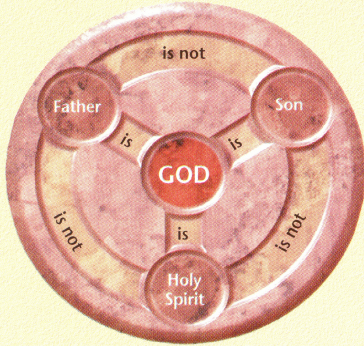


## SERMON NOTES — THE TRINITY

There is only one God, and this one God exists as one essence in three Persons.

The three Persons are:

- God the Father
- God the Son (Jesus Christ)
- God the Holy Spirit (also called the Holy Ghost)



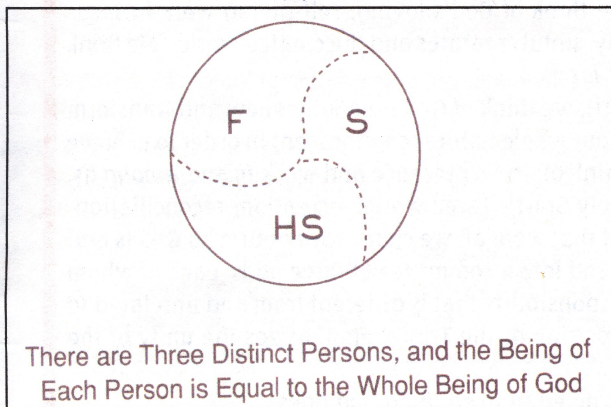
Early Christians used this diagram to explain the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God, but they are not three names for the same Person.

The Persons are distinct:

- The Father is not the Son.
- The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is not the Father.

God is one absolutely perfect divine Being in three Persons. His *being* is what God *is*, in relation to the universe he created. The three are called Persons because they relate to one another in personal ways.

Ancient Interpretation



Wayne Grudem's illustration

### I. The Concept of the Trinity

- \* Definition: One God who exists eternally as three distinct Persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit.
  - \* This does not mean there are three Gods.
  - \* This does not mean the Persons are just different titles or ways God has revealed Himself, or modes in which they operate.
- \* The three Persons are co-equal and share the same divine being/essence.
- \* The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God.
- \* This is emphasized in passages like the Shema: Deuteronomy 6:4 ("Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one").
  - \* God is not understood abstractly, but Christians are to know and worship Him by way of the three Persons.
  - \* Truth is singular and does not contradict itself; God exists in complete harmony with Himself.
  - \* There is one God, but God is three Persons.
  - \* God is the source of all things.
- \* Biblical Basis for Three Persons
  - \* The Great Commission includes baptism "in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).
    - \* It is significant that Jesus uses the singular "name" in The Great Commission, indicating God is one being (Matthew 28:19).
  - \* Paul refers to the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14).
  - \* The baptism of Jesus involves all three Persons (Matthew 3:16-17).
- \* The belief in one God means not only an indivisible God but also one unique God.
- \* The Persons are distinct from one another (The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Father).
  - \* They relate to one another in personal ways.
  - \* The unity of the three Persons is referred to as the Triune God and/or the "Godhead."
  - \* These three persons are inseparable yet distinct.
  - \* Understanding the Trinity is a crucial foundation and framework for the Christian faith. It is a concept that sets Christian understanding apart from other worldviews, though it is a struggle to understand.
  - \* The Trinity can be described as God above us (the Father), God alongside us (the Son), and God within us (the Holy Spirit).
  - \* The common, but incorrect, views of the Trinity such as water-ice-gas, grandparent-parent-child, etc. do not reflect the interconnectivity of the three Persons. These analogies are misleading.
- \* These views are considered "modalistic", considering the Trinity as three completely separate entities (or modes) that do not interact within a unified essence.
- \* Ice and gas may come from water, but they are NOT water. The three Persons of the Trinity ARE God.
- \* All of God's attributes are possessed by all three Persons of the Trinity.
  - \* They are distinct Persons, neither blended in essence nor divided in being.
  - \* They are, in their entirety, co-eternal and co-equal with each other.
    - \* Divinity, glory, majesty, power, un-createdness, and immeasurableness are shared equally.

- \* Belief in this Trinity, including the incarnation of Jesus Christ as both God and human, is a core tenant of authentic Christian belief.
- \* Athanasian Creed mentions uncreated nature of Father, Son, Spirit
  - \* This creed is named after Athanasius (AD293-373), the champion of orthodoxy against Arian attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. Although Athanasius did not write this creed and it is improperly named after him, the name persists because until the seventeenth century it was commonly ascribed to him. It is not from Greek (Eastern), but from Latin (Western) origin, and is not recognized by the Eastern Orthodox Church today. Apart from the opening and closing sentences, this creed consists of two parts, the first setting forth the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and the second dealing chiefly with the incarnation and the two-natures doctrine. This translation was adopted by the Christian Reformed Church Synod of 1988. Pastor Elizabeth has reformatted the text to better fit within these notes.
  - \* "Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic [universal] faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally. Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons, nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal. What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal. And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being. So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being. Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty. Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord. Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord. Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord, so catholic [universal] religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords. The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone. The Son was neither made nor created; He was begotten from the Father alone. The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; He proceeds from the Father and the Son. Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers; there is one Son, not three sons; there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits. Nothing in this Trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three Persons are coeternal and coequal with each other. So in everything, as was said earlier, we must worship their Trinity in their unity and their unity in their Trinity. Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the Trinity. But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully. Now this is the true faith: That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and human, equally. He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and He is human from the essence of His mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. Although He is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by His divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to Himself. He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of His Person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human. He suffered for our salvation; He descended to hell; He arose from the dead; He ascended to heaven; He is seated at the Father's right hand; from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people will arise bodily and give an accounting of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire. This is the catholic faith: one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully."

## II. Roles within the Trinity

- \* God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity:
  - \* Is God and the ultimate source and destiny of all things.

- \* Knows the needs of His people even before they ask.
- \* Rules the universe and is deeply engaged with the world and His people.
- \* Sent the Son and the Holy Spirit. Imparted life-in-Himself and authority to the Son.
- \* He is greater than the Son in the Son's incarnate (human) state, but not in essence.
- \* He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). God brought order and life out of disorder and nothingness.
- \* Christians are to relate to Him as a loving Father.
- \* He is addressed in prayer as "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9).
- \* He loves His creation.
- \* God the Son (Jesus), the second Person of the Trinity:
  - \* He is the Word who was with God and was God in the beginning (John 1:1-5).
  - \* Became human (the incarnation) to fulfill the Father's purposes.
  - \* He was fully human and fully God simultaneously.
  - \* Is in the Father and the Father is in Him.
  - \* He and the Father are one in action, will, and task.
    - \* Faith in Jesus is faith in God.
  - \* Has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. God has put all things under His feet.
  - \* Is Head of the Church and over all things to His Church.
  - \* Was the perfect sacrifice when He died for the forgiveness of our sins.
  - \* Was raised from the dead.
  - \* Is exalted and seated at the right hand of God. This indicates His complete sovereignty.
  - \* Is the incarnate (human) revelation of God.
  - \* Became flesh and "tabernacled" among us (referencing John 1:14).
  - \* Is our mediator, the only way to access God.
  - \* Intercedes for believers. Christians are called to distinct communion with God the Son, characterized by grace.
    - \* Is the Mediator between God and mankind.
  - \* Christians are called to distinct communion with God the Son, characterized by grace.
  - \* Believers are to pray in Jesus' name.
- \* God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity:
  - \* Has attributes of personality, such as intelligence and the ability to make choices.
  - \* Involved in Jesus' virgin birth, baptism, and resurrection. Poured out on Jesus at His baptism.
  - \* Empowers believers. Enables holiness. Provides power and guidance. Works upon minds and hearts, enlightening and quickening.
  - \* Distributes spiritual gifts to believers according to God's will.
  - \* Enables believers to confess "Jesus is Lord".
  - \* Intercedes for believers to Jesus and the Father.
  - \* Thought of in personal terms.
    - \* Can be grieved or lied to, showing He is personal.
    - \* Comes as a Person, not just a force.
  - \* Enables the believer to address God as "Abba, Father".
  - \* Was present and involved in Creation (Genesis 1:2). The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
  - \* Is sent by the Father and the Son.
  - \* Dwells permanently in the hearts of believers, making them God's dwelling place or temples of God.
  - \* Guides and teaches believers.
  - \* Produces fruit in the lives of believers (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control).
  - \* Involved in the baptism of believers (Matthew 28:19).
  - \* Gives the comfort of Christ and spreads the love of the Father and Son in believers' hearts.
  - \* Is necessary for spiritual enlightenment and new life.
  - \* Sanctifies and perfects believers' prayers.

- \* Christians are called to distinct communion with God the Holy Spirit, characterized by comfort.
- \* Unified Action: The divine love of the gospel originates with the Father, is purchased by Jesus, and is communicated by the Holy Spirit.

### **III Inter-relationship and Roles in Mission and Salvation**

- \* Salvation is a work involving all three Persons: planned by the Father, accomplished by the Son through his sacrifice, and applied to believers by the Holy Spirit.
- \* The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) involves the authority of the resurrected Jesus and commands disciples to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching obedience to Jesus' commands. Jesus also promises to be with them always.
- \* Prayer is described as communication with God, which believers can access "in the Spirit through the truth of Christ" (John 4:24). The Spirit helps believers pray correctly, and Jesus intercedes for them.
- \* God's mission to save creation is fulfilled through Jesus and extended through His disciples (including us) empowered by the Holy Spirit.