

Session 2 • The Nature of God and the Trinity

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Welcome back to the series, Knowing what you Believe. I'm Pastor Paul and we're going to get started on our next session, Session number 2, which is all about The Nature of God and specifically keying in on the Trinity.

I got to tell you, I really enjoy teaching from the Bible about the nature of God because He's so incredible in the sense that it goes beyond our human ability to comprehend. And there's something very comforting in that.

If God were at a place where we could intellectually apprehend Him and comprehend all that He is, frankly, that would mean that He is equal to our minds, or if you will, our minds are equal to God. But He is so much greater and that's what we're going to see in this second session.

One of the things we have to remember as we start off talking about the nature of God is simply this. If God had not chosen to reveal Himself to us, we could know nothing. There is no way apart from Him making the effort. There's no way for you or for me to reach out and know God, but thankfully He has come to us, and He has revealed much to us, including much about Himself.

Actually, there are two terms that we use to describe how God has revealed Himself to mankind and those terms are these:

GENERAL REVELATION

GENERAL REVELATION and

GENERAL REVELATION SPECIAL REVELATION

SPECIAL REVELATION. And I'll define each of those for you.

General Revelation is something that the apostle Paul actually writes about in his letter to the Romans. And it speaks of how God made Himself known first of all, in creation. The passage goes like this.

Romans 1:18-20 (ESV)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

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So through creation, God simply making the world, God has revealed Himself. And specifically Paul writes, He has revealed Himself in the things that have been made.

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This is what we call General Revelation. Paul tells us that General Revelation is significant. In fact, it is sufficient he says, so that men are without excuse.

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You'll notice in that passage of in Romans that we just read that Paul said that men are guilty of suppressing the truth.

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Well, what truth is that? Well, it's very simply that God exists. That we can see clearly in the creation that there is a God that He has revealed Himself. Men are actively trying to suppress that information and so much so that God says they are without excuse.

Thankfully, God didn't stop with general revelation. He went on to speak more about who He is and even what He is. And this is what we call special revelation. And we get, of course, special revelation from the Word of God, the Scriptures. And it is in this special revelation that God reveals Himself in very specific terms.

This revelation was at first and uniquely given to the nation of Israel, and it is from that scriptural revelation of Himself to Israel that God has spoken to all of mankind in a very unique and insightful way.

It begins with the revelation to Moses where God speaks of who He is. Let me show you this passage from Exodus chapter 3.

Exodus 3:13-14 (ESV)

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

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This is interesting and it almost sounds like a riddle, but the fact is by God referring to Himself as "I AM," He is revealing to all of us that He is eternal. He didn't say I was, or I began, or I will be. He simply said, "I AM." Without beginning and without ending.

God is revealing Himself elsewhere through the prophecy of Isaiah. God further revealed Himself as unique and alone as God. He said this in Isaiah chapter 43.

Isaiah 43:10 (ESV)

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.”

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.”

Well, this word was a huge boost to special revelation. God is making it very clear that not only is He eternal, but that He is alone as God. there are no other gods. And obviously this was a very important word back in the time that it was given when Paganism believed that there were many Gods; a multiplicity of gods, gods for every aspect of life, literally.

But God speaks very clearly on the subject through Isaiah and says, *“Before me no god was formed, nor (will) ...there be any after me.”* Again, this is special revelation, and this is important insights for us. And special revelation got a huge boost in the New Testament where God continues the revelation of Himself. Here are the writings of the apostle John,

1 John 1:1-3 (ESV)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you...

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you...

Now we're getting into new and wonderful insights concerning the nature of God with the coming of the Son of God.

Now we're going to be talking a lot more about Jesus, who He is and His deity in the next session. But this is also what the author of Hebrews is talking about when he refers to how Jesus came as the final revelation of the nature of God. Listen to what the author of Hebrews writes:

Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...

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Once again, we're going to talk a lot more about some of these statements concerning Jesus and concerning His deity, but I want you to see how the author of Hebrews is telling us that Jesus is the perfect revelation.

As we're talking about special revelation, we're basically saying it doesn't get any more special than this. John says, we've seen Him, we've touched Him. We have beheld the glory of God, the revelation of God.

And the author of Hebrews says the same thing. “*He is... the exact imprint of his nature.*”

Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and **the exact imprint of his nature...***

Remember, we're talking about the nature of God. Jesus is the exact imprint of that nature. We learn about the nature of God by studying the person of Jesus Christ. He is the full and final revelation of the nature of God.

Now for this session, we're going to focus on this larger aspect of the nature of God to understand the plurality of the Godhead. And when I use that term plurality, I'm obviously talking about more than one person in the Godhead.

This is a concept, this is a revelation that has come to us through the Scriptures, but is a very, well, I was going to say, a very difficult concept to grasp. I'll go on to say it is an impossible concept to grasp, but it is an important concept to grasp as it relates to understanding what God has revealed concerning Himself.

Even in the Old Testament, we see clues of this revelation of plurality. In fact, it goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis and the time of creation, particularly the creation of mankind. Let me read you this from Genesis chapter 1:

Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

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This is so incredible. We are getting a glimpse, if you will, into a conversation within the Godhead concerning the creation of mankind. And I want you to hear in this conversation the plurality of voices.

Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV)

*Then God said, "**Let us** make man in **our image**, after **our likeness**. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

Notice it says, "**Let us** make man **in our image**, after **our likeness**."

Well, the natural question that comes up is, who is God talking to? Well, there are some who would say, well, He's obviously talking to the angels. I. Okay. Let's imagine for a moment that God is talking to the angels and He's saying to them, let us make man in our image. That falls apart when you keep reading and you find out that it says,

Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV)

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God...

There is nowhere in the Bible where we are told that mankind was created in the image of angels, only in the image of God. This is the first major hint in the Bible concerning the plurality of the nature of God.

And as we get into the New Testament, of course, it just absolutely breaks wide open. And it begins in John chapter 1 by saying:

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

This is amazing because it's one of those revealing passages in the Bible concerning the nature of God. John identifies the One that he calls, “*the Word,...*”

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

*In the beginning was **the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

Which he writes, “*was with God,...*”

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word **was with God**, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

But then John goes on to say the unthinkable that, “*the Word was God.*”

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.** He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

So “*the Word was (both) with God, and the Word was God.*” Well, he doesn't even tell us who the word is until we get down to verse 14 in this same chapter where he writes:

John 1:14 (ESV)

...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Well, it's clear, John is writing about Jesus. And so this gives us the plurality of God the Father and God the Son, which is mind bending enough, but God is not done revealing as it relates to His nature.

He goes on. The Word speaks of yet another person within the Godhead, unique from the Father, unique from the Son. Let me share 4 New Testament passages that speak about the Holy Spirit, and then we'll talk about them, and what they have in common. It begins in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 30, which says:

Ephesians 4:30 (ESV)

...do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

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Acts 5:3:

Acts 5:3 (ESV)

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?”

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John 15:26:

John 15:26 (ESV)

“But when the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

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And then John 14:26.

John 14:26 (ESV)

“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.”

“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.”

These are great passages, but I've picked them for you for a very special reason. Not only just that they all mention the Holy Spirit, but I want you to notice what they say about the Holy Spirit. Let me put these in a bulleted list for you.

- In Ephesians 4:30 we learn the Spirit **can be grieved**
- In Acts 5:3 we learn the Spirit **can be lied to**
- In John 15:26 we saw the Spirit **can bear witness**
- And in John 14:26 we see that the spirit **can and does teach**

We see that Ephesians 4:30 that the Spirit can be grieved. In Acts 5:3 we learn that the Spirit can be lied to. In John 15:26 Jesus reveals that the Spirit can bear witness. And in John 14:26 Jesus says that the Spirit can and does teach.

So what do all of these passages about the Holy Spirit have in common? Well, simply they are conveying personality attributes about the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit is a person. Again, He can be grieved, He can be lied to. He can bear witness, and He can and does teach. He is a teacher. We see here that the Scripture reveals personality as it relates to the Holy Spirit.

So what are we to make of this plurality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? I mean, are we saying that we believe in three Gods? Some people claim that those who believe in the biblical revelation of the nature of God are in fact worshipping 3 Gods. In fact, He's even been called, a three-headed God.

Well, that's not at all what we believe because in the Hebrew Scriptures. God declared Himself this way. Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 4:

Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV)

“Here, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

“Here, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

You're familiar with this verse I trust. It's referred to as the Shema, and that's taken from the Hebrew word that begins, that passage, the word, Here. But in this passage, God declares Himself to be one.

Well, first of all, does this verse contradict the idea of God being a trinity? Not at all. Because the word one in Hebrew does not refer to a numerical understanding of one. It refers to uniqueness. In other words, God is saying, *“Here, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is... (unique).”* There is none like Him.

And so this is the same message that was repeated through the prophet Isaiah that we already looked at earlier in the study, where God said through Isaiah:

Isaiah 43:10 (ESV)

*“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. **Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.**”*

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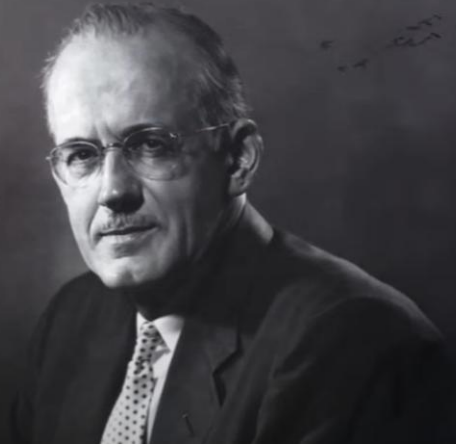
Our God is unique in that He is the only and one true God, and yet He has revealed Himself in the persons of: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Unique as persons, but one God.

It's not at all uncommon for me to receive a question from a believer who is wondering about the nature of God. And one of the most common questions that is asked related to the nature of God is very simply,

HOW CAN THERE BE ONE GOD AND THREE PERSONS?

How can there be one god and three persons? Well, let me close with a quote from A.W. Tozer his incredible book: Knowledge of the Holy. He writes concerning the nature of God and says this,

Our sincerest effort to grasp the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity must remain forever futile, and only by deepest reverence can it be saved from actual presumption.



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He goes on to write:

Some persons who reject all they cannot explain have denied that God is a Trinity. Subjecting the Most High to their cold, level-eyed scrutiny, they conclude that it is impossible that he could be both One and Three.



Some persons who reject all they cannot explain have denied that God is a Trinity. Subjecting the Most High to their cold, level-eyed scrutiny, they conclude that it is impossible that he could be both One and Three.

These forget their whole life is enshrouded in mystery. 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.

A.W. Tozer • Knowledge of the Holy



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Well, I concur with A.W. Tozer. Understanding the revelation of the nature of God is not something we comprehend by intellect. It is something that we accept by faith, the nature of God can be known from the standpoint that we understand it has been revealed. It cannot, however be comprehended. We cannot and never will understand the depth of the mysteries of the nature of God.

Romans 11:33-36 (NIV84)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

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I hope that this explanation of the revelation of the nature of God is not unsatisfying to you. I think a lot of Christians go into a study of the nature of God, really hoping that when they get to the end, they're going to comprehend all that there is to know about the nature of God.

But frankly, when we get done looking at the revelation that God has given us, both in nature, general revelation, and in the Scriptures, special revelation of Himself, all we can really do is bow in humble submission to the wisdom of God. And we can simply declare, God, you have spoken. I have heard it, and I receive it, even though I cannot comprehend it.

As I said at the outset of this study, I draw great comfort from the fact that I can't comprehend the nature of God. It proves that He is so far above me as to be incomprehensible.

Thanks so much for joining us for this Second Session. In the next session, we'll be talking about the deity of Jesus Christ.