

What Is the Trinity? Why Believe It?

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[0 : 00] Okay, this time in earnest. What does it mean to be a Christian? One hypothesis that one might put forth is to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

But then, I think that's a really good hypothesis, but then you might think, well, Muslims believe the same. And they're not Christians, are they? Right? Fun fact, if you didn't know that, Muslims confess that Jesus is the Messiah who will come again on the last day to judge the living and the dead.

So that cannot be the Christian distinctive. One might say to be a Christian is to believe that through Christ, God accepts us by faith apart from anything we do.

But then, well, the first century Jews who rejected Jesus largely believed the same thing. And they weren't Christians, were they?

So then one might say, well, to be a Christian is to seek to live according to the ethical teachings of Christ. But then, you know, there's a whole lot of people out there, especially in the West, because we've sort of been inculcated with the Bible.

[1 : 23] A whole lot of non-Christians out there who seek to live according to the ethical teachings of Christ. The golden rule, you know, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, which Jesus says is the summary of the law and the prophets.

Now, we don't do a very good job of it, but a lot of people try to do that. And they're not all Christians, so surely that cannot be the Christian distinctive.

So what does it mean to be a Christian? I think that the utterly unique claim of the Christian faith is that God is triune, God is trinity.

You know, this is one of the startling developments in the New Testament. So we were just, we just spent 10 weeks in the Old Testament. Then when we get to the New Testament, one of the startling plot developments is that God discloses himself as trinity.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And yet, you know, we worship one God, not three. You know, so this week we will look at what really we mean by that, by saying that God is trinity.

[2 : 38] And then next week we'll look at some of the implications of that. What does that mean for what we believe about God? For those coming in, there's handouts here, and I think there's also a stack in the back.

Great. Great. Great. All right.

Now that we're pretty much settled. So does everyone have a handout? We'll be relying on this quite a lot. Great.

Now, when I say trinity, I can imagine a whole number of different reactions.

One of them might be, and as I've been talking to some of my friends about teaching this over the past couple of weeks, a lot of the reaction has been, wait, you mean the church? Because trinity, Baptist church.

[3 : 49] But the fact that the church is named after the trinity surely means that it's really important, I think. Right? But one might say, well, if you've grown up in the church and you've been taught the doctrine of the trinity, you might think, well, the trinity is just a kind of nonsensical puzzle.

It's a great mystery. And that's for the sort of pastors and the theologians and the really bookish people to think about. And not for me.

And I think it is true that a lot of the time when people talk about the trinity, it is presented as a kind of, you know, a technical puzzle to solve using a lot of weird foreign language, a lot of strange words that we don't ordinarily use.

And I think that is, in some ways, a failure of the teaching of the church. If we come to the trinity and think, this is just a mystery and I'm not going to touch it.

Because I think that this doctrine is, whether we recognize it as such or not, the lifeblood of the church. And then one might think, well, how can something that's not even explicitly taught in the

Bible be so important?

[5 : 12] You might even be thinking that in what I've been saying so far. That, you know, I'm suggesting that the trinity, the doctrine of the trinity, is the Christian distinctive. But then you might say, well, the word trinity doesn't even appear in the Bible.

Does it? And that's true. The word trinity doesn't appear in the Bible. So how could it be that important? But even though the word is not in the Bible, I think the idea of it, the doctrine of it, is. And to use a non-biblical word to describe a biblical message doesn't mean that we're moving away from the Bible, but it helps us to enter more deeply into it.

And then one reaction one might have would be to say, well, what's the point of talking about this at all? You know, isn't it enough to just follow Jesus? And it is.

It is enough to just follow Jesus. I don't think, you know, when Jesus came to James and John as they were fishing with their father and said, follow me, and they left everything and followed Jesus, I don't think they were thinking, look, there's God the Son, the second person of the triune God.

[6 : 31] No! Right? But, you know, they didn't need to know that. It was enough to follow Jesus, to hear the call, follow me, and follow him, and leave everything and follow him.

But I think that, like I was saying, this teaching that the church has been proclaiming for many, many centuries helps us to enter into the Bible more deeply.

Helps us to marvel at our salvation in Jesus more, more deeply. And so I think it can be valuable to spend some time on this great Christian distinctive of the Trinity.

I hope that between today and next week, we'll see a little bit more clearly how the Trinity is a biblical idea, and it's the lifeblood of the church, shaping how we think and how we live in God, even if we don't, you know, consciously think about the Trinity all the time.

If we spend a lot of time in Scripture, it sort of forms us, and how we think and how we live, whether we are, you know, acknowledging that or not. But before we go on, any questions about where we're going?

[7 : 53] Great, okay. Now, we just spent, in Sunday school, if you've been coming, 10 weeks in the Old Testament.

And coming out of that, with Old Testament in mind, one might be thinking, why would Christians start thinking about this Trinity thing in the first place? Because after all, the idea that there is a plurality to God is utterly foreign to the Old Testament.

You know, in the Old Testament, God emphatically and repeatedly insists that Israel is to worship a single, utterly unique God. And then when Israel fails to worship this single, utterly unique God, things go really badly for Israel.

Over and over and over. And so one might wonder, why are Christians seemingly talking about a plurality to God? You know, there are texts like, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Or, you know, in the Ten Commandments, you shall have no other gods before me. Or in Isaiah, Isaiah puts it really, really starkly. I am the first and I am the last.

[9 : 13] Besides me, there is no God. Is there a God besides me? There is no rock. I know not any. Deuteronomy 13 says, if anyone you know, even your friend who is as your own soul, comes to you and said, let's worship this other God, you are to stone him.

My goodness. It's, right, this is a really serious matter in the Old Testament to suggest even the possibility that there might be another God that God's people are to worship.

So one might ask, you know, what's going on in the New Testament when it seems on the face of it that Christians are adding things to God. You know, when we begin reading the New Testament, we see Jews who are really committed to the Old Testament speaking of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit alongside the Father.

Seemingly, you know, putting other beings alongside God. And in fact, this goes back to Jesus himself. Jesus forgave sins. Even as his opponents were saying, were accusing of a blasphemy and saying, who can forgive sins but God alone?

Well, his opponents weren't wrong. And yet Jesus kept doing it. What are we to make of that? Who is this Jesus? Jesus called himself Lord of the Sabbath.

[10 : 44] The Sabbath that God instituted for Israel. So who is this Jesus? What are we to make of this? Jesus insisted that he existed before Abraham.

Abraham who lived centuries earlier. What are we to make of this? Who is this Jesus? You know, his opponents understood the suggestion, the implication, and sought to stone him.

Paul, very frankly, you know, this is unusual for Paul, but in one place he just straight up calls Jesus our great God and Savior. That, on the face of it, just seems like blasphemy.

Because Jesus is just a human being, right? What are we to make of this Jesus? Jesus, before ascending into heaven, instructed his disciples to baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A verbal formula that we've been hearing a lot recently at Trinity with great joy with all the people being baptized. And then Paul picks up this verbal formula as well at the end of one of his letters.

[11:54] You know, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, he says. So, what's going on here?

You know, we're putting other things alongside the Father to whom Jesus prays. You know, what are we to do with all this? Historically, the church's answer has been to say that the Father to whom Jesus prays is God, that Jesus, the Son of God, is himself also God, and that the Holy Spirit ought to be counted alongside the Father and the Son also as God, all without denying the Old Testament emphasis that there's only one God.

If we're very confused right now, that makes sense. Because it seems like the church, historically, has wanted to talk out both sides of its mouth.

You know, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God, yet there's only one God. These three beings are God, and yet there's only one God. So, this is very confusing, and there have been a number of Christian leaders who have, you know, faithful and well-meaning Christians have sort of simplified this to make it make more sense humanly, but then in doing so, they've inadvertently taught a gospel that is not nearly as glorious and beautiful and saving as the biblical gospel.

And I want to move on to talk about some of these misunderstandings of this Trinity thing, and then how they lead us to a less gloriously beautiful gospel in order to clarify what actually this biblical gospel and what actually this biblical Trinity is.

[13:52] But before we go there, any questions about where we've been or where we're going? I realize this is deep waters with the Trinity. Okay.

Right. So, because this Trinity idea that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God, but there is only one God, because that's sort of confusing, there have been a number of misunderstandings put forth that make much more human sense.

One of them is tritheism. Tri-three theism, you know, three gods. If we say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God, then it seems like we're saying there's three gods.

You know, that might naturally be one's conclusion. But then, if there, now this makes a lot more human sense than to say there's one God, but three persons.

But then if we start saying that there's, in fact, three gods, then these are rather deceptive, tricky gods that can't be trusted. Because they've already been deceptive towards us by asserting, in the Old Testament, that there is, in fact, only one God.

[15:19] Now, if they've been deceptive about this, then how can we trust them about anything? You know, the tritheism, if we start saying that there's three gods, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are completely distinct, unique gods, then that leaves us with gods we cannot trust and promises we can't, in which we cannot reasonably hope.

Now, tritheism has never been very popular in the church. But I think sometimes I sort of slip into it in prayer.

I think a lot of the time, yeah, at least for me, I slip into misunderstandings of the Trinity when I pray. And that's not like God's going to smite me for it.

But at least for me, I like to be self-aware and like, oh, I'm praying to the Father and the Son as if they're completely distinct gods. And this isn't how God revealed himself.

So, I'm going to try to be a little more careful with my words. Now, a more common misconception of the Trinity is that there's only one God and that this God appears to us in different forms or different modes.

[16:39] Hence the name modalism. Right? Modes. You know, in different times, in different places, God, God, in different contexts, God appears to us in different ways.

In the Old Testament, God appeared to us as the Father. And then in the Gospels, when Jesus walked the earth, he appeared to us as the Son, and now, he appears to us as the Holy Spirit. There's only one God, but he just sort of shapeshifts. Sort of like a Greek God. If you've read any Homer, the gods sort of appear in different forms.

Now, once again, this seems like, actually, before I move on, it isn't just sort of the Greek gods, but some of our analogies, when we try to teach about the Trinity, are actually sort of modalist. If we describe the Trinity like water, well, water is solid, liquid, and gas. Solid ice, liquid water, gaseous water vapor.

[17 : 40] But it's all water. That is this idea of modalism. It's water that appears to us in different forms, in different conditions, different contexts.

But then, once again, this seems like a god that can't really be trusted. consider, for instance, the baptism of Jesus.

Reading from the version of it in Mark. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven, you are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased. Now, did you catch that? All three persons of the Trinity appear at once.

They all show up on stage. You have the Father speaking from heaven, you are my beloved son. You have Jesus, the Son, going to get baptized. And then you have the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, Holy Spirit, descending like a dove.

[18 : 57] So, what's going on here? You know, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each appear in this scene. Is this all just an elaborate show? You know, with God playing different parts in the same scene?

Or is it as it appears that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are actually distinct from one another?

They're really distinct persons from one another.

I just read this baptism part, but actually a lot of the New Testament really stops making sense if we say that there's really no distinction between Jesus and his Father.

That they're actually completely the same and just appearing in different forms. When Jesus prays to his Father in John 17, the high priestly prayer, was that God just talking to himself and putting on a show for us?

That seems a little strange. Or Jesus up on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Well, how can you forsake yourself? That really stops making any sense.

[20 : 09] I actually don't know what Jesus is getting at, why he would say that from the cross, if Jesus and the Father are completely the same. So, it seems like this understanding or I suppose misunderstanding of the Trinity gives us a God that's sort of deceptive.

Sort of plays tricks on us. And I'm not really sure what to make, not really sure what to make of him in how he shows up in the New Testament.

But then, probably the most significant of these, certainly the most significant historically, is this idea called Arianism.

Now, be careful here, that's an I, not a Y. You know, there's no, seriously, when I first learned about this, I thought like, what, like Nazis? No, not at all.

This was like many, many centuries before that. In the fourth century, a Christian leader named Arius, so that's where we get the name, it's named after this guy named Arius, he convinced many that there's only one God and that Jesus, the Son of God, isn't really God at all.

[21 : 27] Again, this makes some sense. This makes a lot more sense humanly than the thing that the church has been teaching, which is that Jesus and the Father are both God, but there's only one God.

So I have a lot of sympathy for this Arius, right? Jesus called God his Father, saying that the Father is greater than he is. That must mean that Jesus, the Son, is less than his divine Father, right?

That seems to be what he's saying there. And then consider what it means for Jesus to call God his Father. when human parents have a child, they create them.

Before the child is conceived, the child doesn't exist. Doesn't that mean that there was a time when the Son of God didn't exist? And if the Son isn't eternal, surely he can't be God, right?

You know, I can't conceive of a God. You know, maybe in this sort of Greek gods like Athena sort of leaped out of Zeus or something, right?

[22 : 37] I think that's the story. But, I mean, the creator God of the universe can't just come into existence at some point in time. That just doesn't really make sense.

So, if Jesus, if there's a time that the Son of God didn't exist, then surely he can't be God. All that to say, this Arianism idea makes a certain amount of sense on the face of it.

But then, what would it mean for the gospel and for our Christian experience of God if the Son and the Holy Spirit are not themselves God, but rather are creations of God just like we are?

This would mean that God himself doesn't save us. This would mean that God the Father is up in heaven and he sends others to save us instead.

You know, if Jesus isn't God, then, then it isn't God who, who is coming to the world to save us. You know, God's sitting up in heaven and sends Jesus and, you know, Jesus might be more than human but he's less than God.

[23 : 51] He might be like a super powerful angel or something. You know, this would mean that there's always a great distance between us and God. The Son, Jesus, came to us but in this misunderstanding, the Son isn't God.

The Holy Spirit lives in us but in this misunderstanding, the Holy Spirit isn't God. God, the Father, remains far away, off in the heavens. This God doesn't want to get his hands dirty with the sinful world.

He doesn't want to dive in himself. He might send others to do his bidding but he doesn't himself want to get involved. But the biblical gospel teaches us that our situation in sin and death is really, really severe.

In fact, it is so severe that only God can save us. If only God was able to create us in the first place, then only God is able to recreate us in his image after we've twisted God's image in us through sin. If only God can create life, then only God can recreate and resurrect life after we've run into sin and death. Only a Jesus who is fully and completely God can fully and completely save us.

[25 : 26] And so, this idea that this well-meaning guy, Arius, had, that Jesus isn't fully God, it gives us a deficient gospel.

So you see what I'm doing here with these sort of misunderstandings of the Trinity that seek to make it a little more comprehensible to us. I'm saying, well, in each of these different ways of making the Trinity more comprehensible, we actually end up with a God who is not as wonderful and glorious as the biblical God, a gospel that is not as wonderful and glorious as the biblical gospel.

That as strange as this Trinity thing is, you know, one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only one God, as strange as that is, there's a reason we believe it.

It's because it gives us this, you know, wonderful, glorious, biblical gospel. So, at this point, that was a lot, I realize.

Any thoughts or questions on what we've talked about so far? Yes?

[27 : 07] I've wrestled in the past, how important is the Trinity in the Bible? You know, you know, you're a follower of Jesus. And the point you made about if Jesus isn't God, that God is not our Savior, that's where the most resonance is going to be.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. If Jesus isn't God, to whom does my first belief belong? From my point of view, I can't make an argument that it belongs not to God, but to my Savior, who is Jesus, which, to me, kind of uses things up a lot.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, well put. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think, I think that's, that's something that certainly can be said as well.

Yeah. You know, if, if it is the case that, that the Gospels are telling us the truth that Jesus said that before Abraham existed, he did, uh, and then it turns out that Jesus isn't God, then it certainly seems like Jesus is a liar.

[28 : 41] Um, yeah. Yeah. Or that he doesn't know what he's talking about. He's crazy, right?

Yeah. I mean, that didn't, didn't like C.S. Lewis say something like this, like the, uh, if, if the Gospels are reliable, um, then, uh, given the claims that Jesus makes, he's either a liar or he's a nut or he's, or he's God.

Yeah. I think you could discount, because I've heard that quote before too, and I think you could discount both of the first two because he's not a liar because of all the truth he told.

I mean, why would a person exist to tell us all of the truths that we know are true but then be lying on another account? That wouldn't make sense.

You know, and he wasn't a fool. He was, you know, he wasn't insane. He was educated, you know, and able to lead people. That, that doesn't sound like a crazy person to me, you know?

Yeah. So. He had like deeper insights into, into what it means to be human than anyone else that I've, that I've ever known. Yeah. That doesn't sound like a nut. That doesn't sound like a crazy person.

[29 : 56] It doesn't sound like a liar, you know? Yeah. So. He must be. He's a sinner. Yeah. Yeah. And then all of that's predicated on, you know, the Gospels are reliable, right?

Which, uh, isn't always a given for, for anyone you might be talking to. But, uh, yeah. Yeah, John. I realize that any human analogy is going to fail.

Yeah. That is, but, we think in those charts. Right. I have, over the last couple of years, been thinking much more on the analogy of a perfect marriage.

Hmm. Where, I don't have a perfect marriage. But, there are three entities. There's myself, there's Dorothy, and then there's a third entity, which is John Dorothy.

Hmm. And, you know, any number of people see us as that third entity. And, not the two of us, but in the perfect marriage, there's that perfect love, communication, oneness, that can be expressed in the unity, um, as well as in the individuals.

[31 : 13] Yeah. Yeah. So, that's actually, I think, an old analogy. Um, I think it may have been St. Augustine, uh, who, who described, uh, but don't quote me on that.

I'm not actually sure it was him. Um, but I guess it's on record with this recorder. Um, but who said that, who described the Trinity analogously as, sort of, uh, the lover, the beloved, and the love that they share.

Um, yeah. Yeah. Um, and then even, uh, probably a, a bit of a sneak peek for next week.

When, when we say that God is love, we, we don't say that God loves, that love is a thing that God does. We say that love is a, is a thing that God is, that God is love.

Um, well, love is a, is, it's a transitive verb, right? It requires an object. You, you can't just love in the abstract, right?

[32 : 14] To, to, to love requires an other, a beloved. To say that God is love is to say that there is something in God, a beloved, in the very being of God.

So, I, I think even, uh, John, you know, John writes in, in 1st John 4 that God is love. I, I think John would be, uh, would be on board with John's analogy.

Um. Okay.

So, uh, so, we don't, we don't just believe in the Trinity, uh, because of a number of, sort of, isolated Bible verses that seem to suggest that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine.

Um, but we believe it because the way that God saves us is Trinity-shaped. Um, you know, the, the way that, the, the gospel by which God saves us looks like Trinity.

[33 : 33] Um, you know, how, how did God save us? God saved us by sending to us the Son and the Spirit, um, who, who perfectly bring to us God.

Um, and so, we, we conclude from that that, that the Father, Son, and the Spirit are God. Um, you know, in, in the first century, God, the Father, sent, sent the Son into the world.

Um, and, and, and all throughout John's gospel especially, uh, Jesus describes his relationship with the Father. And, uh, in, in this one bit in John 5, um, he, he describes something, I think, really, really critical, um, that, that I'll read.

Um, so Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show them, so that you may marvel.

[34 : 51] For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. So, what, what did they put in the handout?

Yeah, so, we, we see here that, that Jesus does everything exactly as the Father does. You know, the Father shows the Son everything he's doing. Jesus does nothing on his own.

He only does what he sees the Father showing him, and the Father shows him everything that he's doing. Right, Jesus does everything exactly as the Father does. And, and that's pretty important, right?

If Jesus only acted according to the Father some of the time, then we'd be left wondering, you know, what, when is Jesus acting according to the Father, and when is he doing his own thing? But, but if this self-description that Jesus gives here is true, then Jesus is the perfect disclosure of God, that everything that the Father is, the Son is.

Everything that the Father does, the Son does. As, as Hebrews puts it, the Son is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

[36 : 07] and that's, and that's why Jesus can say to his disciples, if you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Because, everything the Father does, everything that the Father is, the Son, the Son does. Everything that God is, is in Jesus.

Um, so when the Father sent the Son into the world to save us, God withheld none of himself from us. Um, he, he withheld none of himself from us in the incarnation when God became a human being named Jesus.

God gave himself to us completely. Um, this, this is part of, this is what I mean by the, the way that God saves us is Trinity-shaped. Um, that, does that bit, is I clear in, in describing what's going on here?

Any questions on that? All right. So, and then, and then we see the same sort of thing going on with the Holy Spirit. Uh, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, into the world.

[37 : 21] Um, in, in his farewell meeting with his disciples, Jesus says to them, uh, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away.

For, if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me.

For he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. Therefore, I said he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

So, everything that Jesus has, he gives to the Spirit. So, there, there's this dynamic of everything that the Father is, is in, is in Jesus, and everything that, that Jesus has from the Father, uh, he, he gives to the Spirit to declare to us.

[38 : 29] Um, you know, if Jesus is the perfect disclosure of the Father, bringing the Father to us, um, well, in the same way, the Spirit is this perfect disclosure of, of the Son, bringing the Son to us.

Um, since the Spirit declares everything that, that he has from the Son. Um, all that to say, this means that everything that God is, is in the Holy Spirit.

Um, and so, when God filled the church with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, in Acts 2, uh, God withheld none of himself from his people. When, when God, uh, when the Holy Spirit fills the church today, and fills, uh, individual Christians, when they, when they, you know, put their trust in Jesus, God withholds none of himself from us.

He continuously gives himself to us completely. Um, and, and it's, uh, it's, it's as if God the Father, uh, sent the Son and the Spirit into the world as, as, as his two hands embracing the world.

Um, you know, giving all of himself to us in this embrace. Um, I, I, I like that image. I, I totally stole that from this old great dead saint.

[39 : 49] Um, and, and, and so we believe this Trinity thing because that's how, that's the way in which God saves his people.

You know, he sends, he sends himself, uh, he sends the Son and the Spirit, um, to, to reach out and embrace us, so to speak. Um, so there's, there's, there are these suggestions, uh, about the Trinity all over the New Testament, but, uh, even more, you know, we, we affirm this thing, the church has always believed this thing, um, because that's the way that we're saved and enter into a relationship with God.

Um, cool. So, uh, I wanted to, instead of me praying, um, I wanted to, to end with this, uh, great creed that, uh, is this, this affirmation of the Trinity that was written a long, long time ago and it's recited in most churches every Sunday.

Um, but before we end with that, uh, are there any, are there any more thoughts or questions? I wanted to try to leave, uh, a good chunk of time at the end. We have about, like, eight minutes.

Which is not as much as, but still. Yeah, Andrew. When you talk about the Father sending the Son and Jesus saying I can do nothing apart from the Father, does that imply, uh, like a subservience?

[41 : 20] Mm. That's it. You know, he was sent. Yeah. Yeah. So, this is, uh, believe it or not, this is, uh, uh, uh, live debate among, um, some church leaders in the evangelical world right now.

Um, there, there are some who are saying that, uh, well, the Son is, in this way that you're describing, Andrew, sort of eternally subordinate to the Father, that before all time and now and

forever, the Son will be subordinate, subordinate to the Father.

Um, and, and the, the reason that they do this, that the people who espouse this view do this, is they, they want to say, well, the Trinity is a, uh, a model for, um, relationships between men and women, that they're of equal value and yet one is, you know, eternally subordinate to the other.

Um, personally, I'm unconvinced of, of that, um, in part because, uh, I, I question the wisdom of using sort of our, um, I, I question their methodology of, of thinking, well, we have certain ideas about how men and women should relate, therefore we should project that onto the Trinity.

I, I, I think that's, I'm not sure that's a great method. We, we should keep, yeah, we should keep that separate. The Trinity is a wholly precious thing. Um, but then, there is this question of, you know, is this, that whole issue aside, the gender thing aside, is the, the son subordinate to the father?

[43 : 01] Um, the, the historical answer, as far as I understand it, is, in so far as the son is human in the incarnation, Jesus is a human being, right?

And in fact, he's the perfect human being, completely without sin. Well then, if he's a perfect, the perfect human being, completely without sin, then he's going to do, he's going to submit to the father and do whatever the father says.

Because, you know, what is a perfect human being to do? What, what were we made for? What is full human flourishing? It's to live in all of the ways that God has designed for us.

Um, that, that's full human flourishing. So of course, Jesus is going to submit to the father because Jesus is the perfect human being. Um, but then, in so far as the son is God, you know, if we, if we leave aside his humanity and say, let's, let's talk about maybe before, you know, in eternity past, before the son became a human being, um, then the, the historical answer has been to say that because the son is just as human, sorry, just as God as the father, that there's not a sort of subservience there.

Um, that it's not as if the father sent the son and the son is just sort of slavishly obeying by going and becoming human, but they, they do this together. Um, I realize that may have been more than, than I needed to have said, but does that?

[44 : 32] Okay, cool. Well, I'm thinking maybe it's not a matter of subservience because if you say, as you were just saying, Jesus was a human, maybe he was just following, I mean, he was a perfect human being, but he was also a regular human being too.

Hmm. Maybe he was just following the model that he saw, you know, a father teaches a son and the son does not try to usurp the father, you know?

Yeah. He was just playing the role of the faithful son. Maybe it was as simple as that, and it's not a matter of subservience, it's just a matter of respect. Yeah.

Well, it is certainly the case that in this sort of perfect love relationship in God, it's not like there's a power play and the son is trying to overrule the father.

That's, yeah, that's definitely, uh, that's certainly the case that, that the son is not trying to sort of overrule the father. Um, because that wouldn't be, because that wouldn't be loving.

[45 : 34] Uh, and God is, is perfect love. Yeah, uh, I don't know which hand us off first. Tyler, I think. Uh, so, I, I guess my question is, what is the point in which a Christian can have confused thoughts about the Trinity?

Um, like you said, like you kind of, we, we all have an, uh, imperfect understanding of this one and three and three and one to the point where it's heresy and, like, Arius and other, like, no witnesses would deny that Jesus is the son of God, but he is God himself.

Um, where would be that point where you kind of, you go past the point of no return and you're no longer considered a Christian because you denied this fundamental doctrine?

Um, that is a very good question. Um, I, I almost didn't put the H word in, in the handout.

Heresy is the H word, by the way. Um, I almost didn't put that in here. Uh, because when we hear that word, we think, you know, Spanish Inquisition and heretics and burning them and, um, that's not at all what I mean to suggest by talking about, you know, heresy is this sort of, sort of technical term used by bookish academics.

[46 : 57] It's, it's, uh, it's just a technical term for, this is something that the church has agreed is missing the mark, um, of, of who God is.

Um, and it's not like, yeah, I, I want, I, I'm very cautious not to use that word like a weapon, uh, like, like it sometimes has been.

Um, I would also definitely want to say that you know, if you're a faithful believer and, and you're just a little confused about the Trinity, uh, then join the club, right?

It's not, it's not as if anyone is going to try to, to oust you and say, well, you're not a Christian because you don't, because you said something once in prayer that suggested that the Father was on the cross.

You know, thank you, Father, for dying for our sins. Eh, heresy. Uh, we're removing you from membership. No, no, right? That, that's ridiculous. Um, yeah.

[47 : 59] Uh, and as, and as far as, as other, as other, uh, religious groups like Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons go, I, uh, I don't feel equipped to, unfortunately, I, I just don't feel equipped.

That, that seems like deep waters. Um, you know, I, I, I am quite comfortable saying, should God judge me faithful and he raised me on the last day. I fully expect to see Arius there.

Because, he was motivated by the glory and dignity of God. Yeah. He just got it wrong. Um, you know, I think that this doctrine is important.

Uh, this has been the lifeblood of the church. Um, and if we, and if we miss the mark, then we end up implying that there's something deficient about the gospel. We end up with the gospel that doesn't save.

Uh, but, it's not, it's not as if, you know, an individual person gets it wrong and then God throws him to hell or something. That's, that seems, that seems like a denial of God's mercy to me.

[49 : 03] I don't know if that's an answer to your question. Yeah. I was just going to say, John, when, you know, it's like the test that you put, how do you know if you're a Christian or not? One of them is, you have to believe that Jesus is the Lord.

Yeah. That's, I mean, that's one of the five tests that he gives. So, I, I, I'm just thinking out loud here. So, Yeah. It is, it's not a question that I think is a clear answer, but, it's one of those, it's a part of our faith that we hold that Jesus is, is God himself.

Yeah. And like, you, yeah, yeah, yeah, no, that is a good question. Following a lot of that, I have a more serious problem. What, with our Jewish friends, who may not accept the New Testament, God, um, expressing himself in the Old Testament mainly of one person, that's difficult then for people to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

And not to mention the fact that the Holy Spirit is not in the picture. Except obliquely. I know there are small references here and there. Right. It's not, if you reject the New Testament, then you essentially would reject the character of God as being a Trinity.

No? Or, that's a difficulty. Yeah. No, it is. It is a challenge. Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah, no, it's, it's definitely a challenge.

[50 : 28] Right? And the same thing with, uh, not, not just with, with, uh, our Jewish friends, but with our Muslim friends as well. Sure. You know, you go up on YouTube, you'll find so many, I don't necessarily recommend this because YouTube is not the place for, you know, religious instruction, but, um, but I, but I've, I've not followed my own advice.

And, uh, you know, you can find like all of these, you know, Muslim preachers talking about the Trinity and how it's horrible and, and polytheism. Right? Um, yeah, it's, it's a big barrier. Um, yeah.

Uh, why would you suppose God did that? Why didn't he express himself to the children of Israel as a Trinity, as Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the wilderness all together to solidify his person?

Yeah. His nature. Yeah. I guess that's not an answerable point, but it's, I, I think it's something about which we can reverently speculate. Um, but not something that we can come to really solid.

That's the mind of God stuff. You know, who has known the mind of the Lord and who has been his counselor? Yeah. Yeah. John. I think that there's thinking that often equates to fathers and the Trinity.

[51 : 39] Mm. And, uh, for example, in the Old Testament, Elohim, it's like a class. So, that's class. That's the Trinity. Right.

Right. When we see God in the Old Testament, that's the triune God. We, we say by faith. Uh, as Christians. I don't think we could clarify our thinking. So, if we saw that, it's about, say, in one.

Yeah. Rather than just thinking of it because of us. Yeah. Um, that's, that's well put. Uh, unfortunately, we are like four minutes over.

Um, so, uh, come back next week if you are still sitting with a lot of this stuff. And, and you can pull me aside and I'd be happy to chat. But, um, yeah.

Uh, I will, why don't, why don't I pray very, very briefly? Um, Father, thank you that you are, um, glorious and magnificent in your saving plan.

[52 : 40] Um, and thank you that you are not the kind of God that we can totally wrap our minds around, but that you exceed our understanding. And thank you that, and Lord, I pray that, that this draws us to worship you, um, as, as the God that is beyond all of us.

Through Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.