

TRIUNE GOD, ISAIAH 45:18-25

What is God Really Like? #8

◆Intro: It was around the year 1992, I think. I was in sunny California at a conference held at the Crystal Cathedral. (picture?) Pastor Juan Carlos Ortiz was speaking to us and he said that it was silly to argue about doctrine. What difference does it make, he asked. Father, I give you praise. Son, I give you praise. Spirit, I give you praise. And if there is only one of you up there, you may keep it all for yourself.” “Who knows,” he asked, “Maybe God says, “Hah, there are 53 of us. We only tell you about three because you are so dumb!”” So, does it make any difference? Well today we are going to look at another characteristic of God, and this time is his Tri-unity, the Triune attribute of God, and we are going to answer why it matters. In a nut shell it is the fact that there is one God, and the Father, Son, and Spirit are all him. We’ll come back to the definition, but first...

◆**1. Why does theology matter?** Does it matter that we say we believe a certain thing? Most American’s today do not think so, which makes us one of the most irrational generations of all times. We assert, contrary to all learning, that truth is relative to the person. Whatever you experience of God, that is fine for you, and mine is good for me. First of all that doesn’t work with any other truth. (“Whatever speed limit you choose is good for you, and... Don’t jump off that cliff! Oh don’t worry, I don’t believe in gravity!”) Secondly, how do you know that what *you* are worshiping is not a demon instead of God? You might as well say that we can all chose our own pills when we feel nauseous, but the reality is, one may settle your stomach, the other may kill you. Theology matters because truth matters.

◆CS Lewis explains that theology is like a map of the oceans, and a map that is based on hundreds and thousands of people who really were in

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touch with God, probably far more than any of our meager encounters. One might prefer their own glimpse of the sea, which is fine as long as you don't want to go anywhere on it. "But a map is going to be of more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America." says Lewis. "And you will not get eternal life by simply feeling the presence of God in flowers of music. Neither will you get anywhere by looking at maps without going to sea. Nor will you be very safe if you go to sea without a map." Lewis point is that if you do not have a good map, you will not do well on the ocean. And if you don't go out on the sea you will not get anywhere new. And if you do not have true theology, you will not find the true God or do well on the eternal sea. And if you actually want to get somewhere spiritually, you shall have to venture onto the waters.

◆ So good theology matters in finding God and eternal life just as a good directions matter in finding your way across the sea. Your personal experience of the beach will not amount to sufficient resources. Now what about the theology of the Triune character of God?

◆ **2. What is the Trinity?** To say God is triune means that he is one God in three persons. These persons are co-eternal, distinct from one another, yet not three different gods, but one and the same; not divided, and not confused together either. First a few preliminary thoughts about this challenging mystery called the Trinity.

◆ **A.** Now it is true that this is a mysterious teaching, but because something is mysterious does not make it false. People will say that $1+1+1=3$. Three cannot be one. But that is only in one sense. It is also

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true that $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. So we must be carefully precise in our discussions, just as an aeronautical engineer must be with her math. Let take another example. We have been very happy with two dimensional movies for many years. But in recent times we have become able watch our shows, play our video games, take our ultrasounds, all in 3D. Just because we didn't have 3D didn't mean that there was no third dimension. So when we speak of the Trinity, we are saying there are more dimensions than we fully understand.

◆**B.** Now it is also true that the term "trinity" does not appear in scripture. But then a lot of useful terms do not (millennium, virgin birth, eternal security). Still, the truth of the Trinity is easily seen in the Bible. We don't have time to look at all of it, so we'll skim.

◆**1)** OT: In the very first lines of Genesis one, the very first book of the Bible, we read that "God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew term is *elohim*, a plural noun for "god", with a singular verb form, "created". Now Hebrew is a very precise and developed language. And this amounts to saying something equivalent to "Those men is climbing that trees." The tenses do not fit.

Nonetheless, they are consistently present. Later in that chapter God says "Let us make man in our image." (v26). Who is the us? No Hebrew for a moment believes in multiple gods. The Hebrew people were strict monotheists. The same author of Genesis 1 clearly teaches of one true God in subsequent writing.

◆In the prophecy of Isaiah, it is quite clear that there was no belief in 53 gods, or even millions as the Hindu's posit.

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◆ *“I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.” Isaiah 45:5, NIV.*

◆ It’s repeated in verse 6. It’s repeated in verse 14. It’s repeated in verse 18. It’s repeated in verse 21. It’s repeated in verse 22. Not to mention a great many other chapters throughout. And still, this same writer speaks multiple times like this...

◆ *“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,” Isaiah 61:1, 2, NIV.*

◆ Now we have the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord, and the servant of the Lord, all of whom appear in Isaiah. Jesus applied this verse to himself in the Book of Luke. Something like the famous Christmas text...

◆ *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6, NIV.*

◆ So a son is born who is said to be eternal already and named as Father. The prophecy of Micah says it. David does it in the Psalms. The prophet Jeremiah speaks in the same odd way...

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◆““The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.” Jeremiah 23:5, 6, NIV.

◆Now isn't that strange. An offspring of a man who will be called God the Lord.

◆**2) NT:** Add to these veiled references in the Old Testament all the explicit claims in the New Testament. Jesus himself did not hide his claim to actually be God!

◆*“I and the Father are one.” Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” “We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”” John 10:30-33, NIV.*

◆Or his claim to be eternal!

◆*“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” John 17:5, NIV.*

◆Add to this the fact that at Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit came down and the Father spoke from heaven. So the Father, the son, and the Spirit were all there. At the Great Commission Jesus himself told his followers to baptize disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our conclusion is that the Holy Book clearly

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reveals that there is one God, and that Jesus is that God, and the Holy Spirit is too.

◆ *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Hebrews 1:1-3, NIV.*

◆ **3. What difference does the Trinity make? What does it mean?**

◆ Just this week I was in a leadership meeting for our local ministers gathering, Teamm. We are changing the name and clearly spelling out who we are, what we believe, and why we are cooperating together as churches and ministries. All present were clear trinitarian christians, but the question arose as to whether we should say so or not. Not all people who claim to follow Christ, even today in Lafayette, agree about who his is. Some pentecostal churches do not believe Jesus is an eternal being. Should this divide us.

◆ How about a little history? Clearly trinitarian doctrine has always been important to the Christian Church on earth. Every time the question has arisen in history, the Christian Church as a whole has rejected all but the trinitarian doctrine. We'll walk through the history, but first a story to help the history be relevant.

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◆ A few years ago two African-American women knocked on my door in Highland, IN, and wanted to talk about Jesus and give me a magazine called the Watch Tower, a publication of the Jehovah's Witnesses church. I told them I'd be glad to listen to what they think about God if they listened to what I thought about God. They agreed so I went first. I said I was a follower of Jesus, and that I believed he was my savior. They quickly agreed that they were also "Christians" and followed Jesus. But, knowing the teaching of JWs I explained, "You and I don't believe in the same Jesus. You see, I think he is God Almighty. That he made you and the ground your standing on right now. That He existed before time began, has always been the one true God, and decided to step into human time to pay for the sins of the people he made, because he loved them and they couldn't earn forgiveness on their own." The ladies eyes widened for a moment and then one of them quickly responded, "Oh no, we don't believe that at all!"

◆ A. And so history repeated itself many centuries later on a doorstep in IN. When a preacher name Arius came along in the 4th Century and said that Jesus was not really as much God as the Father, and that he wasn't a mere human like you and I, but a third kind of created being, the Church rejected him, and wrote the Nicene Creed in 325AD to correct him. Arius' view that Jesus was a created being who was a lesser god, not really human, rather a third being, is revived in our day in the Jehovah's Witnesses churches. If this is true, then Jesus is not one of us, but can model for us how to be

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really good people and become gods too. But the Bible does not teach this. And Jesus himself did not teach this.

◆B. Another preacher condemned at Nicea was a man named Paul of Samosata. He said that Jesus was a deified man, a regular guy, wearing Levis like the rest of us, but that he was elevated into godness for his fine behavior, by the Father. Apollinarus taught that Jesus was 2 parts man (mind and body) and 1 part God (soul), kinda like a centaur of greek mythology. Sabellius taught that the man Jesus was one of three modes or forms that God took over time, like water can be liquid, ice, or steam but it's always water. This heresy called modalism says that in the OT, God manifest himself as Father, then he turned into the Son, and at the ascension took a new form of a Spirit but the three were never all there at the same time. Jesus in this case, was God's *form* for about 30 years in the first century. (this view still exists in some pentecostal churches right here in town.)

◆In contrast to all of these, the Christian Church has always held that Father, Son and Spirit are three persons in one God. As the Belgic Confession puts it...

It is evident then
that the Father is not the Son
and that the Son is not the Father,
and that likewise the Holy Spirit is
neither the Father nor the Son.
Nevertheless,
these persons,
thus distinct,
are neither divided

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nor fused or mixed together.

For the Father did not take on flesh,

nor did the Spirit,

but only the Son.

The Father was never

without his Son,

nor without his Holy Spirit,

since all these are equal from eternity,

in one and the same essence.

There is neither a first nor a last,

for all three are one

in truth and power,

in goodness and mercy. (art.8)

◆Some of you are wondering at this point if this will be on the test, or at least why it matters. Wasn't that a long time ago? No, not really. We're still having these discussions everyday. I talked with a pastor from the "Unity Church of Christianity" who told me you can't really put your finger on God because he is in all things. I asked him what he believed about Jesus. He said, "You mean the historical Jesus or the Christ?" To him the historical Jesus is the man the Romans killed. The Christ is a religious consciousness in all people. We are all gods. Heaven is within us. Scripture means different things to different people. Sure Christ is god but so is Fido, your pet. He said, "The dogma I deny is the exclusivity of Jesus. My difficulty with the orthodox church is not that it made Jesus God, but that it stopped there."

◆This man prays to a different god. If he is right, Christianity has been wrong about Jesus for some 2000 years. If he is right, the Bible

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is not telling us the truth about God, and we should quit pretending that we should follow it. In fact, we may not need salvation at all! If he is right, salvation is not paid for by the love and blood of Christ. But this is not the message of the Bible at all. It teaches that only God can bear the punishment for sin. Only God can die and come back to life. Only man is the fair recipient of punishment for his own wrong. Therefore only a fully divine, fully human person can make us right with God.

◆ **Conclusion:** Why is the truth of the Trinity important?

◆ Because God's written truth speaks this way. The alternative is to reject the Bible as of God.

◆ Because of the truth about human sin, which needs undoing.

◆ Because of the truth about atonement for sin. A Jesus who is not God or is less than God, is at best a prophet or a fine example, which most heresies freely admit. But fine examples have never done the human race any real good. We continue to rack up black marks anyway. But only a Jesus who is God, and also distinct from the Father, can represent us to him, and take us into a life with God. If God is not triune, the eternal deity of Christ is in question. If the eternal deity of Christ is in question, our hope of salvation from sin is in question. If our salvation is in question, knowing anything about God is pretty much impractical in any way.

◆ There is one final truth behind the Triune nature of God. Unlike other religions it is the Christian God that is defined by love. We might also notice that love cannot exist without more than one person for love is a disposition

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of one heart toward another. Augustine: "The mystery of the Christian Trinity is the mystery of Godly love. You see the Trinity, if you see love."

◆Listen folks, Christianity claims to be telling us about another world, about something behind the world we can touch and hear and see. Jesus is of that world. We are not. The Father of that world and ours loves and so he sent his Son into ours to bring us to his. Jesus is the only begotten of God. We are created sons and daughters God. We may be like God, as a statue a man makes may look a lot like himself. But a statue cannot come to life. Now listen carefully. "This world is the Great Sculpture's shop. We are statues and there is a rumor going round that some of us are some day going to come to life." (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p.140) A life that is more than this one. One that is at this point mysterious but real nonetheless. That can happen only through this Jesus God's word preaches. You and I must surrender to him completely, and repent of all else. He is the Holy and Anointed One. He was sent because of how deep the Father's love for us is. And if we surrender to him, His Holy Spirit will accompany you as you walk out of here and into eternity.

Communion: read BC.10