

## ***“In the beginning God”***

### *Understanding God: The Holy Trinity*

Another new year, another opportunity to start fresh, new beginnings. To begin this year, the Holy Spirit led me back to this *beginning* to help us better understand important theological concepts that may get less attention than they should. Such things seem to some “over our heads”, “too deep”, or simply uninteresting. I want to begin the year challenging men to go deeper *understanding what you believe and why you believe what you believe*. Solomon equated wisdom with adding *understanding* to knowledge.

Taking on one of the most difficult theological doctrines was not a welcome challenge when this subject and the truths that follow were first presented to me by the Holy Spirit. I am not a theologian. I am a student of the Bible and teacher, a missionary to men, called to encourage, equip, and exhort men from all walks of life. As such, I have a genuine concern today. Too many men lack basic understanding of key biblical doctrines and their application to help sustain a spirit-filled life. One cannot operate a successful business without understanding basic principles and market(s) in which you compete. How can we expect to live *successful* Christian lives, as God defines them, without (some) understanding of biblical basics?

Because many of my audiences consist of men with only basic educations, I work hard to write and teach in a manner that makes difficult concepts easier to, at least, partially understand and apply. I learned that early in my career as a young bioengineering professional asked to create and teach highly technical content to non-technical sales people. People typically cannot sell what they do not understand. So the more they understand, very often, the better they sell or represent the company.

That principle holds true for us as Christians. It is important to have at least a cursory understanding of biblical doctrines we say we believe. And it is equally important to understand their **relevance** and **application** in our lives. Why? We represent the Lord God in all we say and do. The Apostle Paul called us “ambassadors for Christ”. *Understanding* equips and emboldens us to live “in the world and not of it” and share the love of God with others as Christ did. That is our *mission* in life. With that prelude, let’s begin this overview of one of the great mysteries of the biblical universe, the Trinity.

**The Holy Trinity.** First, we need to know the Bible never uses the word *Trinity*. Secondly, I want to say up front the best we can do here is improve our partial understanding. This side of Heaven, we will never have full revelation or understanding. I am often amazed at how little of this I really understand and comprehend. Some things remain mysteries, veiled to human understanding. Yet we know God is faithful and has revealed what He wants us to know and understand, yet that only to those who seek Him with all of our hearts and receive His truth. It does not come via osmosis or just hanging around church. God has not revealed all truth, but He has revealed enough. Then we walk by **faith** the rest of the way Home.

### **Three Persons. Three Roles.**

**God the Father**, the first Person of the Triune Godhead. The first four words of Genesis 1:1, introduce God. (I know that sounds funny.) “In the beginning God”. Theologians use terms like *pre-existent* and *self-existent* in their description of God. He was. He is. He will forever be. No beginning. No end. No way to explain it any more at this point. All of His creation testifies to His being and awesomeness. We could read Genesis 1:1 like this, “When God Who always was decided it was time, He created everything that is from nothing that was.” In Latin, *ex nihilo* – *something from nothing*.

If we fast forward to verse 26, we come to the creation of mankind. Here is the first “hint” of the Trinity, i.e., God was not alone in creation.

*“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness...” (Genesis 1:26)*

Who was God talking to? Some suggest other created beings already in existence, but conservative biblical scholars agree this is the first revelation of what we will come to know and call the Trinity or Triune God, Three in One, each fully God, yet distinct in Person/personality.

Before we continue, let us not misunderstand the use of the phrase man was created *“in the image of God.”* This does not mean because humans look as we do, the three Persons of the Godhead must be men walking around Heaven. Jesus said very clearly **God is Spirit**, not human or flesh and blood. We worship Him in Spirit. (John 4: 24) The *image of God* is more a reference to the fact that we are created as spiritual beings like God, Who is Spirit, unlike animals or other created beings, angels, etc. Man is unique and above all things created in that sense. God gave us that authority from the beginning.

God the Father is all about *relationships* with His creation, especially mankind. Jesus called God *Father* and deferred to Him. Here are two key verses that give us a picture of that relationship. Jesus said,

*“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world...”* (John 16:28a)

*“I have come down from Heaven, not to do My will, but the will of (the Father) Who sent Me.* (John 6: 38)

Jesus’ words confirm the person and role of God the Father, and the fact that He sent the Son (Jesus).

**The Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is referred to as the third Person of the Trinity. Presenting Him here will seem out of order with respect to how we typically view the Trinity. We will come back to the Jesus, the Second Person, shortly. As we noted, the first verse of the Bible reveals the existence of God. The very next verse speaks to the presence of the Holy Spirit. (Genesis 1:2)

*“Now the earth was without shape and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the watery deep, but the **Spirit of God** was moving over the surface of the water.”* Genesis 1:2

In the Old Testament (Hebrew), we are taught the Holy Spirit was present and active in the lives of many Jewish leaders and people as God deemed necessary. OT experts tell us Jews did not see the Holy Spirit as separate from God but the expression of His power. The New Testament illuminates the role of the Holy Spirit much and reveals Him as part of this Triune Deity. Jesus spoke to this on many occasions.

*“I will ask **the Father**, and He will give you another **Helper** (Comforter), that He may be with you forever, that is **the Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be **in** you. John 14: 16-17.*

As the God the Father sent the Son, so Jesus, the Son, sent the Holy Spirit to comfort and help His people. All three Persons of what some refer to as the God-head, working together – different roles, same God.

**Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, Second Person of the Trinity.** Chronologically from a scriptural point of view, the Bible reveals God, then the Holy Spirit as we just read. To see how the Bible establishes Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity, we look ahead to the New Testament. The Apostle John eloquently laid out Jesus’ role in creation. He refers to Jesus as the **Word** of God.

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. **All things came into being through Him**, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* (John 1: 1-3)

Want more collaboration and validation? The consistency of the infallible Word of God is well displayed by the Apostle Paul’s comments on Jesus’ role in creation.

*“For by (Jesus) all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible...all things have been created through Him and for Him”.* Colossians 1:16

How does that tie Jesus to creation? Back to Genesis 1. This time we read v3.

*“Then God **said**, “Let there be...”*

This spoken word of creation, according to Apostles John and Paul, comes from the mouth of Jesus. That links all three Persons of the Trinity in the biblical account of Creation in the first three verses of the Bible.

Then we have Jesus' own testimony about Who He is and His relationship to God the Father. Jesus called Himself, "*the Son of God*". (John 10:36)

Two New Testament examples confirm the existence of the Trinity.

☞ The baptism of Jesus. (Matthew 3: 16-17)

*"After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and He saw the **Spirit of God** descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens (God speaking) said, "This is **My beloved Son**, in whom **I am** well-pleased."*

☞ Jesus command in the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:19)

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of **the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...**"*

### **Are there physical analogies that help us better understand such a difficult concept as the Trinity?**

God understands that Christians, regardless of maturity, wrestle with the concept of a Three in one Being, One God in three Persons. Hard to wrap our minds around that. Let me share two physical analogies some use, with the caveat no physical examples are adequate comparisons to our spiritual Triune God.

- The Sun. We can argue that the Sun presents three phases or "personalities" to us.
  - The Sun itself, i.e., the star that is a mass perpetual nuclear explosions represents God the Father.
  - The light from the Sun makes it visible, therefore we see it. Jesus, God the Son, is called the "Light of the world".
  - The Sun generates tremendous power. We use it to light entire cities and heat homes. God, the Holy Spirit, is the *dunamos*, Greek word for power for Christian living.
- H<sub>2</sub>O. This unique compound readily exists in all three phases of matter known to man:
  - Solid (ice)
  - Liquid (water)
  - Gas (steam).

While there are no direct analogies to the Persons of the Trinity, this example demonstrates the existence of three different phases of matter, yet they are the same compound.

My dear brothers, thank you for hanging in there with me through this discussion of a pivotal, albeit difficult, theological truth, whether introductory or review for you. Let's turn our attention to what I like best about the Bible: *practical application*. To find that, I always try to answer two questions:

1. *How does this knowledge/information help me draw closer to God?*
2. *How does it help me help someone else come closer to God?*

### **Three Persons, Three Roles, & Three Practical Applications.**

Biblical truths, regardless of their complexity, are not very helpful if we do not understand their practical application. That is one key reason Jesus came in the flesh as a man. He wanted to address the human race *Man to man*. Jesus often used practical explanations to help the disciples (and others) understand His message. If it was not theirs to understand, He said so up front.

Following are three simple examples and their applications written to help us better understand the Trinity. They help us and, more importantly, help us help others know that our great, infinite, Triune God wants a relationship with those created in *His own image...you and me*.

1. **CONCERN.** God the Father is **concerned** about you and me and what concerns us. I found David's words in the following verse a great help to grasp this concept.

*"The Lord will accomplish what concerns me..."* Psalm 138:8

As a boy, I knew my dad was concerned about me. My children know I am concerned about their well-being and every area of their lives. As I did, they draw peace from that belief. How much more then should we draw peace from the fact that God our Abba Father is concerned in every way for us?

To demonstrate concern, particularly to our families, the first thing we do is make sure they feel **welcome**, i.e., open access to bring their concerns to us. God wants to hear every concern we have. Nothing is too great or small. We hold no secrets from Him, so He will never be shocked nor should we be embarrassed. Bring it all and bring it on. Your concerned Father wants to hear from you.

Then we **listen** to their concerns. God will listen to our concerns more carefully, closely, and completely than any person could. He will hear you out, no interruptions. Finally, we **help**. God helps those who seek Him and ask anything according to His will. With infinite resources, our loving Father brings help to the hurting, healing to the broken, and hope to the hopeless.

2. **CARE.** God the Son, Jesus, **cares** for you and me. The best analogy to practically demonstrate the kind of care Jesus gives comes from His own words. Two verses connect the dots.

*"Greater love has no one than this, that **he lays down his life** for his friends.* John 15:13

*"...I (Jesus) came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd **lays down His life** for His sheep."* John 10:10-11

Doubtful that shepherds of Jesus' time laid down their lives just to save a sheep. They did their best to rescue or protect them, but not die. That makes Jesus' declaration that much stronger. He told the people He was their Shepherd and would lay down His life for them. Shortly thereafter, He did.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, **cares** greatly for us. We say with certainty, "He loves us to death!" The awesome Message of His care, expressed in unconditional love, sacrificial death, and the power of His resurrection, is the message of hope we must share with those who remain in the dark. You may have heard the saying, "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." As Christians we need to eat these words and digest them. Then, and only then, will people believe **Jesus cares**.

3. **COMFORT.** God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the holy Trinity, **comforts** believers. Jesus spent a lot of time giving His disciples advance notice of what was to come, better said, *Who* was to come.

*"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **Comforter**, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth...And when He comes He will **convict** the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...He will **guide** you into all the truth...He will glorify Me."* (John 14: 16,17a; 16: 8, 13, 14a)

Jesus knew His disciples would need comfort and reassurance after His death. So after His resurrection, He appeared to them many times and hung out on earth again for forty days. After His ascension, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell believers. He **comforts, convicts, guides**, and gives **power** to all who are in Christ. He is with us in and through **all** things. Let that truth comfort you.

My dear brothers, I hope this lengthy lesson on a difficult subject makes all Three Persons of this mysterious Trinity more real and personal for you. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Three in One, "love us to death" and demonstrate it in many ways. I briefly shared only three. Let His concern, care, and comfort encourage you to begin living anew or afresh with all the blessings He has for us this year.

*Walter*