



Session 1 – The One True Gospel of the One True God

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Let's start by looking at the gospel according to God. Before we look at the false, let's look at the true—like the characteristics of the \$20 bill—one of the distinguishing marks of the one true gospel of the one true God. Let's listen straight from the Word to one passage that maybe more than any other summarizes the essence of the gospel though I think Romans 3:21-26 would probably rival it.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:1–10).

Based on that passage along with others, we need to establish a clear understanding of the one true gospel. Part of me wants to move through this quicker because if you have been to the Secret Church before, these are truths we've walked through in different ways. However, I don't want to assume that you've been to the Secret Church or been through these truths before; and we really have to have a good grasp on the real deal if we're going to identify counterfeits.

I pray this might land on fresh hearts in a new way right now. I have put here what I hope is a helpful summary of the one true gospel. That word 'gospel' means good news, so what's the good news of the Bible? Here's a paragraph that I think sums it up.

The gospel is the good news that the only true God—the just and gracious Creator of the universe—has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent His Son, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin through His substitutionary death on the cross and to show His power over sin and death through His resurrection from the grave so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever.

That's the one true gospel summarized. In that summary, I want you to notice what I call five specific gospel threads—five truths that are woven together in the gospel—that I would encourage you to weave into the fabric of your everyday thinking and conversations so that we might be a gospel-believing, gospel-speaking people.

Gospel Thread #1: The Character of God

The gospel is first and foremost the good news about God. The gospel tells us that **God is the holy, just and gracious Creator of all things**. Every word there is important.

God is holy which means He is perfectly unique, completely separate and absolutely pure. There is no one like God. In purity and power, His being is greater and more glorious than anyone of us can even begin to imagine: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1).

He is without error. He has no sin. He is without equal. He has no peer. God is holy: *“I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King”* (Isaiah 43:15).

God is just. God is right and righteous in all that He does. All of His judgments are right which means that God justifies the innocent and condemns the guilty. God is a just Judge Who says to the innocent, “You are innocent.” And He says to the guilty, “You are guilty.” *“He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord”* (Proverbs 17:15).

At the same time, God is gracious. He shows the guilty free and unmerited favor. *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people”* (Titus 2:11).

As soon as we say that, you might think, “How can God be just and gracious toward the guilty at the same time?” That is a good question particularly when we factor in the second gospel thread.

Gospel Thread #2: The Sinfulness of Man

The gospel makes clear that **we are each created by God, but we are all corrupted by sin**.

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. And God blessed them. And God said to

them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:26–28).

Right after we see that in the Bible, we see men and women made in God’s image disobeying God’s Word:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths (Genesis 3:6–7).

They sinned and their sin didn’t just affect them. It affected every, single one of us.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come (Romans 5:12–14).

This means in other words, just like Adam and Eve, **we—every, single one of us—have rebelled against God.** This is the true indictment of all men and women in Scripture: “*All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one*” (Romans 3:12).

We have all turned away from God to ourselves. It looks different in all of our lives. Sin manifests itself in different ways. Sin is manifested in the self-indulgence of our flesh, all sorts of indulgence in our ways and in the things of this world.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:5–8).

At the same time, sin is manifested in self-righteousness in any and all of our attempts in our flesh to make ourselves righteous before God. We all have innate desires to do things our own way instead of God’s way. We trust ourselves and what we think is good instead of trusting what God says is good. In our sinfulness, we want to be free to think, desire and do whatever we want regardless of what God says. In our sinfulness, that’s what we thought freedom was. But what we thought would lead to freedom has only led each of us into slavery.

An alcoholic drinks the bottle thinking that is going to bring fulfillment. We think sin is going to bring satisfaction, when in reality we are being controlled by a deceptive foe that leads to our fall.

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin’” (John 8:34).

As a result of our slavery to sin and our rebellion against God, **we are separated from God**. *“For (we) all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”* (Romans 3:23).

The effects of our sin on our relationship with God are many.

We possess guilt before God and one another. *“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate”* (Genesis 3:6).

We have shame before God and one another. *“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths”* (Genesis 3:7).

And, we rightly have fear before God. What should be a joy—being in the presence of a holy God—becomes a terror. *“And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself’”* (Genesis 3:10).

One sin—even what we might call a small sin like eating a piece of fruit—is an infinite offense to a holy God. We convince ourselves that sin is not a big deal, that it’s not as bad as some other sins. It’s not too serious. But, what we think is a relatively minor issue is actually an infinitely major problem. One sin separates us from the holy God of the universe forever. One sin leads to eternal, everlasting death: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

This leads to the last reality here. As sinners we rebelled against God, we’re separated from God and **we are dead without God**. *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience”* (Ephesians 2:1–2).

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...” (Colossians 2:13).

You were dead in your trespasses. See the deception of sin. Think about it. Why do we sin? We sin because we think it will bring us life. We sin because we think by doing this, by thinking or desiring this, it will be good for us. But what we thought would lead to life has actually led every one of us to death. This is death on two levels.

One level is our eventual physical death. Why do we die? Why does there come a point when we breathe no more? Why are our bodies decaying and wasting away? Why did I wake up in the

morning two weeks ago and, after a simple night's sleep, find I had done something horrible to my lower back? How does that happen when you are sleeping? The whole picture we see is that our bodies are deteriorating, but this was not God's design from the beginning. We die because of sin in the world and sin in our lives. We have funerals in this world because of sin in this world. Sin leads to eventual, inevitable, physical death.

The second level is that sin leads to eternal, spiritual death. If we die in our sins separated from God, then we experience eternity separated from God, His goodness and His love. We may think, "How can that change?" We see it in Scripture: "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*" (Romans 3:23).

The wages of sin is death for all of us so how can we avoid eternal death without God—this eternal separation from God? How can we be saved from the payment of our sin? The gospel in God's Word tells us we are completely unable to save ourselves. Completely is the right word in that study guide blank.

We read in Ephesians 2:1: "*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...*" The Greek word for dead there in Ephesians 2 means 'dead'—not barely breathing and you recover to have life, not kind-of dead or part-dead—dead. That's the point. Dead people can't cause themselves to come alive. Who among you can decide when your heart stops beating and your brain goes dead, "I think I'm going to come back to life?" Dead people can't do that. Someone else with power has to bring you back to life because you are completely unable to save yourself.

You may think, "That's not good news." But it is because there is One Who has power to bring you to life! "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son (Jesus)*" (John 3:16).

Gospel Thread #3: The Sufficiency of Christ

Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and restore us to God. Alone. There is no one like Him. "*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5).

How can Jesus bring you or me to life? How can Jesus and no one else—not Mohammed, not Buddha, not Confucius, not Joseph Smith—no one else? How is it possible that Jesus can bring you or me to life?

The answer is **because of Who He is.** There is no one like Him. The gospel tells us of His humanity. See His humble character. Jesus came as a Servant: "*But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must*

be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43–45).

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5–8).

The Creator God of the universe came robed and clothed in human flesh as a Servant of sinners. There is no one humbler than Him. See His deity and hear His extravagant claims: *“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’” (John 6:35).*

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6).

Those are bold statements.

The following is a quote from John Stott:

One of the most extraordinary things Jesus did in His teaching (and He did it so unobtrusively that many people read the Gospels without even noticing it) was to set Himself apart from everybody else. For example, by claiming to be the good Shepherd Who went out into the desert to seek His lost sheep, He was implying that the world was lost, that He wasn't and that He could seek and save it. In other words, He put Himself in a moral category in which He was alone. Everybody else was in darkness; He was the light of the world. Everybody else was hungry; He was the bread of life. Everybody else was thirsty; He could quench their thirst. Everybody else was sinful; He could forgive their sins.

Indeed, on two separate occasions He did so and both times observers were scandalized. They asked, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:5–7; Luke 7:48–49). If Jesus claimed authority to forgive the penitent, He also claimed authority to judge the impenitent. Several of His parables implied that He expected to return at the end of history. On that day, He said, He would sit on his glorious throne. All nations would stand before Him and He would separate them from one another as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats. In other words, He would settle their eternal destiny. Thus He made Himself the central figure on the day of judgment.

Talk about extravagant! He made these claims because He was no mere man. Yes, He was man but He was also God—unlike any other man ever. That is huge as we'll see. Many counterfeit gospels err at this exact point, so don't think this is a minor detail in the gospel. The major truth on which the whole of the gospel hinges is the humanity and deity of Jesus; His uniqueness in this way.

He is uniquely able to remove our sins and restore us to God because of Who He is and what He has done. What did Jesus do? What has He done? Jesus lived the life we could not live—a life of perfect obedience to God without sin. *“You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin”* (1 John 3:5).

Jesus was fully tempted by sin and He fully triumphed over sin. *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15).

Here is why this is so important: As a perfect man, Jesus alone is able to substitute for human sin. He must be human in order to pay the price of sin for humans and, as perfect God, He alone is able to satisfy divine judgment. He must be divine in order to endure the full judgment of the divine, which He did. Jesus lived the life we couldn't live. Then, Jesus died the death we deserve to die. This is why Jesus went to the cross for us: *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed”* (1 Peter 2:24).

Follow this and think about it. This is the essence of sin: Man substitutes himself for God. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be which is in charge. This is what we've all done. We have all taken God off the throne of our hearts. We've put ourselves on the throne instead. We think we know what is good, right and best. The essence of sin is that man substitutes himself for God. The essence of salvation is that God substitutes Himself for man. God in the flesh, Jesus, sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be.

This is the gospel: *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What happened at the cross, in such a way that it is the centerpiece of all human history, is that God expressed His judgment upon sin, endured His judgment against sin, and at the same time enabled salvation for sinners—all at the same time. He expressed His judgment; the penalty of sin and death was doled out. He endured His judgment against sin and Jesus paid the price we deserve to pay. In the process, God enabled salvation for sinners, making it possible for all who place their faith in Jesus to be saved from their sin. That's what happened at the cross.

Then the good news keeps getting better because Jesus conquered the enemy we cannot conquer. Three days after dying on a cross, Jesus rose from the dead. In the words of Revelation 1:18, Jesus says, *“Behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”* Jesus is not dead. He is alive. Right now, He is Lord over life and death. He has risen from the dead.

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved,

and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes (John 20:1–10).

He is Lord over sin and Satan. He has defeated death. He has triumphed over the rulers and authorities:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Colossians 2:13–15).

Jesus is Lord over life and death. He's Lord over sin and Satan. Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus is Lord over you and me. God has made Him both Lord and Christ. *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified"* (Acts 2:36).

Don't be mistaken. You don't need to make Jesus Lord of your life. You don't need to decide whether or not Jesus is Lord over your life. To every person within the sound of my voice—regardless of what you decide—Jesus is Lord over your life. You don't have a choice in the matter. *"One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess."* One day your knee will bow and your tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's already been decided. The only question that remains is: Will you bow the knee now or will you bow the knee when it's too late?

Gospel Thread #4: The Necessity of Faith

Just because of Who Jesus is and what Jesus has done doesn't mean everybody's saved from their sins. How can we be saved from our sins? Once again, that's the question that we'll see counterfeit gospels skew, distort and deceive with ultimately.

The answer that the Bible gives to this question is that we can be restored to God only through faith in Jesus. Ephesians 2:8 cannot be any clearer: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."*

Hear this truth: **We as sinners can be restored to God.** We can be acquitted before God the Judge. He will cancel our guilt. Sinner, it is possible for you to stand before the holy, just Judge of the universe and hear Him say, “Not guilty.” *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1).

He will cancel our guilt and we can be adopted by God the Father. He will remove our shame. It is possible for God to call you and me—sinners—His sons and daughters.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:14–17).

We can be acquitted before God the Judge, adopted by God the Father and we can be assured by God the King of eternal life with Him. He will overcome our fear of death altogether. *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38–39).

“How is that possible? How can I be restored to God in that way?” The answer is only through faith in Jesus. “How can I be restored to God? What can I do?” Nothing. You can trust in what has been done for you: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Get the picture because this is huge. This will be huge all night so follow this. Jesus is the basis of salvation. His identity, life, death, resurrection are key. Without Who He is we could never be saved.

How is His work applied to our lives so that His death for sin counts for us? It is through faith. Faith is the means of salvation. Faith is the means through which the saving work of Christ is applied to our hearts and lives. We believe, and such belief changes our lives. When we believe in Jesus, our lives begin to look like Jesus.

In this way, works are the evidence of salvation. *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10).

We’re restored to God only through faith in Jesus which begs the question: What is faith? What happens when we put our faith in Jesus? The answer the Bible gives is that we turn from sin and

ourselves. The biblical word here is repent. *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

We repent. We confess our sinfulness. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

We acknowledge with contrition that we’ve sinned against a holy God and we die to our selfishness. Quite literally that means we die to ourselves. *“(Jesus) said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it’”* (Luke 9:23–24).

To follow Jesus is to turn from your sin and yourself—your ways, your ideas, your plans for your life, your desires and thoughts, your everything—you die to yourself. *“And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it’”* (Luke 9:23–24).

We turn from our sin and ourselves and we trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Very plainly: *“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:9).

When we put our faith in Jesus, we believe in Him as the Savior Who died for us on a cross for our sins and we submit to Jesus as the Lord Who rules over us. Faith is definitely not just saying some words so we can get to Heaven. Faith is saying, “Jesus, I turn from myself and I trust You as my life.”

That initial moment of faith in time leads to inevitable growth in faith over time. *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13).

All this leads to our fifth thread.

Gospel Thread #5: The Urgency of Eternity

Our eternal destiny hinges on our response to Jesus. *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28).

The Bible clearly teaches that hell is a dreadful reality for those who turn from Jesus. The Bible describes hell as a place of continual rebellion, final separation and eternal duration.

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thessalonians 1:7b–9).

Hell is real and forever. The description of hell in Revelation 14 doesn't just say forever. It says forever and ever. Forever would have been sufficient for the point. Why add ever? It doesn't add anything to the meaning, but it sure does make it soak in. It's never, ever, ever going to end.

Jonathan Edwards urged people to consider the torment of burning in hell like a living coal—not for an instant nor for a day—but for millions and millions of ages at the end of which people will realize that they are no closer to the end than when they first began; and they'll never, ever be delivered from that place.

Hell is a dreadful reality for all who turn from Jesus. Let's get the perspective.

Heaven is a glorious reality for those who trust in Jesus. The Bible describes Heaven as a place of full reconciliation, complete resurrection and ultimate reunion with God and with all who have trusted in God. *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:20).

The question for each one of us and everyone in the world—the question that determines our eternal destiny—is: **Will you turn from Jesus or will you trust in Jesus?** *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

Will you turn from Jesus? In other words, will you live without Christ now and die without Christ forever?

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15).

Will you turn from Jesus or will you trust in Jesus? Will you die with Christ now and turn from your sins and yourself? Die with Christ now and live with Christ forever.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned

for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away"
(Revelation 21:1–4).

I urge you to trust in Jesus! This is the greatest news in all the world! Sinners can be forgiven of all their sins before a holy God and receive eternal life with Him. It's not through what we can do for God, but through what God and His love has done for us through faith in Jesus.

Right now, I trust, hope and pray that some of you have realized in the last few minutes, "I've not turned from my sin and myself. I call myself a Christian but I've not put my faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord of my life." I urge you now—right where you are sitting whether it's at home, in a church building or in this room—to say in your heart, "Yes. God, save me from my sin. Save me from myself. I trust in You as my Savior and my Lord."

You call on the name of the Lord in this way and you will be saved. This is the one true gospel of the one true God.

The Trinity in Three Truths

This is where I'm going to go deeper into the nature of God and specifically, the Trinity. This mystery that you've wondered about, that all Christianity has wondered about for 2,000 years, will change the ball game. All three truths are clearly communicated in the Bible.

Truth #1: God is three Persons.

The Bible speaks about God in three Persons. Scripture refers to God with plural pronouns.

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 (Genesis 1:26–27).

"Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7).

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'"
(Isaiah 6:8a).

The Bible also clearly teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are Persons. They are not just powers or forces or anything like that. I don't think Christians have a hard time understanding that

God the Father and God the Son are Persons, but sometimes I think Christians view the Holy Spirit as more of an impersonal force or power than a Person in the Trinity.

Go to the Bible with that question. Is the Holy Spirit a Person or a power? Listen to how Jesus describes Him—and Him being the right word, not it: *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you”* (John 16:13–14).

All those descriptions are explicitly personal and echo all throughout the rest of Scripture.

We see that **the Spirit teaches**: *“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”* (John 14:26).

The Spirit bears witness: *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”* (Romans 8:16).

The Spirit intercedes: *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God”* (Romans 8:26–27).

The Spirit searches: *“These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:10).

The Spirit knows: *“For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:11).

The Spirit gives gifts: *“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills”* (1 Corinthians 12:11).

The Spirit speaks: *“And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot’”* (Acts 8:29).

The Spirit is grieved: *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”* (Ephesians 4:30).

Clearly the Holy Spirit is not a power or a force, but a Person—and a distinct Person at that—along with every other Person in the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all distinct Persons. We see them distinctly in Scripture.

Think about specific passages such as Jesus’ baptism in Matthew chapter three. Here we see Jesus, God the Son, with God the Spirit descending on Him and God the Father speaking from Heaven: *“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were*

opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'” (Matthew 3:16–17).

Even in the great commission Jesus talks about the Trinity distinctly: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).*

Other examples of this are in Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 1:

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift (Ephesians 4:4–7).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you (1 Peter 1:1–2).

In the Bible, the Son is distinguished from the Father: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1–2).*

The Spirit is distinguished from the Son. Jesus says, *“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” (John 14:26).*

The Father is distinguished from the Spirit: *“And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27).*

The first truth is clear in the Bible: God is three Persons. He’s a trinitarian God. Let’s keep going.

Truth #2: Each Person is fully God.

Each Persons of the Godhead is fully God.

God the Father is fully God—not part God—from the beginning of the Bible and throughout it. *“Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6a).*

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26).

“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:30).

Likewise, God the Son is fully God—not a part God. He’s fully God. This is huge when we think about a couple of cults tonight. The Bible clearly teaches:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5–11).

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3).

“Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

The classic text here: *“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 him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1–4).*

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’” (John 8:58).

“Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:28).

Then, God the Spirit is fully God. We see in Acts 5 that when you lie to the Holy Spirit you are lying to Whom? You are lying to God.

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? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:3–4).

We see divine attributes attributed to the Holy Spirit all over the Bible.

The Spirit is omnipresent. *“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” (Psalm 139:7–8).*

The Spirit is omniscient as we read in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11: *“These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a*

person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

The second truth is clear. Each Person of the Godhead is fully God which leads to the final truth and summarizes the Trinity. God is three Persons; each Person is fully God and then we have the last truth.

Truth #3: There is one God.

The Bible clearly teaches monotheism—not tritheism or polytheism. The Bible strictly teaches there is only one God: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"* (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

"I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:5–6).

These three truths are clearly communicated in the Bible and lead to some additional notes on the Trinity.

Three Additional Notes Regarding the Trinity

As we think about these truths, we need to realize **the Trinity is a mystery**, not a contradiction. This is really important. It's not just a matter of semantics.

Follow this: God's three-ness and oneness are different, meaning God is Three in a way that is different from His being One. Let's flush that out. A contradiction would be present if we were saying, "God is One and not One." That's impossible. God can't be One and not One at the same time, but that is not what we are saying nor what the Bible is teaching. We're saying it's a mystery. God is One in Three which means His oneness and three-ness are different. He is three in a way that is different from being one. Without question this is a mystery and in many ways beyond our ability to fathom. Imagine that: A God Who is greater than our small, finite minds can comprehend.

That's the first note: The Trinity is a mystery.

The second note is **the Trinity is eternal**. We see this from the very beginning in Genesis 1:1-2: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."*

We see in Colossians 1:15-16 that God has been Three in One even before the beginning: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in*

heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”

God has not progressed adding different members to His Oneness at different times.

The Father always has been and always will be God.

The Son has always been and always will be God.

The Spirit has always been and always will be God.

The third note is that from the beginning and throughout the Bible **the three Persons of the Trinity are equal in terms of God’s essential attributes.**

It is right to say that God is all-powerful: *“For nothing will be impossible with God”* (Luke 1:37).

God is all-knowing: *“O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it”* (Psalm 139:1-6).

God is love: *“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love”* (1 John 4:8).

God is just: *“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he”* (Deuteronomy 32:4).

You can say all these things about God and you can say all these things about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The three Persons of the Trinity are equal in terms of God’s essential attributes.

The three Persons of the Trinity are revealed to us distinctly in different ways.

For example, in the work of creation we see God the Father speaks: *“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host”* (Psalm 33:6).

God the Son implements: *“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made”* (John 1:3). We will talk about this more in-depth later.

God the Spirit brings to completion: *“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”* (Genesis 1:2).

In thinking about the work of salvation. We see God the Father sends His Son for our salvation. We’ve already read this Scripture: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Similarly, God the Son becomes incarnate for our salvation: *“And 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”* (John 1:14).

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5–11).

God the Spirit applies to us the blessings of salvation: *“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!””* (Galatians 4:6).

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13–14).

The Persons of the Trinity are equal in Their essential attributes and They are revealed to us in distinct ways in God’s Word.

All that leads us to three practical conclusions when it comes to the nature of the One true God.

I don’t suppose that this quick run-through is totally comprehensive nor that you’re thinking, “This is so easy. I’ve got it now. Where have you been all my life? This is so helpful.” Hopefully it is helpful, but it is important that we see these truths because—as we’ll see later with different cults and different kinds of gospels—this is where a variety of cults and counterfeit gospels veer away from the truth of God’s Word. We need to know these truths and we’ll come back to these foundations. Even in your own your life, let this soak into your own heart.

Three Practical Conclusions from the Trinity

The first conclusion is our God is worthy. He is worthy of worship.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:1–3).

There is a reason right now why Heaven is filled with angels who are constantly crying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!” They sing it all the time. When you lay your head on your pillow at night, they are still singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!” When you wake up in the morning, they are still singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!” There is no one like our God and He is worthy of all our worship.

It is appropriate to worship the Father. It is appropriate to worship the Son. It is appropriate to worship the Spirit. It is appropriate to worship God with awe, wonder, reverence and fear.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us not approach God casually. May God deliver us from casual Sunday mornings when we walk in, start singing some songs, bow our heads and someone just casually opens this Book—all the while our minds are wandering. Oh, no! No.

When we gather with the church, we are gathering with a community before the holy trinitarian God of the universe and before Whom we should stand in awe. Our minds should be blown by His majesty, wonder and greatness. We should sing from the depth of our being and pray with humility and focus. We shouldn’t think, “Alright now, let’s have prayer time,” but then we bow our heads and each one starts thinking about different things while Heaven is saying, “Do you realize to Whom you are talking?” We should open His Word as if it’s the most important thing we could hear. It’s far more important than anything we could scroll through on our phones. It’s the Word of God.

Our God is worthy!

The second conclusion is **our minds are finite**. In the words of 1 Corinthians 2:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:6–16).

The Trinity is divinely revealed, not humanly constructed.

This is what Tertullian, an early church father emphasized when he said, “It’s so incomprehensible from a human standpoint that nobody would have invented this.” We don’t hold it because it is self-evident. We hold it because God has revealed that this is what He is like.

The Trinity is utterly unique, so any analogy is insufficient.

You cannot say, “God is kind-of like an egg. The Father is like the shell, the Son is like the yolk and the Spirit is like the egg white.” That is absurd. Do not talk like that nor tell your children that in children’s ministry. That is blasphemy. Do not say in children’s ministry, “God is like water. It’s solid when it’s frozen. It’s liquid or it can be vapor when it heats up,” I don’t even know how to say this with a straight face. I wouldn’t point it out if it weren’t a problem. When we use analogies like this, we end up promoting all kinds heresies.

There is no one like God. This leads to the question: Can we know the doctrine of the Trinity exhaustively? The answer is no—not with our finite minds. But can we know the doctrine of the Trinity truly? Yes! We absolutely can.

Our God is worthy. Our minds are finite.

The third conclusion is **our salvation is secure**. We can look at Ephesians 1, see the gospel, and see how our trinitarian God works for our salvation from beginning to end.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:3–14).

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are all interested in your salvation. Let this soak in. I know these are controversial verses. Breathe this in now. I am not good at talking about mystery. I am not presuming to know what this means. I’m just reading it. Just let it soak in.

Before a star was ever set in the sky, a mountain placed on the land or water poured in between that land—before any of that—there was the God of the universe, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Who set His sight upon your soul. He purposed to save you as His child. He has drawn you to faith in Christ. You are sealed by His Spirit, by the blood of Christ according to the will of the Father.

We are not saved by a creature; we are saved by the Creator Himself. This is huge. The cults we are about to talk about look at it and teach that Jesus is a created being, but somehow He still saves us. That teaching wrongly attributes credit for salvation to a creature, not to God.

The One Who saves us completely is completely God. We worship Him.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33–36).

This is the one true gospel of the One true God. It is worth giving our lives to make known this gospel.

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