

A Practical Look at the Trinity

1 Peter 1:2

I want to study the Trinity today, but this sermon won't be a doctrinal study. The doctrine of the Trinity is a very complex doctrine and full of many details that can be hard to explain and understand clearly. The basic idea, however, isn't too hard. There is one God. He exists in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And those three persons, as one God, are equal. Equally God. Equal in glory. And together, they are one God.

But our focus today is not a doctrinal exposition of the trinity. In fact, that's it for the doctrinal study this morning. I'm going to presume upon that simple definition of the Trinity, and use it only as a background and foundation of what I will preach from Peter's words in 1 Peter 1:2.

I think it is obvious that Peter is using this trinitarian formula in that verse, obviously using the three persons of the Trinity as the foundation of what he writes.

But it's not just a doctrinal formula. Actually, he's not making a theological point. Instead, what he writes is intensely practical. That's the basic reason I have always been particularly attracted to Peter's letters, because they are so practical. Good doctrine is the foundation, but always with a practical purpose and intention clearly in mind. Good doctrine, used as a proper foundation for good application to our lives.

So what does the Trinity have to do with our daily lives? Or, according to my sermon title, what exactly is a "practical" look at the Trinity? Let's dig in and find out. Beginning with,

I. God the Father.

Let me step back and remind you of what we studied last week in verse 1. Particularly the emphasis upon the Greek word translated "elect" or "chosen." Peter is writing to the "elect," to those who are "chosen," and the placement of that word in the sentence defines its emphasis. This letter begins, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect." Last week we identified those elect as pilgrims or aliens, and as those who are scattered throughout the world. So that's who we are as Christians. We are those whom God has chosen to be his people, those whom he calls to live as aliens and pilgrims scattered throughout the whole world.

So let's look more closely at how Peter defines that election, that act of God to choose us to be his people. And what we read is that God chose us "according to knowledge." That makes sense. We can say that he chose us because he knew us. He chose us personally because he knew us personally.

But it isn't just God's knowledge that is identified. It is his foreknowledge. We who are Christians are elect or chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." God knew us ahead of time. I am calling that an eternal knowledge. In other words, knowledge not based in actual experience, but based in himself, in his own nature.

When I started here as your interim pastor two weeks ago, the transition was pretty easy because I knew you many of you already. I knew you previously. I had preached here a number of times last year, and because of that, I already knew you. But still, that is based on actual life experiences, isn't it? I knew you and you knew because we had opportunity previously to meet each other last year.

But God's knowledge of us isn't like that. God knows us because he is God. And perhaps the chief characteristic of God, if I can put it that way, is that God is eternal. The most important thing you can note about God is that he is eternal. He doesn't have a beginning. There never was a time when there was no God.

So God's knowledge is eternal. His knowledge of us and of all things is eternal. He knows because he is God. That's a contrast to us, because the things we know we learned. But God never learns anything new. He knows all things perfectly, and his knowledge is eternal.

There is a phrase the Bible uses to define that sort of knowledge, that eternal foreknowledge, of God, and it is the best we can do with our language to define eternity. It's the best answer we can give to the question of "when." When did God know us? And that question is really even better asked, "When did God choose us?" Answer?

A. God chose us before the creation of the world.

When was that, exactly? Well, eternity. Or, as we read the first few words in our Bibles, "In the beginning."

In the beginning, or as we would have to say it, "before the beginning," we were chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God."

Of course, Paul teaches the same thing in, Eph. 1:4 "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."

Paul goes on in the next verse to add, "having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the

good pleasure of His will."

So please don't ever distinguish between foreknowledge and predestination as if you can have one without the other. Many people, professed Christians, try to do away with any sense of predestination in order to leave only foreknowledge in the sense of knowing the future but having no choice or purpose involved in that knowledge. In other words, they say, God knows the future as if he looks into a crystal ball. He knows the future, but it is a bare foreknowledge. He has no active determination or purpose in choosing the future.

But that's not true. The Bible always connects the two, foreknowledge and predestination. God knows the future, he has eternal knowledge, because he has an eternal purpose. An eternal determination.

Even as Peter puts it, we were chosen according to this foreknowledge. He knew us, and he chose us! Or as I read just a moment ago from,

Eph. 1:4 "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

Three phrases that must all hang together. He chose us. He predestined us. According to the good pleasure of his will, or his own eternal purpose.

That's what God's knowledge is all about—its about his choice. His determination. His will. His decree, to use the more theological word. His purpose.

B. God chose us according to his own purpose.

That's our identity as Christians, as God's people. We are his

people because of his own choice and determination. And that becomes important when you come to understand his motive. God chose us before the creation of the world. That's the when. But why, in the sense of his own motive? What moved him to choose? What is the basis of his choice?

And the answer to all of those questions comes right back to the idea of grace. In love he predestined us. It was his own good pleasure. And going right back to Ephesians 1, all of this choosing and knowing by God is proclaimed to us...

Eph. 1:6 "...to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved."

It's all about God's grace. God's eternal knowledge is a manifestation of his grace. His choosing is a matter of his grace. His purpose is a matter of his grace. His eternal knowledge is a matter of his grace.

We are saved by grace. God chose us according to his eternal knowledge by grace, not because of anything in us. And people of God, that is where your security and assurance of salvation comes from!

And that is where your confidence in all of life comes from, knowing that God has a purpose. And he works everything out according to the purpose. Therefore,

Rom. 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

And then, for your great encouragement, the next verses, what might be the most triumphant declaration in all of the Bible,

Rom. 8:31 "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

All of that is based upon the reality of God the Father's eternal knowledge. If you start with God's eternal knowledge, then you end with the confidence that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That's God the Father. Then, in 1 Peter 1,

II. GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The one whom we generally identify as the third person of the Trinity. And what does Peter say about God the Holy Spirit? v.2 "...in sanctification of the Spirit."

Or, "by the sanctifying work of the Spirit." That is a little bit of

interpretation added to the literal translation, but its accurate. Sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of God in us. It is the personal power of God in us.

So it is not simply that God knows his people, but that he is at work in us, personally, with his own power! The simple statement is that,

A. God gives us his Holy Spirit.

Paul teaches the very same thing in,

2 Thes. 2:13 “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There this choosing by God is specifically identified as choosing you for salvation. And Paul calls that the gospel! With reference also to “sanctification by the Spirit.” Those whom God chooses for salvation, he gives the Holy Spirit.

Two cross references,

Eph. 1:13 “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

2 Cor. 1:21 “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

So if you are a Christian, if God has chosen you and redeemed you, you have the Holy Spirit. And the focus of the

work of the Spirit is that of power. Paul uses the word power when he identifies the work of the Holy Spirit in,

1 Thes. 1:4 “...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”

B. God empowers us with his Holy Spirit.

That’s the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, it is the power of God at work in us. It is an ongoing work, in which God enables us more and more to put to death sin and more and more to live in righteousness. And the emphasis here upon the Holy Spirit is so that you realize that what God commands, he enables! What God requires you to do as a Christian he enables you to do. That’s the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. That’s the sanctification of the Spirit. Power.

Let me go right back to 1 Thessalonians 1:4, for the evidence of this power at work in your life is the evidence that God has chosen you in the first place. So election and predestination is not a secret work of God, in which you are left wondering if you have been chosen. Paul’s point in 1 Thessalonians 1, and Peter’s point here in our text, is that is you have been called, if you have been chosen, the the power of the Holy Spirit will be evident and obvious. And that is for your encouragement.

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That’s leads directly to my third point, and to Peter’s reference to Jesus, the second person of the Trinity.

III. GOD THE SON.

Notice how Peter puts it, “for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” For obedience and sprinkling.

So, as a Christian, as one of God’s people, the elect, you have the Holy Spirit, the power of God is at work in you. And, in that context,

A. God chose us to be obedient to Jesus.

Sometimes we avoid this whole subject of obedience for fear of legalism. Sometimes we avoid the subject of obedience because we don’t to come to terms with and admit our disobedience. Sometimes we talk about God’s grace as if we don’t have to address matters of obedience, but the apostles had no such hesitancy to talk about it.

Just look at Peter’s words. We were chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

So we were chosen by God for obedience!

Let me always be clear. We weren’t chosen by God because we were obedient. We weren’t chosen by God because he knew we would be obedient. We weren’t chosen by God upon condition of our obedience. We weren’t chosen by God because of the merits of our obedience. Instead we were chosen by God because of God’s own grace. It’s all of grace, and none of works, so that no one can boast.

But we were chosen by God for the purpose of obedience. And if you recognize that I just made reference to Ephesians 2:8-9, let me read,

Eph. 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

That’s the purpose of God the Father’s eternal knowledge in choosing us. That’s the purpose of the work God the Holy Spirit in sanctification. And that is the purpose for which Jesus saved us, to be obedient. Or, in the language of,

Rom. 8:29 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

God chose us to make us like Jesus, to be conformed to his image! And we who are chosen are motivated by his grace in order to obey. Indeed, it is our response of love to Jesus that is expressed by your obedience.

John 14:15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

John puts it this way,

1 John 2:3 “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

And even more directly,

1 John 5:2 “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.”

God chose us for the purpose of obedience. But there is another word mentioned, too. For sprinkling. For “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

In other words, for cleansing.

B. God chose us to cleanse us from our guilt through the blood of Jesus.

Yes, God chose us for obedience. And, God chose us in order to forgive us for our disobedience. It’s a both/and proposition. If you miss the sprinkling and have only obedience, you end up with legalism. If you have sprinkling but miss obedience, you end up with antinomianism, or lawlessness.

We need both. God chose us for both, to enable us to obey and to cleanse us from the guilt of our sin. Again, to use another cross reference from John,

1 John 2:1 “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

So there are times when the Bible calls you to obey, for that is how you express your love to God. Yet, even then, the reminder of the gospel always comes. “We are sprinkled by the blood of Jesus.”

Let me end all of this and tie it together with a final, practical encouragement. Again, this practical look at the Trinity is just that, practical. My conclusion is for your encouragement, and your assurance. As I remind you that God chose you for the purpose of obedience, and as I declare to you that God

empowers you with the presence of his Holy Spirit enabling you to obey, let me give you this encouragement that comes from the promise of the gospel regarding the cleansing work of Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of his blood.

You who feel the weight of your sin, you who feel the pain of your ongoing struggle with sin, let this practical view of the Trinity give you much hope as you approach God to worship him at this very moment.

Heb. 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”