

Growing in Our Shared Faith



Getting to Know the Triune God Who Is: Or at least getting reacquainted

Intro:

Have you ever introduced yourself to someone multiple times?

I had a friend in college named Garuka who had been raised to be very polite and formal, always making sure to introduce people that may not know each other. He introduced me to some new friends, but he also reintroduced me to some of my best friends, even some of my best friends multiple times.

I thought I knew people well enough that I did not need Garuka to attempt to re-introduce me to more people. But then later I found out that I did not remember meeting everyone. I had one friend I introduced myself to anywhere from 3-5 times. Since that time, I have repeated this failure to remember meeting someone at least a couple of times. The problem each time is NOT that I was not introduced well. The problem is that I did not pursue those friendships enough in the early stages so that I better understood those friends on their terms.

I would have benefited from Garuka helping me to know these friends better, even if it meant him re-introducing me to them again.

If you are saved in Christ, you were brought into relationship with the Triune God. Perhaps you know that He is Triune but may not understand what that means. Maybe you do but have downplayed the importance of knowing God on His terms. Or you know our God as He is in His nature and His interactions within the godhead and with the world. If so, may today be a good time to smile and enjoy being reminded about the God who is, who does not need us, but lovingly created us and invited into the fellowship that exists between Father, Son, and Spirit.

2 Cor 13:13

13 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

What:

Have you ever noticed the ease with which the NT writers reference the Trinity, one God yet three persons, each of whom are fully recognized as God?

Paul writes at the end of 2 Corinthians:

2 Cor 13:13

13 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Matt 28:19

**19 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,**

Or from the very lips of Jesus:

Matt 28:19

19 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,

And notice that the word name is singular.

We could reference the baptism of Jesus, at which the Spirit descends upon the Son like a dove, and the Father speaks from heaven.

John 17:1–5

**1 Jesus spoke these things,
looked up to heaven, and said,
“Father, the hour has come.
Glorify your Son so that the Son
may glorify you,**

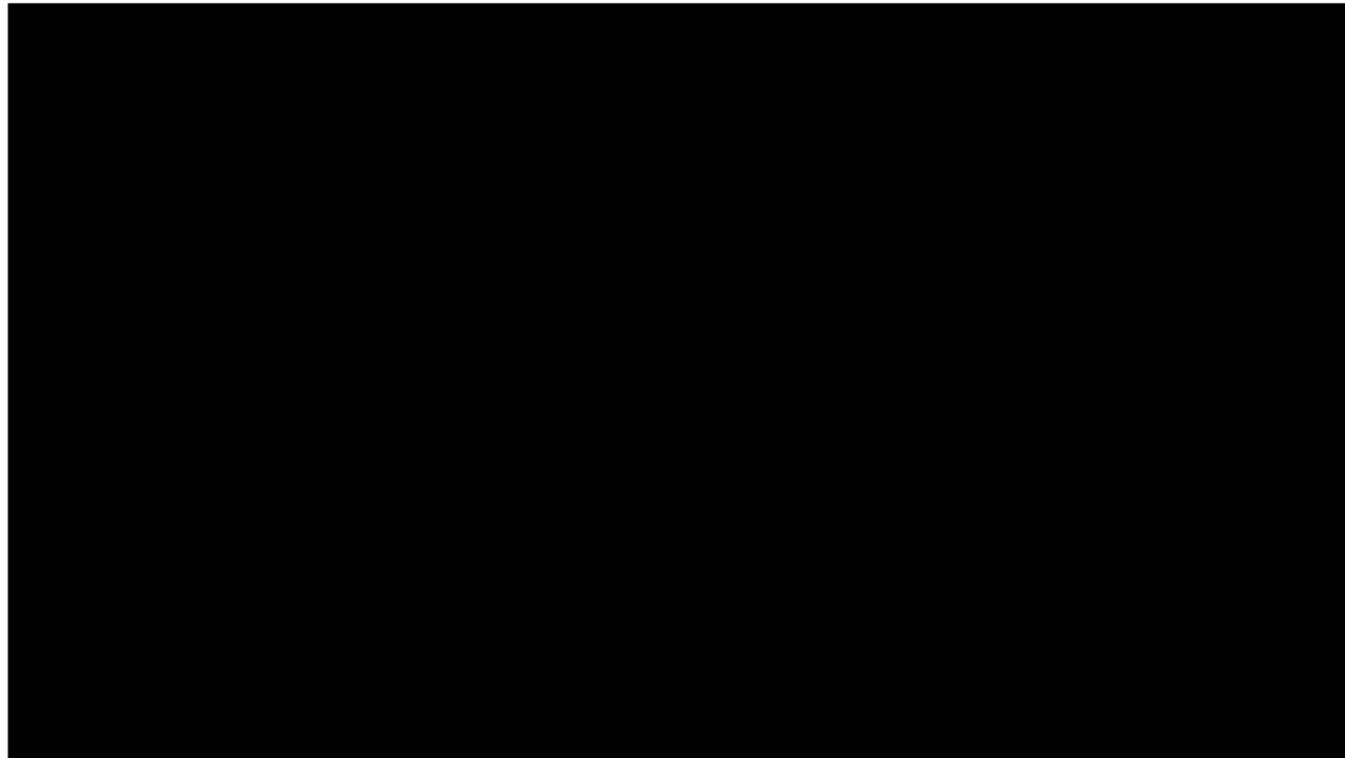
Jesus also consistently references his relationship to the Father, noting both the unity of them as God yet distinction from God the Father.

**2 since you gave him authority
over all people, so that he may
give eternal life to everyone you
have given him.**

**3 This is eternal life: that they
may know you, the only true
God, and the one you have sent
—Jesus Christ.**

**4 I have glorified you on the
earth by completing the work
you gave me to do.**

5 Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with that glory I had with you before the world existed.



God has always been Triune. In the beginning, God the Father spoke by means of God the Son to bring about all of creation with the Spirit preparing the Creation for its purpose. The One True God brought about the Creation with each person of the Trinity having an appropriate role. Where one person is at work, all three are at work, even if a particular person is the proper terminus for a particular task. For example, all three persons were at work to redeem the creation through Jesus's sacrifice, but it was appropriate for the Son to die on the cross. The Father did not die on the cross. Jesus, God the Son, was our sacrifice, not the Spirit. Yet the Father and Spirit were at work to bring it about.

The Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God, but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. And these three are but one God.

As one theologian has put it, the doctrine of the Trinity is not so much heard throughout the Bible but overheard. The doctrine of the Trinity is most clearly expressed according to the storyline of redemption.

As the OT prepares us for God's work of redemption in Christ and the NT, so the OT prepares us for God manifesting clearly Himself as Triune in the gospel and new covenant.

Our One God has always been Triune.

“The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.”

<https://bfm.sbc.net>

What has the church believed about God as Triune? Let's start with our statement of faith:

**The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being. BFM 2000

Our website has some brief summaries of some of our beliefs:

**We believe that the Godhead
exists eternally in three persons
– Father, Son and Holy Spirit –**

Here is how it reads regarding God's nature as Triune:

We believe that the Godhead exists eternally in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and that these three are one God, and are worthy of precisely the same confidence, obedience, and worship. (Matt. 28:18-19, Mk. 12:29, Jn. 1:14, Acts 5:3-4)

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Acts 5:3-4)**

A) There is only One God

B) There are Three eternal and co-existent persons in perfect relationship, who are of one divine essence.

C) Each One of these Three is fully God

It might make it easier to understand God's nature as Triune if you understand the three major parts to this teaching: ***

A) There is only One God

B) There are Three eternal and co-existent persons rightly referred to as God

C) Each One of these Three is fully God

So maybe that helps you.

Or maybe it will help you to focus on two factors: The Unity of God, or oneness of God, and the Relationship between the persons who are God.

This unity and relationship is part and parcel to the very message of the gospel that you came to believe. For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, so that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.

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There is one God, who is three persons, each of whom is fully God, who are of one divine essence, eternal and co-existent, dwelling in perfect unity and love. You may still have trouble describing or even repeating the teaching on the Trinity. That is okay and understandable. We are talking about the God who made the world and all of creation from nothing, who spoke existence into being when there was nothing in existence but Himself. Because He is uniquely in His own category as Creator, nothing in creation can properly define Him by analogy. So, do not try to say the Trinity is like ... As soon as you start that statement, you are preparing to tell someone else a highly dangerous analogy. So it may be hard to understand or describe, but we dare not deny it.

**[The] doctrine of the Trinity is
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As the 1689 confession states, [The] doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him. (1689 confession)

As Robert Letham points out, churches may tend to lean too far in one of two ways. You do not want to underemphasize either the Oneness of God or the Threeness of the persons of the Godhead.

We want to uphold both truths about the nature of the God who is, just as He has presented Himself in His Word. We want to uphold this truth in our profession of saving faith, in our understanding of the world He made, and in our part in His mission.

**We must accept God as He is if
we are to know Him.**

Regarding our personal confession of saving faith:
We must accept God as He is if we are to know Him.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal him.

Jesus makes clear that we can only know God by means of the Son. To reject him is to reject God. To know him is to know God.

He also clarifies that blasphemy against him is forgivable but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, one of the persons of the Trinity, is not forgivable. ***We must accept God as He is***

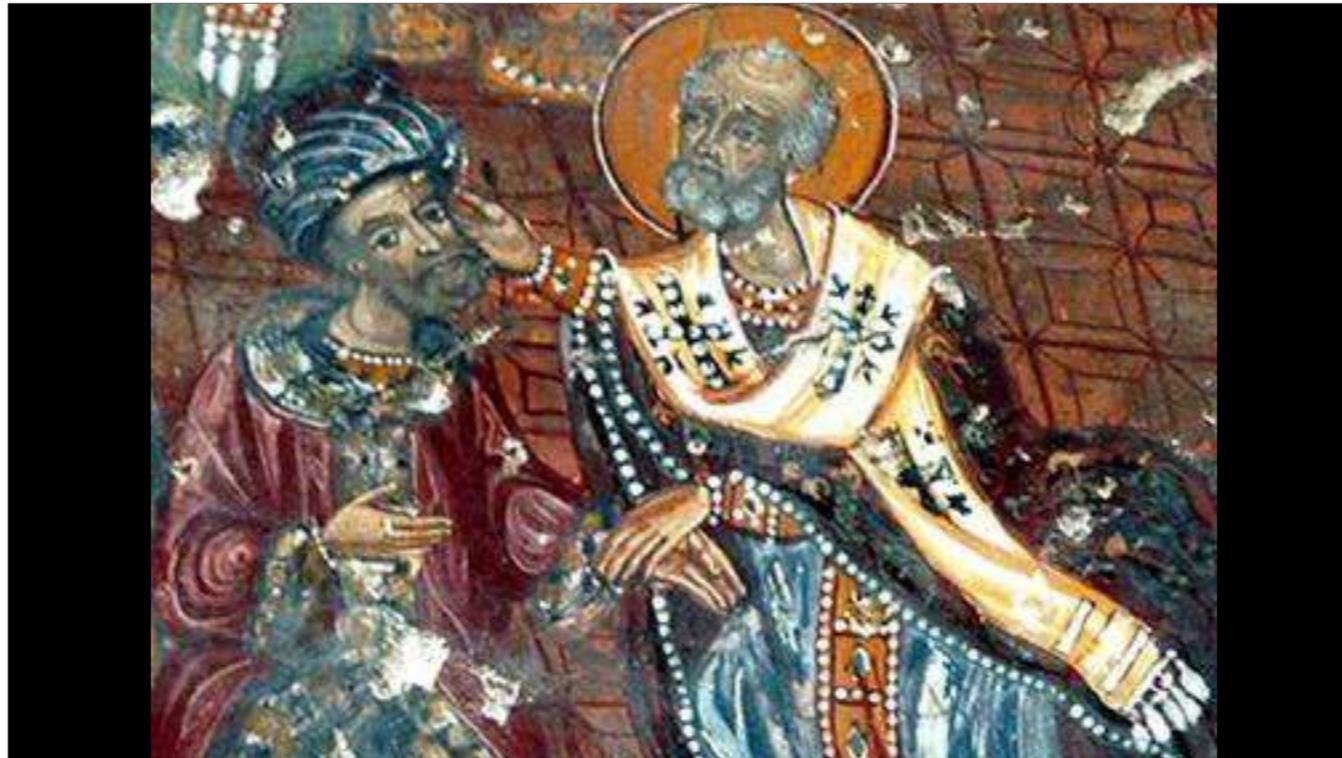
To err too far toward oneness to the exclusion of three persons in relationship is to deny God as He is. To err too far toward three persons to the exclusion of one God is to deny God as He is.

This is a doctrine that we cannot fully explain because we start with a human, created perspective. We are finite, but this is the God for whom we are made. Spurgeon is known for pointing to the mind-expanding nature of this teaching. This understanding of God as TRINITY IN UNITY is the very core and foundation of everything we embrace in the gospel.

You may not be able to explain it well, but you cannot deny it if you truly know Christ. Paul says that the very test of the Christian's confession is that Jesus is Lord. "This is the message of faith that we proclaim: If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"

(Rom. 10:8b–9).

First, the reference to Lord is the translation of the Hebrew name YHWH. Acknowledging Jesus is Lord is not just calling him Master but saying He is God. Part of the Christian's confession is that Jesus is very God of very God. But Paul also makes a distinction between Jesus and God somehow. It is an action that God did toward Jesus to raise him. Each person of the Trinity is affirmed as having the right and power to raise Jesus from the dead (Father–1 Pet 1:21; the Son–John 10:18; the Spirit–Rom 1:4). So, the very confession and belief we take on for saving faith is explicitly Trinitarian.



The Eastern Orthodox Church has images reinforcing the importance of defending the truthfulness of God's Trinity. One of the men in the image is a heretic named Arius who denied the Trinity by denying the deity of the Son. He attempted to persuade many others to follow him in denying that Jesus is God. The rest of the icon is of Santa Claus slapping Arius.

Now, we don't know if St. Nicholas actually slapped Arius, nor should we condone physical violence against those who disagree with us. But the point still stands: If Santa Claus would be angry enough about a claim to want to slap somebody, it's probably not a good claim.

Arius' denial of the deity of Christ would have subverted the gospel message, producing a false gospel that would have no power for salvation.

The Triune God is the Creator and Source of all the good diversity within the one creation.

-Ontological

The Triune God is the Creator and Source of all that is good and diverse within the one creation.

We get the terms universe and university from the diversity of life that is united together as the creation. The term university describes a single entity with diverse branches, one educational institution with many colleges.

Our universe is beautifully and mysteriously diverse. This diversity promotes curiosity and wonder. People explore depths and heights to discover what is different than them. This week NASA landed a rover on Mars, a trip that took nearly 300 million miles, all so that we can explore a planet that is different than ours, a planet that is still within the same solar system and operates consistently with the laws of the one creation that the one Creator has made.

This desire for unity and diversity is put into us by the Triune God who has made us in His image.

Gen 1:26–28

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

27 So God created man

in his own image;

he created him in the image of God;

he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”

The great unity of mankind under God was to be displayed amidst our great diversity. The complementary sexes of men and women, the many different family lineages that would result from filling the earth, was to be united under the headship of God while displaying His glory through our differences.

Our existence as a church is supposed to model this unity and diversity within this world. We must hold United in our confession of Christ and essential truths to this faith. But we do so as people of diverse backgrounds, diverse languages, diverse ethnicities, and diverse skin tones. Our diversity and unity together are a work of God to display His glory. Our diversity and unity are built into our existence as a church by the Triune God Himself.

We are all equal at the foot of the cross as fellow believers in Christ, modeling the equality between Father, Son, and Spirit. We also demonstrate the relationship that accomplished redemption through willing submission. The Son willingly submitted to the Father so that He might accomplish salvation by the power of the Spirit leading Him. We have relationships that involve willing submission within our church so that we might accomplish our mission to connect, grow, serve, go.

The very grain of the universe speaks to the Triune God; the church is supposed to be the One People who clearly and consistently flow with the grain instead of against it, instead of getting splintered by wrong belief.

Belief in the Triune God propels us in our purpose and mission as His people.

***Belief in the Triune God is not only at the very core of our existence; it propels us in our purpose and mission as His people.

Telological

The Father, Son, and Spirit is the Triune God who has brought us into His fellowship and to whom we are traveling on our way home.

Titus 3:4-8

When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a trustworthy saying.

The goodness that we experience in this life comes from the overflowing grace of God. Everyone experiences common grace but this special grace is communicated to us by the Triune God to the glory of this one God. We have received this grace for acceptance by God and for transformation by God.

We are being conformed to the image of Christ, so that he might be exalted as preeminent, by the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of the Father.

This is why people exist, to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. As the church, we are the people able to reflect God's glory because God now dwells within us. So we as the people of Christ are to grow up in maturity of belief and character so that the world will see and hear the testimony of the gospel through us.

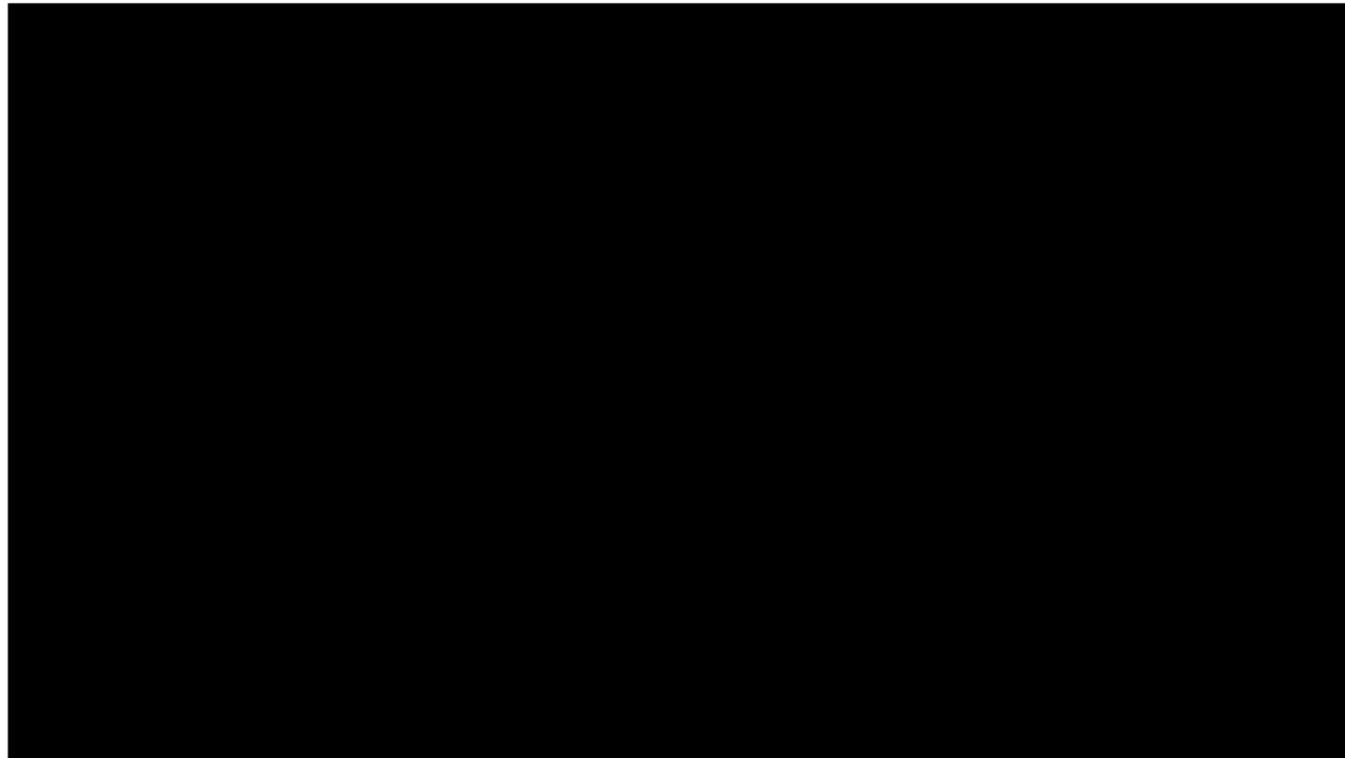
One of the most excellent ways we display the gospel is through our love.

We rightly exalt love as the greatest virtue, but this can only be our virtue according to God as Triune and according to our experience with him in salvation. 1 John 4:8 states that God is love. This is his character. He has always been and will always be loving. For God to be eternally loving and that he does not need us, He must be Triune.

If we are to live according to the love of God demonstrated in Christ, we must continue to walk with and believe in this Triune God who is.

The Father, Son, and Spirit is the God who is on mission—The Father is calling people to Himself by means of His Son as the Spirit emboldens and sends the church to proclaim the gospel.

So as we hold forth our faith and declare the gospel to the world, we declare a message that reveals God as Triune and so show ourselves consistent with the faithful church throughout the ages.



I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
begotten of his Father before all worlds,
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;
who for us men and for our salvation
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried;
and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,

and ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of the Father;
and he shall come again, with glory,
to judge both the living and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;
who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped
and glorified;
who spoke by the Prophets.

And the writers go on to speak of the church, the proclamation of the gospel, the resurrection of the dead, new creation, and eternal life.
The Triune God is the God who is.

This Triune God has called people to Himself. We evidence this call through faith in His Son, as we follow Him in faith, love, and practice. Those who belong to Christ are declared to be children of God, with the Spirit leading us to call God, "Abba," or Papa, Father. As God's children, we are welcomed to His table, with the practice of the Lord's Supper being a symbolic meal that anticipates that greater banquet still to come.