

## **A Trinity Shaped Life**

John 14:15-31

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning. Today we'll be picking up in John 14 where we left off three weeks ago on June 1<sup>st</sup>. We didn't really plan it this way, but Michael's sermon on the incarnation on the 8<sup>th</sup> was a good part three to this little doctrinal series. So, we did part one on June first, then part three the next week, then we took a week to look at Jonah, and now we're coming back with part 2 today.

On the first, I covered the first six verses in this section, verses 15 through 20. That was a bit more high-level, all about knowing the Trinity by experiencing the Trinity. I more or less zoomed in on verse 20, and made the case that we primarily come to know and understand the Trinity when Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says that when we receive the Spirit we will know that Jesus is in the Father, that we are in him, and that he is in us. That means that basically the Holy Spirit teaches us something about the Son – that he is in the Father – something about the Father – that we are in the Son, and therefore sons and daughters of the Father – and something about the Spirit – that through the Spirit Christ lives in us.

Today we're going to look at the rest of this passage, and see a little bit more of what we can learn about the Trinity, and specifically we'll see a bit more about what it means to experience God as Trinity.

First, before jumping in I just want to give a little comment on why this matters, why we should bother to think somewhat closely about the Trinity. Last week David used the imagery of the Christian life as a dance, following the Trinity. And I think that's just super helpful. And C.S. Lewis used that same image to describe the Trinity in his book *Mere Christianity*. Lewis described the Trinity as an eternal

dance of three coequal persons in perfect harmony and balance. Now, Lewis himself would say that that's just a metaphor, and not to push it too far, but that's a super helpful image I think. It captures something of the unity – there's one dance, one movement – but also something of the diversity, three persons eternally relating.

So, the reason that it's helpful to think about the Trinity is basically just the simple fact that the Christian life is Jesus' invitation to you to join the dance. What we're going to see in this passage today is that the Christian life is just getting caught up in this Triune dance. There's a way, and a rhythm that we need to see, that we need to learn to join in on.

That's why I tried to stress a few weeks back that doctrine and experience feed off each other. The more you see and understand the dance, the more you will be able to join in. And the more you feel and can participate in the dance, the more you'll notice and understand.

So, this isn't just, "hey here are some interesting things to know about the Trinity," but "here are the steps to the dance that Jesus is inviting you into."

Today we're going to look at three different ways that we see the Triune dance in action. We're going to see three ways that God acts in a Trinitarian way towards us, and in those, three ways that we are invited to respond to him in a Trinitarian way. So, we're going to look a little at God's love, God's word, and God's redemption – how he redeems us. Now, I don't want to get too lost in the details, in all of that, what I want to highlight is the Trinitarian shape of what God is doing, and the Trinitarian shape of our response.

So, here's the big point – if you get lost in the details, or if I'm not being clear at any point, here's the pattern I'm trying to show you. Everything God does towards us he does as Trinity, from the Father, through the Son, in or by the Holy Spirit. All of God's actions, and movements toward us are from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. But, importantly, and I'll try to drive this home at the end, it's not three actions, or three parts to one action, but one action done Trinitarianly.

Then, all of our response, all of our Christian life, love, service and worship is done in the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. And again, it's not three acts of worship, or three parts of one act, but one act of worship in, through, and to the One Triune God.

That's the point, if you forget everything else, this is what I want to stick with you. All of God's acts towards us are from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. And all of our response to God is by the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the Father.

So that's the dance. This is what Jesus wants us to know, and this is what Jesus is inviting us into. The Christian life isn't a set of rules and doctrines about how to live for some abstract and distant God, but is about getting caught up into the very life of God in you, around you, and above you.

So, let's go ahead and pray for help, then jump into the text.

## **POINT 1 - LOVE**

The first thing in this passage that I want you to see is the Trinitarian shape of the *love* of God. Look at verses 21 through 23.

It would be really easy to read these verses in a kind of works-righteousness way. It'd be easy to read these in isolation as if Jesus were telling us how to get and secure God's love. Do you see that? "If you obey me, then the Father, and I will love you."

But, given the context of the passage as a whole, that read doesn't really work here. He's not telling us how to get God to love us. Jesus is talking about what Christian experience looks like, not how to get saved. He's just connecting what's happening behind the scenes – God's love – with what we can see – our obedience.

So, don't read this passage like a big chain of cause and effect, don't read this as a series of if-then statements, but more like if-also statements. It's not 'if you obey, that will *cause* the Father to love you which will *cause* the Son to love you, which will *cause* the Son to manifest himself to you.' But it's if you obey his commands, that *shows* that you love Jesus, which means it is also true that the Father loves

you, and that the Son loves you, and that the Son manifests himself to you. It's not – causes, causes, causes, but also, also, also.

You need to read these verses in the context. He is preparing his disciples for his departure. He isn't preaching to non-believers how to get saved, he is reminding believers of what they can't see, based on what they can see. In Jesus' bodily presence they can see his love for them, but when Jesus leaves and sends the Holy Spirit, they won't be able to see that. So, Jesus gives us a way to remind ourselves of God's Triune love.

Obedience to Jesus shows that you love Jesus. If you love Jesus that's because God first loved you. That's the consistent message of the New Testament – God's love always moves first.

So, let's dig into these verses a bit.

Look at verse 21, **“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”**

Notice just that first phrase – “whoever has and keeps my commandments.” So, it isn't clear yet, and this will be the next point, but in a little bit Jesus will make the point that it is the Holy Spirit in us that causes us to *have* and to *keep* his commandments. The Holy Spirit brings us Jesus' Word in the Bible and causes us to know and obey it. We see this hinted at in verses 15 and 16 from last week – “if you love me, you will keep my commandments” and “he will give you another helper, the Spirit of Truth.” So, the Holy Spirit helps us to *know* and *do* the Truth.

Again, I'll say more on that in a second, but for now I'll just assert it – to say, “whoever has my commandments and keeps them,” in this context can be taken to mean “whoever is filled with and led by the Holy Spirit.” It's the Holy Spirit who teaches us to know and obey Jesus.

Then, notice the last phrase “and I will manifest myself to him.” What does that mean? Again, this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The whole point of this chapter is teaching on the Holy Spirit, how Jesus will be present to his disciples even though he will leave them bodily.

Last week, in verse 18, Jesus said, **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you,”** talking about the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus manifesting himself to us is in and through the Holy Spirit.

Ok, let me just read verse 21 again with some of those explanatory points. **“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, [whoever is filled and led by the Holy Spirit], he it is who loves me [the Son]. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him [in and through the Holy Spirit].”**

Do you see the Trinitarian dance in this verse? Our love towards God is in the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. And God’s love towards us is from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. By and through the Spirit we love the Son, which brings us to the Father. Then, the Father’s love rolls into the Son’s love, which leads to the Holy Spirit manifesting the Father and Son to us.

Then, Judas (but not that Judas) asks just the perfect follow up question. One of those questions that just perfectly sets the teacher up for the next section in his notes. Look at verse 22, **“Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’”** That’s such a perfect follow up question.

Judas just hits the nail on the head with this question, this is exactly the point that Jesus is getting at. How will Jesus be present to his followers after he leaves them bodily? By his Holy Spirit, who he will send from the Father.

Jesus answers in verse 23, **“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, [again, in and by the Holy Spirit] and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** In and through the Holy Spirit.

So, all I really want you to notice today is the shape, the shape of God’s love, and the shape of loving God. God’s love comes to us from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. And our love for God begins in the Holy Spirit, is directed to the Son, and through him to the Father.

## **POINT 2 - WORD**

Ok, so we see God’s Trinity shaped love. Second, in the next two verses, we see the same pattern with God’s Word: how it comes to us, and how we respond to it.

Look at verses 24 through 26.

**“[24] Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”** So, here he’s just kind of completing the Trinitarian pattern that was a bit unfinished in the last verses. So, like I’ve argued, obedience (and thus, love) begins with the Holy Spirit in us, but then it says something about our love for the Son. But here, we see it doesn’t stop there. Because obeying Jesus isn’t just about the Son and the Spirit, but the Father too. Jesus words are really the Father’s words. And this is different than how the prophets speak God’s word to us. The prophets are messengers of God’s Word to us. Jesus *is* God’s Word to us.

So, Jesus’ Word, and how we respond to it, is Trinitarian up and down. Notice verses 25 and 26.

**[25] “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. [26] But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”**

Ok, so the word of God comes from the Father, through the Son. But notice verse 25 – and this is super helpful for us who weren’t there with the Apostles hearing and seeing Jesus. He says, **“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.”** So, again, Jesus is the present word of God to those who hear him teaching. But what about to us? How do we hear the word of the Father?

Through the Holy Spirit.

Verse 26, **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”** So, the Word of God comes from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit.

Here we see two things, the *illumination* and *inspiration* of the Bible through the Holy Spirit.

We see the inspiration of the Bible in the last part of that verse – **“he will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”**

Here, this is a promise to the Apostles that the Holy Spirit will assist them in faithfully remembering and recording the teachings of Jesus. That is incredibly relevant to us, but indirectly. This is not a promise of some kind of special revelation to us as individuals. This is a promise to us that the Word

of God in the New Testament recorded by the Apostles was supernaturally produced and protected by the Holy Spirit.

This is a promise that should drive us *to* the Bible, not away from the Bible to our own private supposed revelation. Here, through the Apostles, Jesus is telling us that the place to find the Word of the Father is in the teaching of the Son preserved by the Holy Spirit through the pens of the Apostles. So, if you want to hear from God, read your Bible, that's where you will find the Triune Word.

Jesus teaches here that the Holy Spirit will preserve and inspire the writings of the New Testament, but he also promises that the Spirit will "teach us all things."

There's a double promise here, not only will the Holy Spirit make sure that the Apostles correctly remember the words of Jesus – inspiration – but he will also guide and continually teach the church through those very words – illumination.

Inspiration has to do with the production of the Bible, and illumination has to do with the effective power of the Bible. Inspiration is the fact that the Holy Spirit is the chief author of the Bible, but illumination is the Holy Spirit turning the lights on so you can read the Bible for what it's worth. Without the Holy Spirit, the Bible is still the Word of God, but it's like trying to read a book in a dark room. But the work of the Holy Spirit in you is to turn the lights on so you can see what was there the whole time.

Ok, what does that mean for us. For today, what I want you to notice is the Trinitarian shape of the Word of God. It is the word of God the Father, given through the Son, and ultimately brought to us by the Holy Spirit – both objectively in the *inspiration* of the Bible, and subjectively through the *illumination* of the Bible to us.

What we see here in this text is the shape of how the Trinity brings the Word of God to us. From the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit.

But then what happens? We've seen this a little already in what Jesus said about having and keeping his commands. The Holy Spirit causes us to see the goodness, beauty and truth of the Father in Jesus, which causes us to love and obey Jesus out of love and obedience to God the Father in him.

So, God's word comes to us from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit his Word brings us through the Son to the Father.

The Word of God brings us back to God the same way it came to us from God.

This is what it means to experience God as Trinity. It's not some mystical personal revelation – it's God the Holy Spirit shining through his Word to make your head *understand* his word, your heart *delight* in his word, and your hands *obey* his word. The Holy Spirit makes you see Jesus, love Jesus, and obey Jesus in the *Bible*, and He makes you see the Father, love the Father, and obey the Father *in Jesus*.

Ok, this is something of the trick with the Holy Spirit. What he is doing in you is pointing you to Jesus. So, the more you are thinking about, trusting, and obeying Jesus, the more you already are experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit in you. He doesn't draw attention to himself, he doesn't draw attention to his signs and wonders for the fun of it. He quietly works in you through the Bible to make you see, worship, and obey Jesus.

One day you'll be reading your Bible, and it's lifeless and confusing to you, and you'll have no idea how it relates to your life. Then, all of a sudden some text will just click. All of a sudden what was foggy and irrelevant yesterday is clear and vital today.

Experiencing the Holy Spirit makes the Word come alive to you, and you come alive to the Word.

One day the Bible is a confusing list of things that you want to do that you know you're not supposed to do that is somehow related to Jesus. Then the next day it's *power* – to live the life you've always wanted to live that is cover to cover comprehensively about Jesus. That's the Holy Spirit. Not just showing you Jesus, but showing you the beauty and glory of God in Jesus, and inviting you into his life, into the Trinitarian Dance.

### **POINT 3 - REDEMPTION**

Ok, so we've seen Trinity shaped love, Trinity shaped word, and last, I want you to see this – Trinity shaped redemption.



Here, I just want to walk through these last five verses one by one and tease out some of the key points. Here's the big idea I want you to see here: Redemption, God's plan to save a people for himself, originates in the Father, is accomplished by the Son, and is applied by the Spirit. Then, first encounters us through the Spirit, unites us to the Son, in order to reconcile us to the Father.

Look at verse 27. **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”** Ok, here we need to see what Jesus' departure will accomplish. Notice how he escalates with the idea of peace.

First, it's just *peace* I leave with you, but then it's *my peace* I give to you. There's union and substitution going on here. Somehow, the effect of Jesus' departure, his leaving the disciples, results in him giving us his own peace.

Now, again, remember the context. He's giving his disciples some last minute encouragements a few short hours before he gets arrested, and sent to the cross. So, him leaving isn't just him taking off, but his departure is him going to the cross.

He takes our curse to give us his peace.

This is what Paul says in Romans 5:1 – “therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

So, he's saying, “when I leave, when I send you the Holy Spirit, I'm actually not taking away your peace with God, but giving you my peace.”

They probably would have had a certain sense of security when they were with Jesus in the flesh. You could imagine that they might get anxious that Jesus leaving might take away their peace with God. But, he says, not only will he leave them with peace, he will leave them with *his* peace. His perfect righteousness, his perfect obedience to God will be the basis, the ground of their peace, of our peace.

Then look at verse 28, **“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”** On it's own, it's not exactly clear what this verse is doing, but in context he seems to basically be

saying that it's good for us that Jesus ascends to the Father, because from there he and the Father will send us the Holy Spirit.

He touched on that a bit in verse 16 last time, **"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper."** But then, in chapter 16, during the same conversation, Jesus spells this reasoning out a bit further.

In John 16:5-7 he says, **"But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."**

He seems to be making the same basic point in all these places. "I'm going to leave you, but that's a good thing, because when I go to the Father, I will send you the Spirit, and in the Spirit be with you more intimately forever."

So, don't think of this like divine tag-team wrestling. It's not a geography problem. It's not like Jesus needs to get out of the way for the Spirit to come to the disciples. It's not *that* Jesus is leaving that allows him to send the Spirit, but it's *how* he leaves – it's what he does on the way out, that opens the door to send the Spirit.

Redemption has to be accomplished by the Son on the cross before it can be applied by the Spirit.

Then, skip down to about the middle of verse 30, and 31, **"the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."**

In other words, the minions of the Evil One are on their way, Judas, and the mob from the priests are on their way to arrest Jesus. But, he's making clear here that the cross isn't happening because somehow the devil got the upper hand. Jesus has no sin to be accused of, so he's not being punished for his own sin. And the devil didn't outsmart Jesus. Why then? Why is Jesus going to the cross? Notice what he says here.

**"I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."**

Do you see that? 'I go to the cross to obey the Father, and to show my love for the Father.'

Ok, there's all the Legos, now I need to build something with it. Let me put some of those blocks together.

First, Jesus goes to the cross for two reasons, did you catch them? One – Jesus goes to the cross in order to send the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Then two – Jesus goes to the cross to obey and show his love for the Father. Do you see it? This Triune dance? The cross, the plan of redemption comes from the Father – it is an act of obedience to him – then it is accomplished by the Son, then last it is applied to us by the Spirit.

But then notice how it catches us up into that dance.

Remember what Jesus said about his peace? When Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit he gives us *his* peace – The Holy Spirit unites us to the Son, so that our sin is taken on Christ to the cross, and his righteousness is put on us.

And this union, this peace, isn't just a subjective well being, it's an objective right-standing before the Father. Through this Holy Spirit union with the Son we stand before the Father united to Christ as adopted, justified, redeemed, sons and daughters of God.

So, redemption, is *from* the Father, *accomplished* through the Son, and *applied* by the Spirit – then catches us up by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father.

## CONCLUSION

Ok, that's the text. I hope you can see what I've been getting at here. I said this a few weeks ago, but if this feels unclear, or confusing to you, please, don't be discouraged. These are not simple and plain things to learn. In general, nothing worth doing, and certainly nothing worth learning comes easy or all at once. My hope isn't that this would be clear as day for everyone, but just that this would move the ball down the field a little bit for you. So, please, don't write this off, and certainly don't write yourself off if this is a little difficult. Interestingly, this is the doctrine that the different denominations have the most agreement on. For the last 1700 years, the whole Christian church has agreed on how to talk about the

Trinity, but at the same time, we've all agreed that it's really really confusing. So, if this feels foggy, and kind of hard to grasp – you're actually probably getting it. If the Trinity feels crystal clear to you, you're probably missing something.

Again, what I've wanted you to see in this text is just this dance. How the Trinity acts, from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit, and how we get caught up into that dance in the Holy Spirit, through the Son, and to the Father. This text helps us see that dance in God's love, in his Word, and even in the plan of redemption. This dance is the way of God towards us, and this dance is the shape of the Christian life.

So, to close this out, I just want to give you two principles to give you more or less bumpers to keep you from falling into the gutter on the Trinity. So, the two big gutters when it comes to the Trinity are dividing the persons on the one side, so that you basically have three gods, and on the other side flattening the persons so that they are just kind of masks that the one God wears from time to time.

The mystery, the tension in the doctrine of the Trinity is keeping the three persons in God in tension with the one being of God. So, we can tend to collapse the mystery to either side. Either God is functionally three gods, or God is just simply one person. We need to be careful to avoid both of these errors.

Here are the principles that will help you do that.

The first is called *inseparable operations*. This means that the operations of God – his activities, the things he does – are inseparable, indivisible. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit never act independently and separately from one another.

This is really important to maintain Biblical monotheism. There is only one God. So, there is only one divine nature. There is only one divine knowledge. There is only one divine will. There is only one divine power. There is only one divine activity.

Whenever the Father acts, all of the one God acts. Whenever the Son acts, all of the one God acts. Whenever the Spirit acts, all of the one God acts. God doesn't have three loves, but one love. God doesn't have three words, but one Word. God doesn't have three redemptions, but one redemption.

Jesus talks about this in John 5, particularly verses 19 and 20. I talked about this in Foundations earlier in the year. That was one of the diagrams that Michael mentioned a couple weeks back. So basically *inseparable operations* reminds us that whenever any person of the Trinity acts, the One God acts.

But then, the flip side is what we could call *trinitarian operations*. And that basically teaches us that any time the One God acts, each person of the Trinity acts. And that's more or less what I've been trying to spell out in this sermon today. Whenever God acts, he acts from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

This has always been true. The God of the Old Testament, in all of his actions acted from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1, God created the heavens and the earth from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

So, those are your two guardrails – there's inseparable operations – the undivided activity of God – and Trinitarian operations, the ordered operations of the three persons. John Owen gives some helpful clarification on this idea in his book on the Holy Spirit. He describes trinitarian operations saying that it's not "as though one person succeeded another in their operation, or as though where one ceased and gave over a work, the other took it up and carried it on; for every divine work, and every part of every divine work, is the work of God, that is, of the whole Trinity, inseparably and undividedly."<sup>1</sup>

So, take the Word of God – it's not like the Father said one thing, then the Son added some clarification, and the Spirit added his own creative flare to it - but that the whole Word and every part of it is together from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. There is one action of God, done from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *Pneumatologia, Works of John Owen*, Vol. III, p. 94.

Let me end with this. Why does this all matter? Why does it matter what we think about how Father, Son, and Spirit interact? Why is the Trinity important to understand? Here's the short answer. Understanding the doctrine of the Trinity matters because you can't know Jesus without knowing the Trinity.

Is Jesus creature or creator? Is he creature or God? The Bible plainly teaches that Jesus is creator, that he's God. If he's God, is he the same person as the Father? No, the Bible teaches that Jesus and the Father are not the same person. If Jesus and the Father are both God, but not the same person, are there multiple gods? No, the Bible plainly teaches that there is only one God. What do you do with all that?

A few weeks ago, I mentioned that this summer marks the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the council of Nicaea. This is where the contours of the doctrine of the Trinity first really got hammered out. But, it didn't start out because of questions about the Trinity. The council was called to respond to the teachings of a man named Arius. At its root, that council got together to answer the simple question "who is Jesus?"

This is why the doctrine of the Trinity matters. You cannot know, love, serve, and worship the Biblical Jesus without knowing, loving, serving, and worshipping the Biblical Trinity. To deny the Trinity is to deny Christ.

Now, I'm not saying you need to have this doctrine totally mastered to follow Christ – not at all. But, it's following the Biblical Christ, listening to what he says about himself, about the Father, and about the Spirit that points us to the Trinity.

So, here's the big point. The whole point of these two sermons is one big invitation. You affirm the doctrine of the Trinity, you believe the doctrine of the Trinity. My invitation to you, and really Jesus' invitation to you, is to wade out deeper into the pool. And – here's the point I've tried to make – studying the Trinity, reflecting on the Trinity – isn't some exercise in doctrinal curiosities – it's getting to know Jesus more deeply, it's joining in the divine dance that he invites you into.

Two of the more robust Trinitarian passages in the New Testament are here in John 14, and a little later in John 16. Do you know what passage is right in the middle of those two Trinitarian passages?

What's between John 14 and John 16? John 15 – maybe you're familiar with it, maybe you're not – if you're not, read it today.

John 15 is this visceral picture of Jesus as the vine and his followers as the branches, that draw life and fruitfulness through the vine. John 15 is a call to abide in Christ, to *live* in Christ – right in the middle of his most robust teaching on the Trinity.

So, here's the point – the invitation to know the Trinity, to experience the Trinity, to enter into the Triune dance, is nothing more and nothing less than the invitation to abide in Christ. To experience the Trinity is to abide in Christ.