

The Attributes of God: The Tri-Unity of God

John 14:5-21

April 29, 2012

[Pray]

Please turn with me to John 14:5-21. Today we are continuing our series looking at the attributes of God – what God has revealed to us about who He is. Last week we introduced the topic by looking at “why it is important to think rightly about God”. And we said that the primary reason was that it saves us from creating idols in our minds. When we envision God other than He is, though we still give Him the title “God” or “Jesus”, what we have actually done is created another god in our minds – and trusting in *this* puny god of our imaginations makes us enemies of the Creator of the Cosmos.

And because this is not somewhere we want to be we must invest everything into making sure that what we believe about God is actually who He has revealed Himself to be.

To this end today we are looking at “The Tri-Unity of God” – the fact that God exists in one essence but three in persons.

[Read John 14:5-21]

Ok, now as we begin to look at our topic today the first thing you need to know is that the word “Trinity” does not appear anywhere in the Bible, yet the Bible is absolutely packed with Trinitarian texts.

And John 14 is certainly one of those texts so we were start there, but we will also jump around a bit to look at several others that point us in this direction.

Ok, the thesis I want to prove to you today is this:

The Community of God, Father, Son and Spirit, exists to glorify Himself in a dance of shyness that includes an invitation for us to join in.

Now if that statement sounds loaded to you it is. I am convinced that what we are looking at today is the greatest mystery and truth that exists in the universe.

Let’s start with the first part of our thesis:

1.) The Community of God, Father, Son and Spirit.

Now as Christians we are fairly comfortable accepting that God exists in three persons and yet is one God. But this idea took a lot of thought to arrive at and so

in order to accept the complexity of this idea we need to get our minds into the context that this idea was revealed into.

As a foundation we need to say that Jesus, His disciples and the other men who were involved in writing the New Testament were all devout Jews. And Jews firmly believe that there is only one God.

Deuteronomy 6:4 as we quoted last week says “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” This is undeniably the most important passage of scripture for Jews of all time.

But if you know the history of Israel you know that they weren’t always faithful to this text. In fact all throughout the Old Testament the Israelites were constantly struggling with idolatry, with worshiping other gods.

And then, finally something happened that cured them of this plague – they were defeated in battle, stripped of their land, and forced into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. This was the punishment for their idolatry.

It was here they learned their lesson such that after returning to the land of Israel in 440 BC the Jews never again worshiped other gods – they had been cured of this affliction and were soundly monotheists – One God worshipers, as a nation.

And it is into this context that we get the language of John 14. Language that calls us to a much deeper understanding of God than the Jews had, to an understanding of God as Father, Son and Spirit.

A.) First look first at the Father and we will start in verse six starts with Jesus responding to a question that His disciple Thomas brings to Him. Jesus has just told his disciples that He will be leaving and going to the Father and Thomas wants to know how he can go with Jesus to where ever He is going – to Heaven.

Look at verse six.

[Read John 14:6]

Jesus tells him, “I am the way to the Father”. The way to Heaven and the way to the Father are the same thing because in verse two Jesus tells us Heaven is His Father’s house.

And in saying this Jesus affirms that fellowship with the Father is the goal for all followers of God... So far this is not controversial for any of Jesus’ listeners. They were comfortable viewing God as their Father.

Here are a couple of texts that show this:

The first one is God speaking to Moses, He says: "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is My son, My firstborn.'" (Exodus 4:22)

There is a son, father relationship between Israel and God. Isaiah the prophet says the same thing.

"You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name."
(Isaiah 63:16)

Again he says:

"But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand." (Isaiah 64:8)

One more...

"When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son."
(Hosea 11:1)

So God as Father is firmly established.

B.) Ok, how about the Son. Did you notice from those texts we just read that this idea was already there too?...

But in the Old Testament it is Israel as a Nation that is the Son of God. But look what Jesus does to this idea in verse seven and following.

[Read John 14:7-10; 13]

With these words Jesus takes language that was familiar to His listeners and puts a whole new meaning to it. Jesus says there is a uniqueness about Himself and His relationship with the Father.

And the uniqueness of this relationship has two parts. First when people look at Jesus they get a perfectly clear picture of the Father, and second Jesus and the Father actually exist inside each other.

i.) So first, the connection between looking at Jesus and seeing the Father. Now this idea is a fulfillment of an Old Testament theme. All along the idea was that Israel as a nation was supposed to represent God to the rest of humanity. In Genesis 12 when God calls Abraham He tells him that "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."¹ And the ultimate form of this blessing will be a knowledge of God that will come to the nations through Israel.

When the nations beside them looked at Israel they were supposed to be able to see God and then be drawn to Him.

¹ Gen 12:3 (NASB)

But, as we all know, Israel was a poor picture of who God was. They constantly forsook His commandments and turned away from what He called them to. Most of the time the image of God the world saw through Israel was an image seen in a very cracked mirror.

Jesus on the other hand was a perfect mirror of God. Jesus says in verse 9 “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”

Jesus is a perfect reflection of the Father. And here is where we get the second part of this. How? How could a man perfectly reflect the Creator of the Cosmos? Jesus says “How? Because there’s more to me than just a perfect reflection.”

Look at verse 10 and 11

[Read John 14:10-11]

ii) Jesus and the Father have such a close relationship with each other that they are actually inside each other. And the result is that the stuff Jesus has been saying and doing are things that can not be said or done by mere mortals.

Jesus says “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.” (John 8:58), or “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30) or from our text today “If you know me you know My Father also” (John 14:7). These are not things sane mortals say, but these kinds of statements were continually on Jesus’ lips. He claimed to be equal with God.

But it isn’t just His words, it is His actions that affirm this. Look at verse 11. Jesus says if you don’t believe my words, at least look at what I am doing and realize that something is going on here.

I mean, who else walks on water except YHWH the Creator and calmer of chaos? Who breaths life into four-days-dead men except God the giver and sustainer of existence?² Who feeds thousands of hungry people on the hillside except Jehovah-Jirah the provider of manna in the desert? And yet Jesus was constantly doing these kinds of things.

Only God does these kinds of things, and that’s why Jesus says if you can’t believe my words alone look at what I’m doing. The only way I can do what I do is because – verse 10 – I am *in* the Father and the Father is *in* Me.

Jesus, the Son, is God.

C.) These are the first two members of the Trinity, and the text goes on. Look down at verse 16. Jesus says:

² John 11

[Read John 14:16-17a]

At the beginning of this chapter Jesus just finished telling His disciples that He wasn't going to be around much longer, instead He was going to His Father, but He isn't abandoning them, instead Someone new was coming to take His place.

Jesus calls this Someone new "Another Counselor" or Helper or Advocate, but it is the word "Another" that is most fascinating in the Greek. It means another one the same as the first. Or, another Jesus.

Now this is a mind bender, don't be troubled if this is a little tricky to understand. The Spirit that was in Jesus, Jesus' Spirit continues to be with us because this Another Counselor is the same kind of Spirit as Jesus...

What does Scripture tell us about this connection between Jesus and the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit was prophesied to be upon Jesus because He was anointed to preach good news to the poor (Isaiah 61:1). Jesus is filled with the Spirit of God at His baptism (Luke 4:1). After this Jesus attributes the coming of the Kingdom of God to the Spirit being on Him (Matthew 12:28). Everything Jesus passed on to the Disciples was in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:2) And Jesus says "I am the Truth", in verse 6 of our text, and then calls this "Another Counselor" the Spirit of Truth in verse 17. And the connections really go on and on.

But the Spirit goes beyond just being connected to Jesus, in fact He interacts with us, His Creation, in a personal way. Romans 8:27 says "He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints" – The Spirit has a mind and prays for us. He also controls His own actions. Talking about the gifts the Spirit gives 1 Corinthians 12:11 says "All these are the work of One and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines." Also the Spirit interacts with Christians leading, guiding and teaching us. In Acts 8:29 the Spirit spoke to Philip saying "Go to that chariot and stay near it." And in John 14:26 Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would "teach [them] all things and remind [them] of everything [He had] said to [them]."

So not only is the Spirit intimately connected to Jesus, but the Spirit has His own will and personality – He too is God.

The community of God, Father, Son and Spirit – Three persons but one God.

Now I want to turn from here to look at the second part of my thesis and examine what this Community of God looks like.

2.) The Community of God, Father, Son and Spirit, exists to glorify Himself in a dance of shyness...

Now I will admit that this is a strange idea. First that God's primary focus and passion would be for His own glory seems a bit strange. And second that in pursuing His own glory He is shy also seems bazaar.

What could this possibly mean?

A.) Let's start with the first half of this statement – God passionately loves His own glory.

Pastor John Piper says "God's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy His glory forever."³

I can still remember the first time I heard this concept. I had been a Christian for over twenty years, been through more than five years of theological training at the time, and still when I heard my pastor preach about this it hit me as absurd.

I mean wouldn't that make God incredibly selfish? Wouldn't it be a tyrant of a God who would focus everything on Himself and His own glory?

And yet this is the picture of God we see Jesus having. Consider His high priestly prayer in John 17.

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."
(John 17:1)

This is the prayer God on earth prayed to God in Heaven – God glorifying God above all else.

God the megalomaniac... Question mark?

I mean this doesn't look good. How can a being be totally centered on Himself, desiring above all else to be worshiped and glorified and be good at the same time? Does it make sense for God's love to be primarily directed at Himself? Is this really something we see in scripture?

Let's consider some texts

In Isaiah 48:9-11 God says "*For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it from you, that I may not cut you off.*"

³ Piper, John. "Brothers we are not Professionals" (Nashville, B&H Publishing group), 2002. pg 6

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.*”

It's pretty clear where God's focus lies. Or consider why God created people in the first place.

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory.* ([Isaiah 43:6-7](#))

Or consider why God chose some people for Himself.

“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace. ([Ephesians 1:4-6](#))

It's all about His glory. Listen to what He says about why He chose Israel.

I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the Lord, *that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory.* ([Jeremiah 13:11](#))

In fact everything God has ever done has been all about His own glory. From raising up Pharaoh, to splitting the Red Sea, to sparing Israel in the wilderness to giving Israel victory in Canaan to being faithful to Israel when Israel wasn't faithful to Him, to saving Jerusalem from attack, to delivering Jerusalem into captivity, to restoring Israel from exile, to sending Jesus to die, answering prayer, forgiving sin, filling us with the Spirit, to ultimately judging all of humanity in the end.

God did all of these things for His name's sake, that His mighty power might be known, that the world would know He is the Lord and that there is no god but YHWH. That His name would be made great, for His own sake, and for the sake of His glory.⁴

The entire creation that we are a part of was created and is sustained for the glory of God – God is about His glory.

So is God a megalomaniac? Someone consumed with Himself and how great He is? Listen to Webster's definition and make a judgment for yourself.

"megalomania" – "a delusional mental disorder marked by feelings of omnipotence and grandeur"⁵

Does God suffer from megalomania?... No, He can't be because He is omnipotent and ultimately grand – and He is worthy of His own acknowledgement. Have you ever wondered who the most God centered person in the universe is? It's God, He's centered on Himself, there is nothing greater for Him to center on. God can not seek the glory of anyone more than He seeks His own glory because He is the being worthy of the most glory in the universe. And God is not an idolater; He has no other god's before Himself.

This could be a whole sermon, but for today it is suffice to say that God seeks His own glory. And each member of the Trinity seeks the glory of God. But they do it in an interesting way... a shy way.

⁴ See Piper's list of scriptures about God seeking His own glory.
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/biblical-texts-to-show-gods-zeal-for-his-own-glory>

⁵ Webster's Dictionary <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/megalomania>

Now by shy I don't mean timidly or self-consciously but rather the Trinity's shyness is a shyness of love.

You see, each member of the Trinity is constantly pointing at the other members in a way that draws the focus off themselves and towards the other.

For example the Spirit comes in the Son's name and bears witness and glorifies the Son.

Professor and commentator Dale Brunner describes the ministry of the Spirit by drawing a drawing a stick figure of Jesus on a chalk board and then, to represent what the Spirit does he stands behind the chalkboard and points at the image saying "Look at him; listen to him, learn from him, follow him, worship him, be devoted to him, serve him, love him, be preoccupied with him."⁶

But then strangely we see the same thing with the Son. Jesus didn't walk around saying "I'm the greatest" instead He came to serve not to be served, He submitted to the Spirit who led Him into the wilderness to be tempted, and He said "Not my will but yours be done" to the Father in garden. Jesus too is shy, always pointing at the Father or submitting to the Spirit.

And then we have the Father Himself. Two times in the gospels God speaks audibly, and both times it is to point at the Son. At Jesus' baptism He says "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."⁷ And at Jesus' transfiguration He repeats Himself "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him!"⁸

God the Father is shy, also pointing away from Himself and towards Jesus. The whole blessed Trinity exists for **His** own glory and yet lives in a perpetual dance of shyness always directing attention and praise and preference to the other.

And this brings us to the final part of our thesis today.

⁶ Dale Brunner in John Ortberg's "Everybody's normal till you get to know them" (Grand Rapids, Zondervan), 2003. pg 38

⁷ Matthew 3:17

⁸ Mark 9:7

3.) The Community of God, Father, Son and Spirit, exists to glorify Himself in a dance of shyness that includes an invitation for us to join in.

Come back with me to our text today and to verse 17. Jesus says “the World can’t receive the Spirit of Truth, but...

[Read John 14:17b]

...

God created us *in* His image. But we don’t physically look like God. He is a Spirit. He has no arms and legs. He is not an old man in the sky. And yet we are created *in* His image. What does that mean?

Today I would like to tell you that it is in our ability to commune, to be *in* relationship with one another that enables us to image God. God created us male and female, and yet two can become one flesh.

Now at a human level this communion doesn’t only happen in marriage. People who are not married are able to have a certain level of oneness with other people, but marriage is the greatest picture of this communion of oneness that exists on earth. In marriage God gives us a picture of the Trinity. Multiple people gaining a oneness that in many ways is like God who is three and yet one.

Now we have here today many people who have been married to for 50 or more years and I think they will admit that marriage is not a perfect reflection of the Triune oneness of God, but that is because sin has entered the picture and gets into and between our oneness that we can experience with each other.

But that wasn’t the way it was intended to be from the beginning.

In the beginning God created Adam and Eve with the goal that they would image Him in one-flesh relationship with each other and be in communion with Him in the garden. We broke that with sin, and that brokenness brought division to one-fleshness here and separation between creature and Creator. Humanity was no longer in communion with the community of God.

But, you know the story, there is good news. What was broken in the beginning has been restored and is offered to us again.

Through the blood of Jesus we can be in communion with each other and in so doing reflect the Triune communion of God. We can image God!

Jesus, through the Spirit which verse 17 tells us The Father has placed within us, invites us into fellowship with the Triune God.

Two final texts to bring this to conclusion.

First Matthew 18:20 – a text you know well.

Jesus says “Where two or three have gathered together in my name I am there in their midst.”

Communion with God doesn't happen by ourselves. It's where two or three gather in the name of Jesus that He enters into fellowship with us by the Spirit. And since Jesus is right now with the Father in this encounter we also have fellowship with Him through Jesus. We enter into the Triune community when we gather together in Jesus' name.

But it's the context that is the kicker of this passage? This is Matthew 18! The conflict chapter of the New Testament.

You know the one “If your brother sins against you go to him and if that doesn't work then take a witness and finally bring it before the church if necessary” with the goal of restoring relationship with your brother or sister.

That conflict passage ends with this verse “where two or three gather in my name there I am with them.

It's only through community with each other, community that overcomes conflict at all costs, that we enter community with God. Isn't church a wonderful place to practice that?

Last text, Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17 and verse 20. This is the place Jesus prays for you and me.

[Read John 17:20-21]

Jesus prays that the Father will grant the Spirit the sanction to transform you and me into one-fleshness, the same one-fleshness that exists between Jesus and the Father, so that we can re-enter relationship with the Triune God like we were created for. And it is when this one-fleshness happens between us Christians here that the whole world will give glory to Jesus.

...

I leave you with a question. Ask yourself: “Where is the Holy Spirit asking me to be an agent of unity within our body here at Fort George in order that our community will image and enter the dance of shyness with the Divine Community of Father Son and Spirit?”