

Introduction

How many of you enjoy math? I do too, primarily because it's so objective. Consider the following equation. $1+1+1=3$. How many of you disagree with that? You think $1+1+1$ doesn't equal 3? None of you do. How many of you agree with that? You think $1+1+1$ does equal 3? All of you do. In the math of man, $1+1+1$ always equals 3. But in the math of the Trinity, and I'm speaking metaphorically, $1+1+1$ doesn't equal 3. It equals 1 and that's what I'm going to preach about today and next week.

The Trinity

John 13-17 records the last supper discourse of Jesus to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. Our text is part of the true "**Lord's Prayer**" in Chapter 17. In it, according to verse 20, Jesus prayed for the 11 disciples with Him that night and all disciples of all generations as well. But to whom did He pray? 17:1 tells us. It was the "**Father**," He being "**the Son**." With that in mind, notice of whom He spoke in chapters 14 and 16. It was one whom He called in 14:26 "**the Helper, the Holy Spirit**." Chapters 13-17, as you can see, present the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to us. The whole of the Bible, of course, also does. Many of its texts reference the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They teach us two things in doing so. First, each one possesses the qualities or traits of personhood. Each is self-conscious and self-directing - thinking, feeling, willing, acting, and relating. They're real live persons in other words. Second, each one is God. Each is perfect and infinite in all His attributes.

But remember what God said in Deuteronomy 6:4. He "**is one**." There is one and only one God. So, how can each of those three persons be God? There is only one way, logically, which Jesus revealed in verse 22. Notice His dramatic declaration. The Father, He, and, according to other texts, the Holy Spirit as well "**are one**." They are what C.S. Lewis called "**superpersonal**." They are one being with three persons, or

“triune” as we say it. I’d sum it up this way. There is only one God and He is Yahweh. Yahweh is triune – one being with three persons.

In his poem *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, William Shakespeare wrote this about two ideal lovers: **“They so loved that love in twain had the essence but of one. Two distinct, division none; Number there in love was slain.”** **“Love in twain”** and **“two distinct”** mean the lovers here are separate individuals. **“Had the essence but of one”** and **“division none”** mean their love has removed the barriers that normally divide people. They’re one, relationally, in mind, heart, and soul. The result is that **“number there in love was slain,”** which means normal math no longer applies to them. In the math of their love, $1+1=1$.

That stanza of the poem assists us, by way of analogy, in understanding the Trinity. Number there, in the Godhead, is slain, in a far different way than Shakespeare envisioned. In the math of the Trinity, $1+1+1=1$. It’s **“1”** not just in relation, as with the two lovers, but in being as well. The three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, together comprise one being, Yahweh. They are Trinity in Unity. We shouldn’t confound the three persons. They’re three distinct persons not one person. But we should also not divide their substance. They’re one being, not three beings. $1+1+1=1$. That is the math of the Trinity.

The Trinity as Community

Now, notice the remarkable insight Jesus gave about the three persons of God in verses 24-25. They **“know”** and **“love”** each other. They did so in fact **“before the foundation of the world,”** before He created the universe. That teaches us something about God. He has a life. It’s a life of the three persons relating to each other in a way that’s totally beyond us. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unceasingly engage each other. They converse with, act upon, and act with each other. That always was and is and always will be the essence of God’s life.

Please grasp what that implies. God is a community of persons. As one author says it, He is **“a community of unspeakably magnificent**

personal beings of boundless love, knowledge, and power.” That is a critical insight. He is a community of unspeakably magnificent persons. And because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfect and infinite in all respects, so is the community they form. Ponder that. Their community is perfect. Its perfection manifests itself in three ways.

The first way is in *equality*. I'd note that there is an order of relation among the three persons. The Bible teaches that the Son and Holy Spirit are subordinated to the Father. Some theologians say it this way. The Son is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son. But this is a subordination of relation not nature. As the Athanasian Creed declares: **“In this Trinity, nothing is before or after, nothing is greater or less: but all three Persons coeternal, together, and equal.”** None of the three persons, in other words, is greater in His nature, in His attributes, than the other two are. Each is as powerful, knowledgeable, loving, holy, and so on as the other two are.

The perfection of God's community manifests itself in a second way, in *deference*. Dale Bruner wrote a book titled *The Holy Spirit: Shy Member of the Trinity*. He explains that this isn't the shyness of timidity. It's the shyness of deference or other-centeredness. He's right. Study verses 22 and 24 and other texts like John 7:18; 13:31-32; 16:13-15; and 17:4-5. They clearly teach that each person of the Trinity defers to the other two. The focus and attention of each is on the other two. Neil Plantinga articulated it this way: **“At the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, defer to one another. Each person, so to speak, makes room for the other two.”** That is deference or other-centeredness.

There's a third way that the perfection of God's community manifests itself. It's in *togetherness*. In his classic work *Paradise Lost*, John Milton pictures the Father, son, and Holy Spirit discussing the redemption of man with each other. He implies in doing so that they could disagree or have different points of view about something, which is incorrect. The

fact is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have a oneness of will that isn't even remotely like anything we've ever experienced.

A.W. Tozer captured the essence of this in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*: **"The persons of the Godhead, being one, have one will. They work always together, and never one smallest act is done without the instance acquiescence of the other two. Every act of God is accomplished by the Trinity in Unity."** I love that term, **"the Trinity in Unity."** The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have a complete oneness of will with each other. They never disagree and debate things. They always concur instead. Their concurring is instant and immediate without any motion or effort at all. One person doesn't think one thing and the other persons another. They think the same thing all at once.

I've said a lot to this point about the Trinity and the Trinity as Community. But it's just the tip of the iceberg. There's infinitely more to it than that. But I pray I've said enough to achieve two aims. One is to increase our appreciation for the awesomeness of God's Trinitarian nature. The other is to assist us in understanding the practical implications of that nature to us. In the rest of today's sermon, and in the entirety of next week's, I'll explain what those implications are. I'll explain them generally today and particularly next week.

An Earthly Community

We begin with a foundational principle. We live in a Trinitarian universe. God always expresses His nature in what He creates, including the universe. It is, therefore, a reflex of His attributes. One of those attributes, as we've seen, is that He is triune. That means that the universe is Trinitarian. It is as it is because He is as He is, triune.

In verses 22-23, Jesus revealed the most noticeable expression of God's triune nature in the universe. It's human beings in community. Notice what He asked Father God to do. Make His disciples **"one, just as We are one"** (verse 22) and **"perfected in unity"** (verse 23). He asked Him, in other words, to reproduce the divine community on earth. That's

what He asked and Father God did it, on the Day of Pentecost. He reproduced it by creating a community on earth, what the Bible calls **“the church.”** The church, in other words, is a reflex of the Trinity.

That implies something few Christians grasp. Jesus didn't die and rise from the dead just to save individuals. He died and rose also to create a community of people. Dallas Willard explained it well: **“God's aim in human history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God Himself as its primary sustainer and most glorious inhabitant.”** He was right. God's aim is to create an earthly community of persons that He Himself sustains and inhabits.

That necessarily debunks the **“Lone Ranger Christian”** idea to which many subscribe. Years ago, I did local follow up for Jim Bakker's television ministry, the PTL Club. I visited people who had called PTL and made a decision for Jesus. My purpose in doing so was to get them involved in a local church fellowship. I visited 15 people, all of whom either said or implied they didn't need to fellowship with other Christians. But according to Jesus, they did need to – for their sake and God's. God doesn't save individuals only to save individuals. He saves individuals to form a community on earth that continues forever in heaven, to His pleasure and glory. This community is embodied in local churches like Bethel Friends, New Life, and Kingdom Community, to name a few.

The Final Apologetic

And it's unique, as verse 22 makes clear. Jesus asked Father God that those who comprise the church **“may be one, just as We are one.”** We have here what is the defining characteristic of God's earthly community, the church. It's a Trinitarian community. The relationships between those who comprise it are like the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They converse with, act upon, and act with each other as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do. They don't do so perfectly of course. But empowered by the Holy Spirit, they do so supernaturally. As I'll explain next week, equality, deference, and

togetherness prevail in their midst.

That's a powerful reality, the consequence of which Jesus explained. It's that **"the world may believe (verse 21) or know (verse 23) that You sent me."** The church as a Trinitarian community is what Francis Schaeffer called **"the final apologetic."** Apologetics is about convincing non-Christians that Jesus is real and His gospel true. Notice what Jesus claimed in that regard. It isn't our teaching, theology, programs, worship services, or music that convinces non-Christians He is real and His gospel true. It's the Trinitarian oneness that prevails among us instead.

A survey was taken to find out why people don't go to church. Two reasons were given more than any others. The first was that the church is full of hypocrites. My response to that is, **"Great, come and join us; you'll fit right in."** The second reason was that Christians are always fighting. My response to that is to learn a lesson from it. Philosopher and atheist Friedrich Nietzsche once proclaimed, **"I will believe in the Redeemer when the Christian looks a little more redeemed."** Whether we like it or not, that's how non-Christians think. They judge the veracity of Jesus and His gospel by how professing Christians act generally, in all respects, and specifically, toward each other.

The bottom line is this. Christians relating to each other as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do persuades non-Christians, more than anything else, that Jesus is real and His gospel true. In contrast, Christians relating to each other as human beings normally do persuades them, more than anything else, that Jesus isn't real and His gospel not true. The church as a Trinitarian community is the final apologetic.

Conclusion

I began with the math of the Trinity. $1+1+1=1$. I close with the math of the church. As I'll explain next week, let's cooperate with the Holy Spirit in making our church a Trinitarian community. $1+1+1+1+1+1$ (and so on) will equal 1 if we do.