

# SHEPHERD'S COMMUNITY CHURCH

Sunday ABF – February 3

“The Knowledge of the Holy”

by A.W. Tozer

## CHAPTER 4

The Holy Trinity

*As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17).*

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.  
2 Corinthians 13:14*

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father,  
may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (Ephesians 1:17).*

*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14)!*

### 1) THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY IN CHURCH HISTORY:

Book of Ephesians 60 A.D.

Ignatius (martyred 107 A.D.) – Clearly proclaimed the Deity of Christ

Tertullian 160–235 A.D. – First author to use the term “trinitas,” Latin for Trinity

Sabellius 215 A.D. – developed the heresy of Modalism/Sabellianism (One God, One Person, three “Modes”)

- Dr Bruce Ware says that this heresy did not need an all-Church Council to refute it. **Ordinary Christians rejected this heresy by studying the Scriptures!** Baptism of Jesus, Jesus praying to His Father, Christ interceding for us, Jesus’ Second Coming — all these refute Modalism.
- United Pentecostal Church International, Apostolic Pentecostals, “Jesus Only” movement, Oneness Pentecostals

Arius 250–336 A.D. – developed the heresy of Subordinationism/Arianism (Jesus is a created Being)

- Jehovah's Witnesses

Council of Nicea 325 A.D. (called by Emperor Constantine I) – condemned Arian heresy

- Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (328 A.D.) — he argued that Jesus has the same Nature or Essence as the Father (Philippians 2; John 1:1; John 8:58; John 10:30).

- Three camps debated at Nicea:
  - heteroousios** ("of different substance/nature") – Arius & his followers
  - homoiousios** ("of like substance/nature") – Eusebius & followers of Origen (the compromise group)
  - homoousios** ("of one substance/nature") – Athanasius & his followers

Council of Constantinople 381 A.D. – Affirmed the divinity of the Holy Spirit

- “Up until about 360, theological debates mainly dealt with the divinity of Jesus, the 2nd Person of the Trinity. However, because the Council of Nicea had not clarified the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of the Trinity, it became a topic of debate. The Macedonians denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.” Wikipedia
- Cappadocian Fathers: Basil (BAH - zil) the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzen defended the Deity of the Holy Spirit at the Council of Constantinople (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 6:19).
- The Council also condemned Arianism (again), which soon died out afterward, or until the JW's revived it

Augustine (354–430 A.D.) *On the Trinity*: ‘in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more rewarding.’ Augustine’s definition: God’s whole and **undivided** Essence belongs **equally, simultaneously, and fully** to each of the three Persons of the Godhead. He emphasized three **DISTINCT, PERSONAL** Beings. (This precise language guards against heresy.)

Council of Ephesus 431 A.D.

- “Jesus was one Person, not two separate people: complete God and complete man, with a rational soul and body.”
- Condemned “Nestorianism,” which believed that Christ has two natures but is not unified as one Person. This position makes salvation impossible. **Why?**

Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D. (Pronounced KAL - si - don or kal - SEED - n)

- Christ has two natures: One divine and one human (unmixed) and is One Person (not two persons)
- Condemned “Monophysitism,” the belief that Jesus had only one nature (divine). They believed that “the human nature of Christ was essentially obliterated by the Divine, ‘dissolved like a drop of honey in the sea.’” (Sounds Gnostic.) This position makes salvation impossible. **Why?**

The Filioque Controversy: John 15:26

- **Does the Spirit “proceed” from the Father only or the Father and the Son? This question has divided the Eastern and Western churches to this day.** (Formally split in 1054 A.D.)
- Synod at Toledo (Spain, not Ohio!) 589 A.D. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father AND the Son. “And from the Son,” “et Filio.”
- Western Church “perceives” the Trinity by starting with God’s essence and then moving to an understanding of the Three Persons individually. This has led to a functional modalism in Western thought.
- Eastern Church takes its understanding of the Trinity by starting with the Three Persons, then moving to comprehend them as One God. This has led to a certain degree of subordinationism in the East, however, the Eastern Church historically has done a much better job of worshiping the Trinity and keeping the Trinity central in their daily lives!

John Calvin – *Institutes of Christian Religion I:XIII* online at:

<http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes/>

John Owen – *Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* online at:

[http://www.aracnet.com/~wing/jo\\_trin.htm](http://www.aracnet.com/~wing/jo_trin.htm)

Jonathan Edwards – *An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity* online at:  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/trinity/files/trinity.html>

2) **What is Ontological Trinitarianism? What is Economic Trinitarianism?** Please read the following verses to see examples of each – 1 John 4:8, 16; John 3:16. (**PLEASE do not worry about answering these questions on your own!!!** I'm asking them so that we can briefly cover these important theological concepts in fellowship with one another.) **Are you familiar with the phrases “Unity in Trinity, Trinity in Unity” and “Unity in diversity, diversity in unity?”** (Islam is unity without diversity & postmodernism is diversity without unity.)

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*  
Ephesians 3:14-19

3) **Why do all attempts to represent the Trinity by a physical metaphor fail? What heresy is found in the “Trinitarian” analogy of the 3 forms of water—ice, liquid, vapor? What heresy is found in the “Trinitarian” analogy of the 3 leaves of a clover? What heresy is found in the “Trinitarian” analogy of husband, wife, child? Why is a triangle or the 3 dimensions of space not good analogies of the Trinity?**

4) **Did the Son of God set aside His deity to come to Earth?** (Read Philippians 2:5-11.) Tozer explains: “In His incarnation the son veiled His deity, but He did not void it. The unity of the Godhead made it impossible that He should surrender anything of His deity. When He took upon Him the nature of man, He did not degrade Himself or become even for a time less than He had been before. God can never become less than Himself. For God to become anything that He has not been is unthinkable.”

### 5) **Should our teaching, worship, and prayer be Trinitarian?**

In song, we worship **God** (“I Sing the Mighty Power of God”), **our Father** (“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”), **Jesus** (“Knowing You”), and **the Holy Spirit** (“Breathe On Me, Breath of God;” “Spirit of the Living God”), and sometimes all three Persons of the Trinity (“Wonderful, Merciful Savior”) but we rarely sing to **the Trinity**. One notable exception is the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy!” Please read the excerpts from the article *Trinity* by Matt Redman on the back pages. Trinitarian hymns at: [http://www.creeds.net/Misc/trinitarian\\_hymns.htm](http://www.creeds.net/Misc/trinitarian_hymns.htm)

Pastor Robert Letham remarks, “‘My God, How Wonderful Thou Art,’ ‘Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven,’ ‘Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise,’ ‘Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation,’ and even (dare I say it?) ‘Great Is Thy Faithfulness’ are only theistic, at best implicitly binitarian. ‘How Great Thou Art’ is at best binitarian.” **But why would this matter? Why is it so important??**

6) At the beginning of the chapter, Tozer says, “Some persons who reject all they cannot explain have denied that God is a Trinity....They fail to consider that any real explanation of even the simplest phenomenon in nature lies hidden in obscurity and can no more be explained than can the mystery of the Godhead.” Scientists do not really know how atoms are held together, what gravity is, or how God keeps galaxies from spinning apart!

“The doctrine of the Trinity, as I have said before, is truth for the heart.  
The fact that it cannot be satisfactorily explained, instead of being against it, is in its favor.  
Such a truth had to be revealed; no one could have imagined it.” A.W. Tozer

### 7) **In what way(s) does Jesus show us the Nature of the Trinity?**

(Please read Isaiah 9:6; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.)

“We, too, have had our clefts in the rock, where we have seen the full splendors of the Godhead  
in the person of Christ.” Spurgeon

### 8) **How should the Nature of the Trinity direct our relationships with one another?**

(Please read Ephesians 3:14-19; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 Peter 4:18.)

*We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true—even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*

*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols (1 John 5:20-21).*

### **Recommended reading:**

*Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* by Dr. John Owen

You can read this book online at: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/ipb-e/epl-owtrinity.html>

*The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief* by James R. White

*The Holy Trinity* by Pastor Robert Letham

The following is an excerpt from *Worship Leader* magazine.

## Trinity

by Matt Redman

Judging by her questions, my four-year-old daughter Maisey is becoming quite a theologian. Recently with her little enquiring mind in overdrive, she threw a tough one at me: "Daddy, is Jesus God or is He the Son of God?" Taken by surprise, I tried to explain as simply as I could that He is both. "Aaagh!" came her frustrated response, "That's so confusing!" And smiling to myself I was glad that she wanted to get a clearer picture of who God is.

There's a strong challenge out there for worship leaders and songwriters today to present a clearer view of who God is through the songs we sing. Not only is it a matter of honoring God's name as wholesomely as possible—but also our songs of worship play an important part in affecting people's view of God. A scary and weighty responsibility.

### Urgent Attention

I recently wrote to church leaders from various streams of the Church, asking them to identify which theological areas need the most urgent attention in today's worship song output. In other words, where are the gaps and blind spots in our current worship diet? By far the most frequent answer was the Trinity. As Chris Cocksworth, Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge, summed it up:

"We need 'the Trinitarian geography of Christian worship' to be made clearer in our songs of worship." [1]

Professor Lester Ruth of Asbury Seminary recently completed a fascinating study into the usage of Trinitarian worship songs in the U.S. church between the years of 1989 and 2004. He identifies the seventy-two most used worship songs over that period, as documented by CCLI, and studies their content, particularly with a view to assessing their Trinitarian content. Professor Ruth discovered that none of these seventy-two songs explicitly refers to the Trinity or the triune nature of God, *per se*. And, even more to the point, only three of the songs explicitly refer to, or name, all three Persons of the Trinity. In particular, very few of them specifically name God the Father or the Holy Spirit. These shocking findings should be a wake-up call to songwriters and service planners everywhere.

### Theological Confidence

My own theory is that for many of us musicians, our lack of Trinitarian-shaped output is due to a lack of theological confidence in that area. For sure, we know that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But perhaps we have felt a little less sure of how these three persons of the Trinity interrelate when it comes to worship, and we end up petrified of writing something which may be at best misleading—and at worst, heretical. Instinctively therefore, we'd rather avoid the area altogether—rather than end up in some kind of theological pile-up. For others, there may be different reasons. Perhaps we have simply not thought about this area enough. Whatever the case, the corrective has come, and the call now is for songwriters and worship leaders to actively respond.

### We Write What We Read

The best way to produce "output" is to first receive "input." We must immerse ourselves in this theme—gathering pointers from as many books and teachers as we can. Sometimes a theologian will help us put into words and more fully understand what instinctively we know to be true—and therefore take us some way

towards helping others find a voice. There are times when we should write overtly Trinitarian songs, addressing and responding to each person of the Trinity by name. There are several songs available where we sing to the Father in verse one, the Son in verse two and the Holy Spirit in verse three—and this is great. But this need not be the only model. At other times, our references might be less explicit, yet a sense of Trinity should always be there in the background. Robin Parry says, "When it comes to worship, Trinity should be like the grammar in a sentence." [2] It is not always explicit, but it underpins and shapes everything.

Returning to some wise words from Chris Cocksworth:

"Sometimes I feel that our worship songs do not allow the song that Jesus sings to the Father to be sung in me. Although the songs take me to Jesus, they don't always take me in, with and through Jesus to the One He calls Abba." [3]

Service planners and worship wordsmiths, let us take up the challenge.

Matt Redman's songs include "The Heart of Worship," "Better Is One Day," and "Blessed Be Your Name." As an author he has written *The Unquenchable Worshipper*, *Facedown* and *Blessed Be Your Name*. Matt, his wife and three children reside in West Sussex, England.

SOURCES:

[1] and [3] Chris Cocksworth, *Inside, Out Worship*, Matt Redman and friends, Regal Books, 2005

[2] See Robin Parry's excellent new book *Worshipping Trinity*, Paternoster Press, 2005.