

Trinity: God is Love

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[0 : 00] I remember when I was, this is off the cuff, but Alexander said, well, say something about yourself, or I said, I'll say something. When I did spend a couple of years at Regent College, I remember you spend some time thinking about the big things, of course, in different ways.

But the big things in our faith are things like the Incarnation, Christmas, Bethlehem, and, of course, the somber realities of Good Friday and the resurrection, that little center of the faith in some ways. But I don't know why this is, and I'm glad to hear an echo of this in one of the books I consulted for these two talks. Douglas Hall, I think Jim knows Douglas Hall.

One of your students, Jim, at one point, or somebody Hall. But he says, he just says, he'd always found the doctrine of the Trinity beautiful. And I remember thinking, that's me too.

I don't know why, peculiarly, I find the doctrine beautiful. There's a loveliness about it. Colin Gunton quotes that very strange poet who wrote Kubler, Kubler-Kahn.

[1 : 14] Coleridge, yeah. Said that the doctrine of the Trinity is the greatest idea that ever entered into the mind of man. He said, things like that just appealed to me. I don't know why.

I can't quite put, there's something maybe aesthetic about it. Something that just holds my imagination, holds, my affections are stimulated by the idea.

And I know a lot of Christians, their affections are more associated with Christmas, with incarnation, with Good Friday, Easter, Sunday.

Hence, I've always been drawn to this topic. The word God, which Trinity is all about, it usually comes to us in big letters, capital G.

When you read about God in the newspapers, if a Globe and Mail editorial decides to talk about religion issues for some reason, God will be with a capital G all the time.

[2 : 14] Almost always, almost always. Sometimes you'll see the word God in different kinds, spelled with a small g. I think there's a big difference there.

The first, with the capital, speaks of the final, really final, infinite mystery of things. Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light, inaccessible, hid from our eyes, we sing gladly.

Yes, that's God, usually. That's what we mean by God, capital G. God with a small g, of course, just feels different, doesn't it?

If we ever saw a small g God, it would be quite a shock, of course. Angels might be thought of, I think, as small g gods. I'll only do this once again, a hymn, Ye Holy Angels Bright, again we sing, who, this is from memory, I'm sure, I think about the words basically, right?

Who wait at God's right hand, a lot of you can now sing this. Through the realms of light, go at your Lord's command. It continues, assist our song. We're apparently praising God and we need help.

[3 : 35] Assist our song, we address the angels. Or else the theme, too high to seem for, I think this is always interesting, for mortal tongue. We are mortals.

We have a mortal tongue. We ask the angels to help us praising God. If angels are immortal, it is because the capital G God has given them immortality.

Obviously. We will be given this gift ourselves. You know, someday you will be, I hope it's true of me, too, we'll all be immortal.

Paul tells Timothy, the gospel has brought life and immortality to light. God has brought this truth before the world in the good news.

That immortality is in God's gift. He's going to give it to his people. The gospel has brought life and immortality to light. 2 Timothy 1.10 In our world, just right now, we're obviously a pluralist culture.

[4 : 54] It might be advisable, in the discussion time we could talk about this perhaps. I think this is probably true. It might be advisable to always assume in conversation that we're using the small g.

When you talk to people about God, I think it's wise to think in your imagination, ah, yes, small g, O-D, God. Some reference to transcendence is here, and that's it.

Small g, God. Tom Wright, in his book, the first of his, in his series of major scholarly books about the New Testament, the book is called, and the people of God.

If you've read that book, you'll remember that in that book, he always uses the lower case. Small g, God. It's throughout the book. It has an impact on your imagination, I found as I read it.

Why? Because it is, this is Tom Wright's conviction, and I think he's just completely right here. I think you'll probably agree. At its deepest level, the Bible altogether, and the New Testament in particular, very much in particular, the New Testament, unfolds what the word God means.

[6 : 09] Yes. Let's not assume that when we hear the word God, we all know what we're talking about, in other words. So he's telling the reader in that book, we're not going to assume we know what the word God means.

So it's always up for grabs here, as we talk about this mysterious revelation in the Bible, and particularly the New Testament. What does the word God mean?

Mean. What does it mean? The gospel reveals, you would think, I think it's obviously the case, the gospel reveals an astonishing re-evaluation, I would rather use the word intensification, of what the word God means.

That's what we're reading about in the New Testament. An explosion of new meaning about what the word God, in fact, means. The God of Israel is seen, writes one writer on the Trinity, the God of Israel is seen as surprisingly complex.

That's what the New Testament is telling us. There was an obvious need to complexify here, as the New Testament took shape, rethinking what the word God means now, in the light of Jesus, and the spirit of Jesus.

[7 : 34] The experience of Jesus, and especially his resurrection, re-evaluates, restates, changes even, the meaning of the word God.

Learners' exchange, as Alexandra reminded us, how could we not notice? We're back. Learners' exchange begins again today. I don't know where the summer went. In these sessions, of course, as we look forward to these speakers that have been arranged, I look forward to them.

In these sessions, to point out the obvious, the word God, what a prediction this is, will be used frequently. We can be sure of that.

We'll hear the word God frequently. You come to church, and you hear about God. It's going to be used frequently. Will we use it with care? Maybe it's a good, this is a good idea to start learners' exchange with Trinity Talk for this reason.

Will we use the word God with care? It will be used frequently. Again, will we use it in a distinctively Christian way?

[8 : 47] Is there, some people will ask, is there really a distinctive way that the Christians use the word God? I think the answer to that question is yes.

Just in passing, I could tell you, in ecumenical circles, in circles of inter-faith discussion, that'll start a riot in some circles.

The deep agenda is to make the word God mean the same for everybody. So it's a hot topic beneath the surface. Our elder brother, as the letter to the Hebrew calls our Lord, teaches us to say, as you know, our Father, hallowed be your name.

So, that is the way the Son teaches his people to address his Father. So, in looking today at the Trinity, and this is my prayer to begin for us, Lord, we pray that in so doing, as we look today at this doctrine of your people, the Trinity, we would indeed learn to hallow the name of our God.

Amen. I don't see what time it is. Will somebody, every now and again, give me a time check?

[10 : 13] I don't know. What time is it? Sure, that'd be great. Thanks, Beth. A good place to start in on this massive, thank you very much, that's so helpful, a good place to start in on this massive topic, and I'm sure no one in here will disagree with this decision about how to look at the topic of the Trinity.

A good place to start is with Scripture. And even that, again, in some circles, would raise eyebrows to start with the Bible.

This is where the idea, the Trinity idea, comes from. So the Church claims. We might say, to be precise, in material terms, Trinity God talk comes from the Bible.

Oh, yeah. Next week, this topic will be looked at again. That will be expanded upon.

Trinity talk, after all, may come from, and this has become a prevailing view in the Church, certainly in the Academy since the 19th century.

[11:32] It's now being challenged helpfully, I'm sure, in a big way. It used to be a truism. Now, Trinity talk came from Greek intellectual culture and therefore had little, if anything, to do with the Bible.

No. Or maybe it came from Palestinian Judaism combined with Greek culture. I'll talk next week about those kind of issues.

I think the doctrine of the Trinity, let you know where I stand, comes right out of the faith of Israel. But that's a big topic.

Today, it's interesting just to see that, the first vocabulary, again, of what I'm calling Trinity talk, comes from the Bible, comes very specifically from the New Testament.

You might start, when you look at this topic, we won't do this today, but you might start with John's Gospel. Someone has called John's Gospel, I believe it was Gerald Bray, I heard say this once, John's Gospel could be called a Trinitarian tract, he said.

[12:45] It speaks of God, you remember John's Gospel, especially the prologue, and it speaks of God's Word, Logos. It speaks of Spirit, as sent to do divine, sanctifying work in those who accept the Word.

John's Gospel is a pretty tempting place to start. But this passage in front of us up here today, this passage from Galatians, I think is better for our purposes.

Galatians is without controversy, Pauline, for instance. No one doubts, it seems, that Paul wrote Galatians, and it's very early.

That's significant. This is an early piece of Christian writing. This probably predates the Gospels, for instance. They were forming, perhaps at this time, in different ways, would be the scholarly consensus for what that's worth.

But this is really early. Here's an example of really early Christian talk, if you will. It is nicely concentrated.

[13:59] You notice that's the whole thing up there. There isn't a part two for up there. It's very concentrated, and it puts, again, Trinity language, what came to be called Trinity language, into play, if you will.

as we will see, and as it's quite, it's obvious. God, Son, Spirit, Father, are all here, concentrated in these few little verses, as Paul writes to the churches of Galatia.

So, write to this passage, and a somewhat swift overview of these verses, and a few related issues as we move along.

And along the way, again, a bit of context from Paul and the whole of Galatians, when that seems at all helpful. So, to this short little passage in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

This is one of, I would think, Paul's glories, these few little verses. I don't know if in a Bible study group, in a larger group, or if you've ever, by yourself, you've ever studied Galatians.

[15:16] I think it's one of the more difficult, strangely difficult, of Paul's writings. It's also beautiful, very beautiful, in places at least, on its surface.

Well, again, I find this kind of passage just one of Paul's wonders. The fact that Paul could write like this, we take for granted, but we shouldn't. Paul concentrates here.

Paul, as you know, you readers of Paul, he's famous for just packing lots into a few words. He just does that, for good or for ill.

He is rhetorical, and I find this passage quite rhetorical, with a real power. He writes, of course, and this is always good to remember. I try to remind myself of this when I read Paul.

He writes to be heard. He would approve of us reading this today, together. It's an oral document. When he wrote, when he dictated to someone, he could see, maybe a group of Christians, in the atrium of a home that some member of the congregation gave over for the meeting space.

[16:28] Love to think of, perhaps, torches on the walls. It's early evening. They've never had a meal together. Perhaps they've had a time of fellowship together of some kind.

And now, a letter has arrived from Paul, and the leader of the group says, we're hearing from an apostle today. And they gather, they sit, and then they hear the apostles' words read to them.

That's what Paul was thinking as he dictated the words. He writes, of course, again, so that it will be heard, will go into the heart, and will be repeated by the members of the congregation.

Sometimes that's why you think Paul is a bit staccato, a bit almost creedal in some of his writings. I think we'll hear that here today. As you know, the Galatian churches were thinking through something that we might very generally call membership qualification issues.

The circumcision issue was on the agenda in these churches. Paul was deeply concerned and wrote a very pungent letter to address what they were thinking through.

[17 : 40] So Paul here wants to rehearse the very, we can call them, the first things, the most important things as he sees them, of the good news of the gospel.

So, let me just start by reading this. But when the fullness of time had come, context will come in a while here, we don't need too much. Let's, for the most part, hear it standing alone.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son. Born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son. and if a son, then an heir through God. Paul to the Galatians.

[18 : 54] What a love to have been there when it was first read. What an honor it is to hear an apostle sent by Christ to preach for him the good news.

but when the fullness of time had come, what words those are to start a little part of an epistle, a little minor treatise, we almost call it.

But when the fullness of time had come, if set to music, what would be appropriate just there? I don't know. Some of you maybe hear music as you read.

I don't know. but when the fullness of time had come, there is a beginning. I don't know. What do you hear? When the fullness of time had come, yes, the time has come, said another great Jew in the first century.

The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. That's how the gospel writers tell us Jesus sort of announced his ministry.

[20 : 08] The time has come. Not all times are the same. Jesus said the time has come. The kingdom of God is near.

Paul so often echoes Jesus. Don't stop and think that he echoes Jesus. He echoes Jesus a lot. And the fullness of time had come. As Jesus had said in Galilee, the kingdom, the time for it has come. God sent forth, Paul continues, his son. If Paul feels, or if Paul ever felt a bit awkward in saying things like this, God's son, if he ever felt a bit awkward again in saying this kind of thing, writing this kind of thing, he never shows it.

He seems to be speaking language to them, which he thinks they can expect to hear from him. God sent forth his son. Yes.

In Israel, of course, in Saul, the Pharisee's faith, son is present. the word, son, of course, is present.

[21 : 31] Be careful here, go slow, but we know that at least. Israel is called God's son in Holy Scripture. Yes.

Out of Egypt, have I called my son, says God to his people through the prophet, for instance, Hosea. God. It's interesting to note that in Matthew's gospel, what is often called the most Jewish of the gospels, that's probably true enough, when Matthew tells us that Mary and Joseph took the child Jesus into Egypt to hide from a persecuting power for a while, when that sojourn was over, Matthew summarizes it by quoting that verse.

Out of Egypt, have I called my son. It's as if the gospel writer is saying to us, he is just saying to us, Jesus recapitulates Israel.

That's what Matthew is telling us. Out of Egypt, have I called my son. Said of his people Israel, now said of this little child with Mary and Joseph, out of Egypt have I called my son.

Not to belabor this point, but Psalm 2 always should be mentioned in this regard. Psalm 2 speaks of Israel's king as God's son, you recall. The nation's rage, you recall.

[23 : 06] Kingdoms surround Israel, but God says, in Zion have I set my son, the king. There's where I will establish my witness amongst the pagan nations that surround Israel.

The king is the son. Here in Galatians, Paul makes this confession, God sent forth his son, and then unfolds it immediately as this son, born of woman, born under the law.

I wish he'd kind of expand on that, but this isn't the time to do that, as he writes to the Galatians. He's unfolding another kind of argument.

This son is in some sense, this seems to be the sense here, born of woman, this son is in solidarity, is perhaps a word we can use with humanity.

We're all born of a woman. This one came into the world in solidarity with humanity. He was born of woman, and he is identified as belonging very much to Israel, born under the law, Paul says.

[24 : 26] He is of Israel, this son that God sent forth. Rushing right along, sent forth his son, why?

Well, Paul tells us right away, to redeem those who were under the law. Now the wheels really begin to turn in this little passage, to redeem those who were under the law.

Born under the law, expand on this a bit I think, I think is just very profound in the way Paul apparently thinks about the mystery of Jesus and Israel.

Born under the law, Paul says. At this point, again, we might just see something of Paul's amazing worldview.

Let me just wander a bit from this text here. Recall in a passage, for instance, like in John's writings, John will say things like in one of his epistles, he'll say, John will say, sin is lawlessness.

[25 : 44] Sin is to be without law. To live in a lawless place, you would be frightened there. Sin would be rampaging.

Sin is lawlessness. Law is meant somehow, would you agree, to counter sin. It creates order, where sin is creating disorder.

God created the creation to be ordered and beautiful. Sin attempts to disrupt it. So, sin is lawlessness. Law is meant to somehow counter sin.

May I, John says, again, sin is lawlessness. So, law is meant to counter sin. But here, Paul is saying something, therefore, a little bit shocking.

He says, to redeem those again, to redeem those who were under the law. Might you expect here, maybe, for those first hearers in a church gathering in Galatia, we might sort of shake our heads at that point.

[26 : 58] Shouldn't Paul be saying something like, to redeem us from sin? Aren't we redeemed from sin? Paul means us evidently in his writings, and here is an example of it, to think deeply and thoroughly about law issues.

The law, Paul will say in his writings sometimes, the law is holy. The law is just. The law is good.

But why the law, he'll sometimes ask, why was the law given to Israel?

And then he'll say something really strange like, well, the law was given so that sin would increase. Wow! The law was given so that sin would increase?

The mind kind of reels sometimes when you read Paul, and Paul means it to reel. The gospel has brought amazing things into the world. About 1909, I looked at the date of this little volume I've been reading recently.

Some of you have probably heard of Peter Taylor Forsythe. I find his writings very hypnotic and powerful and faithful to the gospel. He's a very believing man.

[28 : 19] He's a congregationalist, a very learned congregationalist in Great Britain. He published a little book called *The Cruciality of the Cross*. I remember of late I came across this sentence in it, and it jolted me away, more so than coffee.

Just whoa. I'm paraphrasing a bit because he's in a certain context, but I know this is what he says. Almost word for word.

Jesus, he writes, Jesus finished the universal task, latent, that's his word, in Israel's faith, and dealt once for all with the sin of the world.

Now, the task, as Forsythe sees it, given to Israel, was to deal with the sin of the world. That was why God called her. She may not have known it at times, but that's what God called her to do.

God was under law, Israel, excuse me, Israel was under law, but all that it did was reveal how powerful a thing sin is.

[29 : 36] The Son, the Messiah, on behalf of Israel, as Israel, dealt with sin. Out of Israel, have I called my son.

Why? To deal with the sin of the world. Why? Again, because that's what God called Israel to do. For you, I'm going to deal with the sin of the world.

It's an amazing thing. Born under the law. Why? Why? Why was he born under the law? Paul now continues, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

There it is. God sent his son to create a family, if you will, of sons. Born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Doesn't Paul say a lot in a few words? He's amazing. There it is. And the sons, he continues. By the way, of course sons is inclusive.

[30 : 49] It would go without saying in Paul's mind, a son is someone deeply loved, one most precious, my son, my daughter, of course.

His people, his sons, his daughters, dearly loved. And these sons are to receive, Paul says, the spirit of his son.

And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts. There it is. God wants his sons to receive the spirit of his son, the one he has sent forth.

I don't know, does the word spirit go through your mind too easily? It does through mine.

Sometimes I need someone, a good theologian or a biblical scholar or somebody to help me a bit.

The word spirit can be a bit, a cloud of fairy dust floating around. It sometimes gets inside people.

Spirit knows no boundaries is maybe a good place to start.

[32 : 00] Spirit knows no boundaries. Spirit therefore means intimacy. a spirit may be inside you, shaping you.

Spirit no boundaries, intimacy. In that regard, I think, and this comes out of this passage, I find it, and I don't know about you, for some it's very hard, but I think for everyone properly understood, it's hard to call God Father.

it really is. It's not easy. People may think, oh yeah, I do, I'm a Christian, God's my Father. It's not easy to call God Father.

It's in fact, nothing less than a work of the Spirit of God to call God Father in you, as this passage makes clear. But the Spirit of Jesus forms this intimacy of knowledge of God in us.

Paul talks in Galatians, doesn't he, I'm in agony until Christ be formed in you. Only the Spirit can do a forming work in you.

[33 : 16] The Spirit formed Christ in Mary. He forms a Christ in us. Hence, we're able to say, as this passage now tells us, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

The Spirit can cry, Abba, Father, in you, for you, forming that mystery in us. Isn't that beautiful? So, Paul says, when this happens, when the Spirit of the Son comes to you, you're no longer a slave.

Worried about the one who's over you with authority, but this one who is your daddy now, your father, who is his very, the Spirit of his Son is being formed in you.

What an intimacy is there. You are no longer again a slave, no, but you're a son, and you become an heir of all the Father's wealth.

You are a son, then you are an heir through God. You inherit everything the Father has. What a gospel presentation in just a few short, swift words.

[34 : 35] Paul can do this magnificently, can't he? You have to take a step back here. I think there are echoes here. There are strange echoes in Paul from other things in Scripture.

There are definite echoes here of John's gospel. people. We have never been slaves. Some people in Israel said to Jesus with some indignation.

We've never been slaves of anyone. But Jesus said to them, no, no, if the Son of Man set you free, then you will be free indeed.

It's almost as if Paul knew that passage and writes a commentary on it. I often wonder, well, what did Paul know about the historical Jesus? My guess is he knew lots about him.

My guess is Paul knew everything that we know from the four gospels and more. He knew the people who were behind the traditions of the gospels. He knew Peter. He knew James.

[35 : 36] He knew John. And he talked to them about Jesus. What else would he talk to them about? There it is. Quite a passage.

Again, this is all just to lay the groundwork for trinitarian talk, trinity talk. God sent forth, he says to the Galatians. Son is here.

Why is he here? Sent to redeem. And the spirit of the son is here, who says in us, Father.

So we have here in this passage, concentrated again so tightly for us. Father, Son, Spirit, God.

There it is. All that trinity language waiting to happen, if you will, in the church. Happened in prayer, in hymnody, which it did right away.

[36 : 40] Prayer, song, liturgy, the way we worship together. Father, Son, Spirit, God.

What was the first step in the story that leads the church to 325 A.D., three long centuries down the world's history from Paul, that led to the Nicene Creed?

What's the first step? It's easy to miss. I've never seen this better answered, better done than in Thomas Odin's wonderful, rather large book, Systematic Theology, it's called.

A little minor modern classic, but not that little. Odin wrote a systematic theology. It's an interesting theology. Odin, I believe, is a Methodist, by background, good believer, who wrote a big theology and he pretty well confines himself to establishing and building up this theology.

It's a thorough theology. Every major topic of the church's concern is addressed, only with reference, almost all references to the first seven centuries. the church fathers east and west, right out to about 700 or so.

[38 : 12] He does this because he wants to say to the church universal, look what we have in common, Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox. We share this.

He builds a massive, wonderful, it's a wonderful book. In the New Testament, Odin points out something very simple. We have these words, Father, Son, Spirit.

Here's an example of the words. They're sprinkled all over the New Testament. Here's the way Odin lays it out. It couldn't be simpler. You start to think, where does the church get Trinity talk from, Trinity hymnody, Trinity prayers?

Each of these three, Father, Son, and Spirit, is named God in Scripture. To each, he continues, is attributed divine attributes.

Each is described as performing divine acts. And because of this, most crucially, it seems to me, each is worshipped.

[39 : 23] Therefore, if you will, each is worshipped. For me, that's the amazing thing to say. Each is worshipped. there is the simplest elemental kind of background for the Trinity idea.

Father, Son, Spirit, named God in Holy Scripture. To each is attributed divine attributes. Each is described as performing divine acts.

Each, therefore, is worshipped. took the church a long time to precisely work out what to do with this, if you can dare, if you can call it data.

It started to pray the words of Scripture, sing the words of Scripture, worship along with the words of Scripture, Scripture. And then it started to say, now how do we say this?

How do we, in an orderly, godly manner, how do we say this? Over time, it worked out this big thing which has the word Trinity attached to it.

[40 : 42] Trinity describes the gospel's God. There is, again, the simplest, most elemental kind of background for the Trinity idea. As I said at the beginning, Trinity ideas usually received from most Christians, I'm glad this is true, notional assent.

Yep, Trinity Sunday comes along. Yes, thank you. That's great. I've heard evangelical preachers that I admire very much come to Trinity Sunday and begin the sermon with a bit of, just a little bit of humor.

Now I know I'm going to talk to you about something which is really, you know, strange, but we've got to get through this, so hold on. I think that's tragic, absolutely tragic, that it could dwindle in our living faith minds to that extent.

It should be, I think, received, and there should be a warm engagement of the affections, maybe that's asking too much, with these formulations.

But there you go, it's not always the case, but it lives in our hymnody, it lives in our prayer, it blessedly lives in when we baptize anyone in the church.

[42 : 05] It's almost always in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We don't baptize new members of the church in the name of a creature.

Would we baptize someone in the name of the Most High and glorious cherubim and seraphim? Never. They are creatures. They are like us.

They had a beginning. God created them. They are creatures. Father, Son, Spirit. They are not creatures.

They belong to the mystery of divinity. They were never created. They have always been. Baptized in the name of the Trinity.

Again, we sing, we pray. The church worked it out and said it clearly. That kind of leads into where next week will go. This phenomenon of notional scent, but the heart having troubles with the Trinity may just indicate that always our hearts are slow to believe, as Jesus said to those on the road to Emmaus.

[43 : 26] I need to be reminded of it. Without a doubt, there are many things about the gospel I'm just slow to believe, that I haven't made very much progress, if any at all, about these things. So be comforted.

The Lord knows that we are slow to believe, but I guess he means us to make some progress along the way. I wonder sometimes if the church is really still very young and needs to grow more fully into its Trinitarian heritage.

The church may be still young. I was extremely surprised and pleased the other day to read a book about eschatology, that a greater figure as Athanasius apparently had members of congregations that he knew who were very excited about the Lord's second coming.

And he was glad that they were excited about the Lord's second coming. This writer happily tells me that he would sometimes say to them, you know, the Lord may not return for roughly 10,000 years. The church, maybe he's right.

Maybe the church is still young. We're just learning about this Trinity stuff. It's a good thing. I hope it's a good way to start Learner's Exchange for this year, sort of have a bit of a ground floor about what we're meaning when we say the word God.

[44 : 55] Just as I draw to a close, we need lots of time for conversation. I find this to you, God is high and lofty. You come across that beautiful language in Isaiah. That seems obvious to say about God.

Yes, God is high and lofty. Yes. But God as lowly is perhaps very hard for us to take in.

But Trinitarian, again, this very much leads into what I'll talk about next week. God is lowly. He dwells with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit.

Because God knows all about being humble and contrite, he became very lowly. the Son became our sin even. He couldn't have become more lowly.

And this God even wants to come and dwell in us and teach us how to say Abba, Father.

[45 : 56] God wants to live in us and dwell with us always and teach us the right things to say. The Son is the truth of God.

One of the church fathers says it this way roughly. And the condition for understanding him is the Spirit of the Son. It's very simple when you see it.

We don't understand Jesus. How would we, the church fathers, I'm really anticipating next week, how would we know divinity when we are in the presence of it? We're probably in our imaginations much like pagans.

We think he'd show up maybe like Zeus, overwhelming and lightning power, on clouds, scaring us. That would be divinity. No, we wouldn't recognize divinity, the New Testament telling us, if he stood in front of us and talked to us.

Because he did, Jesus. And we are slow of heart to believe that that's God. That carpenter, the carpenter in Nazareth is God.

[47 : 05] God is Father, high and lofty. He's the Son, low and humble. He's the Spirit, come to teach us about the truth. That is what God, tentatively we can say, that's what the word God means.

Father, Son, Spirit. That is God. We are slow to believe. I'm slow to believe. We're slow to love this God.

He's so overwhelming in his majesty, in the mystery of his oneness. But the mystery that he comes to us, he can come to us as Father because he is a Father, as a Son because he is a Son, as Spirit, knowing no boundaries, forming Christ in us.

This is the gospel's God again. The Trinity is the gospel's God. God. That's all I want to say today. I went on longer than I thought. And I just think about some questions. We've got 10 or 15 minutes now. And before, I just want to, I know when you talk about things like this, this is a kind of loftiness, speaking of lofty, about this doctrine of the Trinity.

[48 : 18] It's all intellectuals near the church had time on their hands and they came up with this stuff. What a shame. And it just kept getting talked about in the church's history. It's even in the prayer book.

Trinity, yeah, we believe it. Check that off. It's always there. But this is very, very relevant to, I think, who we are today. So I just wanted to end today with a bit of a move into next week.

Just a bit of a move. And it just dawned on me the last 24 hours that I might do this. If you're ever at Regent College, as you know, Bill is allowed to come up to you and say, oh, I've got a book that you might be interested in.

And then, you know, and then like a fish in front of the worm, you sort of, oh, really? Bill showed me this in a very tempting way. He showed me Times Literary Supplement, a big review of this book. Then he really lured me deeper and deeper. He said, Jim Houston read this book and really says it's deep. Oh, who am I now to disagree? Times Literary Supplement, Jim Houston, and someone named Sarah Williams at Regent apparently read it and decided to change one of her courses on the basis of its profundity.

[49 : 33] So I wanted, again, this is a segue into next week. This book is written by a man with a strange last name. I know nothing about him other than his academic resume, so to speak.

His name is Larry Seidentalk, and he wrote a book just recently, *Inventing the Individual*, it's called, *The Origins of Western Liberalism*. He's a heavy thinker, and he was once the first ever historian of ideas at Sussex, and he now holds a highfalutin position in political thought at Oxford, and he's written books about Tocqueville, you know, that French guy, and a great history of the universe by someone named Guizot, *History of Civilization in Europe*.

he floats around in the high places of academia. The reason this book gets attention is because Larry Seidentalk is thinking about the way Western people in our culture now talk about themselves, where we come from, what our story is.

Usually a story, not to be unfair, and there's some truth to the story, and maybe very smart people will tell you, well, the world started to get over religion, sometime in early modernity, and Renaissance happened, hallelujah, and the enlightenment, and we started to roar ahead into all the good things of liberal modernity, and Larry Seidentalk, this is the relevance for today, says, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Our civilization came from this guy, Paul, taking a message out from Palestine into the Mediterranean world, that was a message of universal equality and love.

[51 : 18] He started to plant like a seed, a mustard seed in the ground, a message about a God who is plenty potentiary sovereign over any, all individuals, no in-between structures of authority get in the way of that supreme sovereignty, and the individual was born at that moment, women were born, slaves were born into their humanity, all were born into their humanity.

Paul and the church fathers in the Middle Ages, jurists, started to work out the socialization, the social form that that kind of message should take, and that takes the form of justice, love of all, concern for all, for the lowly, for the nobodies, for slaves, for women, and that.

Our civilization started to work out the intuitions, the presuppositions of this amazing message.

Paul, church fathers, along the way, by the way, they worked out a doctrine of the Trinity.

But Sidentor, again, I don't know, he's a Christian, but he shows you, I just want to bring this up now, this kind of thing is living and active, it's sharper than any two-edged sword, I'm always honored to listen to an apostle, this will change your life, you know, that is God speaking, that is the word of God, living and active.

This guy is sort of a late, a late glancer back at the story and saying, boy, a lot of change happened in the world because of this kind of thing. Our lives have been changed, reshaped, and they go on being changed and reshaped because of Paul and what he said about Jesus and God's love, the gift of his spirit.

[53 : 11] In Galatia, there must have been slaves who were hearing that God loves them. Women heard God loves you, has a plan for you, wants to put his spirit into you and give you a glorious life and eternity.

That has to change a world, a civilization. Just little echoes of it get picked up by thinkers, just once in a, every now and again. Just a passage.

That's a bridge into next week. I want to talk next week about how the church fathers grabbed this and just ran with it, where it went, what it did. I find it exciting, but I told you at the beginning, I already love this doctrine, so maybe you don't, so it'll just maybe next week you'll just not listen. but that's what I wanted to share with you today. I'm gone on longer than I thought I would. May I say a word of prayer and then please conversation questions, I need to hear them.

Lord, we thank you for the gospel and all the ways that it blooms out into our imaginations, our thinking, how it forms the church, it forms us, it gives us glories that we can hardly understand, but you've given them to us to in some measure understand, and may they make us happy and thankful people because we've heard this good news, and may we go on hearing it, and may it change us from one degree of glory to another.

[54 : 47] We pray this in the name of the Son who teaches us through the Spirit of the Son to call you our God, our Father. Amen. Amen.