

Class Two

THE TRIUNE GOD

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “TRINITY”?

God as “three Persons in One” expresses the distinctive Christian understanding of God, and reflects our view at Park Street Church. The Bible speaks of one God, but attributes the characteristics of God to three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God the Father created

We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; and in the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God.

We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the beginning “was with God,” and “was God,” and who “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.”

all things and planned the redemption of his people from all eternity (**Genesis 3:14–15; Ephesians 1:3–12**); God the Son accomplished that redemption on the cross (**Romans 3:21–24; Galatians 3:13–14**); and God the Spirit applies the benefits of that eternal redemption to all believers (**John 3:5–8; Titus 3:4–7**). The doctrine of the Trinity is a way of describing this biblical revelation of the nature of God. It states that God is one in essence, but that he exists in three Persons who are equal, eternal, inseparable and interdependent. We must note that our English word, “Persons,” falls short as a way to describe God because it can give the impression of three separate individuals; rather, a more accurate view is that God is one being with three personal self-distinctions.

WHY SHOULD WE USE THE WORD “TRINITY”?

We might wonder why we should accept the word “Trinity” as a way to describe God when it isn’t in the Bible. Heretical groups came on the early Church scene and denied either the deity of Christ or that of the Holy Spirit. This drove Christians to search the Scriptures to come up with a formal way to describe the Bible’s teaching on the nature of God, and the doctrine of the “Tri-unity” was the result. Tertullian, an early Church

father, was the first to use the term “Trinity” in 215 AD. Like the word “Trinity,” there are many words such as “omniscient,” “ineffable,” “omnipresent,” “self-existent” and “uncreated,” none of which is found in the Bible, but nevertheless, each of which can be extremely helpful for us in summarizing what the Bible clearly teaches about the character of our amazing God. We often act as if the concept of the Trinity is something negative since it is difficult for us to grasp; rather, we should view it as something wonderful because it means not only that we have a God who is greater and more mysterious than our imaginings, but also that we have a God who seeks a personal relationship with us through the redemption of the Son and the presence of the Spirit. If God were not a Trinity, he would be the God of Deism or Islam, both impersonal and unknowable.

Because he is a trinity, God himself exists in community: three persons of one essence, who love each other with a perfect love and whose love overflowed in the creation and redemption of humanity. When God created humanity in his image, he created us as relational beings, created to love each other and our Creator.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR CONCEIVING OF GOD AS A TRINITY

The Bible teaches that we have One God (**Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10; 1 Corinthians 8:4–6; Ephesians 4:4–6**). At the same time, that One God is revealed progressively throughout Scripture as three Persons:

- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are active in Creation (*Genesis 1:1–2; Colossians 1:16–17*)
- Isaiah prophesies that the one born of the virgin would also be Immanuel, God with us (*Isaiah 7:14*) and later calls the Messiah “Mighty God” and “Eternal Father” (*Isaiah 9:6*)
- The NT calls the Father God (*John 6:27; 20:17; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 4:6; Philippians 2:11; 1 Peter 1:2*)
- The NT explicitly declares Jesus Christ to be God (*John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8*); they also apply the name Yahweh, the Lord God who created the universe, to Jesus (*Philippians 2:8–11; Hebrews 1:10*)
- The NT writers recognize the Holy Spirit as God (*Acts 5:3–4; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; 1 Corinthians 6:19; John 3:5–6, 8; Titus 3:5*)
- The NT writers speak of the presence and work of the Father, Son and Spirit in one breath (*Matthew 28:19; Mark 1:10–11; Luke 10:21, 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2*)

HOW SHOULD WE ADDRESS GOD IN PRAYER?

Since God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are “Persons,” we should speak of them as such (e.g., the Holy Spirit is “He” and not “It”). Though we may certainly address any member of the Trinity in prayer, it may be helpful to follow the guidance of Scripture. Jesus addressed God as “Father” in his model prayer for his disciples (**Matthew 6:9–13**), and he told them to pray to the Father in his name once he was no longer on this earth (**John 16:22–24**). Since we have God’s Spirit dwelling in us, it is by his power that we cry out to God in prayer and seek his will (**Romans 8:15–16; 26–27**). Thus, in addressing God in prayer it can be helpful to think of praying to God the Father in the name of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

JESUS: FULLY GOD AND FULLY MAN

Crucial to our understanding of the Trinity is the Bible’s presentation of Jesus Christ as fully man (**Matthew 8:23–24; 21:18; John 11:32–36**) and fully God (**John 1:1–3; John 10:30; 17:4–5; Titus 2:13**), in possession of both divine and human natures, unified in one person. The two natures coexisted in union without confusion or change, separation or division. Jesus Christ had to possess both natures in order to be our Lord and Savior. Because he was fully divine, Jesus is able to be the perfect and eternal sacrifice for the complete atonement of our sins, as well as our permanent high priest, allowing us to be eternally reconciled to God (**Hebrews 7:23–28**). Because he was fully human, Jesus was able to be our proper substitute on the cross to experience the wrath of God, and he is able to be a comfort and example for our daily living (**Hebrews 2:14–18**).

Being divine, Jesus could not sin, because God can't change his nature (John 5:19, 30). We might wonder, then, how he can truly identify with us in our struggles and temptations as Hebrews 2:18 promises. Because he was human, Jesus couldn't conquer temptation without a struggle. We struggle with temptation, and when the struggle overcomes us we eventually give in. Unlike us, Jesus had to keep resisting temptation until he had overcome it, and so his temptations were more terrible than we can ever experience. The promise of Hebrews 2:18 should then bring us comfort: "because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Questions for **REVIEW, THOUGHT & DISCUSSION**

1. What would be the implication for Christianity if Jesus had only been an ordinary human being? What would be the implication if Jesus had not really been human, but only God in disguise?
2. Why is the concept of God as Trinity so important to our faith? What would we lose if we deny that God is both one and three? Compare our Trinitarian faith with other religions or systems of beliefs with which you are familiar.
3. In what ways can your understanding of the Trinity instruct and enhance and your devotional life? With which person of the Trinity do you most often interact? Why?
4. In what ways do you live out Christian community? Read the "Window Into Park Street" on Affinity Groups on the next page. After this class is over, is there an affinity group or other ministry in which you can more fully love God and his people?

WINDOW INTO PARK STREET

Affinity Groups

Our worship services and most programs are intergenerational, but affinity groups also provide a natural place for friendships to form and develop.

Real Life Boston is the undergraduate college ministry of Park Street Church, working in partnership with Cru on many campuses across the city. They have small groups and outreaches on campuses and gather at Park Street every Friday night for large group worship. For **Graduate**

Students, we partner with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Graduate and Faculty Ministries for fellowship and on various campuses. Our international ministry offers friendship and faith-based service and opportunities to international students, scholars, and their families.

Our Young Adults ministry, called **Park Street Café**, is a grassroots ministry for singles and married people in their twenties and thirties, connecting them to God, the Church, the community and each other. They offer small and large groups.

Park Street Women hosts events and offers various ministries for the women of the church. There is also a Men's ministry.

Believing that God has created the institution of the family as a means to help us understand the intimate relationship that exists between our heavenly Father and his children and between brothers and sisters in Christ, the **Family Ministry** offers a vibrant ministry to children, youth and parents, including Sunday

classes and programs, Friday Family Night, **Park Street Union** for young married couples, Home School Fellowship, and Family Camp.

DON'T FIT IN THESE GROUPS?

One of the greatest needs we hear expressed at Park Street Church is the desire to be mentored. People are thirsty for older role models who will listen to them, help guide them with Godly wisdom, and pray for and with them. Whatever age you are, there are younger folks who would greatly benefit from the experience you have from walking with Christ. Consider mentoring a student or young professional in your field of expertise, or helping a parent of infants or teenagers. Take time on Sundays or Friday nights to care for an infant, child, or teenager.