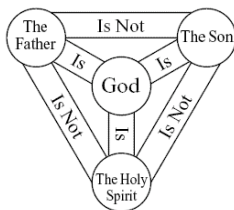


LEAD! A.5 God's Tri-Unity

In Which We Discover The Persons Who Make up the Godhead, and How They Relate to Us



We believe in one God, consisting of one [substance](#) -- one [name](#), one [identity](#), and one [character](#) -- sometimes called the [Godhead](#). Yet, that name is [expressed](#) through three distinct [persons](#), as illustrated by the classic [diagram](#) on the left. Theologians use the term "[Trinity](#)" to describe this paradoxical mystery, which is explicitly described in the [New Testament](#) and often alluded to in the [Old](#).

In this lesson, we will be focusing primarily on the [Economic Trinity](#) ("How God Acts") rather than the [Essential Trinity](#) ("What God is"). See the "Explore" section for other perspectives.

Adoration

[Isaiah 42:1-9](#)

Bible

[Romans 8:1-17](#)

This passage is one of many in the New Testament that mention all three persons of the Trinity, with a particular focus on both salvation and sanctification. We will discuss each of these persons in more detail in future lessons, but for now we will focus on comparing and contrasting their roles:

[There is] therefore now no [condemnation](#) to them which are in [Christ Jesus](#), who [walk](#) not after the [flesh](#), but after the [Spirit](#).

In this verse, the main attribute of Jesus (the Son) is that He saves us from condemnation (as described in the [previous chapter](#)). However, that salvation is characterized by complete submission to the Holy Spirit — which is turn characterized as "life in Christ":

For the [law](#) of the Spirit of [life](#) in Christ Jesus hath made me [free](#) from the law of [sin](#) and [death](#).

The important thing to realize here is that the Law itself — all natural and spiritual Law — comes from God, as a reflection of His character. The question is whether we are on the "right side" of the Law, by being identified with Christ:

For what the law could not do, in that it was [weak](#) through the flesh, [God](#) sending his own [Son](#) in the [likeness](#) of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in

the flesh:

The [old Law](#) — the Mosaic law, which showed us what sin was, and thus condemned us to death for breaking it — could never truly save us. It was limited to the flesh — what we could do through our own efforts — which would never be enough to satisfy God's perfect law. Therefore, God had to go beyond what we could do by doing it Himself.

This is one of those deep mysteries of which the human mind can barely scratch the surface, but as portrayed here the work of salvation is bound up in the work of the Trinity. Specifically, God the Father sent His Son take on our fallen flesh, so that we might take on His Spirit:

That the [righteousness](#) of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

This is a dense topic, no matter how it is [translated](#). Many [metaphors](#) have [been proposed](#) (and are [being proposed](#)) to explain how God works atonement, but it is important to remember that they are merely [analogies](#). For our purpose here, the crucial points are that:

- All three member of the Trinity are involved in our salvation
- They each have distinct roles
- They all share the same purpose

We must resist any interpretation that implies that God is divided against Himself, or conversely that the persons are somehow interchangeable. Each member of the Trinity has a unique part to play in fulfilling their joint goal (even if we humans aren't entirely clear what that is).

It is also worth pointing out that Paul is not so much concerned with how the Trinity works as with how **we** work with Him:

For they that are after the flesh do [mind](#) the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

Put another way: the members of the Trinity do not contend amongst themselves, but our flesh contends against God's Spirit — with grave stakes:

For to be [carnally](#) minded [is] death; but to be [spiritually](#) minded [is] life and peace.

The choice between death and life is really just a question of whether we will fight or submit to God's law:

Because the carnal mind [is] [enmity](#) against God: for it is not [subject](#) to the law of God, neither indeed [can be](#).

This is what might be called the Bad News: not only is our flesh at war with God, it doesn't have the power ([dunamai](#)) to do anything else. In other words, on our own we are hopelessly lost:

So then they that are in the flesh cannot [please](#) God.

This is one of the reasons the doctrine of the Trinity is so central to the Christian life: God is not merely some [transcendent](#) being who created the universe, He is also a Spirit that dwells within us:

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God [dwell](#) in you.

More, this Spirit is identified with the man Jesus Christ, who walked among us — and we can't have one without the other:

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is [none](#) of his.

In other words, we can't pick and choose among the Trinity, the way a [polytheist](#) might choose a patron from his or her culture's [pantheon](#). We must surrender our life to all — or none — of Him:

And if Christ [be] in you, the [body](#) [is] [dead](#) because of sin; but the Spirit [is] [life](#) because of [righteousness](#).

Again we see the Son and the Spirit working in tandem to bring us to righteousness, just as they partnered in the resurrection:

But if the Spirit of him that [raised up](#) Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also [quicken](#) your [mortal bodies](#) by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

This verse helps clarify that the “[flesh](#)” being condemned above is **not** our physical bodies. Our bodies themselves are intended to be [temples of the Holy Spirit](#); they are only corrupt when we seek to satisfy our own sinful nature (“the flesh”), rather than being submitted the Spirit of God.

Therefore, brethren, we are [debtors](#), not to the flesh, to [live](#) after the flesh.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall [die](#): but if ye through the Spirit do [mortify](#) the [deeds](#) of the body, ye shall live.

This parallels [Jesus' comment](#) about losing our life to save it. It is worth noting that this is pretty much the first actual command in the chapter (in terms of something we need to do), and even this is only doable through the Spirit.

That is another important implication of this doctrine: whatever service we might render to one person of the Trinity is only possible through the work of another person, so we ourselves never truly can (or need to) take credit. Just as the Trinity means that God can in some meaningful sense serve Himself, so too it means He can use us to serve Him.

For as many as are [led](#) by the Spirit of God, they are the [sons](#) of God.

Here we transition from a discussion of the Spirit and Christ to one regarding the Spirit and the Father. Being led by the Spirit — i.e., being in Christ — means we too can call God our Father:

For ye have not received the spirit of [bondage](#) again to [fear](#); but ye have received the Spirit of [adoption](#), whereby we cry, [Abba](#), [Father](#).

Wow! Think about what that means. In [human adoption](#), we give a child our name, and we become their parents. In divine adoption, God also give us His name — His Spirit and His character. God is thus not a solitary dictator under whom we slaves must tremble, but a loving Father -- "[Dada!](#)" -- who recognizes Himself (by His Spirit) within us.

The Spirit itself [beareth witness](#) with our spirit, that we are the [children](#) of God:

And as children, we share in all the privileges of Christ our brother:

And if children, then [heirs](#); heirs of God, and [joint-heirs](#) with Christ

In a very real (if very limited) sense, we have the privilege of being “caught up” into the Trinity, sharing a tiny but glorious fraction of Christ's relationship with His Father, and empowerment by the Spirit.

This privilege isn't without price, however. Not only did it cost God Himself greatly, but it also costs us. In order to enjoy that fellowship, we too must have our wills, character, and purposes conformed to the Godhead. It is a painful process, but the rewards are literally out of this world:

if so be that we [suffer with](#) [him], that we may be also [glorified together](#).

Conversation

1. What are some of your favorite metaphors for the Trinity? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
2. What do you think Paul means by the “flesh”? How do you experience the war between the flesh and the Spirit? How can the doctrine of the Trinity help?
3. Do you tend to view God more as an external lawmaker or as an internal lawkeeper?
4. To what extent do you agree with the statement: “It is only by the work of the Spirit that I can do anything acceptable to God the Father.” Why or why not?

5. Do you sometimes live under a “spirit of bondage” instead of a “spirit of adoption”? When and why?
6. Share a time when you had to experience suffering in order to grow deeper into a relationship.

Decision

- Repentance: What aspect of your fleshly nature does the Spirit want to mortify?
- Action: Whom can you invite into relationship with you or your family the way God invited you into the Trinity? At what cost?
- Worship: How can you cry out to God as your "Daddy"?

Explore

- [The Ontological and Economic Trinity](#)
- [Trinity, 1 – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: The Blessed Trinity](#)
- [Trinitarian Analogies](#)
- [Trinitarian Hymns](#)
- [YouTube – Michael W. Smith – Holy, Holy, Holy](#)
- [YouTube – Abba Father – Take Me Home – Acapella Company](#)

For Next Week

Read [Genesis 1–2](#). How does creation reveal God's “name”: His character and identity? What does it say about *our* “name”?