



#4: The Trinity | Michael Hockett | January 22, 2012

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat, perhaps offering coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray, or invite someone to pray, and open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes.)

Introduction: We don't find the word "Trinity" or a definition of it in the Bible. As we saw two weeks ago with Moses and the Israelites, God reveals Himself by His relationships, His promises, and His actions. And when we encounter Jesus Christ in the Bible, what we see through these relationships, promises, and actions is the Trinity.

1. The Trinity is creedal.

There are two great historical Christian creeds, or statements of belief: the Apostles' Creed of the 2nd century and the Nicene Creed of the 4th. They complement and affirm each other, and they're biblically based. The most important thing they share in common is their Trinitarian view of God. [Read the **Apostle's Creed** together now.] Notice that the three major sections of the creed begin with a Person of the Trinity. Christians don't believe in "God" generically. We *respond* to the love of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And we don't believe this one God revealed in three Persons is just one of many manifestations of God. We believe He is the *only* God.

2. The Christian concept of the Trinity is monotheistic. The nation of Israel arose within the Ancient Near East. The overall culture was polytheistic, meaning they believed in many gods. As God revealed Himself to Israel through prophetic words and supernatural deeds, Moses told them to believe in only one God. [Read **Deuteronomy 4:39, 6:4-5** together now]. Everything else in Jewish and Christian belief flows from this one core statement of faith. According to the Bible that's rooted in Israel's history, there is one God, and *only* one God, and He has a specific identity, "The LORD," which is not a *title*, but a *personal name* in Hebrew: *Yahweh*. We can see why the religious Jews of Jesus' time were not keen on the claims Jesus made to divinity in word and deed. And they didn't look kindly on His followers, proclaiming either His or the Holy Spirit's divinity after the resurrection, either. Jesus is Abraham's descendant, and He came to fulfill a covenantal promise God made with Abraham in **Genesis 12** that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him and his line. The fulfillment of that promise came through Jesus Christ, and through that fulfillment, God gave us a more complete revelation of Himself. [Read **John 14:8-9, John 10:30-31** together now]. The Jews were trying to stone Jesus for his claims: unless Jesus and the Father are one, unless we have God the Father and God the Son interacting as *one God*, Jesus is a megalomaniac and a blasphemer. Jesus goes even further to talk about sending the Holy Spirit, who also works in ways that are reserved for divinity - for God - *alone*. As Jesus comes to the end of His ministry, He comforts His disciples with a promise of a Counselor, explaining who he is. [Read **John 14:15-17, 14:26** together now]. We see God the Father interacting with us through the Persons, the *distinct* Persons, of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Some people have argued that God is simply working in three different modes. We should envision Him as a single entity or Person who simply takes on different forms, or modes, like a shape shifter. This conception of God is called *modalism*, and it's not Trinitarian, and it's not creedal. In the classic Trinitarian description of God in the Western Church - God is one essence or substance in three Persons. He's always one substance, *and* He's always in three Persons. He doesn't simply switch modes at will. [Read **Luke 3:21-22** together now]. Let's look at how Jesus closes that earthly ministry as He commissions His Apostles at the beginning of our present church age. [Read **Matthew 28:18-20** together now]. We're commissioned to bring people into a faith that believes not just in "God" in a generic sense, but God understood as "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Jesus is giving us the primary identity of God here. We don't baptize into the names of, but the *name* of, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Also Jesus is with us until the end of the age. He's with us as the Holy Spirit, whom He promised to send from the Father, as we saw in John. In the Trinity, we have *three* Persons, so three minds and wills. But Jesus always absolutely slaves His mind and will to the Father's and acts accordingly. [Read **John 5:19** together now]. And the Holy Spirit is described in similar terms of aligning with the Godhead. [Read **John 16:12-13** together now]. The Bible indicates three minds or wills that align in *one*. That's part of why the church has historically argued for three distinct Persons of the Trinity and continues to do so. But as Christians we're also part of a monotheistic faith solidly grounded in the Old Testament. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit *is* the Trinity, one God.

3. The three Persons of the Trinity have roles. There are three main movements of God's interactions in human history: 1. God created the world, establishing it with order and form. 2. God redeemed the world in Jesus Christ. 3. God is present in the world here and now, guiding and encouraging believers. We need to keep in mind that the Trinity and its workings are much more complex than these designations. The church has historically affirmed that God, is in truth always one and always doing all of these things together, even if one Person is given a prominent role in each. The three Persons of the Trinity have interacting roles that are loving in their very nature. Each one does what's best for the other, no matter what the cost. Now let's review the role of the Holy Spirit. The "*catholic church*" here doesn't mean just the Roman Catholic Church. "Catholic" means universal, so the creed is indicating the universal church. All the local churches add up to being the one church worldwide. "Holy" is set aside for God's purposes. The Holy Spirit comes to unify and empower the church for a mission. [Read **Acts 1:4-5, 7-8** together now]. The "communion of saints" is the body of Christians having a common faith and discipline and intimate fellowship or rapport. [Read **Romans 8:26-27** together now]. When we band together as the church through the power of the Spirit, we become a witness of God's work in us and in the world. Finally, the last three lines of the Apostles' Creed can *appear* to primarily address the work of Christ, God the Son. But the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in it as well. Paul speaks in **1 Corinthians 6:11** [read now] of what happened to us *as sinners* when we gave our lives to Jesus as Lord and we were forgiven for walking apart from God. "Washed" means we were cleansed. "Sanctified" means we're made holy, or set aside and consecrated as God's people for God's purposes. "Justified" means that we were acquitted and set free from the penalty for sin, which is death and separation from God. These things are done in the *name* of Jesus Christ and also *by* the Holy Spirit. When you have one member of the Trinity, you have them all. We may not ever fully understand the Trinity. But just from what we do understand, we see that God deeply loves us. He created us; He has redeemed us through Jesus Christ; and He unifies and transforms us through the Holy Spirit. This is good news not only for us, but also for all those whom we want to know God as well.

C. Life Group Questions (Select, revise, and add as desired; 20-40 minutes)

1. The Bible supports the concept of the Trinity without ever specifically stating such doctrine. Why do you think that Jesus never specifically talked about the Trinity?
2. What does the Trinity reveal to us about the nature of God? The Bible tells us in 1 John that God is love, how does this relate to God's existence in three persons? Since God is love, why is it important that He exists as one but in three persons?
3. What are the roles of the Trinity in the different persons? How are those roles significant in relating to us?
4. What is the Trinity? Take some time to discuss your understanding of the Trinity. How would you explain the Trinity to a new believer or to someone of another faith?

D. Personal Application (1-3 minutes)

Take some time this week to reflect upon your understanding of the Trinity. Do some research in the Bible or some books like C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* or John Stott's *Basic Christianity*.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4; 10-15 minutes)

- Thank God for His vast love for us and for the redemption we have through His actions.
- Ask God to help you grasp a deeper understanding of who He is and how much He loves you.
- Bring up other things for prayer that may have come up during discussion.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,