

The Trinity an introduction

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Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

[0 : 0 0] And verse 16 and 17, that famous scene of the baptism, Matthew 3, verses 16 and 17. When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.

And behold, a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. If you recall back to the meeting we had weeks ago now with laying out the plan for the year, one of the sections said, I didn't give a time frame for it because I was trying to write it behind the scenes, so one of the sections said we'd address issues that were working towards something of apologetics.

Now, we'll bring in objections to Christianity, bring in all that, but there's one area of theology that covers so much, one area of theology that all the cults and other faiths and other religions have an issue with, and that is, of course, the Trinity.

So, brothers and sisters, for the next while, and it will be a while, it will be broken up because, with the Lord's help, I hope for us to engage in an in-depth, long study on the Trinity.

It will be broken up for various reasons. First of all, it will be long. The best will in the world, I'm under no illusions. Spurgeon couldn't keep his listeners for that long, and I certainly can't.

[1 : 4 3] So, it will be broken up to help us to concentrate, but also broken up because when we look at the theology, it will be more lecture, perhaps, than sermon, and we have a mixture of both.

There's a place for it. I would argue personally, and this is what we're going for, that a Thursday evening, a midweek meeting, is the best time for a lecture. The Lord's day is perhaps part lecture, but you want to be fully evangelical, mixed into that.

For ourselves this evening and going forward, if you forgive me, it will be more of a lecture, perhaps a shorter time, but more in-depth. So, the question is, what are we doing?

Why are we doing it? Well, tonight, the simple start is, what is the Trinity? And we'll do that in three ways, in a short time.

Because that question will be the question we have from now, until we finish this study. We'll go through the Old Testament, we'll go through the New Testament, we'll look at all the objections, we'll look at all the other cults, and all that.

[2 : 5 0] But this evening, what is the Trinity? What is the theology of the Trinity? And we can do that by looking at the three biggest opposing theologies.

The three errors, or heresies, well, one error, and two heresies, technically. We go against the Trinity. We can see what they are. And by seeing how they're wrong, we can then see what the Trinity actually is.

Let's start, though, with what we know. Just a quote from that section. We know from the Catechism. We'll look at it from the larger Catechism, though. Larger Catechism, question nine.

How many persons are in the one God? Three persons are in the one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Although they're differentiated by their own individual personal qualities, these three are one true eternal God, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory.

[3 : 58] So before we move on to these three heresies, just a reminder of what it is we do profess. Now, we know this, but, brothers and sisters, we are liable, and I'm sure all of us, to forgetting just the basics of what we believe.

Simply, one God. As revealed from the start of Scripture, all the way through, we believe in one God. We see this in a few weeks' time. We see that the Shema, the call of Israel, that God gave Israel, that there is one God.

We worship God alone. Yahweh alone. We worship God. One God. That one God we worship, one God is three persons.

Not three gods. Not three individual gods jammed together. No. One God, that one God is three persons. We know that. A triune God.

As a confession, as a catechism says, these three persons have, as it words are here, personal qualities. personal qualities. That tells us, that's speaking about how the Father, Son, and Spirit, how they relate to one another.

[5 : 11] What their functions are. How they work in terms of creation and providence. And more internal than that, the qualities of the Father, Son, and Spirit speaks on how they relate together.

The Father, eternally begets the Son, and the Son is eternally begotten, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

And that's three more sermons in the future. One God, three persons, equal in power. Equal in power.

Equal in holiness. Equal in worthiness of worship. Brothers and sisters, the reality is, if at the end of our study we say, right, we get it now, I understand now what the Trinity is, I perceive it, I understand it fully, then I think we've gone wrong somewhere along the lines.

This side of glory, we can be guaranteed we will never understand understand the mechanics, never understand the full dynamics of the Trinity. We're not called to understand how it works, how our Godhead works, how presumptuous of us to think we can begin to understand it.

[6 : 40] We can't. In fact, all the heresies, the errors we'll see this evening, they are attempts to understand God in a way that He cannot be known by our minds.

Indeed, many of these errors and many of the errors, they come from a good place, they come from men and women trying to understand and trying to think for ourselves what God is like.

And at the same time, abandoning what God tells us Himself. God tells us that in His nature, in His eternity, He is unknowable.

We don't know the full nature of who He is. At the same time, He is eternally knowable and how He makes Himself known to us. In other words, God tells us what the Godhead, the triune Godhead is.

We're told one God-free person. So that is clear to us in Scripture. We're not told the details. We can't even understand the details. So our goal is not to understand the exact mechanics of the Trinity.

[7 : 48] Our goal is at the end of our time together of this study is to step back and say, God, you are glorious. God, you are wonderful. God, our triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, we bow down before you and we magnify your holy person, your holy nature.

We don't understand you, but we love you. that is our goal. So the three errors. Well, one error and two heresies.

The first one is the error then. What is the Trinity not like? This error is called tri-theism. So tri-theism, tri-free, theism, gods, three gods, three gods.

This is, you could say, the most commonly held and most commonly used error in trying to understand the Trinity. It's not just found in the cults and other sects, the Mormons, that hold to a version of this.

Tri-theism is the most common misunderstanding, brothers and sisters, that normal Christians will find ourselves verging into. Not on purpose, but very quickly we fall into a tri-theistic view of God.

[9 : 12] So what is tri-theism? Well, tri-theism teaches or puts forward a view that the Father, Son, and Spirit are free, there's a word here, independent divine beings.

Three separate gods made up of the same substance, but three independent gods.

This view, it overstates the plurality of the Godhead and doesn't put anywhere near enough focus on who God actually is.

So this view claims Father, Son, and Spirit, they are God, they are all divine, they are all powerful, three gods of the same substance, but three independent divine beings.

You think, well that's very close, that's a bit complicated. Exactly. Tri-theism is dangerous because it's so close to the true biblical understanding of who God is.

[10 : 19] Tri-theism says, same substance, equal of power and glory and worship, three perfect, eternal gods who are of the same substance.

And when worded very carefully, you might think this is what we believe, but it's not. Often when you hear illustrations of the Trinity, they verge into tri-theism.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with Sproul, R.C. Sproul, and indeed Sinclair Ferguson, as of recently, the last ten years, has written about the danger of using analogies for the Trinity.

In one sense, we use analogies to teach all the time. When it comes to God, there is no analogy that works, not a single analogy that works, not one image we can draw on.

And often the analogies we use, the images we use to try and explain Trinity, they fall into this error. Not a heresy, but an error. The Trinity is like...

[11 : 27] Almost every time you hear someone say that the Trinity is like... We're verging then into tritheism. People mean well, and ministers mean well, and they try and share it well, but the second we say the Trinity is like, I mention something human, something created, it does not work.

It does not work, it cannot work. The image is often used of water or an egg. We'll go for the egg image. People say the Trinity is like an egg. You've got the shell, you've got the white, you've got the yolk.

It's three things in one package. You say, well, yeah, it's not perfect, but it makes sense. The Trinity is like an egg. One thing, shell, white, and yolk.

That makes sense. no. It sounds good, and it feels right, and people who use the analogy, they mean well, they're not trying to be off, but it's not right.

Because an egg is three different parts, three different objects. You're making God three different independent things.

[12 : 45] things. A shell, a white, a yolk, that is not the Trinity. God is not three independent gods of the same substance. One God, three persons.

No analogies work. Not a single analogy works at all. The three leaf clover is the example that's often used. It doesn't work. It doesn't work.

It doesn't make sense. Yes, there's three parts, and it's all connected to one stem. But God is not one. He is three. One God, three persons. There's no physical object we have, in other words, that can represent or show who God is.

And the second you do, you're verging into tri-theism, and you're verging very close to Sinclor Tills and Sprell before him, and Calvin before him. You're verging very close to dangerous territory.

Again, tri-theism is not called a heresy, technically because many Christians believe it by accident. It's not done maliciously, but we're not careful we can fall into the pattern of trying to describe God in a way that is wrong.

[13 : 55] Let's never think of God as three different parts, three different gods. One God and three persons. One God and three persons.

That's an error. Here we have now our first heresy, this is something the church has called a heresy from the start. Perhaps that word is lost to us, but when the early church councils met, when they called something a heresy, we perhaps think of heresies in the Roman Catholic context.

That's what we're used to perhaps. Before they existed, the Roman Catholic church had a basis what they are now. The church existed quite happily. The church councils, like general assemblies, we said it before, we met together and we decided what was being said and taught had no bearing in scripture.

If I had no evidence in scripture, we said it is a heresy. It should not be taught in our church. It's simple as that. We do the same today. If I started preaching, if I started preaching tri-theism, if I said, well, God is three gods, God is three gods, you would, a general assembly, that's meeting this month, you would tell them our minister is talking nonsense.

He's saying God is three gods and it would be called heresy. And I would be removed from position. Nothing's changed. This happened back in the early church. So modalism, modalism, this is something that's been condemned right from the start.

[15 : 27] It came to appearance around 215 AD, so 215 years, 200 or years, after Christ led really from Gnostic thinking, which is what John deals with in his first, second and third letters.

Modalism, in short, tells us that God works and appears in different modes.

to explain that. Modalism teaches us that in the Old Testament God appeared as God, as Yahweh, as Father, you could say. In the New Testament God appears as the Son, and that today, post-New Testament, post-apostolic times, God now appears as the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament is one thing, New Testament is something else, and now is something else completely. God appears in different modes. hence the word modalism. God is not three persons, but is one single person in three different forms.

Again, as Calvin would describe it, it's one God in three different disguises. That's the view. God changes how he looks basically from Old Testament to New Testament to today.

[16 : 51] God is and I hope it's clear why this is wrong. I hope it's clear pretty quickly why this makes no sense, why scripturally this is wrong.

Even the passage we had there in Matthew, if God appears in three different modes, then how can God be speaking to his son, as the Holy Spirit descends over the son?

It's not possible. If modalism is true, we have to chuck out huge sections of scripture. Now, we won't say much on this, because actually for us, modalism, this idea that God appears in three different ways, is not very common for our society.

This is something that unfortunately is quite heavy in America and in Africa. I don't know if you've heard of the tele-evangelist T.D.

Jakes, the big man, African-American man, big muscly man, big beard, he, for years, is very well known, health and wealth prosperity teacher.

[17 : 59] It turns out that he is a complete modalist. It's also called oneness, you could call it oneness thinking, but there is only one person in the Godhead, not three.

Brothers and sisters, God does not appear in three different modes. God does not appear in three different disguises. There is one God and three persons. It is not God the Father becomes God the Son, who then becomes God the Holy Spirit.

We know that as clear nonsense and we teach it to be nonsense and we hold it to be nonsense. One God, three persons. From creation, the Father is there, creating through the Son as the Holy Spirit hovers over the waters.

We read and we sang Psalm 110 and Psalm 2, the Father speaks to the Son. Two persons. The Holy Spirit here at Christ's baptism, the fool God had here represented, the Father speaking, the Son there in the water and the Holy Spirit ascending and descending.

Modalism is wrong. God does not appear in three different modes. tritheism is wrong. God is not three gods of one substance. And finally, and perhaps most fitting for us in our context in North Tolstair, given the dangers we're facing are primarily from our friends and they're friends and neighbours and in one sense we must love them, we must show hospitality of sorts towards them and care towards them, our friends who are part of that false church drove as witnesses.

[19 : 45] The JW's, I don't call them that to be disrespectful because it's just shorthand, the JW's hold to their third and final heresy here, which is called Arianism, named after Arius.

He was around in the third century, give or take, 300 to 320. He was teaching this sermon again and again and again.

And at this point, bear in mind, the church is centred in the Middle East. There's great theology being done here, amazing work, God is blessing his church, but there is heresy after heresy popping up and Arius pops up and Arius is there teaching that Christ, that the Saviour is created.

He is created. I'll say more in a second. we've mentioned before, over time, the council of Nicaea. Have you heard of the council of Nicaea? The Nicæan Creed? It's very well known.

The Nicæan Creed and the council of Nicaea was called directly to battle against the heresy of Arianism. The heresy of this man and his followers were preaching.

[20 : 59] So what does this heresy teach? It teaches that Jesus is a created being and the Holy Spirit is either a created being or it is just a force, a force of some sorts, God's working force.

Essentially, Jesus is created as is the Holy Spirit. The Father is eternal. At some point, the Father makes the Son and he makes him glorious, he makes him powerful.

the words of Arius himself. We have his words recorded. Arius says, If the Father begat the Son, then he who was begotten had a beginning in existence.

And from this it follows. There was a time when the Son was not. Arius quoted Psalm 110 to back that up. He also quotes Psalm 2 to back that up.

Thou art my only Son, this day I have begotten thee. A cliffhanger here, brothers and sisters. We'll come to this one day, not today. This features in our answering back to our JW friends, which is its own series in itself, a section in our study later on in the year.

- [22 : 17] To quote from them, just now, to give them an understanding of what they believe, this is from the JW manual. This was updated last December, the manual. So this is right now where our JW friends teach and preach and believe.

This is from their material. It says, God created Jesus before creating Adam. God created Jesus before creating Adam.

In fact, God created Jesus and then, brothers and sisters, here's the smart part they have. God created Jesus and then used him to make everything else, including the angels.

That is why the Bible calls Jesus the firstborn of all creation. It's smart, isn't it? It's so close to the Bible says.

If you aren't ready for it, it sounds like they may be right. The Bible does say Jesus is the firstborn of all creation. That means God made him first. He's the first one to be born.

- [23 : 20] God made him first. And that relies on you not stopping and thinking and using your God given intellect, which we all have. Because you have the question, what does firstborn mean?

It's referring in context to his resurrection in that passage. It's about Christ's resurrection. Just read the area around that if you want to understand it. But like every other heresy, the JWs, the Arians, they take one verse and they twist it and they twist it and they become scholars in one verse, experts in one Bible verse.

They twist it so much and they become so enamored by one verse or two verses, they forget the context. They forget what else God is saying and they'll hammer home this one or two verses.

They will say the Son is begotten, therefore the Son is created. And they'll speak highly about Jesus and in their own way, they love their Jesus.

He's not a Jesus we know, but they love him and they seek to serve him. He's a false Jesus but they love him nonetheless and they mean well and they want to save us from hell of sorts, but they're wrong.

- [24 : 40] And they'll twist scripture and twist scripture. They are Arians. Their theology is not new. It's been known about and it's been called heresy from the very first hundred, two hundred years, three hundred years of the church.

We believe in all of scripture, not one verse taken out of context. The Arian heresy tells us that Jesus is created.

Jesus at some point was made. He is not eternal. He is not eternal, brothers and sisters. If he is not God, fully God, nothing he does for us makes sense.

It is all a waste of time and our salvation is in complete tatters. Your hope is gone. If he's a mere creation, what mere creation can call himself God?

It makes Christ a liar. It makes Christ useless. It makes his work useless. It brings him no glory whatsoever. So our three errors this evening, this is our homework to memorise these errors.

- [25 : 49] I won't test you, but our homework is, first of all, tri-theism. The belief that it's three individual gods, independent gods, made up of the same substance.

Tri-theism. Then modalism, that God appears in three different ways. One God appears in three different ways, Old Testament, New Testament, and for us today.

And finally, Arianism. The belief that God, the Father, is alone and he has created Jesus and created the Holy Spirit.

All these three beliefs, they rob the deity of our Saviour, they destroy his finished work, make a mockery of God's word, and sadly, they lead people away from the glory and the beauty of what God is, of who God is, and what he's done for us.

We said that the Nicene Creed was written to combat Arianism. This is a creed that so many churches, from the second century to today, repeat often in their services.

[27 : 03] There are some three churches who will repeat and go over this creed. We're not saying tonight that's right or wrong. There are Kirk Sessions who believe it's right.

There are liberty to do that. But I'll read this creed for us to end this evening. This is a second century church, 200 years or so after Christ, as they faced this heresy, they got together and they compiled this glorious reminder of who God is to them.

Vanessian Creed. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in the one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, eternally born.

God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father of the same substance.

Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. By the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.

[28 : 19] For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried, rose again on the third day in accordance of the scriptures. He ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand in the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one holy, universal, apostolic church. I confess one baptism for forgiveness of sins. I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

As we face heresies and friends in the village who believe in heresies, we face nothing new. The church of the second century had to write this creed to help the churches to see what is true.

And this creed applies for us in the exact same way. Two thousand odd years later, we have the exact same need as the church had. Why? Because Satan is creative, yes, but at the end Satan wants to disrupt and distress and destroy the gospel work.

[29 : 41] And if Satan defrones Jesus in terms of theology, if he makes Jesus less how people view him, he is doing his work well. But Trinity is not just something we have to have in our head or head knowledge.

But Trinity is, as we know quite literally the centre of all that we have and all that we believe. And our goal is not full understanding of the mechanics.

Our goal is adoration and praise. Going forward, that is what we hope to achieve. I believe in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

Bow our heads. Myrtle McKeithen, a word of prayer, peace. in front of 1 salaam vorstellen, berger and happy eyes. This automatically is headed to the expertise.

In Mr