, we worship God, while being in God, according to the power of God
  1. "Christ is presented to us as the Son living a life of union and communion with the Father in the Spirit, presenting himself in our humanity through the Spirit to the Father on behalf of humankind. . . . He receives the Spirit from the Father for us, vicariously, in his humanity, that out of his fullness he might baptize the church by the Spirit at Pentecost into a life of shared communion, mission, and service." - James Torrance
  2. See John Owen's *Communion with God*
  
4. **Deepens our understanding of God's glory**
  1. "God's goal [in all he does] is his glory, but this is easily misunderstood. The glory that is his goal is a two-sided, two-stage relationship. It is a conjunction of a) revelatory acts on his part whereby he shows us his glory, with b) responsive adoration in which we give him glory for what we have seen and received. In this conjunction is realized the fellowship of love for which [we] were made." – J.I. Packer

**How ought this to impact our prayer, character, and community?**