

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

There are some things in the universe that are difficult for us comprehend. For instance, I could go to a university, and sit in on a lecture in the astrophysics department. While the professor explains the process by which the sun radiates heat and light, I could listen with fascination, but most of what he says will probably go right over my head. I'm sure I will get the part, at the beginning, when he says, "Hello my name is Mr. So-and-so," but the rest of the hour will seem like a blur. I may catch a few key phrases, here and there. I will be impressed when he mentions details like how the core of the sun reaches a temperature of 27 million degrees Fahrenheit, but still, I'm not able to comprehend how insanely hot that truly is. I think the oven is warm, when I accidentally bump my hand on the inside while baking, but it's only 400 degrees. How can I compare that with the intensity of the sun? As the professor goes on to talk about protons fusing together to create alpha particles, I might smile and nod, as if that makes sense to me, but in reality he might as well be speaking another language. How can I visualize something I've never seen? There is a good chance I will walk out of the classroom with a bit of a headache. But do you know what? Even though I may not understand how it all works, I can appreciate the presence of the sun, as I step outside and feel the rays of sunshine touching my face.

In a similar way, there are many things we may never be able to fully comprehend as we think about the nature of God, like the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that God is greater than our human minds can fathom, and this shouldn't surprise us. He is infinite, but we are finite creatures. The entire universe cannot contain Him, but we are just a tiny speck on the earth. If it were possible for us to explain the complexities of His being, then He wouldn't be God. Thankfully, the Lord doesn't expect us to understand all of these things, but He does invite us to seek Him and to know Him in a personal way. Even though I have a difficult time wrapping my mind around these things, I can still appreciate God's presence my life, and I can experience the love that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have for me. As we learn about God through the pages of His Word, we find ourselves filled with a deeper sense of awe and wonder. I hope that is the case this morning, as we explore this important doctrine.

In the verses we looked at a few moments ago, the apostle Paul refers the Trinity in 2 Corinthians 13:14, when he prays: *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* As he closes the letter, he reminds believers about the distinctive nature of the God we worship. Many of the people who were part of that congregation had come from a pagan background, and they could remember visiting the temples scattered throughout their city devoted to various gods and goddesses. They may have offered a sacrifice to Zeus, and prayed to Athena, and had a shrine in their home devoted to Artemis, and they made sure to burn a little incense at the altar dedicated to the emperor. That was life in the Roman Empire. But when they had come to believe the truth of the gospel, they gave all of that up, realizing that the gods they once worshipped were merely idols. Christianity affirms that there is only one true God. And yet, He exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This brings us to our first question this morning:

“What is the Trinity?”

Basically the word means: three-in-one, or tri-unity. You may be surprised that the word itself never appears in the Bible, but the concept is certainly present all throughout Scripture. While the doctrine is more fully revealed in the NT, there are all kinds of references in the OT as well. One definition tells us that: “God eternally exists as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, yet there is one God.” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.226)

We might be tempted to offer an illustration, at this point, to help explain what that means, but the problem is every illustration we can up with breaks down, because there is nothing in the universe to which we can compare God. /// One popular example we often hear is the three forms of water: it can exist as a liquid, ice, or steam depending on the temperature. But regardless of its form, it remains water. At first, that sounds like a good comparison, but then we realize that water doesn’t exist in all three of those forms at the same time. And unlike water, God doesn’t change from one form to another. And so that illustration doesn’t really help us to better understand the Trinity.

Christian author Wayne Grudem writes,

“In one sense, the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we will never be able to understand fully. However, we can understand something of its truth by summarizing the teaching of Scripture in three statements: 1. God is three persons, 2. Each person is fully God, 3. There is one God.” (*Systematic Theology*, p.231)

As we unpack those statements, we find that there are many passages of Scripture which affirm that God is three persons. All three members of the Trinity are mentioned together a number of places throughout the Bible, as in our passage in 2 Corinthians 13:14. Another passage would be John 14:16-17.

In John 14:16–17 Jesus tells His disciples, *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”* In the context, the Lord was preparing the disciples for what was ahead. In a matter of hours, He would be taken from them. He speaks of His death and resurrection, and then encourages them by making a promise that He was not going to leave them alone. When Jesus returned to His Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to guide them. The Spirit would be a Helper and Comforter, and would dwell in the hearts of God’s people. These verses make a clear distinction between the members of the Trinity. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit. They are unified, and yet carry out different roles. We see the relationship that exists between each of the members, and how they interact with one another.

This is important because one of the mistakes people have made, when trying to understand the trinity, is thinking of God as one single person who reveals Himself in different ways, depending on the circumstance. They would say, in the OT He was the Father, in the Gospels

His the Son, and in the rest of the NT He is the Holy Spirit. Not three persons, but one person wearing three different hats at different times. We wear different hats sometimes. When I am at church people call me Pastor Trent, at home my children call me Daddy, and when I'm with my parents they call me son. I'm the same person, but have three different titles or roles depending on the circumstance. But this is **not** what the Bible teaches when it describes the nature of God. There are three persons, not simply three modes. In the Gospels, we see the Jesus praying to His Heavenly Father; the Holy Spirit is at work throughout His ministry, and the voice of the Father calls out from Heaven affirming "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him." (Mt. 17:5) The Trinity is not simply different hats, but three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Scripture also shows us that each person of the Trinity is fully God. Look at **Hebrews 1:3**. The passage is defending the deity of Christ, telling us that Jesus is greater than the prophets, and greater than angels. Hebrews 1:3 says, "*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*" Notice that it doesn't say that Christ is similar to God, or that He resembles God in many ways. He is God. He shares the same glory and reflects the same nature as His Heavenly Father in every possible way. Jesus deserves our worship, just as much as the Father deserves our worship. He deserves our obedience, every bit as much, as the Father deserves our obedience. To worship and obey Christ is to worship and obey God.

We could say the same thing about the Holy Spirit. In **Psalms 139: 7-8** David wonders, "*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*" The passage refers to the Holy Spirit as God. What is true of the Father is also true of His Spirit: His presence is with us wherever we go.

The divine attributes are shared by each member of the Trinity. The Father is all-powerful the Son and the Holy Spirit are also all-powerful. The Father is everywhere, the Son and Holy Spirit are also everywhere. The Father is everlasting, the Son and the Holy Spirit are also everlasting. The Father is merciful, the Son and the Holy Spirit are also merciful. We cannot say that one member is more fully God than the others.

There was false teaching that arose in the fourth century when a teacher by the name of Arius claimed that only the Father is God. He believed that both the Son, and the Spirit were lesser, created beings. Arius would admit that Jesus is very powerful, and is similar to God, but refused to accept that Jesus is God. He had many followers, and created a great deal of controversy that lingered even after his teaching was condemned as heresy. It is interesting how the same teaching has been rebranded, and continues to show up in different forms today through many of the cults.

If we stop here, we might get the impression that Christians worship three different gods, but that's not even close to the teaching of the Bible. The doctrine of the trinity shows us that God is three persons, each person is fully God, but there is just one God.

Turn back to the OT, to **Deuteronomy 6:4**.... “*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!*” Moses was warning the children of Israel not to worship the gods of other nations. The people around them believed in many gods. Each nation had their own list of deities to whom they prayed. They believed there were gods who sent the rains, and gods who gave victory in battle. But Israel was commanded to worship the Lord, because He alone is God, and there is no one like Him. The nations surrounding Israel believed in many gods. There was a god who sent the rains, and a god who gave victory in battle, a god of the mountains and a god of the valley... but Scripture makes it abundantly clear, there is only one true God. The children of Israel were commanded not to worship the gods of the nations, or to follow many gods, but to worship the Lord alone. In Isaiah we read, “*I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God...*” (**Isaiah 45:5**)

We don't want to make the mistake of suggesting that there are three separate gods. The members of the Trinity as united in such a way that they are one. It's not just a shared purpose or a shared vision that unites Father, Son, and Spirit, but they are one essence. Even though I can't explain that, I can embrace it by faith.

That is our first question: “What is the Trinity.” I know this is a lot of information, and it is difficult to process, but I want to go on and address a second question that we sometimes forget to ask.

“Why is the Trinity important?”

For one thing, this doctrine distinguishes the Christian God from other so-called gods. We are constantly being told, in our culture, that “we all worship the same god,” “we all believe the same basic thing,” but as appealing as that might sound, it just isn't true. No other religion speaks of God in the same way. If you compare the God of the Bible against the gods of other faiths, you will find glaring differences.

Imagine that I am meeting my wife at a restaurant for a romantic dinner. When I get there, the restaurant is crowded, and there are lots of people waited to be seated. I see a woman who looks like my wife in front of me. Her back is to me, so I can't see her face, but she is about the same height, and she has the same color hair, and she is wearing the same kind of purse. I'm convinced that it's her, and so I walk up behind her, and give her a hug, and kiss her on the cheek. When she turns around, I realize that I've made a terrible mistake. She is upset, and so is the tall, muscular man standing beside her. And my wife, who walks in about that time, is also wondering why her husband is kissing a strange woman. People may think that all gods are the same, but when you look closely you will discover very different ideas and beliefs that contradict the Bible. There is only one God who can save, and so I don't want to make a mistake, and follow an imposter.

As one author writes, “The Trinity identifies *our* God: it helps us to name him and to know him, to speak to him and about him. In a world that presents us with a smorgasbord of gods, the Trinity specifies who it is we worship.” (<http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2000/07/the-very-practical-doctrine-of-the-trinity/>)

The Trinity helps us understand the various ways that God relates to us. We have a Heavenly Father who loves us. He is delighted to welcome us into the family, and to call us His sons and daughters. We have the privilege of calling out to Him in prayer. We can use the same words spoken by Jesus in the gospels when He prayed: “Abba, Father.” Our Heavenly Father watches over us, and takes care of us. There is not a moment of the day when He isn’t close by our side, because He knows how much we need Him. Even when we mess up, He still loves us. Our response should be loving obedience, seeking to please our Father and bring honor to His name.

We have a Savior: the Lord Jesus Christ. He has demonstrated tremendous grace, reaching out to rescue us from sin, even when we were still running the other way. Through His death, burial, and resurrection He has drawn us into a relationship with God and given us hope for eternity. The Son of God came to this earth, and walked in our shoes, becoming flesh and blood like us, and so He can identify with our struggles. We are called to follow Christ, becoming more like Him each day.

We have the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us. He empowers us to overcome sin and to live godly lives. When we are struggling with fear or doubts, He comes to our aid as a Comforter and Counselor. He equips us to serve Christ, using our gifts and abilities to bless the lives of those around us. One God, three persons, each ministering to us in their own unique way.

The doctrine of the Trinity is also promotes unity among God’s people. We see that in our passage, in 2 Corinthians 13. We only read verse 14, but if we were to back up and read the entire paragraph we would find that this was part of an appeal for greater harmony among believers. The church in Corinth had struggled with conflict and strife. Many of their arguments were over trivial things. But the apostle points them to the Triune God and encourages them to be one. In 2 Corinthians 13:11 he says,

¹¹ Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints greet you. ¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:11–14)

The trinity gives us an example of unity in diversity. Father, Son, and Spirit have distinct roles and yet each member perfectly works in unison to accomplish redemption. There is no jealousy or competition among the members. God is one. We should be one, as well. It is true that each of us are different. God shaped us with distinct personalities and gives us different roles to fulfill, but He has drawn us together and made us fellow members of His Church. There can be unity amidst our diversity when we remember that we are on the same team, and are working towards the same goal. So whatever disagreements or conflicts there might be along the way, let us cast them aside. If we have been shown the same grace by the Savior, if we have the same Father who loves each one of us, if the same Holy Spirit fills us and empowers us to work together, let there be unity among God’s people.

Conclusion –

We have looked at a number of verses, and we have covered a lot of ground. Though we may not be able to fully comprehend the Trinity, but there are some truths that we can know. The Bible shows us that: God exists as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each person is fully God, and there is one God. We've seen three implications of this doctrine (although there are many others): it distinguishes our God, it helps us understand how God relates to us, it unifies God's people.

Why is this a core value of Grace Gospel Church? A simple answer is that it has always been a core value of the Christian Church, but also because we strive to reflect the love of the Triune God in our ministries. We want to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in all that we do. We want to tell the world about Jesus, the Son of God who came to save us. We want to let the world know that there is a Father in heaven who loves us, and who is eager to adopt us into His family.

I want to close by reading an excerpt from a statement of faith, produced by the early church, called the Athanasian Creed.

“We worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal...

...What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal. And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being...

...Nothing in this trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other. So in everything, as was said earlier, we must worship their trinity in their unity and their unity in their trinity. Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the trinity...”