

GOD IN THREE PERSONS, BLESSED TRINITY!

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

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June 11, 2017

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/god-in-three-persons-blessed-trinity/>

Do you see our Trinity stained glass windows high above me? We see them every week. We sing that famous hymn without thinking about it—"God in three persons, blessed Trinity!" What does all this mean? This morning's text is the earliest known Trinitarian formula. I've prepared a sheet for those who are interested, in the narthex on the welcome center table (also on our church's webpage), listing various Bible passages which mention the three persons of the Trinity. But the early church struggled with this and debated it for nearly 400 years.

Here's the challenge. We don't want to talk about the Trinity as if we have three gods. This is why Muslims have so much trouble with Christianity. They hear polytheism. No. God is one. Yet from eternity, God has existed in relationship with the Son and the Spirit. Christ existed in eternity before the incarnation, before his birth as a baby in Bethlehem.

My theology professor in seminary, Dr. Morris Ashcraft, said that the Trinity is inevitable the moment we refer to Jesus as the Son and yet also Lord (the same thing we call God), and when we say that Jesus is present with us (the Holy Spirit). Now, we're going to go deeper than we usually do on a Sunday morning. But you're smart and spiritually minded. You can handle this! Stay with me. The three Persons are intertwined, interdependent and they interpenetrate one another. They are intimately connected with mutual indwelling. Analogies and illustrations fail, but note this famous symbol of the Trinity, three interlocking links.

Consider this. Scripture doesn't actually begin with doctrine. It begins at the other end. We don't go from doctrine to experience; we go from experience to doctrine. The Trinity became a teaching in the Church when the first century believers discovered they couldn't say all they meant by the word "God" until they had also said "Jesus and the Holy Spirit" [James Stewart, *The Strong Name*, p. 251]. A perfect example of that is when Jesus said to baptize in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). One name, one God. But three expressions.

What does any of this have to do with real life, everyday life? Well, for starters, the Corinthians' fellowship was fractured. They were fussing and divided (you know how your children sometimes fuss? "Mom, Rebecca looked at me!"). Note vv. 11-12. Paul says, "Look how the God enjoys fellowship with the Spirit and Son." God is communal, God thrives on relationships, even within God's Self—perfect oneness and harmony.

But here's a second thing. I dare you to try to successfully follow Jesus while neglecting one of the Persons of the Trinity (in fact, that may be what we've been doing all these decades; maybe that's why our faith is so anemic!). Paul was writing to believers who struggling with failure, temptation, pride, bad habits, guilt, shame, disagreements. In v. 13, he was saying, "You need all the resources of God's Trinitarian fullness to help you! Your ordinary lives need the extraordinary power of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

And isn't Paul's sequence interesting? The grace of Christ, the love of God and the fellowship/communion of the Holy Spirit. We start with what we know. God isn't some far off concept or harsh judge. God has broken into history and come to heal, forgive and die on the Cross. And then be raised. Once that is established, we know God loves us, period. Nothing can change that. And all of this is made real by the Holy Spirit, the glue, the fellowship-fixer, the perpetual relationship healer.

I know this is all very deep and profound. But just because we can't explain something doesn't mean we cannot participate in it. Examples abound: the air conditioning in this room. The brakes on your car. Antibiotics for your sick child. A pastor was preaching from Eph. 3:19, "Be filled with all the fullness of God." A humble, quiet lady came up to him afterward and said, "Pastor, I can't hold much, but I can overflow lots!" I don't know about you, but I want to overflow. I want to participate in the Trinitarian fullness of God's life.

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In this message, Pastor Doyle Sager mentions that several places in the New Testament make reference to the three persons of the Trinity in addition to the primary scripture ([2 Corinthians 13:11-13](#)), even though the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly stated. Some of those verses are below:

- [Matthew 28:19](#)
- [John 3:34-35](#)
- [John 14:15-17](#)
- [Acts 2:32-33](#)
- [Acts 5:30-32](#)
- [Romans 8:14-17](#)
- [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](#)
- [2 Corinthians 13:13](#)
- [Galatians 4:4-6](#)
- [1 Peter 1:2](#)