

# THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

## Unit 1d The Economy of the Trinity

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Hello. This is Unit 1 Session D. Today, we will conclude our discussion of the Trinity. As we begin today, I would first like us to review what we've learned about the Trinity thus far. Our first main teaching point was that God, in himself, has both unity and diversity. Under this heading, we unpacked two statements. First, we looked at the idea that there is in the divine being but one indivisible essence. Second, we looked at the idea that the Bible progressively reveals that the divine being is both personal and triunal. Our conclusion was that the fullness of the divine being is best understood in his triunity, in his three in one nature. In our second main teaching point, we dug into the triunity of God by considering the confession of the Trinity. Our main teaching point in that session was that God eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And each person is fully God, and there is one God. Here we unpacked the truth that God's personhood is unlike our own and showed from Scripture that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have all existed eternally as God and have distinct personhood. We also saw how God can logically and coherently be three in one.

This brings us to our main teaching point for today. Today, we want to understand how the persons of the Godhead interact with one another. In theology, this topic is referred to often as the economy within the Trinity. So our main teaching point for today is this: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in being but relate to the world and to each other differently. We start our discussion by considering the important fact that all the members of the Trinity are equal. We must assert that the whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons of the Godhead. Now, we've actually already established this in a previous session, but it is exactly this truth that allows us to argue that the various members of the Godhead are equal, something that's very important when talking about the economic Trinity. The divine nature of God can subsist wholly and indivisibly in more than one person of the Godhead. Because this is true, each member of the Godhead being fully and eternally God is absolutely equal. So God should not be considered like what we see in the image on the left that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each one-third God. Rather, we need to understand that the Trinity is more in tune with the picture on the right, keeping in mind that no true picture of the Trinity can fully explain it. But what we need to see is that God is the Holy Spirit, God is the Son, and God is the Father equally, individually, and fully.

So the persons of the Godhead have numerical unity of essence. They all possess an identical essence. Now, you'll remember our discussion of Bob, Bill, and Tom from our last session. You'll recall that while they shared similar essences, each one of their essences was unique. Three individuals, three essences. But it was not so, and it is not so with God's essence. And in fact, if we take the idea of God's essence a step further, look at the image on the right. What we see is that God is fully and equally the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God's essence fully and equally exists in each person. However, it's also true that apart from these three persons, the essence of God does not in fact exist. In other words, the essence of God is not independent of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is only equally and fully shared among them.

Now, as always, keep in mind that no illustration can fully or adequately describe the Holy Spirit, but this again helps us understand something about the essential being of the Trinity. Because each person of the Godhead then possesses an identical essence, there is no subordination among the Godhead as it relates to this essential being. And this is a critical point because while there is no subordination among the Godhead as it relates to essential being, there is an economic subordination within the Trinity. You see, each person of the Trinity has equal dignity because each shares the same essential being. However, we come to see the Trinity working within time and space, both creating and redeeming. The

members of the Trinity display a certain order and relationship that can be both recognized and studied in their work within creation and redemption. And as we come to recognize and study this, theologians have referred to this as the economic Trinity, that is, the Trinity as it is at work within creation and redemption.

But if we take a step back from creation, we also see that an ontological relationship exists between the members of the Trinity as well. Ontology is the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being. You see, at times, the Bible discusses the economic Trinity, that is, the way that the Trinity works and relates to itself both within creation and within redemption. However, the Bible also talks about the ontological Trinity. The ontological Trinity is the Trinity that existed prior to and apart from the work of creation and redemption. Of course, these are simply theological headings given to one and the same triune God of the Bible. We're not talking about two separate Trinities here. Rather, we're looking at two different aspects of the same Trinity. And they help us better understand how this triune God presents himself to us. In short, we see clear relationship in both the ontological Trinity, the Trinity as it existed before its work in creation and redemption, and within the economic Trinity, the Trinity at work within creation and redemption.

The order found within the ontological Trinity is one of properties. So the Father comes first. And what we find in Scripture is that he is not begotten. Neither does he proceed from any other person. Then we come to the Son who is second. The Father is the one who has eternally begotten the Son. Finally, the Holy Spirit is third. He proceeds from both the Father and the Son from all eternity. The order found within the economical Trinity is one of activity or derivation. All things come *from* the Father. This is because God the Father generates all things. He is essentially generative. Next, all things come to us *through* the Son. The Son is the mediator of all things. Finally, all things come to us *in* the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that is the inspirer or the inspiration. He both animates and empowers. So we can see, both in the ontological and economic Trinity, a clear order of relationship. However, we must always remember that this subordination, this order does not have to do with dignity, with equality, or essential being, for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all equal as it relates to their essential nature.

So let's take a look at the work or the administration of the Trinity within creation. And let's start with the Father. Now, we've already stated that it's the Father who generates activity within creation, so we should expect to see such within the Bible. Specifically, but not exhaustively, we'll take a look at several different things that God the Father does within creation. Let's take a look at, first, the fact that the Father is the one who has designed the work of redemption. Two passages that we'll take a look at help us understand this: Psalm 2:7-9 and Ephesians 1:3-6.

First, Psalm 2. "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'" So here we begin to see that God the Father is orientating redemption. He is writing the story. Ephesians 1:3-6. "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." So we see that it is God the Father who has been at work to write the plan of

redemption. Now, not only this, but we also see that it is God the Father who elects. This is told to us in 1 Peter 1:1-2. We see that it's God who loves the world, as John 3:16 notes. And we also see that it's God who gives good gifts, as we're told about in James 1:17. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." God the Father is at work within creation, designing redemption and generating creation itself.

Now let's take a look at God the Son and his mediatorial work. God the Son is the one who mediates within creation and redemption. So we see him as the one who created and maintains all of creation. John 1:3 and John 1:10 communicate this to us. "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made... He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him." Specifically, we see that it was God the Father who designed creation, but it was God the Son who carried out that act of creation. Now, we also see some other work of God the Son within creation. We see that it's God the Son who suffers and redeems, as Mark 8:31-32 and 1 Peter 1:18 respectively teach us. We also see that it's God the Son who upholds all things, as Hebrews 1:3 states. There it reads this: "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." God the Son is at work mediating the Father's plan in creation. He maintains creation, he has suffered and redeemed us, and he is upholding all things.

Finally, we look at God the Holy Spirit and his work within creation. God the Holy Spirit is the one who inspires within creation and redemption. So we see that it is God the Holy Spirit who actually is in the process of regenerating us. We see this in Titus 3:5. "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Now, the Holy Spirit is also involved in empowering us (Acts 1:8), sanctifying us (Galatians 5:22-23), qualifying us (Exodus 28:3). And we see that it's the Holy Spirit that is teaching humanity, as John 14:26 tells us. There it 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." So God the Holy Spirit is inspiring, animating, and empowering within creation and redemption.

So let's take a quick look at how the economic Trinity is working together in the act of redemption. First, we see that it was God the Father who is actually violated by sin in the world. John 6:37-38 talk to us about this reality. Yet next we see that it's God the Son who is executing the Father's plan of redemption. He does this by being the guarantee for his people. This is shown to us in Psalm 40:7-8. Finally, we see that it's God the Holy Spirit who is revealing God's plan to us. 2 Peter 1:21 tells us this. And we also see that it's the Holy Spirit that is preparing the church for her eternal destiny, as noted in 1 John 2:27. So here's a good example of the economic Trinity at work within creation and redemption.

So we conclude our discussion of the Trinity. God in himself has both unity and diversity. This unity and diversity has come to be expressed in the concept of the Trinity. That is, that God eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And each person is fully God, and there is one God. And the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in being but relate to both the world and one another differently.