
WHAT IS THE TRINITY?



STUDENT'S EDITION

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INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS STUDY

TO BEGIN, we would like to thank you, the students, congregants, church leaders, elders, pastors, and churches for supporting and using *What Is the Trinity?* We hope it enriches your Christian life, challenges your hearts, and builds up your faith to the glory of God.

This study was designed with several things in mind.

First, we designed this study to advance the gospel.

According to the Pew Research Center, theists, agnostics, Jews, and Mormons score higher in religious knowledge than Protestants, outperforming them on questions about the core teachings and history of Christianity. Almost 60 percent of our youth leave their churches as young adults, with many of them joining the growing numbers of the so-called “nones”: those who profess no adherence to any faith whatsoever.¹

Despite this unsettling news, the core message of Christianity, the gospel, is still capable of renewing the church. Rather than worry or act out of fear and self-preservation, we believe that the best hope for Christians, the Church, and the people who feel the pressures to abandon the faith, is the historic Christian faith, the gospel announcement of what God has done through Jesus Christ for the world.

Second, we designed this study to speak to honest questions.

Many in our Evangelical, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches have honest questions about faith and life that they may even be afraid to ask. Thus, we have sought to shape the material in this study to be of use to the concerns of long-time, committed Christians, new Christians, Christians with wavering faith, and skeptics alike.

We want this study to challenge skeptics and the growing numbers of people leaving the church with answers of substance and beauty, answers that give hope to the hopeless. We designed this study to build the faith of Christians who have doubts and to give new Christians a firm grasp of the Christian faith. And we want to renew the faith of long-time committed Christians and equip them to better share the faith with others.

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/>.

Third, we designed this study with an eye toward simplicity and a variety of settings.

We have thought of Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, informal gatherings among friends, and even individuals who want to learn more about the Christian faith. Thus, this study is arranged in a series of short lessons each that could be done within an hour a week, with questions for personal reflection and group discussion so that Christians can come together to share insights, ask questions, pray for their churches and cities, and find hope to share what are learning with friends and family.

The best way to do this study is to plan to meet once a week having read the lesson and answered the questions on your own first. There are two types of questions. Questions for reflection are personal and not something you should feel obligated to share with everyone. Questions for discussion are best discussed in a group where everyone can share their thoughts and questions. After each question, space has been provided for you to answer, but some people prefer to write their answers in a journal or note book, that is fine too!

Fourth, we designed this study to engage the drama of Scripture, teach the doctrine of historic Christianity, move to doxology, and enable healthy discipleship.

It was really important that we handled doctrine in a way that shows how it naturally arises out of the Bible's narrative of Jesus Christ and his saving work. It was also really important that we should both how this doctrine inspires our worship and leads to life.

In each lesson, there is a section to read followed by a set of questions for reflection and questions for discussion. We have designed the questions for reflection and discussion with a practical emphasis to force you to engage the material in a prayerful way that should inspire worship and lead to a fuller understanding of how to live as a disciple of Christ. The questions for reflection have personal emphasis while the discussion questions are oriented toward groups.

For Christians who want to get a good foundation in the basics, this study is a complete, self-contained study on the Trinity. For Christians who want to go deeper, we recommend reading Michael Horton's book *Core Christianity: Finding yourself in God's Story*.

Before you begin the first lesson, watch this video where Michael Horton gives an overview of what you can expect in this study: <https://vimeo.com/196509751/6712d8875e>.

LESSON 1: HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE TRINITY

READ

The doctrine of the Trinity arose from the drama of redemption over time. The first Christians were faced with the fact that God became flesh in history. After Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christians were able to return to the Old Testament and understand it better in light of these extraordinary events.

In this lesson, we will consider what the Bible teaches about the Trinity.

First, the Bible tells us that God is one.

Though some religions teach belief in, and worship of, many gods (polytheism) or that everything is one with God (pantheism), adherents to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism believe that there is only one God. The Jews held strictly to the declaration of the *Shema*, which states, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). The belief and worship of one God is called *monotheism*. Yet Christianity differs from Judaism and Islam because Christianity believes that *God is one in essence and three in persons*.

With the addition of the New Testament to the Old Testament, Christianity gives us a fuller picture of God than what the Old Testament explicitly communicates. In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul expands on the *Shema*: "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Here the New Testament writer takes what is perhaps the most famous verse in the Old Testament (for Judaism) and shows us how Jesus is right there in the middle of it! The New Testament with the Old Testament reveals more about who God is than the Old Testament could alone.

Second, the Bible also tells us that God is three persons.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons acting in the story of redemption.

In Scripture, we find many places in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are revealed as three distinct persons acting in history.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, his cousin John the Baptist had been preaching that the kingdom of God was about to arrive. In preparation for that coming kingdom, John called for the people to turn from their rebellious lifestyle, turn to God, and submit to water baptism. Mark describes John the Baptist this way: "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). His message was tied to his actions. Baptism pictured the cleansing from sin that God had promised in the Old Testament.

As Jesus appeared for baptism, John recognized that Jesus was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. Of course, Jesus did not need to be baptized or be cleansed for his own sins because he never sinned. Instead, Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, because John's baptism was a commandment of God (Matt. 3:15).

As John baptized Jesus, the gospel writers record for us a scene in which all three persons of the Trinity were acting. Jesus was being baptized. The heavens were torn open. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, and the Father from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:13–17). In this passage, we see God identified as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now someone may try to reason away that Jesus is divine, but even in this passage Jesus' divine nature is taught when the Father refers to Jesus as his "beloved Son." For example, in John 5 when Jesus referred to God as his Father, verse 18 tells us, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So the Father's identification of Jesus as his beloved Son would have been a significant clue that Jesus is a divine Person.

Next the imagery of the Holy Spirit resting on Jesus at his baptism echoes Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit is present at creation, as well as Exodus 25:18–22 where God's Spirit is present between the wings of the cherubim in the temple. From the apostle Paul in Colossians, we learn that God created the world through Jesus Christ. This places each person at the site of the original creation. The conclusion we can draw from this is that each person is distinct yet involved in the creative work of God.

Because God is one, we distinguish the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as distinct persons. This leads us to distinctions according to what theologians have called personal properties. Consider these two points:

- Jesus is the eternal Son of God, a distinct person from the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:1-4, 14; 3:16; 1 John 1:3).
- The Holy Spirit is a distinct person who proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26; Acts 2:1-33).

To say that Jesus is the eternal Son of God is to acknowledge the traditional language that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. Here to be eternally begotten does not mean that the Son was created. To be eternally begotten means that the Son always existed as the Son distinct from the Father; it's part of the personal properties that distinguish the Father from the Son.

Further, that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son says something about the Holy Spirit as a distinct person. As God he is eternal, and as a distinct person of the Trinity, he eternally proceeds. This leads us to realize that these facts about the Son and the Holy Spirit teach us something very important about the Father revealed in the passages above: The Father is eternal, but neither is begotten nor does he proceed. Of course, we haven't defined what it means to be begotten or proceed. That is a mystery.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God, equal in power and glory. At the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20), Jesus told his disciples to meet him on a mountain. As the disciples ascended the mountain and approached Jesus, they began to worship him. As their Lord and Savior, Jesus told them to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The disciples were to baptize Christ's followers into *one name*, the name that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share. In the Bible, we find that each person of the Trinity receives worship, participates in our prayer life, and displays their power and glory as equals. (See for example, John 1:1; John 17:5; John 10:30; Heb. 1:8-9; Acts 5:3-4; Rom 9:5; Col 2:9.)

In the lessons that follow, we will explore how the church came to understand the Trinity, how to recognize the Trinity in the Bible, and how the church worships the Trinity. It is our hope that such an exploration will move you to know God better and to worship him with a greater sense of wonder.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Does God’s mysteriousness bring you comfort or unsettle you?

2. What was the most difficult part of this study for you?

3. What Scripture passages did you find to be the most compelling revelation of the Trinity?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it vital that we affirm Jesus and the Holy Spirit are both equally God with the Father?

2. How does learning about the Trinity help you better appreciate the greatness of God?

3. What are some specific Bible passages that emphasize God's oneness?

LESSON 2: THE TRINITY IN HISTORY

READ

In the 5th century, St. Augustine wrote concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, “In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.” (*De Trinitate* I.III.5). Augustine was writing on the heels of many Trinitarian disputes, and he understood that the question of *who God is* was of fundamental importance to the Christian life. Throughout the history of the church, Christians have grappled with God’s revelation of himself.

Early on, the infant church was learning to speak and struggled to find the proper words to describe what she saw in Scripture. It was clear that God was one (Deut. 6:4), but it was also clear that, in some way, this one God was three. The Father is called God (1 Cor. 8:6), the Son is called God (John 1:1), and the Holy Spirit is called God (Acts. 5:4). The early Latin- and Greek-speaking Christians grasped for the proper language to describe this biblical mystery. The journey towards articulating that God is one in essence, and three Persons, was not without its difficulties. From very early on, there were disagreements that helped to forge what came to be the theology of the Nicene Creed, which is still confessed by Christians throughout the world today.

Language Barriers

Part of the difficulty in coming to a consensus on how to articulate a biblical doctrine of the Trinity was rooted in the language barrier between the Eastern and Western Christians. In the East, the church spoke Greek, whereas in the West, Christians spoke Latin. The language barrier added to some of the terminological tension, but both regions were essentially working toward saying the same thing. In fact, Augustine wrote concerning the Greek Christians, “For they say three substances, one essence, in the same way as we say three persons, one essence or substance... These terms sprang from the necessity of speaking, when copious reasoning was required against the devices and errors of the heretics.” (*De Trinitate* VII.IV.8-9)

Some people think that the doctrine of the Trinity was a 4th century innovation, and that it wasn’t really supported prior to the council of Nicea (325 A.D.). The reality is, leading up to

the council of Nicea, *everyone had some sort of doctrine of the Trinity*. Khaled Anatolios writes that at the threshold of Nicea:

All parties and individuals accepted the Trinity as the object of Christian faith and worship. There were different understandings of the relations between the three... but references to Father, Son, and Spirit were inscribed into the grammar of Christian faith through liturgical formulae, creeds, and, of course, the rite of baptism, so that all took for granted that Christian faith and worship was oriented to Father, Son, and Spirit. (*Retrieving Nicea*, 36)

In other words, the church had universally embraced the biblical language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). The real question was this: Were these three equal in power and glory, and how did they relate?

The church leaders prior to Nicea—the ante-Nicene Fathers—give us clues as to what the church believed in the years after the apostles died. Writing to a town not far from Ephesus (the city Paul wrote to in the New Testament), Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Magnesians saying, “Jesus Christ was with the Father from eternity and appeared at the end of the world.” (*Letter to the Magnesians*, 6) This type of language is really important, because Ignatius was writing around the first century and saying that Jesus was *eternally* with the Father!

Other early Christian leaders, like Irenaeus, taught something similar, “I have largely demonstrated that the Word, namely the Son, was always with the Father; and that Wisdom also, which is the Spirit, was present with Him, anterior to all creation.” (*Against Heresies* 4.20.3) Later, some people in the church would dispute that Jesus was eternally with the Father, like the Arians.

Two Errors: Subordinationism and Modalism

The Arians were a group who followed a presbyter in Egypt named Arius. Arius lived in the 3rd century, and he did not believe that Jesus was eternal. Arius taught what is commonly called *Subordinationism* or *Arianism*. In his view, Jesus was essentially subordinate to the Father, and although Jesus was viewed as divine in some sense, he ultimately wasn’t co-equal with the Father. Instead, Arius taught that there was a time when the Son didn’t exist, and that he was created by the One God to be a mediator between God and creation.

Arius’ views were condemned at the first council of Nicea in 325 A.D., and a creed was enacted that directly addressed Arius’ views and declared them wrong. In the year 381, this creed—called the Nicene Creed—was expanded at the council of Constantinople, and the original condemnation of Arius was replaced by a longer section including statements about

the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the church. Arius' views remained rejected and the creed clearly stated that Jesus was of the same substance or essence of the Father.

Arianism wasn't the only problem the early church ran into, though. There was another Trinitarian conflict surrounding an obscure figure named Sabellius of Rome. Sabellius is associated with a heresy known as *Modalism*. Modalism taught that Jesus was equal to the Father, but it failed to *distinguish him from the Father!* In Modalism, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each only a different mode of the one God. This means that the Father *is* the Son, and that the Son *is* the Holy Spirit. The difference only depends on which mode the one God chooses to put forward! Arianism and Modalism give us a helpful sense of some of the early battles that were fought surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity. The church sought to recognize the equality of the Son to the Father (contrary to Arianism), but it also sought to distinguish him from the Father (contrary to Modalism). We will explore these heresies further in the next lesson.

Clarifying the Mystery

As the church matured, it learned to more clearly uphold the teaching of Scripture. As early as the 3rd century, Christians like Tertullian of Carthage were using the word "Trinity," and distinguishing between there being one essence or substance in the Godhead, and three distinct persons (*Against Praxeas*, 3).

In the 4th century the theologians known as the Cappadocian Fathers helped to further articulate the mystery of the Trinity. These men, Gregory of Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea taught that we could not know God's essence, but that we could reflect on how God revealed himself through his great works of creation and salvation (see for example, *Gregory of Nazianzens 2nd Theological Oration on God*, 17). They defended the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while also maintaining their distinctness as Persons. Gregory of Nyssa wrote about the ineffable mystery of the Trinity,

...It is observed to have distinctions and is yet grasped as a unity; it admits distinction of Persons, and yet is not divided in underlying essence. For the Person of the Spirit is one thing, that of the Word another; and different yet is the Person of Him whose Word and Spirit they are. But when once these distinctions are grasped, the unity of the nature still does not admit of division. (*Address on Religious Instruction*, 3)

The doctrine of the Trinity is thoroughly biblical, but the inadequacies of human language made the pathway to articulating the doctrine difficult. In the end, what you had were finite men attempting to grasp the revelation of the indescribable God! As the church looked at Scripture, wrestled through language barriers, and responded to those who contradicted the

biblical text, they settled on the language used by Christians throughout the world today: we worship One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three distinct Persons who are One in essence and undivided!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you agree with Augustine that *who God is* is of fundamental importance for your faith?

2. How does studying early church history help you understand the Trinity today?

3. If you had to explain the Trinity to a friend, how would you explain it? How would you avoid falling into one of the two heresies discussed in this lesson?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In your own words, what are the differences between the two Trinitarian views subordinationism and modalism? Why do they not accurately explain the revelation of the Trinity found in the Bible? How might it be easy to fall into one of these two errors when trying to explain the Trinity to someone?

2. Why is defending the unity of the three persons vital for your faith?

3. How have the early church's councils and corresponding creeds helped the church through the generations?

LESSON 3: HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE TRINITY

READ

Because of the challenges of heresy and error, often Christians are intimidated to even talk about the Trinity. In this lesson, we want to give you some direction so that you might better know God as the Holy Trinity and better know what to say when sharing this glorious truth with others.

The Trinity is a mystery.

The Trinity puts us face-to-face with a God that is beyond our understanding. Simply put, the Trinity is the Christian teaching that God is one in essence and three persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, but they are not three gods. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are the one God we hear about in the Bible.

The Trinity is a mystery, but it's not a contradiction. We can understand that God is one in essence and that God is three persons, even though we can't understand *how* God can be one in essence and three in persons at the same time. That is beyond us. The point of recognizing that the Trinity is a mystery is to guard against thinking beyond what the Bible reveals.

The heresies of modalism and subordinationism reduced God's incomprehensible nature to something more easily grasped. In the early church, Christians struggled to understand how God might be one and yet revealed as three distinct persons. In Lesson 2, you learned that some people, like the early theologian Origen (184–253 A.D.), attempted to say that Jesus was a lesser god than the Father. You also learned about a man named Arius (256–336 A.D.) who took it a step further. He fell into the error known as subordinationism, which argued that the Father alone is God while the Son was only a created being. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses embrace this same error.

Others (such as Sabellius in the third century) taught modalism, which says that God only appears in different forms or modes, like someone wearing different masks. Rather than accept that God is three persons, modalism insists that there is one God but that the three

persons are only different appearances of the one God. They are like masks that the one God wears to reveal more of his character. The problem with modalism is that it denies the full personhood of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It chooses God's unity over God's relations. It has no place for the personal attributes of the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

Rather than accept the oneness of God (the unity of the Trinity), subordinationism denies the full divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son and the Holy Spirit are treated as lesser gods or no gods at all. Subordinationism looks at the Son's willful submission to the Father in our salvation as a sign of being less divine. And often subordinationism even denies the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

These two errors were so serious that the church officially called these views "heresy." A heretic, therefore, is someone who holds to a position contrary to the core beliefs of the Christian faith, going against the clear teaching of Scripture reflected in the collective wisdom of the church. In 325 A.D. church leaders gathered together to formulate the Nicene Creed to better unify the church and clarify the teaching of Scripture. The Nicene Creed is a doctrinal statement that is the result of the first ecumenical (universal) church council. Contrary to the errors of their day, the creed affirms that the Son and the Spirit are of the same essence as the Father, but are each different persons.

As the Nicene Creed models for us, the solution to avoiding error is to hold the mystery of God's three in oneness. It's to accept that the one God is also three eternal persons equal in power and glory. It's to embrace the mystery of this and not try to force God to fit our understanding. It's to accept that no human analogy, illustration, or picture can communicate what it means for God to be three persons. This is what the early church did and what we must continue to do to stay faithful to biblical revelation.

The gospel story reveals the Trinity.

The Trinity is not an abstract doctrine for philosophers and theologians; the Trinity is the God who saves. When we take a simple gospel passage like John 3, we see that Jesus revealed his mission to Nicodemus, a Jewish leader who came one night to have a conversation about what Jesus had been preaching: the kingdom of God. Jesus told him that the only way to enter the kingdom of God is through a new birth, a birth of "water and the Spirit." And, as Jesus continued to elaborate, this birth is not gained through human achievement but is instead God's freedom to save. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (v 8).

Then Jesus got to the climax of his message. He said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (v 16). Here, as Jesus let Nicodemus in on what God was doing, Jesus spoke of God the Father, the Spirit, and spoke of himself as the Son. This core message—the Father sent the Son into the world to bring eternal life through the Spirit—unfolds throughout Christ’s ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Because the gospel story reveals the Trinity, any sharing of the gospel will involve talking about each of the persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You don’t have to worry about this. If you stick to the gospel story, you will discover that you can speak accurately about the Trinity.

Every Christian knows the Trinity.

In John 17:3, Jesus prayed: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” To be a Christian is to receive eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). As humans, we were created to know and love God. To know God as the Trinity brings us into an intimate knowledge of God.

The good news is that as a Christian—having trusted in Christ for your salvation—you are already immersed in the Trinity. You intimately know the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15). You have trusted in the Son. And you believe in God the Father who created the world. When you pray, you are actively engaging the Trinity. You can pray to the Father as a child because of the work of Christ that saved you, and you pray in the power of the Holy Spirit whom Christ has poured out for your salvation (Eph. 2:18, 22; 4:4–7). Our salvation is dependent on the Father, the Son, and the Spirit who draw us into a loving relationship with themselves.

If you keep these three points in mind—that the Trinity is a mystery, that the gospel story reveals the Trinity, and that every Christian knows the Trinity—God will keep you from error. As a Christian, you don’t have to worry that you will fall into error, you just have to continue in what you have already been taught and what you have already experienced.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Reflect on the mysteriousness of God. What does God’s mysteriousness tell you about yourself?

2. How does knowing more about the Trinity impact your prayer life?

3. What parts of this lesson were most helpful to you for explaining the Trinity to someone?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did the two errors in understanding the Trinity try to do to God?

2. What are some places in Scripture not mentioned in this lesson that reveal the Trinity?

3. Why is accepting the mystery of the Trinity important for talking about the Trinity?

LESSON 4 : WORSHIPPING THE TRINITY

READ

The Church is a worshiping community, a community reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ who has been set apart to give God thanks for his great salvation. As the church, Christians recall the great acts of redemption: that God showed himself faithful to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that God saved his people from Egypt and brought them into the promised land, that God remains faithful to his people even when they are not. This story of God's faithfulness comes into full view with the person of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). As Jesus lived and died to make satisfaction and full atonement for the sins of the world, God the Father was displaying his love for the world (John 3:16). As Jesus rose by the power of the Holy Spirit he took a place of kingly authority and powered out his Spirit to give gifts to men (Rom. 1:4; 8:11; Acts 2:32–36; Eph. 4:8, 11–14).

To tell the Christian story, to explain the great redemption of sinners, and to give an account of the history of Jesus Christ is to tell a story about the Trinity. It is this message, this gospel, that informs our worship. The church as a worshiping community is created, sustained, and formed by the gospel message and is, therefore, a community that worships the Trinity, in and with the Trinity. This is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, or—as the Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck said—“Our God is above us, before us, and within us” (*Reformed Dogmatics Volume 2*, 260). In this lesson, we are going to consider three ways the Trinity shapes our worship.

Salvation has a Trinitarian shape.

Fred Sanders in *The Deep Things of God* said, “The Gospel is that God is God for us, that he gives himself to be our salvation.... He does not give us something that makes us blessed, but he blesses us by giving us himself” (125). Ephesians 1:3–14 teaches this point.

In Ephesians 1:3–14, the apostle Paul records a wonderful doxology (expression of praise) to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for their shared work in salvation. Paul declares that the Father has predestined believers “for adoption as sons through Jesus

Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph. 1:5–6), and sealed them “with the promised Holy Spirit,” who is the guarantee of their inheritance (Eph.1:13–14).

The Father’s love moved him to send Jesus. Jesus’ love moved him to die in our place and send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s love moved him to draw us back into the Father’s love. From beginning to end, salvation is a work of the Trinity. The entire Christian life is characterized by the reality of the Trinity.

Our prayers flow along a Trinitarian path.

In *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer explains that prayer is a time to take what we know about God before God, to lead us to worship. The way we pray has practical significance:

How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God? The rule for doing this is simple but demanding. It is that we turn each truth that we learn *about* God into matter for meditation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise *to* God. (17)

Scripture teaches us to pray to the Father, in Jesus’ name, with the help of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 6:9; John 14:14, 27). Jesus’ name should give you confidence that the Father will hear your prayers. Jesus paid for your sins. Jesus proves that God loves you. Jesus suffered what you deserve so that you could become an adopted child of God (Gal. 4:4). The Holy Spirit gives you the strength to want to pray. And the Holy Spirit helps you, even when you don’t know what to ask (Rom. 8:26).

We worship each person of the Trinity.

In *Core Christianity: Finding Yourself in God’s Story*, Michael Horton explains that much of the church’s understanding of the Trinity comes from passages expressing the church’s worship:

Some of the most foundational passages for faith in the Trinity come from expressions of praise in the church’s worship. Confessing that God is “one God in three persons” arises naturally from the formulas we find in the New Testament, especially in the context of baptism, blessings, and benedictions. (50)

In Matthew 28:19 is a perfect example. As Jesus gave his apostles a commission to make disciples of all the nations, part of that commission was to baptize in the one name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here the name refers to the name of God, YHWH, and each person shares that name. But what is most significant is that baptism is an act of

worship. This means that long before Christians had worked out an articulate understanding of the Trinity reflected in the Nicene Creed, the church was already worshipping along Trinitarian lines.

Like the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:3–14 who records his praises to the Trinity for their work in salvation, Christians have continued to sing praises to the Trinity. One such song is the *Gloria Patri* (which means “Glory be to the Father”). This song has been sung by Christians since the fourth century and is still sung today in many churches. This hymn is a beautiful meditation on the blessed Trinity, the God who is one in essence and three in persons.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does understanding the role each person of the Trinity plays in your salvation important for your faith?

2. Meditate on what you’ve learned about God for a minute. What are some ways you can take what you have learned *about* God and bring it *before* God?

3. Pray or write a prayer that includes each person of the Trinity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it important that Christians be baptized in the name of the Trinity?

2. How does worship in your church reflect the Trinitarian shape of salvation?

3. What are some ways can you be more mindful of the Trinity as you worship God at church and throughout the week?
