



WALKING **TO** **GLORY**

He is the God Who
Lives and Creates

Romans 11.33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been His counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to Him
that He might be repaid?”

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

God is ... a mystery.

God has revealed Himself historically and redemptively.

God the Father. God the Son. God the Spirit.

Claiming the Uniqueness of God “in Three Persons”

Do you recognize ... “eagle?”

adler – German

nasr – Arabic

gogorka ... Somali



ying – Chinese

artsiv – Armenian

ekara – Maori

- It is one thing to call the same animal “eagle” in English while recognizing other languages use different words. People necessarily accept linguistic differences.
- It is another thing entirely to imagine that an eagle is also a bull, a boat ride and a battery. These are not linguistic differences. They are different objects and experiences.

It is common today to assume all people everywhere worship the same God. People fall back on: “Each of us sees only a part of the ‘God puzzle’. With our different names and spiritual truths, each of us brings our singular ‘God piece’ to that puzzle.



(Change the analogy.) We're all trying to make it up the divine mountain; we're just using different paths for our climb.

(Change the analogy ... again.) We're all trying to worship the same "deity"; we're just using different doors to the divine temple.

No. Such cliches are disrespectful not only to other religions but especially to Christianity. The doctrine of the Trinity – *God as one in essence and three in person* – as revealed in Scripture, distinguishes the Christian faith from all the world's religions.

Christianity is not different because of different words, worship practices or cultural values. Christianity is different because of Who we worship and the only name upon Whom we may call for salvation (Acts 4.12; c.f. John 14.14.6) Remember the first lesson of this series: *The Gospel defines Who God is and how we relate to Him.*

THE TRINITY IN SCRIPTURE

The bedrock text of Israel's identity, of the Bible itself, is that there is one God. Standing apart from the surrounding nations who worshipped many gods in many ways, Israel was taught in the 'Shema': "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" (Deut. 6.4,5)

Jesus relied upon this truth when tempted by Satan (Mt. 4.10) Jesus confessed His fidelity to God in what He said and did, saying that true glory comes from "*the only God*" (Jn. 5.36-44) Jesus' miracles testify to this God: "*And they glorified the God of Israel.*" (Mt. 15.31)

Paul taught that while Gentiles worshipped many so-called gods, "*yet for us there is one God, the Father, from Whom are all*

things and for Whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things and through Whom we exist" (1 Co. 8.6). Paul plainly writes there in "one God of all, Who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4.6) Paul pleaded with the



Roman governor Felix: "I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God," (Ac. 24.14-15a). Paul's life was given to turning Gentiles "to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Th. 1.9; c.f., Rm 16.25-27)

Peter appealed to "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers" in his proclamation of Jesus (Ac. 3.13-16). Peter wrote that those who are "elect exiles" have been made so "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood," (1 Pt. 1.1,2) They needed to understand they were made to be "a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt. 2.5)

The Christian faith only continues the Biblical foundation of "One God." Yet the earliest Christian communities began to worship not only God the Father, but God the Son and God the Spirit. Why? Isn't this a contradiction?

Consider the *Drama*. Like the person and work of Christ, the one-ness of Jew and Gentile (which Paul calls a mystery, Eph. 3.6), *God-in-Three-Persons* is more clearly revealed as the story of redemptive history is revealed in Scripture. When we read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, we see many references that we (and Old Covenant believers) might have easily overlooked.

For example, consider the Angel of the Lord. In Genesis 18 "THE LORD" – *Yahweh* – is named as the visitor Who speaks with

Sarah about the child she will bear and with Abraham about His punishment intended for Sodom.

In the Psalm and the Prophets, the coming Messiah is referenced with attributes dependent upon *Yahweh*. In Isaiah 42, the Servant is identified with THE LORD (42.5,6,8). *"I have put My Spirit upon Him"* (42.1) needs to be read in the light of the fuller teaching of the New Testament – the Father put His Spirit upon the incarnate Son (c.f., Mt. 4.16,17; Mk. 1.10,11; Lk. 3.21,22; Jn. 1.29-34) Jesus questioned the religious leaders with a quote from Psalm 110, pressing them to acknowledge the Messiah was not David's son, but David's Lord. (Ps. 110.1-5)

The first Christians found themselves at a turning point in redemptive history: God has acted climactically in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the Son Who existed with the Father before the ages and was took on humanity *"when the fullness of time came"* (Gal. 4.4; c.f., Ro. 1.1-6; Eph. 1.1-10)

Recalling the language of creation, *"In the beginning, God created ..."* (Gen. 1.1) John's first sentence in his gospel is, *"in the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."* (Jn 1.1-3). The Son is distinct from the Father but is identified as God.

John continues. Jesus is *"the only Son from the Father"* (1.14) and is *"the only God, Who is at the Father's side"* (1.18). John the Baptist taught Jesus was the Son of God who came from heaven. (1.34; 3.31) Jesus electrifies His opposition, prompting attacks against Him. He applied to Himself God's name for Himself: *"before Abraham was, I am."* (8.58, 59) He claimed oneness with God: *"I and the Father are one" ... "the Father in in Me and I am in the Father"* (10.30-31, 38-39)

Paul and Peter continued. Paul writes Jesus is *"the image of the invisible God ... For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created*

through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together... in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell," (Col. 15-20) Peter calls Jesus "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pt. 1.1) Peter remembers his own eyewitness experience of God's pronouncement at Jesus' transfiguration, "This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased." (2 Pt. 1.16-18).

The New Testament resoundingly affirms not only the divine Sonship of Jesus, but Jesus' corresponding equality with God. (Lk. 2.26-32; Php. 2.5-10; Hb. 1.3)

But redemption's drama presents not only three names but three distinct persons, teaching redemption's doctrine as well.



The author of creation is also the author of redemption. All things come from the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit. There is the Father Who speaks ("This is My beloved Son"), the beloved Son Who is baptized, and the Spirit – in the form of a dove – Who hovers above Jesus, as He did over the waters of creation. (Mt. 3.13-17; Mk. 1.9-11; Lk. 3.21,22; Jn. 1.32-34; c.f., Gn. 1.2) Indeed, preserving her virginity, the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, the power of the Most High overshadowed her, and the child she miraculously bore was the Son of God (Lk. 1.26-35).

The Holy Spirit, distinct from the Father and the Son, is nevertheless worshipped with them as God. (2 Co. 3.17,18)

- The Holy Spirit possesses
 - the name of God (Ex. 31.3; Acts 5.3,4; 1 Co. 3.16; 2 Pt. 1.21)
 - God's essential attributes (Ps. 139.7; Isa. 40.13,14; 1 Co. 2.10,11).

- God's works are attributed to the Holy Spirit:
 - creation (Gn. 1,2; c.f., 'wind' 'Spirit', Job. 26.13; Ps. 33.13);
 - providence (Ps. 104.30; Eph. 1.13,14)
 - regeneration (Jn. 3.4-8; Titus 3.4-6)
 - resurrection of the dead (Ro. 8.9-11).

The unfolding of the redemptive drama progressively reveals the Triune God.

Doxology can be experienced in the Trinitarian formulas of the New Testament. "God in three persons" is not only a sturdy phrase from a beloved hymn! Baptism is in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. (Mt. 28.19) Blessings and benedictions are offered equally in the persons of God (Jn 5.23,24; Ro. 5.1-5, 8; 1 Co. 6.11; 8.6; 12.4-6; 2 Co. 13.14; Eph. 4.4-6; 2 Th. 2.13; 1 Tim. 2.5; 1 Pt. 1.1,2)

The *Discipleship* of the earliest Christians was rooted in the reality of experiencing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as distinct yet divine persons. God's voice thundered (Jn. 12.27-30; c.f., Mk. 9.7). Jesus was encountered firsthand as the incarnate Son (1 Jn. 1.1-4). They experienced the Holy Spirit, poured out by the risen Jesus on the day of Pentecost (Acts. 2.1-36, emph. v. 33). They experienced the indwelling the Holy Spirit (1. Co. 12.4-11; Ro. 8.1-16).

The earliest Christians neither rejected nor improved the One God of Israel. Rather, they were faced with Jesus as God the Son in the flesh and God the Spirit descending and indwelling

THE TRINITY GIVES SHAPE TO OUR FAITH & PRACTICE

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit worked together through redemptive history.

- We worship, pray, confess, sing praises and bring laments to the Father, in the Son and by the Holy Spirit.
- We are adopted as children of the Father, coheirs with His Son. We are united to the Son and His body, the church, by the Holy Spirit.

- All good gifts come from the Father, from the Holy Spirit, and to the Son.
- To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity; He is the fountain and wellspring of all things. To the Son is attributed wisdom, counsel and the ordered outcome of all things. To the Holy Spirit is attributed the power and capacity of all things.
- The Son and the Holy Spirit are no less our Creator and Preserver than the Father. The Father and the Holy Spirit are no less our Savior and Lord than the Son. No less than the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit worship and glorified.

The 4 “D’s”

Drama: The Big Story – How do the Father, Son and Holy Spirit participate in the unfolding Drama of redemption?

Doctrine: What We Believe – How would you define the Trinity? What do you understand by the distinction between ‘one in essence and three in person’? What would you say if asked: “Aren’t all ‘gods & faiths’ expressions of the same larger truth of divine truth?”

Doxology: Praise & Worship – Everything we do in worship is to the Father, in the Son and by the Holy Spirit. Does this challenge your idea of what worship is? How does the doctrine of the Trinity inform how you pray? Is it possible to begin to understand God’s work in creation, redemption and the final consummation of all things apart from the Trinity?

Discipleship: How We Live – How could reducing the Trinity to only the Father, or only the Son, or only the Holy Spirit, distort your view of God’s work in your life? What can we do to cultivate an awareness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in our daily lives?