

Friday Bible Study - Week Two

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Welcome. My name is Brian Hart, and we are in week two of Friday Bible study, where we are considering how Scripture informs our understanding of theology, which is the study of God, and doctrines, which are the various beliefs that we have about God.

We are today considering the question, who is God? And the answer to that question is one that's probably familiar to you. It is this, God is the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Today, I want to introduce you to this majestic doctrine. Just explain very briefly what it is. I want to explain to you why we believe it's true.

And then thirdly and lastly, I want to help you consider why believing this should affect your entire life. And so we'll look at that at the end. The goal today is not that you just have a little more understanding about the Trinity.

The goal is that you love the Trinity. So why don't we start with the word itself? What does the Trinity mean? You may already know this, but the Trinity, as a word anyway, is not in the Bible.

[1 : 0 7] It's not in Scripture. It is just the word that we have used for many centuries to describe a set of three ideas that is in the Bible, that Scripture makes clear.

So those three ideas are as follows. God is three persons. Each person is fully God. There is one God. Now, the combination of those three ideas creates a real paradox, meaning to read all three of those things and believe them all seems like there's a contradiction there.

And it's fair to ask, why do we have to believe what seems like a contradiction? I think a lot of people probably imagine that the way we get ideas like this is you've got theologians a long time ago sitting around in some dimly lit room, and they emerge with complicated ideas like this one.

Remember from last week that when we study who God is, we don't philosophize our way into imagining what he might be like. We carefully study Scripture much like a scientist, and we just observe what Scripture tells us.

And as it happens, Scripture tells us that all three of these things must be true. And so we accept the fact that as finite creatures, we're probably never going to fully understand the mystery of who God is, but we can at least appreciate that these three things are true.

[2 : 2 9] So let's look at the evidence in the Bible to see what it has to say about each one of these strands of Trinitarian thought.

So first, God is three persons. Now, we never get this idea fully explained in the Old Testament. This idea in particular is progressively revealed in Scripture.

But we can tell right away from the opening pages of the Bible in Genesis 1 that there is more to God than meets the eye. God says when he creates Adam and Eve, he says, Let us make man in our own image, which raises the question, Why is a plural pronoun being used there?

What's with the us language? And we have a reflection there at the very beginning that there is more than one person to who God is.

By the time we get to the New Testament, this idea is becoming very explicit. We see that God's not necessarily taking different forms. There are actually very distinct people who relate to each other in meaningful ways within God.

[3 : 36] John's gospel opens with these words. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Now, a few verses later, John will tell us that Jesus is the Word, which means we can read it this way.

In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. Jesus was in the beginning with God. So we see some distinction there at the beginning of John's gospel between the Father and the Son.

But neither the Father or the Son are the Holy Spirit either. There is distinction between those persons as well. In John 14, 26, Jesus says, But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

And so Jesus is saying there, again, the Holy Spirit is distinct from both Him and the Father. The Father will send Him. He's going to come in my name. And therefore, the Holy Spirit is not the Son, and He is not the Father.

And then, in addition to that, there's a whole lot of other passages that are very Trinitarian in nature. They emphasize the three different persons of God, which we don't have time to get into.

[4 : 45] A great one is the baptism of Jesus. You see Jesus getting baptized. The Father speaks from heaven. The Spirit descends in the form of a dove. And then, at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus famously says that we should make disciples of all nations, and we should baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So there's a lot of evidence in the New Testament for these three very distinct members of the Trinity. The second idea, though, is that each of these persons is fully God, which is to say that we don't believe that God the Father is God, and that God the Son and the Holy Spirit, that they are somehow, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit, that they're somehow less than God.

That they're, or maybe they're only half God, or something like that. All three persons are fully God. We already saw that Jesus, as the Son of God, we saw in John, the beginning of his Gospel, that He was God.

We also see in Colossians 2.9, Paul make the specific point that in Jesus, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Some people have believed that maybe Jesus, before He was born, was fully God, but as a man, He was just a man.

No, the fullness of God was in Jesus, even when He was in a body. The Holy Spirit we know is God. In Acts chapter 5, there's a story where two people are caught lying, and the Apostle Peter asks them, why have you lied to the Holy Spirit?

[6 : 11] And then a few verses later, he says, you have not lied to man, you have lied to God, because the lie to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. The Holy Spirit is God. And then the third strand of the Trinitarian thought is that there is actually one God.

And this is where it can really start to feel paradoxical. This is where it starts to feel confusing, because we don't believe that there are three gods. We believe there are three persons in one God.

Deuteronomy 6 says this, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your might.

Now, those words were written by Moses. And so you might think, well, that was a long time before Jesus. Moses just didn't know any better. He didn't know that when Jesus was going to come and the Holy Spirit was going to come later at Pentecost, well, then he might have said, well, the Lord is three.

You know, you might be tempted to think that. The fact of the matter is, though, Jesus himself quotes this verse in Mark chapter 12, and Jesus affirms it. Jesus doesn't say the Lord is two or the Lord is three.

[7 : 20] He affirms that God is one. In John 14, Philip asked Jesus, hey, show us the Father. Jesus says, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. Now, we can't say that about anybody else, but Jesus can.

I can't say if you've seen me, you've seen my wife, Kimberly. Jesus can say it about the Father because God is one. So it is not correct to say that there are three gods. What we do believe is that there are three persons in one God.

We have an image here to show you called the Shield of the Trinity. It's kind of an ancient image, which I think was made to help Christians understand some of these ideas.

And so that might be helpful for you. I think that when we are confronted with complicated ideas that really stretch the limits of our ability to understand things, the natural human tendency is to simplify them or to use metaphors and analogies, because metaphors and analogies can be very helpful in grasping difficult ideas.

I want to warn you, though, when it comes to the Trinity, any attempt to simplify it, and virtually any metaphor or analogy you use to understand it, will ultimately end up denying one of the three strands of the Trinitarian thought.

[8 : 31] And it's an interesting fact that over the years, most heresies or belief systems that the church has said are not true, not all of them, but most of them have gone wrong at some level around the Trinity, trying to make it more accessible and manageable.

There is a hilarious bit of satire, which is very helpful in explaining why we shouldn't use metaphors to understand the Trinity. You can Google it. It's called St. Patrick's Bad Analogies.

We have an image here, clearly a very serious piece of scholarship. It's only three to four minutes long, and I'd encourage you to watch it. It's helpful in explaining why when we talk about the Trinity, we should just use the language of the Bible and let that be it.

So, that said, I think that the greatest problem with the Trinity is not the fact that it is a paradox. It is the fact that for many people, it's only a paradox.

For many people, the Trinity is not something that causes them to rejoice. It's not beautiful. It does not capture their imagination. It does not make their hearts sing. And so, I want to take a minute and just talk about that.

[9 : 37] If someone were to ask you to pick one word to describe how God is or what he's like, I want you to think about what word you would use. There are a lot of different words you could use, and a lot of them are true.

But I want you to think specifically about what word would best capture the essence of who God is. I think a lot of people might say, well, God is a creator. And that is true. He is. We're probably in a week or two going to be looking at the significance of that.

But if we say that fundamentally who God is, is that he's a creator, the natural question becomes, well, what does that say about God before there was a creation? What was he then?

It would almost suggest that in some weird way, God needs us. And so, it's true that he's a creator, but maybe there's another way to think of God. I think a lot of people would point to God being a ruler or a judge or some kind of authority.

And that is true as well. He does rule. He is a judge. Scripture affirms those two things. But if that's primarily the way that we think about God, it raises some similar questions.

[10 : 41] What does that say about God before he had created anyone to rule? But also, and perhaps even more problematically, how are we meant to relate to such a God if that's who he is at his heart?

We just read from Deuteronomy, which says that we're supposed to love the Lord with our whole heart, with our whole being. And I don't know that you can ever do that for someone who only relates to you as a ruler.

If you get pulled over for speeding or you go to court because you broke the law, you can be forgiven. You can even be let off the hook. And if that happens, you might have a lot of gratitude. But will you ever love a traffic cop or a judge with your whole heart because they have forgiven you?

I don't think that you would. If we are going to love the Lord with our whole heart, we need to be able to see him in a different way. And I think there is a different way to fundamentally think about God as he has always been, even before creation was a thing.

Last week, we looked at a very powerful verse where Jesus describes himself, which we'll turn to again. John 14, verse 6. Jesus said, I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

[11 : 49] Well, the way to what? He says, no one comes to the Father except through me. Jesus is the way to God. And the word that Jesus used with his disciples again and again and again was Father.

It's how he taught him to pray. He said, when you talk to God, you could say, our king, our ruler, our creator. All of those things would be true. But he taught them to say, our father. It's exactly who God is.

It expresses a relationship at the center of the trinity that has always been. Now, it is true that once there's a creation, we know God is a creator.

And once he had subjects to rule, it means that he is the ruler. But there has never been a time from eternity past that God has not been a father loving his son.

And so that means everything God does, he does with the heart of a father. God creates as a father with the light. He rules as a father by giving lavish gifts of grace that are totally undeserved.

[12 : 51] Everything he does is rooted in love. And so this really does set him apart from gods of every other religion. No other religion teaches people to relate to God in this way. Mike Reeves, in his book, *Delighting in the Trinity*, says this, A father is a person who gives life, who begets children.

Now that insight is like a stick of dynamite in all our thoughts about God. For if before all things God was eternally a father, then this God is an inherently outgoing, life-giving God.

He did not give life for the first time when he decided to create. From eternity, he has been life-giving. So with that in mind, consider what we're told about God in 1 John 4.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. It's who he is. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

The reason that God is love is because of the Trinity, because that's what he's always been doing. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him.

[13 : 59] Now, I don't want you to miss what is being said there at the end. John's saying that the reason that the father sent the son was to demonstrate his love to us.

So when we consider the question, why did Jesus come? We can say, well, he came to die for our sins. Absolutely. But we can also say, he came so that we would know what kind of father we have. Like Mike Reeves said, the Trinity is like a stick of dynamite.

It changes the way you think about everything. I am just going to very briefly give you two areas that the doctrine of the Trinity can practically affect your life. And how if we didn't have it, we would, as Christians, have to approach things very differently.

First, without the Trinity, relationships would be very dysfunctional. If the Trinity were not true, if God was only one, then that would mean that the only way that God would have ever related to anything was from a position of superiority.

And it would be from a position of power coming over those who are weaker. And so the only thing we would be able to learn from God about how we're supposed to relate to people would look like that.

[15 : 05] The powerful kind of coming over the weak. And again, most civilizations have believed in religions that have taught that, and they have produced and embraced for almost all of human history that type of relational dynamic.

The strong dominate the weak. But in the Trinity, God shows us something else entirely. God actually, in himself, gives us a template for how we are to live. If there was only one God, or if Jesus was less God than the Father, then we could ask the question, well, why shouldn't a husband treat his wife as a lesser being if he appears stronger than her?

That is, again, precisely what men have done for thousands of years. But the Bible tells us in more than one place, by the way, that men are supposed to relate to their wives as God the Father relates to the Son.

And so that means that in a marriage relationship, there should only be a pouring out of love, a mutualness, a showing of honor, a timeless delighting in one another.

Now, it's true that Christians have sometimes got this wrong, but the Trinitarian message should always confront chauvinism, sexism, racism.

[16 : 18] It should always promote harmony in relationships. And it's one of the reasons why Christianity found such support from women in its early days because it was the first religion to ever say such things, to ever elevate women to have the same kind of equality as men before the Lord.

I don't have time to prove it here, but it's been convincingly argued from Christians and non-Christians alike that all of our democratic ideals of liberty and justice and love are traced back to Christianity.

And from there, they can be traced back to the center of Christianity, which is the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity teaches us that injustice and even loneliness, those kind of relational dysfunctions, they are not eternal.

Harmonious and loving relationships and friendship are eternal. Secondly, and briefly, if there is no Trinity, then that means there is no gospel.

If Jesus was not God, then we would not have our hope in him. We would not have our hope in the cross or the resurrection. The good news of the gospel hangs entirely on the fact that Jesus is God sent to die by God the Father and raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[17 : 37] So there you have it. A short, concise introduction to this important doctrine, why we believe it, and how I think it practically affects, should affect the way that you live your life.

In closing, two points of practical application going from here. I referenced a book called The Lighting in the Trinity. And I can't commend this book to you enough.

It is my favorite book on God that I've ever read. And so if you're intrigued by thinking about the Trinity in these kind of terms, where actually it's not just a heady problem, but the Trinity is something that causes your heart to rejoice.

If you want to know more about that, this is a fantastic book, very accessible. And then secondly, we talked last week about how theology should not just be about info, it should be about worship.

And so I want to encourage you now to take a few minutes, maybe just five minutes, and consider the Lord, pray to him, perhaps journal or turn on a song. I want to encourage you, don't let the paradox of the Trinity make your head hurt.

[18 : 42] It is meant to make your heart sing. Anyways, that's all for now, guys. We'll see you next Friday. You know what?