

The Trinity 2

*God reveals Himself in three persons -
a mystery we receive by faith and understand by faith*

Session Topics:

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In times past in various ways stayed the same to reveal His Glory
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Old Testament shadows and New Testament revelation
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The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is God

Outcomes:

After completing this session you should be able to -

Describe how God reveals Himself through our concept of "Trinity", as portrayed in both OT and NT - confirming that each person is God.

Objectives:

- **Hear His voice**
Relate to those who heard great truths and had to proclaim these to God's children
- to be willing do likewise with the message of the gospel.
- **Discern the persons**
as you are able to identify and illustrate the different roles within the Godhead.
- **Find and discover shadows in the OT & matching NT revelation**
by doing Bible research.
- **Justify each person to be God**
List and recall Scripture as proof of Deity of each person.

This is a term that cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. It is a theological term used to describe a teaching which is derived from several passages in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. It really says: **Three-Unity**. This term refers to the fact that God, Who really is one (in essence) has made Himself known (revealed Himself) to us in three ways. When you get to know a person, you can tell somebody what he is **like**. We learn what God is like in three Persons:

- ◆ God the Father
- ◆ God the Son
- ◆ God the Holy Spirit

God explains
Himself in
terms we can
understand

1. God reveals Himself

Hebrews 1:1,2 *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.*

This verse tells of the centuries of God revealing Himself to man through communication in various ways.

"In time past" refers to the Old Testament. "In these last days" refers to the New Testament time or Church Age in which we still live. As time passed, God gave a more complete or fuller (progressive) revelation of Himself. Can we therefore say that God has changed over the centuries of developing revelation?

Certainly not – for God changes not! When we look back, it becomes clear from Scripture that God has stayed the same through the ages.

Ephesians 3:9 *And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.*

Genesis 1:26 *And God said, Let US make man in OUR image, after OUR likeness ...*

Genesis 1:2 *And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

Although the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are revealed to us in our final understanding in the New Testament, it is clear to us that all three Persons of the Godhead were present from before time began.

Why does God want to reveal Himself? To disclose to us His

- ◆ Power
- ◆ Glory
- ◆ Nature
- ◆ Character
- ◆ Will
- ◆ Ways

God never
changes -
we can rely
on Him

The glory
of God

2. Three Persons in Unity

2.1 God is One

Deut 6:4 *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"*

This was the specific message that came to Israel in a world that worshipped many false gods and idols and does not conflict with the N.T. teaching of the Trinity. God is not an absolute unity, but rather a **compound unity**. We read about man and wife who shall be "one flesh" (Gen 2:24) and how a whole nation can act as one man ...

Judges 20:11 *So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man.*

The word '**one**' used in these three verses is a different word as used to convey absolute oneness. Deut 6:4 uses the plural Name of God "**Elohim**". This shows

us that although God reveals Himself to us in three persons, He is inherently one Spirit, indivisible in component parts, numerically one and free from composition.

The New Testament teaches this truth with the same clarity:

James 2:19 *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe [that] – and tremble!*

In the New Testament, God revealed that He is not only one, but a family of persons – an eternal, inexhaustible, and dynamic triune family of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Who are one in will and purpose, love and righteousness.

2.2 The Trinity defined

First we need to give a basic explanation.

In order to clearly understand that the Godhead is a Trinity in Unity, we must not stress either the threeness or the oneness to the point where we fall into Tritheism (believing in three Gods) or forgetting the distinction of Persons (Sabellianism – that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are merely three aspects or manifestations of God).

From before time began, before any creature existed, there was an Eternal Fellowship between the three distinct Persons of the Godhead – every One of Whom was God, and was conscious of the other Two. Therefore there could also be a manifestation of the existence of **love**. Otherwise, one could reason, how could God be love – since God doesn't change?

1John 4:16 *And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

The three persons operate in singleness of mind and purpose, so that we can say that They are truly One:

- ◆ The Father **creates**
- ◆ The Son **redeems**
- ◆ The Holy Spirit **sanctifies**

God is love
from before
eternity

In each work we see all Three as **present**. The Son and Holy Spirit cooperate in the creative work. The Father and the Spirit sent the Son to redeem. The Father and Son cooperate in the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

For the work of man's redemption, the Son entered the world in a new way when He took upon Himself human nature. He was given a new Name – Jesus. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit entered the world in a new way as the Spirit of Christ, being embodied in the Church, which is made up of all individual believers. We see that:

- ◆ The Father testified of the Son (Matt 3:17)
- ◆ The Son testified of the Father (John 5:19)
- ◆ The Son testified of the Spirit (John 14:26)
- ◆ The Spirit testified of the Son (John 15:26)

■ The word Trinity

Although the word "trinity" is not in the Bible, it was used as early as 181 AD (Greek: Trias) and by Tertullian in 220 AD (Latin: Trinitas).

The "trinitarian formula" is mentioned in the Great Commission (Math. 28:19) and in the benediction of the apostle Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians (2Cor. 13:14).

In Christian theology, the term "**trinity**" means that there are three eternal distinctions in One Divine Essence (being). These eternal distinctions (persons) are known as:

- ◆ Father
- ◆ Son
- ◆ Holy Spirit

The doctrine of the trinity means that within the being and activity of one God, there are these three distinct persons.

■ The Athanasian Creed

A fixed formula to summarise the articles of Christian religion is called a creed, and carries the authorisation of the whole church. It is thoroughly based on Scripture, the result of hundreds of years of discussions and analyses of the Word. It is more specific than just "Jesus is Lord" or a benediction:

2Cor. 13:14 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

Athanasius (4th century) said:

"We worship one God in the Trinity, and the Trinity in unity; we distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance. The entire three persons are coeternal and coequal with one another, so that ... we worship complete unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity."

This is the great mystery of God - His glory can not be measured

2.3 Explanation by Illustration

For a better understanding, we may look at nature and human personality.

■ Nature

- ◆ Water appears in three forms – fluid, solid (ice) and gas (steam)
- ◆ Fire brings forth heat, light and fumes (smoke)
- ◆ The Sun's rays are invisible, but when blocked, give light and heat (known to scientists as actinic, luminiferous and calorific)
- ◆ A triangle has three sides and angles yet one surface and one shape

■ Human Personality

- ◆ Man is one – yet consists of spirit, soul and body
(In "The Whole Man" the first year student will learn more about this)

2.4 Indication by Paul's Letters

Paul gave a subtle indication of his trinitarian view by the way he organised some of his writing. Part of Romans is outlined as follows:

- ◆ Judgement of God upon all flesh . Romans 1:18 - 3:20
- ◆ Justification through Faith Romans 3:21 - 8:1
- ◆ New Life in the Spirit Romans 8:2-30

We find a similar pattern in Galatians:

- ◆ Justification through faith Galatians 3:1-29
- ◆ Adoption into sonship Galatians 4:1-7
- ◆ Christ makes free from the law . . Galatians 4:8 - 5:15
- ◆ New life in the Spirit Galatians 5:16 - 6:10

Judging from his writings, Paul saw God as a trinity

When we think of God, we obviously cannot have more than a fraction of an idea of What, How and Who He is. But we should always be aware of the multiplicity of His personality, the immensity of the variety of the aspects of His character and the vastness of the gap between what we understand and Who He really is.

3. Shadows and Revelation

When studying the Bible, one is astounded again and again by the unity of the book as a whole: the Old Testament will point to something while the New Testament outlines it clearly. What is only a shadow of a truth becomes the revealed light.

You do not need to understand a mystery to acknowledge it

It is quite a relief to discover that what we learn about the doctrine of the Trinity can only be known by revelation through the Scriptures. Let us have a look at the Old and New Testaments in turn.

3.1 Old Testament Shadows

We have already mentioned the plural form of the Name of God, **Elohim**. Although this could be so for the purpose of intensity, it must also have made an impression on the Hebrew speaker whenever he heard or uttered this name, that there was a plurality of persons in the one God. Because of the worship of many gods in the world around them, the Israelites had to be taught first that God Elohim is one God. The accent was clearly on this truth. Certain verses, however, point to a Trinity.

■ The Son and the Father are Distinguished

- Psalms 2:7** *I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'*
- Isaiah 48:16** *"Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me."*
- Isaiah 63:9** *In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old.*

■ The Spirit and God (the Father) are Distinguished

- Genesis 1:1** *In the beginning God created ... And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*
- Genesis 6:3** *And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever ..."*
- Psalms 51:11** *Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*
- Isaiah 40:13** *Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counsellor has taught Him?*

■ The Triple use of "Holy"

- Isaiah 6:3** *And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"*

■ The Triple Benediction

- Numbers 6:24-26** *"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."*

■ The Angel of the Lord

This phrase is often found when one of the Old Testament characters met up with God in person. This is a foreshadowing of the second person of the Godhead coming in the flesh. He was a messenger (angel) and yet spoke with godly authority in the first person. See Genesis 22:11,12.

- Exodus 14:19** *And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them.*

The Old Testament clearly anticipates the fuller revelation of the New Testament

■ All Three Persons are Mentioned:

- ◆ Father *Isaiah 63:16 and Malachi 2:10*
- ◆ Son (Messiah) *Daniel 9:25,26 and Jeremiah 23:5,6*
- ◆ The Holy Spirit *Isaiah 11:2 and Isaiah 61:1*

3.2 New Testament Revelation

In Jesus' trinitarian teaching in John 14 -16 not only are the unity and equality of the three persons of the Godhead stressed, but also selfless love for one another. This is a model to the Christian family of believers in the Church.

The Father bears witness to the Son, having given all authority to Him. The Son gives all glory to the Father and claims nothing for Himself. The Father and Son serve each other and yield to the wishes of the Spirit, Who in turn witnesses to the Son, glorifying the Father.

John 8:18 *"I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."*

John 12:49-50 *"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. "And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."*

There is a oneness that is eternally dynamic. Inexhaustible mutual love spills over into the creation and their generous cooperation brings salvation to the lost.

**John 14:15-17
25-26**

If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.



Some passages mention the three Divine Persons:

Matthew 3:16,17 *And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

Matthew 28:19 *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..."*

2Corinthians 13:14 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

Galatians 4:6 *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"*

Hebrews 9:14 *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

1Peter 1:2 *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.*

4. Each Person in the Godhead is God

The early Christian believers had as their background the strong belief, and would testify, that "We believe in one God." The words of Jesus were to them a proof that He was God.

Romans 9:5 *"... of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, Who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."*

They also knew that the Holy Spirit is God. He was not a mere influence or feeling, but a Being with personality whom they could know through soul communion. He was the One teaching, guiding and inspiring them in newness of life.

So they knew that God is One. They also knew that the Father is God, the Son is God and that the Holy Spirit is God. This was their view of what we now call the **Doctrine of The Trinity**.

4.1 The Father is God

- John 6:27** *Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.*
- Romans 1:7** *To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
- Galatians 1:1** *Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead) ...*
- James 1:17** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

Father,
Son and
Holy Spirit

With the
Father of
Lights there is
no variation
or shadow of
turning

4.2 The Son is God

Numerous Scriptures could be quoted, but let us take a look at His attributes, office and prerogatives of deity. (Latin: 'Deus' = God)

■ The Attributes of Deity

He is ...

- ◆ Eternal Has no beginning or end . . . John 1:1 and John 8:58
- ◆ Omnipresent Is everywhere John 3:13 and Mathew 28:20
- ◆ Omniscient Knows all things. Colossians 2:3 and Mathew 11:27
- ◆ Omnipotent Is all powerful John 5:19 and Revelation 1:8
- ◆ Immutable Does not change Hebrews 1:12 and Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ
- our Saviour,
Judge and
King

■ The Office of Deity – Creator

- Colossians 1:16** *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*
- Hebrews 1:10** *And: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.*

■ Exclusive Rights (Prerogatives) of Deity

- ◆ Forgives sins Matthew 9:2 and Luke 7:47
- ◆ Raises the dead in the resurrection John 5:25 and John 11:25
- ◆ Will execute judgement John 5:22 and Acts 10:42

4.3 The Holy Spirit is God

In order to show that the Holy Spirit is God, we first must establish that He is a person. This is clear from several facts:

- ◆ Personal pronouns are used of Him John 14:26
- ◆ He is called the Helper (Comforter) – Expressing personality John 15:26
- ◆ Personal Characteristics are ascribed to Him:
 - Intellect 1 Corinthians 2:11
 - Sensibility Romans 8:27; 15:30
 - Will 1 Corinthians 12:11

- ◆ Personal acts are performed by Him
 - Regenerates John 3:5
 - Teaches John 14:26
 - Convicts John 16:8-11
 - Guides into truth John 16:13
 - Calls into service Acts 13:2
 - Speaks Revelation 2:7
 - Intercedes Romans 8:26
 - Searches out 1 Corinthians 2:10
 - Works 1 Corinthians 12:11
- ◆ He is treated in a personal way
 - Tempted Acts 5:9
 - Lied to Acts 5:3
 - Grieved Ephesians 4:30
 - Resisted Acts 7:51
 - Insulted Hebrews 10:29
 - Blasphemed Matthew 12:31

He is, like Jesus, also deity. This means that He is a Divine Person.

Let us look at some reasons:

- ◆ Attributes of deity
 - Eternal Hebrews 9:14
 - Omniscient 1Corinthians 2:10
 - Omnipotent Luke 1:35
 - Omnipresent Psalm 139:7-10
 - ◆ Works of deity are ascribed to Him
 - Creation Job 33:4
 - Inspiration 2 Peter 1:21
 - Raising the dead Rom 8:11
 - ◆ Is associated with the Father and the Son
 - Baptismal Formula Matthew 28:19
 - Apostolic Benediction 2 Corinthians 13:14
 - Work in the Church 1 Corinthians 12:4-6
 - ◆ The words and works of the Holy Spirit are considered the words and work of God Exodus 16:7 and Psalm 95:8-11
 - ◆ The Holy Spirit is called God Acts 5:3,4
-