
The Fellowship of God Is Ours (2Corinthians 13:11-14)
6/11/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



How would you explain the Trinity to someone? Some might describe it like a 3-leaf clover. 3 leaves, but one clover. But that's not how God describes himself. Each leaf is 1/3 of the whole clover, but the persons of the Trinity are not 1/3 of God. They are all 100% God. If you take one of those leaves by themselves, that's not a clover, yet each member of the Trinity by themselves is God.

Some have described the Trinity as different masks or roles that God plays. But that's not how God describes himself either. God does not have multiple personality disorder. He doesn't sometimes play the Father, sometimes the Son, and sometimes the Spirit.

God is three distinct Persons and those three distinct Persons are all 100% God. It's hard for us to grasp. It doesn't really fit our logic. In our experience, one person is one being, but God, who is greater than us in every respect, God is 3 persons and still at the same time one being.

The Trinity is hard for us to clearly describe. No picture that we use is ever accurate. At this point, many people might say, "Well, if it's so hard to understand, why bother with it? Why not leave it for the dogmatics books? Let's just get to the stuff that matters."

First off, I would answer, "If God appeared to you and spoke 2 words to you, would you only listen to one of the words and just ignore the other one as unimportant? Who are we to tell God which parts of his Word are important and which are not?" All the Bible is God's Word and all of it is useful to us!

Second, the doctrine of the Trinity is NOT mere technical babble for the overly-educated dogmaticians! It is the stuff that matters! It is vital to our salvation AND it is vital to our own identities as Christians as well as to how we live day by day. Today, as we take a closer look at the Trinity, we will see that the Fellowship of God is Ours.

The Trinity is vital for our salvation. God is just. Therefore, whoever does evil (as in whoever sins) must be punished with hell. God is just. Therefore, heaven can only be earned by a being good enough. And our holy and just God's standard for good enough is holiness, perfection. You and I know we don't measure up. We have sinned and fallen far short of the holiness that God demands. But God, in his grace, in his undeserved kindness to you and me, he promised to save us. God became man and thus became our substitute. Jesus earned heaven by being holy himself. Jesus received the punishment for our sins by dying on the cross.

This is where the Trinity becomes so vital. If Jesus was simply a human being, then his work would have saved himself and only himself. It would not have been enough to save all of humanity. His one perfect life would have earned heaven only for himself. His death on the cross would have paid for only one sinful life. We need a Savior who is True God so that his holy life and his payment for our sins could count for the whole world!

Jesus *had* to be 100% God. A Jesus who is less than God is also less than a Savior. But since Jesus is God, you and I can be assured that Jesus' payment for our sins was enough for the whole world. You and I can be assured that Jesus' holy life is enough to make the whole world holy in God's sight. And if Jesus' work was enough for the whole world, then you and I are fully covered.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit must be God. The Bible makes it clear that on our own, none of us can even do so much as believe God's promises to us. It is impossible for you and me to believe, to have faith, but God the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts through his almighty power as we dig into the Word and as we make use of the sacraments. If the Holy Spirit wasn't God, we wouldn't have the power to repent of our sins or to trust that our sins are forgiven in Christ!

The Trinity is vital for our identities as Christians. God's very nature, his identity says so much about who we are as Christians. The Trinity tells us that God is Unity between different Persons. Christianity too is Unity between different Persons. The fellowship of God, that unity that the different persons of the Trinity share, that fellowship is ours!

God tells us he is love. What does that teach us when we consider the fact that God is Triune? Love is relationships. God is love and he shows that love through the *relationships* between the different Persons of his Being. As Christians, we want to be like our God, right? Therefore, our relationships; relationships with our families, relationships with other Christians, and relationships with others we see regularly; those relationships become a crucial expression of who we are in Christ.

Many people today follow a "just me and Jesus" kind of Christianity. That can be your religion, if you want; but just realize that whatever you are following, it's not the true God. It's not Christ. God never describes our relationship with him as something purely personal, as something we keep to ourselves, or as something just between us and God.

Instead, throughout the pages of Scripture, God describes his people pursuing relationships. God's people proclaim what they believe to others. They gather together with other believers around the Word. They work together to spread the Word and help others. We see God's people talking about their faith with those who are close to them, as well as with those who do not believe.

Our relationships are a vital part of our faith. Jesus even told people in his time that if you were offering a sacrifice at God's altar and remembered that someone had something against you, you should leave the sacrifice there and first go and fix the problem with the other person (Matthew 5:23-24). The point is, if we are neglecting our relationships, we aren't really worshipping God, even when we sit in a church pew. That's how important our relationships are to our faith!

You see how the Trinity so shapes even our lives? This is where Paul is coming from in 2 Corinthians 13:11-14. Paul points to the identity of our God as the basis for how we live as Christians. Paul points to the fact that we worship the Lord Jesus Christ whose grace, or undeserved kindness for sinners, led him to reach across the separation of our sin so that we might have a relationship with God. Paul points to the fact that we worship God who is love and so dearly loves us even when we are undeserving, even when we have fallen far short of what God demands of us. Paul points to the fact that we worship the Holy Spirit who has brought us into fellowship or a relationship with God and our relationship with God leads us to real relationships with each other.

God's identity, who he is, defines who we are and how we live. Paul, in his final words to the Corinthians and in view of who our God is, tells Christians. Paul tells us to aim for perfection. God has set us free from sin, guilt and shame. We no longer need to live as slaves to sin! So, when we recognize sins in our lives, like problems in our relationships, we repent of them, put them behind us, and move forward, because God gives us power to do that! Is it easier or harder to have a relationship with someone who can admit when they are wrong? As Christians, we don't settle for sinful. Instead we ask those we have wronged for forgiveness and we seek to make our lives better.

Paul tells us to be of one mind. Let me ask you this: Say you have two friends. The first friend has same tastes as you, likes the same hobbies, has the same political beliefs, is in the same career path, all of that. But they are an unbeliever and so their whole life is aimed at going to hell. The second friend doesn't have any of those other things in common with you, but is a believer and so their whole life is aimed at going to heaven and helping other people get there. Who would you say you are more like? Ten billion years from now, none of those outward similarities are going to matter, but heaven and hell are going to mean everything.

We are all different. We have very different thoughts, opinions, likes, dislikes, all that. But we can be of one mind because we share the same God. We share the same answers to where we come from, who we are, and where we are going. What can bring more unity between two people than both of them having a relationship with the one true God? Don't allow the earthly things to divide you from those who share the heavenly things with you.

You see how the things Paul talks about: joy, repentance, encouragement, unity, and peace all affect our relationships with other people? And every one of those things flow directly from who our God is.

So, we pursue the fellowship of God in our families. It always amazes me to see the deep hatred and animosity that can build between members of the same family. Sometimes, it's because they are people we see every day. Sometimes, it's because we take those relationships for granted. But family relationships need work just like any relationship needs work. As Christians, our God calls us to strive for real unity in our families. Are we showing our families our love for them, or are we assuming they will just know it? Sometimes we can busy ourselves trying to show love to

others in a way that doesn't mean all that much to them, but then in those areas that do matter to them, we really hurt them. Loving our families means communicating clearly with them, listening and understanding, and showing our love in a meaningful way. If you want to explore that more, please come talk to me.

The doctrine of the Trinity also leads us to seek relationships with other Christians, with our family of faith. Satan is doing his hardest work among Christians. He tries to make us distrustful of each other. He tries to divide us. Satan wants us to be separated.

I think I've used this picture before, but have you ever grilled with charcoal? When you've got all the coals heaped together, they can get pretty hot, right? But what happens when one of the coals rolls off the pile by itself? It cools and loses its flame.

Satan wants us to be that coal that rolls off by itself. Satan wants us divided so that the fire of our faith can more easily die out. So, Satan tries to keep us from talking to each other here at Church. Satan tries to get us to just keep to ourselves, sit in our pews, and leave as soon as the service is done. Satan wants us to think that if we fall into sin then we can no longer show our face at church.

But as God's people, though we are different in many ways, but we are united in the most important ways! As we dig into the Word together, we become united in our convictions that we are all sinners who deserve hell, regardless of how squeaky clean or dirt-stained our lives appear to be. We are united in our convictions that Jesus is our only Savior from sin and hell.

Furthermore, as God's people, we share the fellowship of God as we unite in our mission to grow in the Word and to go with the Word, to destroy Satan's strongholds in our own hearts as well as those in the world. We seek to rid ourselves of the lies Satan tries to fill us with and we help others to do so as well. Those shared convictions and missions are what brings real unity between believers!

Find ways to build relationships with your fellow Christians. Come to fellowship! Come to Bible study! Come to our TriParish events like the TriParish worship service at Sunset Lake Park on July 9th!

We may not be able to explain perfectly how God can be three-in-one, but let us never forget the vitality of the Trinity. The Trinity shows us clearly that God has died to take away our sins. The Trinity tells us that God himself lives in our hearts and daily transforms us through the Word. The Trinity teaches us that we are united together with all of God's Church. The Trinity means that the Fellowship of God is Ours. Amen.