

***In his best selling book, "The Shack," author William P. Young portrays God the Father as a big, buxom, motherly, black American woman.***

- ◆ There have been many adjectives used to describe God over the centuries.
- ◆ But this was probably the first time He's been described in these terms.

***Last time we started a series on "In His Image," based on the scripture, "Let us make man in our image".***

- ◆ We learned God lives in a completely different dimension to the one we humans occupy. He lives in eternity while we live in our restricted four-dimensional world of time and space.
- ◆ We also learned God has the capacity to bring a universe into existence out of nothing and sustain it with His word.
- ◆ However, despite the limitations of our four-dimensional world, there is one important aspect God has given to humans that transcends both dimensions and that is, the capacity for relationships.
- ◆ God has blessed humanity with a mind and consciousness which is unique in the four-dimensional world so we can relate to each other but also to reach out and relate personally with our Maker, Creator and Father.
- ◆ Of all God's creation, it is only angels and humans who can "know" and "love."
- ◆ The ability to relate to others spans both the spiritual and physical dimensions.
- ◆ This fact alone ought to tell us something about what God considers very important to Him.
- ◆ It tells us He is a relational God, as He wouldn't give us this capacity unless He wanted to relate to us.
- ◆ And despite the criticism levelled at William P. Young for describing God as a buxom, motherly, black American woman, I'm sure his intent was to help change people's perception of the way God is normally portrayed.
- ◆ We rarely hear about this God whose very nature can be categorized as "relational".
- ◆ Normally God's nature is portrayed by words that accentuate God's power and authority.
- ◆ Words like Omnipotent, Almighty, All-Powerful, Omniscient, All knowing, Wise, Holy and Just.
- ◆ These are all very important characteristics of God and we should not overlook them but sometimes there is the tendency to over emphasise these characteristics to the detriment of other important relational characteristics of God, such as Father, Savior, and Redeemer.
- ◆ The mysterious description of God being called a Trinity is, at heart, a relationship, a close loving intimate relationship between the three persons who comprise the Godhead.
- ◆ The relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is so close they act as one without losing their individuality.
- ◆ The Doctrine of the Trinity is summed up in the simple phrase, "One God in three persons".
- ◆ Don't ask me to explain how that is possible, it is a mystery in much the same way Eternal time and Chronological time is a mystery to those of us who live in the four-dimensional world of time and space.
- ◆ Our puny inferior brains cannot comprehend these spiritual mysteries.
- ◆ But someday when we are welcomed into that dimension with our new spiritual bodies with a mind to match, we will be able to comprehend how three can be one and one, three (1 John 3:2).
- ◆ Until then, we have to accept this reality on faith.

***I don't want to spend a lot of time on this as much has been written on the subject over the centuries, but just want go through a few scriptural references to show the dilemma the concept of the Trinity presented to the early New Testament church.***

- ◆ Up to Jesus' first coming, the Nation of Israel believed in one God because this was the way He revealed Himself to them (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- ◆ Then Jesus comes along and quoting from the Old Testament confirms what the Old Testament says about God.
- ◆ ***Mark 12:28-29 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'***
- ◆ Then Jesus goes about performing miracles, something only God can do, i.e. forgiving sins, healing the sick, raising the dead, etc.
- ◆ He is also called Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23).
- ◆ So the obvious conclusion if you believed Jesus was indeed God, was to think this was the one God from the Old Testament manifesting himself on the earth or else He was an imposter.
- ◆ Then to confuse the issue even further, John the Apostle comes along in John 1:1 and says, the Word (Jesus) was with God, suggesting that the two can be distinguished from one another.
- ◆ So we begin to see the obvious problem, now there are supposedly two gods!

- ◆ But then Jesus confuses the issue further by saying, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), reinforcing the “oneness” of God.
- ◆ Then on the evening before His crucifixion Jesus introduces a third player, God the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ ***John 14:15-18 If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.***
- ◆ So again in this section we see the three persons of the Trinity conundrum identified.
- ◆ One of the common misconceptions about the Holy Spirit is He has come to be regarded as the power of God rather than one of the persons of the Trinity.
- ◆ However, the apostle Peter clarifies this misunderstanding by accusing Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ ***Acts 5:3-4 Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? <sup>4</sup> Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.***
- ◆ Of course it is not possible to lie to a power, it has to be to a person and in these two verses Peter links lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God.
- ◆ Jesus also prescribed baptism in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three persons who are the one God (Matthew 28:19).
- ◆ So this was the dilemma facing the early church and the result after nearly three hundred years of wrestling with the issue they came up with what we call today, the Doctrine of the Trinity – summed up in the simple phrase, “One God in three persons”.
- ◆ Understanding the doctrine does not try to explain the mystery of the Triune God, in fact it tries to preserve a mystery that cannot be explained.
- ◆ As mentioned, one day when we inherit the spiritual realm and we see God face to face, we will understand this mystery.
- ◆ ***However the main point we want to emphasise about the Trinity is not so much trying to understand the mystery of one in three or three in one, but to underscore the unique aspect of the Trinitarian relationship.***
- ◆ If we were to sum up the type of society we come to embrace and value in our western world we would have to say it is “individualism”.
- ◆ Individualism is the political and social philosophy that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual.
- ◆ Although this may have started off as a worthy goal, in reality it has been hijacked by extremists to the point that individual rights are now placed before the overall good of the community.
- ◆ This “new” individualism has only become more blatant with the rise of smart devices.
- ◆ We withdraw more and more into our own electronic world of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and computers.
- ◆ In the social and political arena we withdraw into groups whose causes we identify with and so the word “Identity politics” was coined.
- ◆ In this “post truth” era, truth no longer depends on the facts or empirical evidence but rather on emotions and how I feel about something at a particular time.
- ◆ We tune into TV stations, news networks and websites that support our particular point of view further reinforcing our personal views.
- ◆ Relationships too have suffered. No longer are relationships based on commitment, but rather on what is convenient and self-gratifying.
- ◆ As a result of these changes our societies are becoming more disconnected, alienated and fragmented with the resulting dehumanising consequences.
- ◆ Yet despite our increasing means of communicating with one another, “social isolation” or loneliness is one of our major social problems.
- ◆ This great big relational hole we were created with has only grown larger under the world’s present trinity of individualism, secularism and relativism.

***In contrast, the Trinitarian reality of three in one and the unity they exhibit points to a totally different philosophy.***

- ◆ This can be summed up in the phrase, “Unity (One) in Relationship (Three) through Love”.
- ◆ We get an insight into the inner life of the Trinity in Jesus’ prayer the night before His crucifixion.
- ◆ Notice how these three Trinitarian aspects of “unity” “relationship” and “love” is repeated.

♦ ***John 17:20-23 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,<sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.***

- ♦ The Trinitarian relationship is a fellowship of three co-equal beings perfectly embraced in love and harmony and expressing an intimacy that no one can humanly comprehend.
- ♦ God is love. He is not just a God who loves, but rather a God who is complete love itself.
- ♦ Complete love itself includes a lover (the Father), a beloved (Jesus Christ), and the act of loving that flows between the lover and the beloved (the Holy Spirit).
- ♦ One God in three divine persons who make up complete love.

***We have trouble expressing this in human terms but here are a couple of feeble attempts.***

- ♦ One word that has been coined to capture this intimate relationship is the Greek word, *perichoresis*.
- ♦ *Perichoresis* means “mutual indwelling” or as some have described it, the “great dance” *peri*, which means “around” and *chorea*, which means, “dance”.
- ♦ *Perichoresis* has been called the “divine dance,” that profound union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that has gone on since eternity past, goes on now, and will go on forever.
- ♦ I particularly like this word because once again this gives us a totally different concept of God’s nature than the ones that usually accentuate God’s power and authority.
- ♦ Sure He is a God of great power and authority, but He is also a God who likes to have a good time and party.
- ♦ Another analogy that may help us to understand this unique Trinitarian relationship in a limited way is through the use of music.
- ♦ I want to play you a piece of music and then make some comments on how this may give us a limited insight into how this intimate relationship within the Trinity works.
- ♦ ***Music – The Hallelujah Chorus.***
- ♦ How did the music make you feel? Inspired?
- ♦ Did anyone not feel inspired by the music?
- ♦ You see for a few brief seconds, the music drew us all into a similar state of mind, we were all on the same wavelength, we all felt moved and inspired by the music.
- ♦ Did anyone look at their watch to see what time it was during the music?
- ♦ Did anyone remember their aches and pains?
- ♦ So for a moment we might say we experienced “eternal time.” We were so involved in the music it seemed as though time ceased, you might say, for a few seconds we experienced “heaven.”
- ♦ Now if we substitute “love” which God is, for the part the music played in this scenario, we may get a brief insight into how the three individual personalities of the Godhead are on the same wavelength at all times and in all circumstances.
- ♦ Love is the music that flows between the individual members of the Godhead that allows this intimate relationship to exist.
- ♦ Perfect love is the lifeblood of God, and the reason the decisions that are made are always in perfect unity is because all three persons are governed by these principles of love that flow between them.

***The amazing truth is, it is into this society based on these three principles of unity, relationship and love, that the Trinity has created and invited humanity to join.***

- ♦ ***John 17:21-23 ...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.***
- ♦ In order to be truly human, we were designed and created by this same God to function in a Trinitarian manner.
- ♦ However, as we look around the world today, we see something has gone terribly amiss, we have somehow fallen a long way from this ideal and instead become de-humanised as a result.
- ♦ How did this happen?