

Text:

Big Idea:

## INTRODUCTION

This morning our question concerns the very nature of God. Who is God? What is he like? One of the historic descriptions of God is that he is a Trinity. That is, he is the great three in one. Most Christians understand the Trinity to be important but there is often confusion over what that term means and why it is significant. Many groups like Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons or Oneness Pentecostals deny the teaching. And thus we will consider this truth this morning.

For one, the **term trinity is not in the Bible**. You can't just look it up and read verses where it is mentioned. This has caused some to deny its truth but it ignores that fact that we use many terms, some coined or invented, to describe certain truths taught in Scripture. Using the same logic we'd have to conclude that God is not omnipresent, or omniscient, or omnipotent since those words aren't in the Bible either. Theological terms are still being coined. There has been debate over recent decades over the role of women in the home and church. Words like egalitarian or complementarian were coined to describe what the Bible taught, so too was the word trinity coined or created to describe what the Bible teaches.

**What does trinity mean?** It's really a mashup of two concepts. The concept of 3 in one, a tri-unity. Trinity is shortform for triune or the tri-unity of God. God is three in one.

Now at this point, the objection is not just that the word trinity is not in the bible but the very idea of three in one is **contradictory**. How can something be three and one. It doesn't make sense. The law of non-contradiction states that contradictory propositions cannot both be true at the same time and in the same way. That is, it is a contradiction if we say that God is three gods and one god at the same time. Or to say that God is three persons and one person at the same time. Those statements are contradictory and thus untrue. But this is not how God has revealed himself. The classic definition of the triunity of God is that God is one in essence or one in being one in nature or substance, and three in person. Three persons, one being. Three persons, one essence. That is no more a contradiction than saying that we are two and one. Material and immaterial yet one person. Or body and soul, yet one person. God is one in essence three in person.

So if not a contradiction, **how can one being consist of three persons?** It stretches the ability of our mind to conceive of such a truth. What can we compare to such a truth? All illustrations fall short or teach some error. How can we wrap our minds around this? Let me just say this: The Bible asks. To whom can you compare our God? It also states: There is no one like him. It would be unfounded for us, even arrogant of us to say, "If I do not fully understand this God, he cannot be God!" Rather from Scripture's self-witness I would say, "If we do fully understand this God, he cannot be God—we are."

**Transition:** Now we've been speaking about the concept of trinity and what God is like but we have not yet considered the Scriptural witness. I addressed some opening questions as way of introduction but the concept of the nature of God comes from Scripture not from philosophy or reasoning. God is known through revelation. So let us turn to his self-revelation, his word.

## I. GOD IS TRIUNE

**Read Matthew 3:13–17.** For our discussion this morning, what we note in this passage concerning the nature of God. We have Jesus, the Son of God, being baptized. We have the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on

him. Then we have a voice from heaven, clearly the Father, whom addresses Jesus as his beloved Son with whom he is well pleased. How do we understand what this text teaches us about God?

It is clear here that Father, Son and Spirit are distinguished from one another. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. The same three here is mentioned in regards to baptism at the end of the chapter when Jesus commands his followers to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**Transition:** But what is this relationship between Father, Son and Spirit? Is this polytheism? Belief in multiple gods? Is this three gods?

There are three core principles I want to demonstrate from Scripture, three pillars, three truths that are clearly taught that will help shed light on this passage in Matthew 3.

1. There is only one God.
2. The Father is called God. The Son is called God. And the Spirit is called God.
3. The Father is distinguished from Son and Spirit and likewise the Son from Father and Spirit, and Spirit from Father and Son.

When we say trinity or triunity, these are the three truths that we speak of.

### 1. There is only one God.

This cannot be the conclusion we get from Scripture. **Isaiah 44:6** says, *"I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."* **Isaiah 45:21–22** says, *"And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."* **Deuteronomy 6:4** says, *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."*

There is only one God. This is the first pillar of truth in understanding God as tri-unity. He is one.

### 2. The Father is called God. The Son is called God. And the Spirit is called God.

For the Father, little argument is needed. It suffices to say that the phrase "God the Father" appears numerous times in Scripture. Concerning the Son, **Romans 9:5** says, *"To them [Israel] belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen."* **Titus 2:13** says, *"waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"* **2 Peter 1:1** says, *"Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ"* **Hebrews 1:8** says, *"But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom'"*

Concerning the Spirit, in **Acts 5**, a man named Ananias was caught in a terrible lie. Peter asks him, *"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?"* Later he says, *"You have not lied to man but to God."* The Spirit of God is not a wind or force but a person. He can be lied to. He can be grieved. He comprehends. He dwells in believers.

Scripture is clear. The Father is God. The Son is God, and the Spirit is God. That's the second pillar.

### 3. The Father, Son, and Spirit are not the same.

We see that here in **Matthew 3**, clearly. The baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **2 Corinthians 13:14** says, *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* **1 Peter 1:2** says, *"according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood."* It is the Son who suffered on the cross, not the Father. It is the Spirit who was

given when the Son ascended. God is not Clark Kent and Superman changing clothes in a phone booth or revealing himself in different modes. We must hold to all that the Scripture reveals about God's nature.

**Summary:** So when we say trinity or triunity, we are affirming all of what the Bible says in these three pillars. God is one. The Father, Son and Spirit are all referred to as God. Yet Father, Son and Spirit are not the same. God is one being, one essence, one nature, one God, one deity. Yet God has made himself known in three persons, all truly God, yet distinct, not according to their essence, but distinct according to their person.

**Illustration (creation):** I want to illustrate this teaching through an important truth—creation. Of the many things that make God God, one of the most prominent is his role as Creator of all things. The uncreated Creator. This is God. Now as we consider God as creator, listen to these texts. Consider how the idea of distinction, yet oneness. Three yet one is revealed of this God who made all things.

Consider **John 1:1**. It says, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Later in the chapter we read, *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (v. 14)*. That is, the Word is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And what it says here is astounding. The Word was in the beginning, sounds like **Genesis 1:1** and the creation account. In the beginning God created. Here, in the beginning was the Word. And the word was with God and the Word was God.

**(a god?)** Some try to change this translation to make Jesus a god rather than God. However the Greek language is clear. Rather than arguing over Greek, which unless you know the language, comes down to trusting somebody else. I did an experiment and put the Greek phrase into a number of online translators. Certainly not recommended for normal Bible translation but to demonstrate that the language here is clear. The online translators translated this text in the same way. The Word was with God and the Word was God. They have no dog in this fight, Jesus, the Word, was in the beginning with God and he was God.

So the Word or the Son is distinct from the Father but cannot be separated from the Father. And in **John 1:2–3** it says, *“[The Word] was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* So in the beginning God created the world and in the beginning the world was made through the Word, the Son of God.

Now if you read in **Genesis 1** we have God creating through the Word *“Let there be light”* and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Father, Son and Spirit, one God, active in creation.

**Another text. 1 Corinthians 8** starting at **verse 4** says, *“we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”* What an interesting text. One God, yet this one God is Father, and Son, both active in creation.

**Colossians 1:16**, speaking of the Son, says, *“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created through him and for him.”*

Consider also **Hebrews 1:2–3**, *“in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”* God is the Creator. The Son is the Creator. The Son is the exact imprint of God's nature. He is truly God.

**Summary:** In creation, there is one Creator, Father, Son and Spirit. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Unity yet distinction. Three yet one.

**Illustration (dividing a person):** So was their three gods or who made the world or one? What do we learn from these texts describing creation? I mentioned before our own personhood, consisting of body and soul. If you divide body and soul, you don't have a person, that is death. While we can't divide body and soul without doing damage to the person, we can make distinctions between body and soul. So too with God. We cannot separate Father from Son or Father from Spirit. God is one. But we can make distinctions as the Scripture makes distinctions.

**Transition:** Now there are many more texts, many more ideas to discuss and arguments to weigh, refute, and promote. I've some of that down on a handout for further study. But I want to transition here to a more necessary consideration. Why does this matter?

We might think it matters to refute heresy. It matters to debate with Mormons, Muslims, Oneness Pentecostals, and Jehovah's Witnesses. We might think it matters as a test of orthodoxy. We might think it matters for theological precision. These things are true, but there is something much more glorious that I want to show you on why God as three in one matters so much.

## II. GOD IS LOVE

Notice here in **Matthew 3** what the Father says to the Son. *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* Here is the key that opens the treasures of grace and knowledge. The love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father.

**(before the creation of the world)** God's love is not something that began here at his baptism or at the cross. God's love is not something that began at creation. God is love. Eternally, God is love. Love between Father and Son through the Spirit. In **John 17:5** Jesus prayed the night before he was crucified, *"Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."* The Word was with God in the beginning, before the creation of the world. Later in **John 17:24** Jesus prays and says, *"you loved me before the foundation of the world."*

That is, what we see in **Matthew 3** is not peculiar. It is an expression of the eternal love of Father to Son, that existed before the foundation of the world.

**Transition:** I'm going to need you to turn to **1 John 4** as we consider more of this love of God. This expression of love from Father to Son is so important. We get a glimpse into the being of God. In **1 John 4** I want to show you three things about God's love and how that makes the trinity of God necessary and so wonderful.

### 1. The Giving of His Love

**Read 1 John 4:7–8.** We see here that love is from God. That is God is the source of love. God gives love. A love that blesses others. A love that is amazing. God, one in three, Father, Son, and Spirit, is the God of love. Why is this so important? How does this relate to the trinity of God?

Consider a god who is strictly one, like the god of Islam. How can that god be love? How can that god be eternally loving? Love is a relational quality. It exists between persons. Such a god, alone, cannot be said to be love. Certainly such a god cannot be said to be loving before creation. What is there to love? Sure you can love yourself but a self love is not a self-sacrificing, others-focused, virtue as we know love to be and is expressed here. A god consumed with self-love has no reason to create anything, and if he does, he will only create such that he is served. This god will always be distant. He may even grant forgiveness, paradise, and eternal life. But he will always be distant, he will never be loving, except to love and serve himself.

However, the true God is the triune God. Eternally love. A perfect and relational, other-centered love between Father, Son and Spirit. And this God, eternally love, doesn't require a creation to love, there is already love there. The Father has

loved the Son for all eternity and the Son loved the Father. This God doesn't create to serve himself or make up what is lacking or that he might show love for the first time. This God's love is an outward facing love. A love that looks outward rather than inward. Rather than create to serve self, this God of eternal love creates to share his self, to share his love. To give his love. To give himself. Creation is an overflow of his love rather than a requirement for or completion of his love. This God creates to share his love, to give his love.

**Do you see how important the tri-unity of God is?** It is the love that we are called into the share. Love is not just the summary of the law, it is the privilege of the redeemed to share in the eternal love of Father and Son through the Spirit.

**Summary:** So this God, the triune God is love and gives his love. Love is from God. Outward. We share in it.

## 2. The Giving of the Son

**Read 1 John 4:9–10.** Here we have love of God revealed, manifest, or given to us through the Son who was given.

**(might live through him) Verse 9** tells us why the Son was given. So that we might live through him. The love of the triune God gives life. God loved the world such that he sent his Son into the world, not only that we might have forgiveness and be granted eternal life. Those are good things but they are means to an end. Even the love of God displayed on the cross was not an end in itself, but a means to an end. And that end is that we, sinners, might be reconciled through Christ to enter in and share in this eternal love of Father and Son through the Spirit for all eternity! **Verse 9** says that *“God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.”* That we might share in his love, that his love might be born in us. This other-centered, self-sacrificing, virtuous love of God!

**(propitiation for sin) Verse 10** describes this amazing love that causes us to live through him. The Son, entered his creation, taking on human flesh, truly God and truly man, and died as a sacrifice for sin. The gospel, is that through the sacrifice of Christ we can share in God's love. The triunity of God is not only foundational for the eternal love in which we're called to share in, the triunity of God is foundational for the gospel, the good news of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God through the death and resurrection of Christ.

**If Christ is not truly God**, then the gospel doesn't make sense. If Jesus was not truly God. If he was a deified human or some created lesser god, then God, rather than giving himself to bear the weight of sin as an overflow of his love, created another being to bear that penalty. God, rather than being loving and self-sacrificing, is cruel to this other god or deified human to make him bear the weight of sin. But in Christ, God himself bears our guilt in his body on the tree. The Son, from all eternity with God and God himself, enters his creation and bears the penalty that we rightly deserve and grants us entrance into the love of God. Since Christ is God, the cross is a demonstration of God's self-giving love. So yes, God gave his Son, and yes, God gave himself.

**Do you see how important the tri-unity of God is?** The gospel depends on the triune God.

**Transition:** So this God gives his love, gives his Son, and now we'll see that he gives his Spirit.

## 3. The Giving of the Spirit

**Read 1 John 4:11–13.**

**(the Spirit assures)** Do you see how amazing **verse 13** is. We know we abide or remain or live in God and he is us because he has given us his Spirit. He gives love, he gives his Son, he gives his Spirit. This is our triune God! What does the follower of Christ obtain through the Spirit given? Assurance. Comfort. A knowledge that we are in him and he in us. Through the Spirit we know the love of God and we love God in return.

This self giving God of love, who gives the Son to reconcile us and the Spirit to assure us and keep us, calls us to share in his love and therefore share that love, as he does, with others.

**(the Spirit moves us to love)** This truth is life-changing. God saves sinners not to be these saved individuals, isolated from others. Our God is not isolated, he is love. God saves sinners so that they might abide in his love. Love is the eternal nature of God and therefore marks the Christian. Christians are called to share in this love and therefore should be loving. Look at **verse 11**, *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”*

Disciples of Christ, brought into the love of the triune God are now marked, defined, known by their love for one another. The given Spirit guarantees it. John is clear here, no love? then no right to the name Christian. The Christian, brought into this eternal God of love, is being renewed into his image. An other-centered, self-sacrificing, virtuous love shown in Father, Son and Spirit. A love for God and a love for others. We are partakers of this love and then a conduit of this love toward others.

This is the Christian life. Not one of doctrine, rules, duty, guilt, fear, but love. A sharing in the love of God through the Spirit given to us and then an overflow of love toward others. Loving with the same love which we have been loved with.

**Do you see how important the tri-unity of God is?** Father, Son, Spirit, all active and important in the Christian life, a life of love. It is through the Spirit that we share in the eternal love of God and know the love of God and love him and others in return. We abide in God, we abide in his love, through the Spirit given to us and the Son given for us.

Will not this move you to love your brothers and sisters in Christ with a great intensity? You’re called to share in the love of the eternal God. To be loved by him and then love like him. Will your heart not rise to love those here today around you? Do you love this God? Do you love the Son? Do you not see the folly of sin and pride and long to share in this love for all eternity? Will you not repent of your selfishness and sin? Will you not flee to the God of love? Trust him today. Abide in his love and love him and others. This is the Christian life.

## **CONCLUSION**

So you see, the triunity of God is not a stuffy set of truths to dissect and debate. It is the fountain, the source of love. We are called to share in that love and then to love others.

All this rests on the nature of God as triune. This is not a matter of small importance. This is our God, the loving God, the eternal God three in one. Let’s worship him, love him and love others.