Several weeks ago we asked the question, "How can a finite, limited, earth-bound human ever accurately describe the Almighty, infinite, everywhere present, beyond space and time God?"

- We are bound in time & have just been here a tiny while but God is above time and eternal
- We are limited to this little place in the universe but the whole universe is but a "hand breadth" to God
- We know very little and have only experienced what happens on earth, but God knows all and has seen all of history.

As finite, limited, earth-bound humans there is no way we "can figure out" the Almighty God on our own! God must reveal Himself to us – God must show us, in our limited terms, what His limitlessness is like. We cannot know God perfectly, exhaustively, or extensively but we can know him truly. And that is because God has revealed Himself to us through His design in creation around us, through His work in History, through His appointed messengers, through Jesus and through the Bible which is God’s word to us. A couple weeks ago we saw there are three ways we try to describe the indescribable – God’s attributes, God’s names and God’s nature as Trinity.

It is the Trinity that we want to look at today. What is the Trinity? Where do we see this in the Bible? What difference does it make?

PROPOSITION: God’s nature as “trinity” gives understanding and wisdom to a huge amount of our life, especially relationships!

I. What is the Trinity?
1 Peter 1:1-2
(also Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; John 14:26; 1 Cor 12:4-6; Rom 14:17-18; Luke 3:22; Eph 2:18)
The word actual word “Trinity” is not in the Bible – it is simply shorthand for these three Biblical truths.

A. There is only ONE God
(Deuteronomy 4:35; 2 Samuel 7:22; Isaiah 43:10, 44:6, 45:18)
First, there is only one God. As King David said in 2 Samuel 7:22, “How great You are, Sovereign Lord! There is no one like You, and there is no God but You, as we have heard with our own ears.” Belief in just one God is called “monotheism” as “mono” means one and “theism” means belief in God. The Jewish & Islamic faiths also are monotheistic – believing in just one God. Polytheism is the belief in many gods and that is common among ancient religions, paganism and parts of Hinduism. When we say TRINITY we are saying there is JUST one God.
B. That God exists in THREE persons

But that ONE and ONLY God exists in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit as we read a number of times in our scripture reading today. Notice the three actively at work here in 1 Peter 1. READ 1 Peter 1:1-2. Father, Son and Spirit are all spoken of here as distinct, yet they are on the same level – each having an important part in our Christian lives. Now who is on the same level with God? Only God! The Bible clearly states that there is only one God, yet we have these repeated references to three persons in that one Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. TRINITY – tri (meaning three) and unity (meaning one). If someone claims you falsely believe in three gods, you can simply respond by saying, “You are picturing that like addition in mathematics – 1+1+1=3. But God is revealing it like multiplication – 1x1x1 EQUALS ...ONE.”

C. Father, Son & Holy Spirit are each fully God but different

(1 Corinthians 8:6a [Father]; I John 5:20 [Son]; Acts 5:3-4 [Holy Spirit])

Let’s recite 2 Peter 1:1 together (you can turn a couple pages to get there is you are nervous about your memory – remember to keep repeating these verses just one a week to refresh them – And April 1st is the last day to get certified for having memorized 1 or more of those verses and then using that reward to help one of our area ministries). RECITE 2 Peter 1:1. Notice that phrase “our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Jesus is not just the Messiah or Christ. Jesus is not just our Savior – the one who paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. But Jesus is also God! In fact, the New Testament clear refers to each of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as fully God. I Corinthians 8:6 calls the Father “God”. I John 5:20 refers to “God’s Son Jesus Christ” as “true God and eternal life”. Jesus taught and showed that He was God incarnate. In Acts 5:3-4 Peter starts by saying Ananias “lied to the Holy Spirit” and ends by saying he lied not to men but to God. The “Holy Spirit” and “God” are seen as one! So we have three different authors writing to three different audiences for three different purposes, and yet each points out that there is distinction between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit YET they are equal in their standing as God – and there is only ONE God. How do you say all that with less words to make life easier – you invent a word – “Tri-unity” or “trinity”. The word “Trinity” is simply shorthand for saying there is absolutely only one God, but that God exists in three persons (or distinctions) who are eternally existing, having the same attributes and working in perfect harmony. God is “Tri-unity” or “trinity”. One essence, three persons.

D. Unique and stretches the imagination

At this point some will say, “But that is not easy to understand?” Why should we think that the Almighty, Creator God who is above time & space and knows everything should be easy to understand? He wouldn’t be much of a God if that was the case. That is why God must reveal Himself to us. Instead of trying to bring God’s nature down to our puny understanding, let’s see the importance of this tri-unity or trinity.
First that makes God’s nature as “trinity” unique among other faiths. What Biblical Christians believe about the nature of God is different than all other faiths! The non-monotheistic faiths believe we are in error because we believe there is ONLY ONE God, while the Jews & Muslims believe our understanding of the “trinity” is blasphemous because God is only one – not three in one. If Jesus is the only way to the Father, as He claims & then backed-up by His bodily resurrection from the dead, then our understanding of God should be unique. All roads can’t lead to the same God when that God is described in very contradictory ways. The trinity is key in what sets Biblical belief apart from all other belief.

Second, this idea that God’s nature is “tri-unity” or “trinity” stretches our imagination – why should we expect anything different. Since God is unique, why shouldn’t His nature stretch our imagination! There is no equal for us to picture. The size of the universe could give us some understanding of God’s immensity & power, but not of His love and mercy. Nothing in all creation is this exalted “three in one” because nothing else is God. If we emphasize the “one-ness” in God too much, then Father, Son and Holy Spirit are just different names for different roles of the same God – like I am a father, son and husband. I am only one person, but those names simply describe different roles as I interact with different people. God is more than that. Look back to 1 Peter 1:2. READ. Father, Son and Holy Spirit each have a unique part in the salvation process of every believer. The Father chooses by foreknowledge, the Son redeems through “the sprinkling of his blood” which refers to Jesus’ death on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin and the Spirit sanctifies us or is prompting our growth in ‘holiness’ – HOLy Spirit. When we emphasize the “three-ness” too much then we divide God up when HE IS ONLY ONE. Some Christians worry they may be praying to the wrong person in the Godhead – there is only One God.

The Trinity is not only unique but do you see how it constantly stretches our imagination. Every time we focus on the three – we need to come back to the One. Every time we focus on the One, we must remember the three. This is not new – listen to what Gregory of Nazianzus said 1650 years ago: "No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Three than I am carried back into the One. When I think of any of the Three, I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light." Don’t try to simplify the Trinity, let it continually stretch your imagination!

E. Necessary

God’s nature as Trinity is also necessary. There is no way that God could become truly incarnate (what we celebrate at Christmas) AND THEN die on the cross for sins (what we remember in each communion and on Good Friday) if the trinity didn’t
II. Human relationships are based on God’s nature as “trinity”
   As with anything created – a part of the creator is reflected in His creation. So let’s spend the rest of our time seeing how incredibly foundational God’s nature as “trinity” is in the area of human relationships.

   A. God’s plan for the family is grounded in the Trinity
      Look back at I Peter 1:2 again and notice the names used. READ. Under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration and Jesus Christ’s teaching, God is referred to as “Father”. In the verses that we read earlier in the service we kept coming back to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Notice God reveals His deepest nature using two words of the family – Father and Son. God’s plan for the family is actually grounded in God’s nature as “trinity”. We don’t want to EVER understand God by our earthly experience with our family which has been marred by sin, but we ALWAYS want to see God’s glorious purpose for the family & close friends through the interactions that happen within God because of the Trinity. The trinity is not a picture of a family, the family is a picture of the trinity. There is a mistaken belief in our day that if you don’t have a good role model in life, you are doomed.
      - If your parents are alcoholic, you’ll be alcoholic
      - If close friends divorce, then you’ll divorce
      - If your Dad was absent or a bad example, then you’ll be unable to embrace God as Father
      - If society is sexually permissive then people will all be sexually permissive. Talk about depressing and fatalistic. Since all humans sin and fall short, this is nothing less than being destined to failure over time. But, because God is three-in-one – trinity – we can always look to the interaction between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to see relationship between equals in essence but differences in function. The Trinity is the greatest relationship model possible and it ALWAYS points to victory. There is no turmoil within the Godhead. God is the definition, picture and true example of what a father is – not our earthly fathers or our own ideas of what we wish our fathers were more like. Jesus is the definition, picture and true example of an obedient child.

   B. The ‘trinity’ is our model for relationships & closeness
      It is not only the family that the Trinity is a model for, but also all interpersonal relationships – like friends, co-workers, neighbors or fellow students. Only two of the
three names in the Trinity are family names – the Holy Spirit is not yet is co-equal and co-eternal to the Father and Son. All three persons in the Trinity work in perfect harmony – in our terms today, "they have always gotten along." Being made in God’s image means we were built for relationships – no matter how self-sufficient you or I may feel, we ALL need human relationships. God is & has always been in relationship even before He created the Universe and anything in it. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-equal and co-eternal, yet they are also one. So the Trinity shows us what “love of equals” looks like. If there were no distinctions in the Godhead how could God ever love an equal – since the true God has no equal. He would only love lesser beings he created – like we love a pet or favorite possession. There was a woman I worked with long ago who knew how to love her ‘cats’ (lesser intelligence) but she couldn’t stand to be around any of her family no matter what their ages (her equals). She really struggled with loving people – that is loving equals.

If you want to better understand great relationships, realistically look at the interactions that are revealed to us between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Right from the very beginning, “Let us make mankind in our own image ...”, there is a cooperation and communication beyond what we can imagine. Because of His nature as Trinity, God has never been lonely. He did not have to create humans to have something to do or someone to do things with.

C. The ‘trinity’ is our model for humility, submitting, self-sacrifice and obedience. God, as trinity, also becomes our model for those virtues that are necessary for strong, long-lasting relationships. If there were not three EQUAL persons in the Godhead, there would be no need for God to ever exhibit humility, submission, or obedience because there is no one His equal. When we are called to “submit” or “obey” by the Bible, we are freed to know this isn’t some signal that I am less than other people because God the Son freely submits to the Father and the Holy Spirit freely carries out the will of the Father and Son without seeking any recognition for Himself! The Son and Holy Spirit are ontologically equal to the Father even as their specific roles call for submission, humility and obedience – which they willingly, lovingly and joyfully do without grumbling, complaining or feeling bad. Each is sacrificing self to bring great unity to the Godhead. Every Christian needs to learn to submit to someone else – every Christian needs to obey someone else – every Christian needs to learn humility. Our model is the Godhead, not what seems to work for the moment.

Now even our best human relationships don’t come anywhere close to the inner relationship in the Trinity. God doesn’t want our relational brokenness to destroy us, but He wants to use those problems to refine us. Our imperfect human family is meant to be a training center so that through God’s power & direction we can develop wisdom, discernment & the fear of the Lord whether we have a functional or dysfunctional family. This is the power of God! He uses the strain & struggles of relationships to refine true love, patience, perseverance, forgiveness & self-sacrifice in us.
D. The ‘trinity’ encourages us that family/relationship is redeemable. The fact that all human relationships are grounded in God’s very nature of Trinity also gives us confidence that every family is redeemable – any relationship can change – no matter how messed up our models have been. Those values of humility, submitting, self-sacrifice, and obedience as well as the gospel’s power to redeem is greater than any dysfunction. If Paul, the vicious persecutor of Christians, can become a humble servant of Jesus, then so can your bisexual, dope smoking brother or sister. If Peter could be transformed from denying Jesus to boldly preaching to thousands, there is hope for your mom, dad or endlessly adulterous uncle. Even more important, if you, who were once dead in your sins and an object of God’s wrath could be drawn to the Savior than so can your most belligerent co-worker. In fact, even if a relationship can not be restored because of continual hardness of someone’s heart, God allows us to gain incredible wisdom, humility, perseverance, and inner value even as we feel like a failure, a mess & broken.

We will end with John. His parents were separated more times that he could count when he was young and they finally divorced when he was 14. He lived with his father who was a chain-smoking alcoholic because his mother was so unstable they never knew when she would be around. John couldn’t wait to go to college to finally get away from the nightmare of his family. Though he had no religious upbringing, there was something in John that attracted him to a meeting of a Christian group on campus. There he heard the gospel, especially of a heavenly Father who loved him enough to send his own Son to die for him and who would never forsake him. That was certainly good news to John and he committed his whole life to Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.

In John’s excitement, one part of him wanted his parents to find Jesus so they could get straightened up but the other part didn’t want to have anything to do with them in their dysfunctional state. There are or will be people in our lives that we feel the same about. But God’s very nature as ‘trinity’ means we are designed for relationships and there are certain relationships we were simply put in without any choice of our own.

Love necessitates that we seek the best for another for the long run. So John’s small group leader encouraged John to take a more creative third approach to sharing Jesus with his dysfunctional family. He said that it is important to let them know that John had personally found something special in a personal relationship with Jesus as soon as possible BUT to do that with NO AGENDA to preach to his family at that time! We absolutely want to have a time where we explain the gospel to every person we are in relationship with and then offer them the same opportunity to find new life in Jesus as someone offered us. But we also need to remember it is God who does the miracle of drawing people to Himself and converting them. In all relationships, God has important work to do in us before doing redemptive work through us. As John later said, “I had to come to that painful realization that I was broken just like my parents were. When I became obsessed with my father’s escape from reality through
alcohol or my mother’s abandoning me, God would point out that I dulled my pain with escape from reality and I had walked away from God all my life. I had to see & respond to God’s grace for me before I could genuinely extended to them. I had to be honest about the pain I felt, while remembering the pain I caused Jesus on the cross. I had to experience God’s love before I tried to share it.”

Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus and remember the core truths of our faith are extremely important in our everyday lives.