

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 3

Scripture: 1st Corinthians 2

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The Triune God

1st Corinthians 2 (ESV) — **1** And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4** and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. **6** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **7** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9** But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— **10** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. **14** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. **15** The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. **16** “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Introduction Here are some crazy ideas about God:

- He is a black woman. Or at least He can turn into one when He wants to.
- God hates people and unless they do *precisely* what He tells them to do, when He tells them, He will cook them and eat them for breakfast. This is the general view (if not elegantly put), of the world’s fastest growing religion.
- God appeared to a fifteen-year old teenager in Manchester, New York in 1820 through (a previously unheard of) angel named “Maroni”, and gave him some special glasses with which to read some secret golden tablets—the view of what is expected to become some 265 million adherents by 2080.¹

Last week I suggested to you that on one level—how others may take us—it is, or at least *seems* preposterous the thing that we claim, that as Bible-believing

¹ <http://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/mormons-are-fastest-growing-religion>

Christians: that we know God; first, that He is knowable, and second that even if knowable we turn around and say that He is *independent* of this universe and utterly “OTHER”, and that we can even have a relationship with Him, as a personal God. That is preposterous, some around us would think. I am not so long in the faith that I have forgotten what it sounds like to listen to Christians talk about God... We are asking people to take in, consider, believe and embrace an awesome and sometimes incomprehensible God!

We're not going to let up today!

I have given you a chart of the attributes of God and today I am going to assert that God is absolutely unique in His nature. There is only one of Him. Now, monotheism maybe has fallen out of vogue but I would suggest to you that God is in no way intimidated by that. There's only one of Him, and He is completely and permanently cool with that.

He doesn't need a referendum to approve it.

He doesn't need the U.N. to agree.

He is in no need of Bruce Springsteen, Bono, Hilary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, Queen Elizabeth, Stephen Hawking, Vladimir Putin, Paul McCartney, Kim Jong-Un, Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Al Franken, Li Keqiang, Bill Gates, Dartmouth Schools, the State House or anyone else to weigh in on whether the God of the Universe can exist or not, as He is.

But we are also going to assert that He is the Three-Person-ed God. He is one God, or as Christians have asserted for oh, seventeen centuries or so, OF one essence. However, He exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Now here is a “preaching point”: In your head when you hear this assertion—the Three-Person-ed Single God, do you hear yourself saying, “**DUH**”?

Christians spent the first four centuries of the new era hammering this out. It is laid down in the earliest creeds of the church. **The Apostles' Creed** (perhaps as early as 180 AD): I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholick Church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. **The Nicene Creed** (325 AD) refined it a little more: We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God,] Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made,

being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.

If you were raised in this country or in almost any place in the Western hemisphere, it is a thing we take for granted, and we judge every group which calls itself “Christian” by this criteria. If the group does NOT ascribe to the idea of a “triune” God we are so bold as to consign it to the “Non-Christian” category. They may be fine people. They may be moral and nice and upright people. They may talk nicely. They may have good family lives. They may be honest in business and make effective community servants. But they are not Christian if they do not hold to the idea of a triune God.

Now, here is a thing we must admit. It is no problem to admit it but we need to honestly acknowledge that the words “triune” or “trinity” are not in the Bible. There is no passage where Moses or David or a prophet or Jesus or an apostle say, “So, God is the Trinity.” You can look, but you will look in vain. I am reading in a relatively new Catholic Systematic Theology that I just bought and I went to the section on the Trinity. That author says, “there is no Bible verse which says God is the Trinity.” But the dude also notes, as I think we say too that the Bible is FULL of the teaching of the Trinity. It is almost as if Peter and James and John and Paul just knew it—as did Jesus. None of them felt the need to say it plainly because to them it was obvious. Take our passage in the reading today, 1st Corinthians 2.

1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4** and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. **6** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **7** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9** But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— **10** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. **14** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. **15** The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. **16** “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Matthew (3:13-17) gives us this account of the baptism of Jesus: ***Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*** Who is present at this baptism? Jesus, the Spirit of God and someone who has a son and is in heaven. Who might that be? We take it to be the Father. (Later Peter authenticated this report when he wrote in 2nd Peter 1:17 & 18, ***For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.***)

It is also Matthew who recorded that Jesus’ last words to the disciples, before He ascended, were ***And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:18-20). Did you notice in whose name they were to go make new followers? It wasn’t just in His (Jesus’) name—they were to baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Three names. Three persons.

The church wrestled with how to really put this all together and came up with the best approximation of how to capture Who God Is. One God, in essence, three persons, eternally co-existent. Classic Protestants, Catholics and Eastern Orthodox all agree and are comfortable with this the-best-we-can-do assertion. Quite a few reject it. The Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Jesus-Only people, and so forth. Liberals waffled on any certainty of this and Unitarians could plainly care less.

Why does this matter to us? There are four reasons.

1. First, this all matters to us **BECAUSE IT IS**. It is, because it is. God has *revealed Himself* in this way. We didn’t just cook up all this theory. He is not a God who plays hide-and-seek with His creation. He has revealed Himself and therefore people should take note and ask, “What has He revealed?” People often want to go beyond what He has revealed and speculate. That is never a good idea. It will be plenty for you and I to study

what He HAS revealed. The Triune God, in all the wonder of Who He is—yes it is traditional, too; yes, it is what the Catholic and Episcopal and Lutheran and Greek Orthodox churches all are supposed to believe too—He is enough to study for the rest of my and your lives.

2. Each person of the godhead (this is the phrase we use) exercises their **OWN UNIQUE ROLE** in my redemption and in that of any and every person who has ever come to believe in Christ. The Father ordained it. The Son acquired and won it. The Spirit sealed it and affirmed it by coming to dwell IN our lives as redeemed people. Each of the persons of the godhead functions in His own role in the winning of people into the body of Christ which is the bride of Christ.
3. The wonder of **COLLABORATION** between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We have said that God is personal and here is an expression of personality: collaboration. The Son works with His Father as with a Father. He will never grow OUT of being the Son. He is eternally the Son of God. And in eternity past someplace the Father and the Son sat down and figured out a plan and made an agreement to rescue people from themselves and from the devil. They collaborated. The Spirit collaborated with the Father and the Son and although it took a couple of centuries for the Church to work this out (as near as they could) it was clear at least that the Spirit *proceeds* (they put that word to it) from BOTH the Father and the Son. Isn't that cool? And He, the Spirit, collaborates with both the Father and the Son.
4. Fourth it matters because there is an *element of mystery* within what we say—and we find that not all people agree with it. It always wakes me out of my half-asleep state to realize that if I say, “Idea A is true” and someone goes, “No it isn't” now we have an interesting discussion coming. And we have to prepare ourselves with the question, “What if people disagree with me about the Trinity?” I have a simple answer to that. So be it. Get ready for it because there are some very smart and nice people who will not accept this assertion that we make. And it might hurt your feelings to be in any disagreement with smart and nice people, especially if they are relatives or people you really respect. Again I say, so be it. We can be polite and kind and compassionate always. But when the day ends,

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholick Church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Holy, holy, holy
All the saints adore Thee
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea
Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee
Which wert and art and evermore shalt be