

Getting Our Arms Around the Trinity

If there is one thing we know clearly from Scripture it is that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6). But the other thing we know clearly from Scripture is that Jesus is God (John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5 NIV). And for that matter, the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3,4). So what do we do with these facts?

One thing we know is that we're dealing with a God who is beyond our ability to fathom. But He has given us a revelation of Himself that enables us to stay within the boundaries of truth about who He is and avoid false thinking about Him:

- God is one in essence. By this we mean that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each share the one and same essence or nature of deity (infinite power, eternal existence, all knowledge, etc.). The divine essence is not split up somehow between them.
- God is three in person. Each person of the godhead is a unique and separate individual who can relate in love to the other, who can think his own thoughts and yet remain at one with the others in terms of purpose and character.
- Each person has a different function. The Father is the head of the Trinity, but not because He is superior to the others (they share the same undivided essence, right?). The Son is the one who took on human nature in addition to the divine nature (or essence) in order to die for our sins. The Holy Spirit is the one who comes to live in us to enable us to become more like Christ.

Thus we do not believe that God is three Gods with three separate divine essences. We do not believe that God is one person who plays three different roles (Father, Son and Spirit). We do not believe that the Son is a creation, albeit the highest creation of God, but rather we believe that He is fully God.

Each person of the Trinity is worthy of the same honor and praise. Neither is jealous of the other. Each loves the other with perfect love. The Son is bringing all of earth under His dominion in order to give the kingdom finally to the Father that He might be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The Spirit bears witness to the Son and brings glory to Him (John 15:26; 16:14). The Father says, "This is my beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17).

This is the example of perfect teamwork as each person of the Godhead fulfilled His own role in accomplishing our salvation from sin. The Father planned our redemption, the Son was our sacrifice, and the Spirit makes it real in our lives. Neither had His own agenda but yielded to the purpose of the Father. All hail the Godhead, three in one!

Randall Johnson

Love and the Trinity

How would you demonstrate that your love is perfect? If you're all by yourself it is pretty hard to prove that you have love. But if you are in relationship with someone, experiencing the rough and tumble of personal interaction, facing each other day after day, you have a case for saying your love is real based on how you interact with them.

But isn't there another test required to give evidence of your love? What if someone else is entered into the relationship equation? How does your love fare if there is "competition"? Can you share the love you have had with one other in a triad of relationship?

The Bible says, "God is love," (1 John 4:8,16). Before anything existed, God was experiencing and demonstrating love at the deepest level. Each member of the Trinity was showing love to the other perfectly, without competition, jealousy, or selfishness of any kind. He could not have proven that He is love without a triad of relationship. To be love, God has to be triune.

The Trinity is the model of how relationship should go in our lives. It is the basis of family love, because God has lived as a family for all eternity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They trust one another enough to give of themselves totally, they take delight in each one's love for the other, they demonstrate respect for each one's character and function, they cooperate at the most difficult levels, and they have allegiance to and gratitude for the love each one has for the other.

How are you doing in this respect? How are you patterning your relationships after the Trinity? God delights to see His love imitated (Ephesians 5:1,2). If you are dating, is your goal to maintain the relationship at all costs, or is it to help the other find out if you or someone else is the best for them? If you're a parent, is your goal to lavish all your attention on one of your kids, or is it to help the whole family have a balanced relationship of love and responsibility. As a church member, are you here to see what you can get for yourself, or do you consider the interests and needs of others as more important than your own (Philippians 2:3,4)?

Randall Johnson

Being Special in the Trinity

Are you satisfied to look the same, act the same, or think the same as everyone else at Central Church? Of course not! Are you just being selfish, then, unwilling to join your brothers and sisters in unity? Of course not! But don't you also want to belong to your family at Central and share in enough of the same things that you could be identified as a member of this body? Of course you do! What's going on?

Because we are made in God's image, and God is a Trinity - one God, three persons - we also feel two compelling desires within us. We desire to be a part of a community where we are loved and cared for, where we feel that we have much in common, where we are willing to set aside personal interests in order to accomplish the purpose of the community. But we also desire to be seen as individuals who are special and unique, not just a number on the roll.

As sinners who no longer can keep life between the rails, we are often jumping the track in this area of our lives. The tension between community and individuality often becomes the tension between conformity and rebellion. But the model of the Trinity teaches us to value both our individual self-expression (You like cowboy boots, I like sandals) and our joy in community (We both follow the leadership of our elders, or sit in the same Sunday school class, or join the same small group).

It is our allegiance to the Triune God that enables us to celebrate both the individual and the community. Are you

making the individuals in your group feel special? Are you sacrificing for the sake of the group when necessary? We need individual differences (spiritual gifts, temperaments) and we need togetherness. Ephesians 4:3-16.

Perhaps this is nowhere more needed than in a family. Do you celebrate your spouse's and children's unique differences? Do you allow each other to be unique and yet one family? Does each member to some extent put aside their individuality for the sake of being a family? Is your family modeling the Trinity?

Randall Johnson

How the Trinity Determines Our Purpose

Before we existed, was God lonely and needing someone with whom to fellowship? Of course not! Because He has always existed as a trinity of persons who share the one, undivided essence of deity, the Godhead has forever been in fellowship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What this tells us is that the decision to create was not out of need for others, but out of a desire to share His love with others. The angels were created for that reason, and so was the human race. Relationship is the essence of existence. When God made us He made us in His image so that we could have relationship with Him and each other.

When the Bible says, “God is love,” (1 John 4:8,16) it is because relationship is the very purpose for which we were created and love is its greatest currency. When Jesus wanted the disciples to know what it was they could do to convince the world that He was the Messiah, He said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Love doesn't just make the world go round, it makes the universe go round! We were made to reflect the love of God to others. When Paul wants to describe the life worthy of the calling we have received as Christians in Ephesians 4-6, it all comes out in terms of love for one another: “speaking the truth in love” (4:15), “builds itself up in love” (4:16), “live a life of love” (5:2), “love your wives” (5:25), “Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (6:24).

If loving relationship is not the focus of your life, whether that is seen in the way you care for your immediate family or the larger family of the world, you are not reflecting the Trinity. You were meant to be a love factory, a love machine in the holiest sense of those words. Being made in the image of the Holy Trinity means your purpose in life is to mimic them by loving as they love, by making relationships the priority over tasks, accomplishments, success, money, and all the other things people vie for.

Randall Johnson

The Trinity and Other Religions

There is no other view of God like that of Christianity! The concept of God as a triune being, the Trinity, has been a source of stumbling for many.

Islam, which was created about 600 years after Christ, was formed as a rebuttal to the Trinity. Allah is one person only and is not a begetter of any (Jesus, according to Scripture, is God's only begotten Son, John 3:16). In Muhammad's scheme, Jesus is a major prophet of Allah, but He is not God (and is, for that matter, somewhat inferior to Muhammad, the final prophet of Allah).

There is no singular representative of Hinduism's view of God. Some Hindus believe that there is one personal God who reveals Himself through a number, a big number, of versions of Himself (Vishnu, Krishna and Shiva being three main ones). Others believe God is an "it," an underlying force that unifies the universe, but somehow beyond personality.

Even so-called Christian movements have gotten this wrong. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is the highest created being of God, but not God. Mormons believe that the Father was once a man and became God, as did Jesus, and as we may. Unitarians also believe that Jesus is not God, that the Godhead is only one person. The Jesus Only or Oneness movement believes there is one person in the Godhead who represents Himself in three roles, thus only appearing to be three separate personalities. This makes each of these movements worthy of

the label "heretics," meaning outside the pale of orthodox Christianity and thus not truly Christian.

As we will see, however, in the next several devotions on the Trinity, this is the only view of God that makes sense of our universe and makes sense out of us. This view of God was only possible by His revelation to us, especially in the person of the Lord Jesus Himself. The Biblical view of God as Trinity is a keystone of defending the truth of Christianity in the market place of religions.

Randall Johnson

The Trinity and the One and the Many

The history of the Medal of Honor is the history of men and women who have acted bravely on the belief that the need of the many outweighed the need of the one. They sacrificed themselves to save the lives of their fellow soldiers.

However, our Constitution also acknowledges the importance of the one when it protects individual liberties and makes it possible for someone to maintain his or her individuality even if it seems contradictory to our national values.

In the Church we are taught to restore someone “caught in a sin” (Galatians 6:1) but also to watch ourselves or we might also be tempted. And if such who sin continue in their disobedience we should take note that “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (1 Corinthians 5:6) and “get rid of the old yeast” (v.7).

We see a constant interplay between the individual and the community. Which is more important? If we regard the Trinity as our model we must argue that both are equally important. God is one God, but three persons. Each individual, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is vitally important, but they are also a community that must be valued as a community.

If one of our own church members is in disagreement with a direction we are going, we cannot dismiss him and exclude him as if he doesn't matter. We must seek to examine ourselves and make sure that we have not missed something important

and, if necessary, change. But if the community is threatened, it's unity disturbed, we must strive to keep the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). One member cannot determine the direction of the church by his concerns if they go contrary to the way the Lord is leading.

We need the wisdom and example of the Trinity to know how to make decisions that affect both individuals and the community. We must imitate the model of the Trinity. This means careful listening to all viewpoints, careful weighing of everyone's needs, but finally, it also means implementation of what will bring the most benefit to the body.

Randall Johnson