

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA

INTRODUCTION:

- Today, in churches all across the world, Christians are worshipping God in a very special way – it's Trinity Sunday!
- Trinity is a foundational doctrine
 - o Trying to be a Christians without the Trinity is like trying to drive a car without the key – it doesn't work!
- The word "trinity" isn't in the Bible, but it's an adjective that early Christians reached for that describes God as He is:
 - o He isn't unitary
 - o He's a single, compound unit Who consists of three distinct Persons, each with His own nature, consciousness and identity
- Definition:¹
 - o (1) within the one Being that is God
 - o (2) there has always existed three co-equal and co-eternal Persons,
 - o (3) Father, Son and Spirit
- This definition rests on three pillars:
 - o (1) there is only one God
 - o (2) there are three divine Persons
 - o (3) these Persons are co-equal and co-eternal
- Many Christians today don't think much about the doctrine of the Trinity:
 - o all Bible-believing churches have it in their doctrinal statements,
 - o but, too many of these churches teach more about the nit-picky details of when and how the end-times are going to unfold than they do about who God actually is!
- The message this morning is very simple – **why does the Trinity matter?**
 - o (1) Why should you care?
 - o (2) What difference does it make?
 - o (3) Is this doctrine of the Trinity technical, arcane minutiae that you can leave to the experts?
 - o (4) Why should this definition (repeat) even matter to you?
- Answer:
 - o God: **"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**

¹ This definition is from James White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998), 26ff.

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church](#), Olympia, WA

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,” (Deut 6:4-9).

- if you're going to love God, you need to know who He is!

TEXT

1. The Trinity matters because of prayer

- Prayer is important; it's how God's people communicate to Him!
- **Did you ever stop to think that each person of the Trinity is involved in your communication with God?**²
 - **(1)** you can only come to God the Father
 - **(2)** because God the Son gave you access in the first place,
 - **(3)** while the Spirit takes your prayers and relays them for you!
- Listen to this:
 - **“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God,” (Rom 8:26-27)**
 - The Son gives us access
 - The Spirit helps us pray, by translating what's in our hearts and minds and bringing it all to God
 - And the Spirit does it because it's God's will
 - Father, Son and Spirit all at work in the simple act of a Christian's prayer!

² “In prayer the Christian has practical evidence of the Trinity, and can see the value of the doctrine; for he comes to God the Father, pleading the name of Christ, and taught how to pray aright by the Holy Spirit,” (Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* [Old Tappan: Revell, 1907], 349).

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA](#)

- If each Person of the triune God is involved in making your prayers happen, then the Trinity is pretty important!

2. The trinity matters because of salvation

- One of the ways God reveals Himself to be triune is by highlighting or playing up the actions of one Person at the expense of the others³ – the Scriptures show us Father, Son and Spirit doing different things
- If you're a Christian, you were saved because Father, Son and Spirit worked together to make it happen:
 - o (1) the Father chooses:
 - Eph 1:3-7: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**
 - If you're a Christian, the Father chose to save you
 - If you ever become a Christian (and why not do it today!?), it'll be because the Father chose you for salvation, too
 - o (2) the Son makes a way:
 - Jesus **“gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen,” (Gal 1:3-4)**
 - o (3) the Spirit applies:
 - The Spirit is the One who the Book of Acts pictures as being **poured out** upon you, **filling you**, **clothing you**, **drenching you**, **immersing you**, **washing you clean** from the moral stain of your crimes against God

³ This is the concept of perichoresis; see Erickson (*God in Three Persons*, 228-238) and Carl Beckwith's discussion of the *opera ad extra* (*The Holy Trinity*, in *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* [Ft. Wayne: Luther Academy, 2016; Kindle ed.], KL 8815-9263).

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church](#), Olympia, WA

- He changes your mind about the Gospel, gives you a new heart and mind, and brings you by the hand into God’s family
 - Titus 3:4-7: **“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”**
- If you’re a Christian, you were saved because Father, Son and Spirit worked together to make it happen – that means the Trinity is pretty important!

3. The Trinity matters because it shows us how much God loves us⁴

- **Did you ever stop to consider that, because Jesus was tortured and died on the cross, God suffered from evil Himself in order to save us?**
 - We’re very quick to think about the “problem of evil” from our perspective
 - We forget that God (Father, Son and Spirit) also suffered from the consequences of evil in the world – **because the Son died!**
 - But, He had so much love, mercy, grace and kindness that He devised a plan to redeem His creation and some of the people in it **by way of** His own torture and death
- **Did you ever stop to consider how it hurt Father and Spirit to watch the incarnate Son die?**
- What do you think Father and Spirit thought when Jesus cried out, on the cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!?” (Mk 15:34)**
- You can think of God as a single society of divine Persons, bound together by their love and fellowship with each other (more on that in a moment),
 - **(1)** and that means their joint decision to send Jesus cost them something
 - **(2)** it’s sort of like a husband and a wife making a joint decision that the husband should die on behalf of others

⁴ This insight is from Millard Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 74-75.

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA](#)

- (3) that decision costs the wife something, and it costs the husband something
- (4) and God's decision cost Him something, too
- Jesus wasn't involuntarily drafted into service; He decided to go:
 - John 10:14-18: **"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."**
- This means the Father didn't put chains on the Son, and throw Him out into the world to die against His will
 - To use a human analogy, Father, Son and Spirit hugged and waved goodbye to the Son as He went off to war in the incarnation
 - (1) But, they waved goodbye knowing Jesus would die
 - (2) Jesus knew it too
 - (3) And they all agreed He should still go anyway, to save some of the very people who'd kill Him
 - (4) And that loss hurt each of them
 - (5) That's love!
- The doctrine of the Trinity shows us how much God loves His people, because He sacrificed Himself for people who didn't want Him
 - (1) He endured pain, heartache, alienation and death so that you could hear the Good News and be saved from yourself!
 - (2) This much is familiar, but the reality of the deep, personal pain and loss Father and Spirit suffered when the Son died **isn't so familiar**
- Now, we come to the real foundation of the question – **why does the Trinity matter?**

4. God wants you to know Him as He is (Gen 1:26-28)⁵

⁵ This section relies heavily on the work of Millard Erickson, specifically his discussion of the image of God in man (*Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998], 529-536) and the metaphysical

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA](#)

- God (in a triune sense) was around before creation existed
 - o Father, Son and Spirit were together, eternal and uncreated
- Our triune Godhead is like a society of three Divine Persons, so closely bound together in love and fellowship that, in a real sense, they're one compound unit
 - o (1) It's analogous to a married couple; a single couple consisting of two individuals who're bound together by covenantal love
 - o (2) This union, this fusion of personality and nature, is why some married couples even start *looking* like one another!
- This analogy of the triune God as a divine society of Persons, bound together by love to subsist in one Being, gives us something to work with when we read the Apostle John say, "**Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love,**" (1 Jn 4:8)
 - o 1 John is a practical book about real Christian belief and practice, and John is saying that you can't be a Christian and hate other Christians – it's like trying to make a square circle!
- **What does it mean that "God is love?"**
 - o it describes something intrinsic about His **nature**, His **character**, His **personality**, His **being**
 - o and, because you can't have "love" without an object to love,
 - o we can assume that Father, Son and Spirit's unity is based on eternal love for each another – it's what binds them together to be one unit
- **So, what does it mean that, one day (Gen 1:1), God decided to create a reality and creation external to Himself?**
 - o (1) Why did God create the world?
 - o (2) Why did He create the animals?
 - o (3) Why did He create the fish in the sea?
 - o (4) Why did He create the little kittens in those viral YouTube and FaceBook videos?
 - o (5) And, here's the real question, why did He create you and I?
- Here's the reason:
 - o God decided to create a creation and to create creatures to populate that creation

nature of the Trinity (*God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 219-238).

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA](#)

- The highest beings in creation are men and women, boys and girls
- God created creation so it could be in relationship with Him, and vice versa
- God created you, your neighbor, and the angry lady who cut you off in traffic the other day so:
 - (1) we'd all be in relationship with Him,
 - (2) giving Him glory,
 - (3) giving Him honor,
 - (4) worshipping Him in Spirit and truth as our Creator and Sustainer,
 - (5) acknowledging Him as God,
 - (6) with Him reciprocating by loving us and protecting us forever
- This is what the “image of God” means – *it's the constellation of attributes that make these relationships with God and with one another possible*:
 - **Read Gen 1:26-28**
 - God made us with the nature and capability to do what He wants us to do:⁶
 - (1) to run and manage creation according to His rules, and (more importantly, this morning)
 - (2) to want and crave relationship, fellowship and community with ourselves and with Him
 - That “image of God” is like a CD that’s been run over by a dump truck; it’s scratched and scarred beyond belief
 - As Christians grow more mature in their relationship with God, He restores that image and repairs the CD
 - **“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator,” (Col 3:9-10)**
 - Little by little, God makes our relationship with Him and our brothers and sisters in Christ what it’s supposed to be
- **What does all this have to do with the Trinity?**
 - God made us to know and love Him,

⁶ That is, the structural nature of human beings make the functional (dominion) and relational (with God and with each other) roles possible.

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church](#), Olympia, WA

- and when He rescues people from Satan and themselves,
- He re-orientes their mind and heart to crave a relationship with Him and their new brothers and sisters in God's family
- In short, God wants you to know Him as He is - and He's triune!
- God revealed Himself as triune in the Holy Scriptures, highlighting different actions of His triune self so we'd see all of Him
 - (1) In the Old Covenant:
 - He shows us the covenant-making Father who defines holiness and righteousness – everything that's good and right
 - He's the one who's angry and outraged at our sin,
 - but whose grace, mercy, love and kindness tempers all that to find a way to rescue us when we don't and can't deserve it
 - (2) In the Gospels:
 - He shows us the eternal Son,
 - distinct from the Father,
 - sent by the Father,
 - who shares the Father's nature,
 - who made Himself nothing,
 - and came here to save us from ourselves
 - **“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” (Phil 2:6-11)**
 - (3) In the Book of Acts:
 - He shows us the divine Spirit,
 - sent by both Father and Son,
 - who indwells, seals and marks believers with the New Covenant,
 - who changes hearts and minds,

Why the Trinity Matters

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA](#)

- who empowers for service in God's covenant community,
- and who establishes your eternal WI-FI connection to God
- (4) In the NT letters:
 - He shows us the result of His work in the life of small congregations (smaller even than this one ☺), scattered all over the Eastern Mediterranean
 - And we have these little confessions of Trinitarian faith in the opening lines of each letter, like Jude's: **"To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept [by] Jesus Christ," (Jude 1:1)**
- **So, do you care about the Trinity?**
 - (1) If this is who God is, then don't you want to know more about Him?
 - (2) Would you ever get married, and resolve to not learn about your wife!?
 - "I married her, I've done my part!"
 - Yeah, but you don't want to know her!
 - Likewise with God!
 - (3) What kind of marriage would you have if, after 20 years, you deliberately stopped cultivating a relationship with your husband?
 - "After 20 years, there's nothing more to know!"
 - For more mature Christians, it's the same with your relationship with God!
 - (4) Are you on eternal autopilot?

CONCLUSION

- Jesus told us what the most important commandment is when He quoted Moses:
 - **Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,'" (Mk 12:29-30).**
- In order to do this:
 - you have to know Him as He is,
 - and God wants you to know Him as He is,
 - and He's triune