

Date: August 5-6, 2023

Title: *What Kind of God - "God is Trinity"*

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Good morning. Welcome to Orchard Hill. It's great to be together. As we turn into this new month, we're going to begin a new series today. This will be a little bit of a topical series. We often work through books of the Bible or text. Sometimes we'll take some topic that is significant, and we'll say let's see what the whole Bible says about this topic. And we're going to take a really small topic, God, and see what the Bible says about God in five weeks. So, this will not hit everything. But we will talk about who God is and what God is like.

And here's why this matters. In all likelihood, if you're a person of faith, you've answered the question, what is God like? And if you're a person who struggles with faith, one of your struggles is probably right here saying, I'm not sure I can believe in a God who's like this. In fact, I've met many people over the years, and when they find out what I do, they say oh, I don't believe in God or I used to believe in God. And usually, it's an invitation for a question. And so, I'll often say, oh, really? Tell me about this God you don't believe in. And what I have found is usually when they hit a point where they start to talk about the God they don't believe in, that it's a God I don't believe in either. It's a God that's not revealed in the Bible. And so how we understand God matters immensely.

I had a friend who was telling me recently about one of his kids driving their car, and evidently, they assumed that their kids would understand that the car didn't take diesel gas, and the kid put diesel gas in the unleaded vehicle. And so, he sold it. So, I hope you didn't buy his car. And because he hit that point where he said the car is just never going to be right, he actually sold it to a dealer. He told them, at least that's what he said.

And here's the issue. If you don't understand how a car works and you think, hey, one gas is as good as another, then what happens is you don't think that there's any implication for the decisions that you make. And if we have a piece of our understanding about God wrong, then really it will impact how we think and live.

And so, today, what I'd like to do is I'd like to just simply make two statements, and the statements will be very simple and straightforward, and then try to unpack them. And I'm indebted to two different authors for a lot of what I'm going to say today. Wayne Grudem, for the first statement, wrote *Systematic Theology*, and I got a lot of my ideas directly from what he's written. And then Tim Keller, for the second point, which is kind of the application, the so what of the two statements.

So, here's the first statement and that is God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, I understand in making that statement that some of you right now are about to hit the pause button mentally and say, okay, the Trinity, I've heard it. It's hard to understand. I'm not sure what it means. You know, what am I going to do with this idea of the Trinity today? But yet I think it's really significant that we understand that the way God has revealed himself in the Bible is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who eternally exists. And the reason this is so important is because this is the very being, the very essence of God, and a lot of times we miss this.

So, let me first show you a few places where we get this idea from the Bible because the word trinity is never actually used, yet it's one of those things that Christians have for centuries said, we believe that God exists as a trinity. So here are just a few of the places, and we could spend a half hour just working through different texts that point to this. But let me just give you a few. One instance in the Old Testament, Genesis, chapter one, verse 26 says this, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"

So, what do you notice? God says, let us make God in our image. It's plural. So, God identifies as plural. That sounds kind of funny to say today. But God's self-identification is us. In the very beginning of the Bible, it's not I'm God the Father and I'm creating, it's us. It's plural. And then when we come to the New Testament. Here are just a few places where we see the three distinct parts of the Godhead that are the beings of the Godhead revealed.

Here's Matthew chapter three, verses 16 and 17. We looked at this a little bit in the last couple of weeks, but notice the existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" So, God the Father, God the Spirit, God the Son.

Matthew chapter 28, verse 19, says this. This is what's known as the Great Commission. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." And then in Jude, verses 20 and 21, we read this, "But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." So again, you have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

And to summarize the way that authors and different people have written about this over time is to basically say that what the Bible teaches is that God is three persons and each of them is fully God. So, each person of the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit is fully God. And yet there is one God, only one God. Deuteronomy chapter six, verses four and five says there is just one God. There aren't multiple gods. There's one God.

And sometimes in an effort to explain this or think about it, people have tried to have different ways of making analogies just to make it simpler. I've heard some people talk about how God's like water, steam, and ice, how it has three different forms, but it's one in essence. That's actually heresy if you put it that way. That's kind of known as moralism because God has these different modes, but he just functions in different ways, and he flows back and forth. The idea is that God is distinct in all three of these beings. Some have talked about God as a clover. So, he's a plant with three different leaves. But again, this is heresy in the sense that. It does not fully recognize the three distinct beings of the Godhead. And some people have talked about a pretzel. You get the three little things and so God's like that, but again, inadequate.

And the reason that I take the time to point this out is that when we come to understand God's very being, it is going to change the way that we think about and relate to God. C.S. Lewis wrote about this, and here's what he said at one point. He said, "In Christianity, God is not an impersonal thing or a static thing. He's not even just one person, but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, a drama, almost if you will not think me irreverent, 'a dance.'" And so C.S. Lewis says it's important to understand that God exists as three and that there's a relationship between the three.

Cornelius Plantinga puts it this way. He says, "Cornelius Plantinga - "The Bible says that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit glorify one another. That means that the persons within God exalt, commune with and defer to one another. Each harbor the others at the center of His being, in constant movement of overture and acceptance. Each person envelops and encircles the others. God's interior life, therefore, overflows with self-giving love for others."

So C.S. Lewis says God is like a dance, weaving and moving between himself. Cornelius Plantinga says it's all about giving and receiving love in the Godhead. And C.S. Lewis at another point says, "Why does all this matter? What's the big deal? It matters more than anything else in the world for the whole pattern of these three is to be played out in each of us. They are the great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality, and there is no other way to happiness for which we were made."

And so why does this matter to you and me? Well, if God does not exist as a Trinity, there's a sense in which God is a unidimensional, single dimension. And what that means is that then God exists and there's a moral code that you try to reach for to say I have related to this God. And if you don't like the moral code, then you're prone to say, you know what, there is no God and I'm not invited into anything. God isn't a part of my life.

And this really leads to the second statement, and that is God invites you to join this dance. Now, I read from Cornelius Plantinga about God giving glory. In John 17, we see this. John 17 verse one says this, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." So, Jesus is talking, and He says give glory to me so that I can give glory to you, God the Father. And a little later in the same chapter in verses 20 and following, He says this, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Listen to this. Verse 22. "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one."

So, what does Jesus say? He says I've given my followers glory so that they can join the glory that God the Son and God the Father and God the Spirit are giving to one another. Now, I don't know how that strikes you. My guess is that some of us get hung up on the word glory. Some of us might get hung up on the idea of God giving some glory to us because we like the unidimensional version of God, where God is the static being that we have to somehow please.

But glory, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word was "Kavod" and in the New Testament, it's the word "Doxa" and it means in essence to give way, to give preference, to let it have its proper place to worship, to give praise, or to serve. And so, if the Godhead is constantly giving glory to one another, the Godhead exists in this sphere of giving and receiving love

and glory and deference and honor. And God says I want my followers to join me in this dance. And I will give you glory and honor as part of this equation.

Here's why again, maybe some of us are uncomfortable with this kind of wording because we say well, I prefer to think about doing things for God. But God, if you are created in his image and you've come to trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you've acknowledged your sin, then God gives glory to you and says I want you to enter into this relationship. And if we use C.S. Lewis's words, in this dance with God.

Scott Peck writes about this in one of his old counseling sessions. He said he was counseling a woman who was struggling, and he said she was struggling with her purpose. And he said, well, what's your purpose in life? And she quoted the Westminster catechism, which says the chief end of men, of women, is to glorify God. And then she said in a moment of candor, but I don't really like that purpose because it doesn't feel like it leaves any room for me. If I have to give glory to God, then where am I in this equation? And what we need to see is that God isn't inviting us to simply revolve around Him, but into a dynamic relationship where there's a give and a take, a dance, if you will. You see, without that, your version of God will always be the moral code, the one that you have to appease in some way rather than the one that you join in a dynamic relationship.

Now, let me ask you. How many of you went to a middle school dance when you were in middle school? Alright. A few of you went to a middle school dance. So, I went to some middle school dances. And I was the guy who thought I was like, I don't know if I was too cool or too insecure, I'll let you decide, to really dance. And so, if I got on the floor other than the slow dance, I would just kind of stand there and let the dance happen around me because I didn't want to give myself to the dance at that time.

Now, fast forward a little bit. I've said this before, but now when I go to weddings or things you rarely see me dance because no one wants to see their pastor shake it. Yes, but here is what is true about dancing. I had a friend, who a couple of years ago was getting married, and he and his fiancée, now wife, wanted all the people who were kind of partaking in the wedding to learn a dance. And so, they sent this country song. It was like dirt on your boots and going uptown tonight kind of a thing. Some of you know exactly the song. I know it because we were supposed to learn this dance. And so, at every turn, my wife and I were trying to learn this dance so we could do this dance at this wedding. And here's what happened for me, and maybe this is because I don't shake it. I don't know. But I would learn the steps, and I would take the steps in complete unison with the video. But I never enjoyed or learned to actually dance. I learned how to take the steps. Does that make sense? Some of you know exactly how that feels and some of you are like that is weird.

Now, the reason I tell you this is because what some of us do when it comes to God is we try to program the steps and say well, if I do this, then I'm keeping the dance. And if I make this little turn here, whatever it is that I need to do, then somehow, I'm dancing with God. I'm relating to God. But what dancing really is, is letting go and responding to the moment. And even if it's choreographed, there's freedom when you say, I'm engaged in the moment. And if God exists, eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in self-giving love and acceptance and glory giving, and He invites you and me into it, then he's inviting us into a dance. And

what some of us will do instead is we'll settle for learning to take some steps, learning to simply mechanically go through the motions.

And here's the other thing that's true about real dancing, and that is if you're stationary and you want everything to revolve around you, you can't really dance. You actually have to be engaged. And for some of us, maybe the reason that our relationship with God is hard is because what we want is we want to be stationary, and we want God to revolve around us and to make everything happen according to our desire when he's saying, take a step and move with me. And the way that you learn to move with him is by reading his word, encountering him in worship, and delighting in him. And as that happens, you begin to say now it's not just this mechanical dimension that I'm trying to somehow reach, but I'm living and moving with him.

N.T. Wright says this. He says, "If we aren't moved to worship, then we haven't really understood who God is or what he has done." And sometimes if you dance, your dance partner will do some things that you think I wouldn't have done that. And if God is your dance partner, there are times that you'll think, huh, what's he doing? But your task is to respond in joyful movement and give glory back because then he gives glory in the same way.

There's a movie that was out several years ago called *Shall We Dance?* And toward the end of the movie, one of the main characters says this about dancing. He says, "It's more than steps. It's the feel of the music. And you dance for the sheer joy of it." I don't know how you come here today, or how you experience God, but what I know from talking to a lot of people over the years is that for a lot of people, God is this static being that we just simply have to revolve around.

And when we understand the Trinity, it revolutionizes the way that we think about God because we can say now, he's inviting me into a dynamic, beautiful relationship, and that's a God that is worthy, not just of our worship, but our devotion. I hope today, wherever you are in your own journey, that you can see that God is inviting you to something even better than you might think and that you can step into that dance.

God, I ask that you would help each of us who's a part of this gathering this weekend at Orchard Hill to be able to step into the dance and enjoy you and enjoy a relationship with you as you've revealed yourself to be. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.