

**“THE TRINITY: GOD IS NOT ALONE.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Sermon Texts: See Scriptures in Article Nine of Belgic Confession**

**Introduction.**

The news this past week has been filled with the story of three women kidnapped and held captive in a house in Cleveland. Ten years and they only left the house once or twice. Isolated from friends and family, from each other and from the outside world. It sounds like our worst nightmare.

Have you ever had the experience of being alone, I mean absolutely alone for an extended period of time, like days or a week? No one to talk to, no one around to touch, no human contact.

Our son Reed is in Yosemite National Park this week on an outdoor wilderness training adventure. Part of the training requires a three day solo camping experience, totally alone with no food, just water. He told us he is not looking forward to that part of the training, in fact it terrifies him. He has to face his fears and the experience of being totally alone.

I recall a very short isolation when traveling alone in Italy for just three days before meeting up with some college friends. Three days alone in a foreign country unable to speak the language. It was an impacting experience of how important human contact and communication are to us.

In the movie *Castaway*, the star Tom Hanks finds himself marooned on a south pacific island by himself for four years. It's an interesting portrayal of a man absolutely isolated and how he struggles to maintain mental and emotional sanity in utter loneliness.

Can any of us even begin to fathom four years alone on an island? Four years of no conversation, four years of no human interaction, no TV, cell phones, texting or Facebook?

If I say “God is \_\_\_\_\_ blank,” what's the first word that comes into most people's minds? Love. God is love.

Now consider this. What was it like for God for millions of years of eternity before He created the earth and mankind? Millions and millions and millions of years alone, as if on a deserted island, living in a deserted universe.

To say that God is love makes no sense for all of those millions and millions of years if God was alone and had no one with whom to give and receive love, no one to communicate with and to express love.

In order for God to be love, in the Godhead there must be a diversity in the unity, an ability to love and be loved, to give and receive and share love.

“Love, by definition, is directed toward another. Therefore, love cannot exist where there is not a plurality of persons. Supreme love is not directed toward creation, since a created person is not worthy of supreme love” (Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, p. 225).

## **Trinity.**

This plural aspect or dimension of the Godhead is called the Trinity, the tri-personality or tri-unity of God. This is one of the greatest mysteries concerning God and one of the greatest glories of God.

I know from past experience with a Muslim friend and other non-believers that the Trinity is one of the most difficult truths about God for us to wrap our heads around. It's confusing to the pagan and absolutely incredible to the believer.

Let's face it. The whole idea of the Trinity defies human understanding. The Trinity may be the most difficult doctrine that Christians try to understand. Jesus being fully God and fully human is tough. And the Bible being fully inspired by God and written by humans is a challenge. But the Trinity is the Mount Everest of doctrines, that highest mountain to climb.

As Peter says, some things in Scripture are hard to understand. After all we are talking about the infinite and eternal God of the universe. But just because they are hard doesn't mean they aren't true. Human pride says that if we don't understand something it must not be true. But by humility and faith we can affirm what Scripture clearly teaches even if Scripture doesn't clearly explain it.

## **Trinity in Scripture.**

Article Nine of the Belgic Confession is unique among Protestant Confessions. An entire article devoted to giving evidence for the Trinity straight out of the OT and NT. It begins with Genesis chapter one and goes to I John. In the OT the Trinity appears in shadows.

The word trinity is never used in the Bible, but that doesn't mean that the Trinity is not a Biblical doctrine or concept.

**Genesis 1:1-3** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 ... And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said ...” (the Word).

Again in Genesis 1 we hear God say, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” In Genesis 3 God says, “... the man has become like one of us ...” It makes one wonder how long the ancient Jews wrestled with the meaning of those plural pronouns.

In Deuteronomy we read the great creed of Israel:

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5** “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is *one*. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

But there is more said there than the English ear can hear. In Hebrew there are two different words for “one.”

There is *yachid* which means one, like the number one. And there is *echad* which conveys the idea of one in many or one in complexity, one in multiple. Like the way a cluster of grapes is one. Not one in number but one in unity. *Yachid* is never used of God.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is *echad*.”

In Genesis 2 when it talks about Adam and Eve and marriage it says, "... and the two shall become *echad/one* flesh." One meaning a unity in the diversity.

There are more early shadows of God being a unity in diversity and a diversity in unity. The three uses of Lord in the Aaronic blessing in **Numbers 6**:

24 The Lord bless you and keep you;  
25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

The threefold "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty" in Isaiah 6:3.

The appearances of the Angel of the Lord who is Jesus and the coming and going of the Holy Spirit.

In Isaiah 63:7-14 we read about the Lord and the angel of His presence and His Holy Spirit. **Isaiah 61:1** "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me."

*In the NT the mystery in the shadows gives way to light.*

At the baptism of Jesus all three persons of the Godhead are present.

**Mark 1:10-11** And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

And Jesus gave to us the baptismal formula: "... baptizing them in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

We hear the Trinity in the common NT benediction in **II Corinthians 13:14**: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

**II Thessalonians 2:13-14** ...God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**I Peter 1:1-2** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect ... 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of the Trinity is an essential doctrine taught all through Scripture, it's not secondary or peripheral or minor. The length of these two BC articles should alert us to their importance.

### **The Nature of the Trinity.**

Trinity describes the nature of God's existence. God is a tri-unity or a triple unity. God is one God who is three persons, equal in essence, but distinct in person and personality.

There is one and only one divine essence, meaning there is only one God. Numerically God is one. But in this unity, in this oneness, there are three distinct persons who are really, truly, and eternally distinct.

But how can one essence be three persons? A finite or limited God could not, but an infinite God can be and is.

We know God by His three names, His three offices, His three operations. Each one is distinct from the other, while all three share one essence as God.

***Articles 8 says it this way:***

“The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning [source] of all things visible and invisible; the Son is the word, wisdom, and image of the Father; the Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son.”

***Article 9 says it this way:***

“The Father is called our Creator, by His power; the Son is our Savior and Redeemer, by His blood; the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier, by His dwelling [living] in our hearts.”

At wedding ceremonies I tell the family and friends that from now on we are to view the couple as one, when we think of one to think of the other.

When we think of the Father, we are to think of the Son and the Spirit. And when we think of the three, we must think of the one true God.

**John 14:9-10** Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?”

***They are co-eternal.***

The Father is ever existing.

The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

***They are co-equal.***

They are co-equal in all things related to the Godhead. They are God. They all share the same essence. The Holy Spirit is not just the power of God, the Holy Spirit is God and shares the same power as the Father and the Son.

Yet the Son is subordinate to the Father and the Spirit to the Father and the Son.

Neither the Son nor the Spirit do anything outside of the will of the Father.

“Thy will be done.”

The subordination is of function and role, not of essence or equality or divine attributes.

***The Trinity is a model for male-female relations*** and shows how we can be equal yet have different roles in the home and at church. The Father and the Son are absolutely equal in essence, there's not even a hint of superiority or inferiority between them. The Son is in no way less than the Father.

Yet there's an order in the Trinity. The Father is the eternal begetter and the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Son comes to earth and the Son submits to the will of the Father.

The analogy speaks to male-female relationships. Men and women are absolutely equal in essence and there is no hint of superiority or inferiority between them. They are mentally, emotionally, spiritually equal.

Yet there is an order in the sexes. In the home the husband is head of his wife and in the church men are to lead. Completely equal in essence, different in roles and responsibilities and it has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. It's not about culture, it's about creation and being created in the image of God.

Feminists absolutely oppose this. They don't believe there can be an equality of essence and a difference of order, yet the Trinity proves it. This is why feminists in the church oppose the Scriptural Trinitarian formula, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They replace it with Parent, Child, Spirit; or Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier; or even the more radical Mother, Child, Womb.

### **The necessity of understanding the Trinity to avoid heresy and false doctrine.**

The doctrine of the Trinity is a theological necessity; it is a crucial part of the foundation of our faith. Without it we would be left in serious confusion as to the nature and activity of God. To deny the Trinity is to deny the Biblical understanding of God. And to deny the Trinity is to misunderstand who Christ is.

It is a doctrine so important that numerous Church fathers through several ecumenical councils defended it to the death. And the Reformation was no different. Our forefathers in the faith understood this well and went to great lengths to present as clear a understanding of the truth about the Trinity as possible from Scripture. The length of these two articles speaks to their importance.

This is not just a nice theological exercise. The Trinity is denied today by a lot of people. By cults like Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, Unitarians, Unity School of Christianity, United Pentecostals and Oneness Pentecostals.

By well-known individuals like TD Jakes, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland and Gwen Shamblin (of Weigh Down Diet fame) all deny some aspect of the Trinity.

By Muslims. Think about this. Islam's god is monotheistic, a unity with no diversity. This explains why love is not a chief characteristic of Allah. There is no way for love to be given or received or shared. Love has no strong basis in the theology of Islam, either god's love or human love.

## **Application and conclusion.**

This is a great and glorious mystery.

Great Reformers in the past have urged on us the practice of remembering our baptism. And yes you can remember your baptism even if you were only a couple of months old. You remember it by meditating on it. Remember your baptism when doubts come to mind, when fears rise up, when Satan attacks, when depression gets a grip. Remember your baptism by remembering who you are and whose you are, by remembering your adoption.

Remember the Trinitarian nature of your baptism. The Father planned your salvation from before the foundations of the earth. The Son came to earth to accomplish your salvation. The Holy Spirit came into your heart to apply the salvation that Christ accomplished and the Father planned.

Use **Ephesians 1** to guide your personal meditation and worship of the Trinity.

From the ***Father*** we receive every spiritual blessing, predestination not only to salvation, but also to holiness and blamelessness, and adoption (1:3-6).

From the ***Son***, we have received redemption, forgiveness, revelation, and an inheritance (1:7-12).

From the ***Holy Spirit***, we have received the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, the guarantee of our inheritance (1:13-14).

Remember your baptism by worshiping the three persons of the Godhead and seeking to be blessed by each of them with the blessings that each of them gives.

Your baptism is a great cause for worship and meditating on it will help you in your worship.