

Satisfaction in the Trinity (Part 1)

1 Peter 1:2 and Selected Scriptures

Transcript of a Sermon Preached by Tony A. Bartolucci on November 28, 2004

Part 1 The Trinity in Scripture

Opening Scripture Reading and Prayer

If you would grab a Bible and open it to 1 Peter, chapter 1. If there's one thing I learned last week, it's not to say at the start of a message that it will be rather short lengthwise; I had several of you call me on that last week. But I will remind you that it was about 8 minutes shorter than the week before. So I thought I was pretty safe. (Since the week before was about 65 minutes, I thought I was pretty safe in saying that.) But, my wife told me, "Don't say that any more." It wasn't a lie, it was 8 minutes shorter (maybe a gross exaggeration, but not a lie!).

Well, hey, take your Bibles and stand with me, 1 Peter, chapter 1, 1 Peter, chapter 1, reading verses 1 and 2 together.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father by the sanctifying work of the Spirit that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood; May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

Lord, we commit our time before You this morning. We thank You that You are Master over all things and You are the One Who originated Your Word; You breathed it out; You inspired it; exhaled it for us that in our studying of it and reading of it and digesting it we may be adequate and equipped for every good work. Lord, we thank You for that, and we recognize that being equipped isn't something that happens all at once. It's something that really is a continuous process; in a very real sense it lasts our entire lives. And we're committed to that here at Clarkson Church, and we're thankful, Lord, that You have been at work in this church throughout history and You are at work in this church today. We commit our time to You; pray that You will, indeed, teach us and lead us and help us to get a greater glimpse of the glory of Who You are. In Jesus precious name we pray. Amen.

A Trinitarian Formula

Well, as it relates to the passage that we've been studying, 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2, the basic main idea that comes out of this passage, and specifically verse 2, is that our hope as believers is found in *the electing grace of the Father, the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, and the saving grace*

of the Son. We see that very sort of thing in verse 2; it's what is called by theologians *a Trinitarian formula.* It's a passage that reflects for us quite clearly the fact that God is a Trinity – He is a Triune God. And we see so clearly in this verse, verse 2, that the Triune God has been at work in a creative activity, specifically the creative activity of making us new creations in Jesus Christ. The Father elects, the Spirit draws, the Son saves, and we've said that this is really the fulcrum of our hope as believers. This is where our hope rests, in the sovereign Source of our salvation and certainly that's why the apostle Peter began this passage in this sense and in this way.

Hope in the Sovereign Source of Salvation

If you remember, when we looked at the historical context, we noted that Peter writes to those who are scattered abroad. He writes to those who are suffering, those who are hurting, and at the outset, he reminds them that they can have a living hope. He'll remind them of that throughout the letter, but specifically, he begins with a reminder that there is hope in the sovereign Source of their salvation and hope in the sovereign Source of our salvation as well.

It's a good thing that it's sovereign, that is God is in control of it, because if it was something that we were in control of, in our humanness and in our sin, it would come to ruin. But we can rest in the fact that God had a plan from all eternity, and so we have hope. We have a hope that's grounded in truth; we have a hope that will not disappoint; we have a hope that will, without a doubt, be realized in our lives through Jesus Christ. And that hope, again, is in a Sovereign, that is, God who is the source of our salvation. And so, we see the three persons, the three members of the Trinity at work, even in our justification as believers.

We Have Been Chosen by the Father

We've been selected by the Father. The first work – we've been chosen, past tense, according to God's foreknowledge, as Peter puts it, and here's the work of God, the Father, Who chooses believers to be saved from out of the entirety of the lost - sort of a picture of redemption, a picture of those who are in the slave market of sin, those who are lost, who have no hope of redeeming themselves, and yet, One comes along Who can pay the price of redemption. That is God, and He chooses us out from the slave market of sin to be members of His kingdom. And that is the work, that is the calling of God, the Father.

We Have Been Sanctified by the Holy Spirit

And not only have we been selected by the Father, but we've been sanctified by the Spirit. The word *hagiasmos* means "set apart as holy", and in that sense, we've been set apart by God in His eternal plan to be holy unto Him – the work of the third person of the Trinity who draws us to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It's what we call "effectual calling."

We Have Been Saved for Service by the Son

And then, thirdly, we see the work of the second person of the Trinity. We've been saved for service by the Son. Yes, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, yes, with the sanctification of the Spirit, *but that for obedience*, and I would take that to be "the obedience of faith" that's talked about so much in the New Testament, that is, for believing in Jesus Christ, and then, in believing, being sprinkled with His blood. That's the application of the atonement.

So the Father elects, the Spirit sanctifies, and the Son saves. Now since we have such a wonderful Trinitarian formula here, we were going to take a few weeks aside and, as a parenthesis, look at Our Satisfaction in the Trinity. That's sort of a subtitle for the next couple of weeks. Satisfaction, rest, joy, gratification in the Triune God Who authored, Who carried out, and Who sealed our very salvation!

The Trinity at the Heart of Christian Orthodoxy

I said last week that this doctrine is at the heart of orthodoxy. This is one of those issues that we don't compromise on. This is one of those issues where we don't say, "*Well... well, brother, you reject the Trinity, but that's okay, we can go our way in merry fellowship.*" No! This is one of those issues that we go to the wall on! This is at the heart of orthodoxy; this is one of the defining issues of what it means to be a Christian, to be a believer in Jesus Christ, and rejecting this doctrine, as many do today, is something that's done at one's own peril. That is without any hope of redemption.

The Failure of the Church to Teach Truth

So this is a doctrine that is at the heart of orthodoxy, yet we wonder, and again, as I said last week, why a doctrine that is so much at the heart of orthodoxy has been so neglected in the church? One writer calls it "the forgotten Trinity". Another theologian writes that "the Trinity, like any other doctrine, needs only to remain untaught for one generation to be lost." And that same writer attributes some of the neglect to modern fundamentalism which has basically ignored the doctrine. And I would add to that the modern entertainment-oriented seeker movement in the church that tends to neglect anything that goes beyond the sixth-grade level. As a result, the church has fallen prey to the very prediction of what would happen if we didn't do a good job of equipping the saints in Ephesians, chapter 4. We've, by and large, become "children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine and by the trickery of men." That's why I said last week that sometimes church leaders and theologians sadly joke about how many of the people in our pews are Arians, Modalists, or Pelagians, all ancient heresies that are evident when unknowing people in the church say things like, "Jesus is the Son of God, but He's not God." Or "All people are basically born good, or neutral, and are just a product of their environment." Or "The Trinity is like a man who's a father and also a son and also an uncle." You see, these are just reflections and illustrations of ancient heresies that creep up in otherwise good evangelical churches because the people are not well-instructed in the Scriptures. And so people in the pew have a gross misunderstanding of

theology and a lot of the basics because the church has been so neglectful in teaching anything. As Ephesians 4 says, the mandate of the leadership of the church is to equip the saints so they don't fall prey to every wind of false teaching, or false doctrine. And rather than equip, we spend a lot of our time entertaining because that's what builds numbers and fills the church coffers.

One writer put it this way:

“Our assignment as churches is not to create a Wal-Mart community church where the aisles are wide, the merchandising slick, and the message is comfortable, and the price of salvation is a little bit cheaper than any place else.”

MacArthur, in one of my favorite quotes of his, contends that,

“Worship services in many churches today are like a merry-go-round. You drop a token in the collection box; it's good for a ride; there's music, lots of motion up and down; the ride is carefully timed and seldom varies in length; lots of good feelings are generated and it's the one ride you can be sure will never be the least bit threatening or challenging. But though you spend the whole time feeling as if you're moving forward, you get off the ride in the exact same place that you got on. No progress.”

So we just haven't done a good job of teaching much on the central aspects of what it means to be a believer in Jesus Christ, and the Trinity is certainly at the heart of that.

Add to that the fact that confusion abounds as to what it means when we say, “We believe in the Trinity.” As I said before, it's quite interesting that cultists don't attack the true doctrine. They attack a caricature of the true doctrine, and after I said that, I read one theologian, last week, who said much the same thing. He said, “Those who oppose the teaching regarding the Trinity usually have not taken sufficient time to examine what they oppose, or to define the charge of contradiction which they make against the doctrine.” And so you have cultists that show up at your door, and they say, “*Oh, well, you go to such-and-such church; well, you must believe in the Trinity.*” And you say, “*Oh, yeah, I believe in the Trinity.*” They reply, “*Well, if you believe in the Trinity, tell me who was speaking at Jesus' baptism when the voice out of heaven said 'This is My beloved Son'. Do you believe that Jesus is a ventriloquist, if He's God?*” Or “*If you believe in the Trinity then that means that the Father died on the cross. And if the Father died on the cross, Who was running the universe when He was dead?*” And the fact is, I would say that 90% of Christians out in the evangelical world couldn't provide an answer. Well, if you listen over the next several weeks, you'll be able to. You see, questions like this are misstatements of what it means that the church of Jesus Christ believes in a Triune God.

The Trinity is the Highest Revelation of God

The Trinity is the highest revelation of God that He has made for His people. It's certainly based on the principle of progressive revelation. That is, revelation unfolds from an embryonic sort in the

Old Testament as it flowers to the New Testament. And it seems as if, this is a revelation of what God wants us to know as it relates to who He really is. It's almost as if God said, "You know, I'm going to bring you right to the limits of what you can understand and what you can sort of grasp in understanding who I am. And you're not going to be able to fully understand it, or fully put it all together, but that's because I'm God and you're not." It's also based on the principle that God is smarter than we are. Well, that's kind of fundamental, isn't it? So it's the highest revelation of God as to Who He is. White calls it the capstone, the summit, the brightest star in the firmament of divine truths. And so, to pervert or misunderstand the Trinity is to pervert and misunderstand the very character and nature of God. In a very real sense, it's to take His name in vain and thus, violate the third commandment, since God's name is the embodiment of who He is. And in understanding this, it should not only - or not merely - equip us in being good theologians, but it should also bring us to appreciation of how great God really is. It should bring us to a greater appreciation of worship. As I've spent so much time this past week in reading and studying the doctrine of the Trinity, I've found myself really being brought to some great heights of worship through it all. And that's certainly part of the goal that we should have as believers - to grow in our worship of the true God.

Is the Word "Trinity" a Biblical Word?

Now, we're just going to get our feet wet a little bit this morning, and kind of, by way of an introduction, we're going to ask the question, "What do we mean by "the Trinity"? What do we mean by that? Well, the word "Trinity" is from the Latin *trinitas* which means "threeness." Now people will often object, "Well, you believe in the Trinity, but the word isn't even found in the Bible. How can you believe in it if it's not found in the Bible?" How do you answer that? You see, the issue isn't whether or not a word is found in the Bible. The issue is, *is the concept that the word or the phrase teaches biblical?* That's always the issue. It's a misstatement to simply say a word's not in the Bible, therefore it's a bad word, or it's not a biblical word. You can look at it from the reverse. People all the time take words that are in the Bible and make false, perverted teachings out of them, and they'll say, "Well, it's in the Bible". And we'll say, "Well, it may be in the Bible, but you're not using it biblically." They take the word "fullness" and say, "Well, that's a biblical word, and it means that the fullness of divinity dwells in me." We say, "That's not what it means at all. It says in Colossians the fullness of divinity dwells in Jesus Christ." So just because it's a word that's in the Bible doesn't mean that it's being used biblically. It would be much better to take a word that maybe isn't found in the Bible, per se, yet is indicative of biblical truth. It would be better to use a word that way than to try to find some word that is in the Bible and use it in a way that isn't indicative of biblical truth. The word "lordship" isn't in the Bible, yet I believe that's a very biblical word as applied to Who Jesus Christ is in His Lordship over our lives. So that's certainly not a good argument. The argument is, "is it biblical?", not, "is it in the Bible?," as far as some dry, wooden, stereotypical sort of thing would be concerned. And the Trinity does convey a biblical concept. However, I think a more accurate word than trinity is a word that I've used several times already. It would be the word "Triunity. In fact, I prefer that word, as do many theologians, over that of "Trinity". "Triunity" encompasses both ideas of oneness and threeness.

Our Hope in the Triune God

Now the main idea for what we'll be studying together on the Trinity of God is threefold. It's there in your outlines. And it sort of piggy-backs off the main idea from verses 1 and 2, which, if you remember, was this: Our hope is found in the electing grace of the Father, the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, and the saving grace of the Son. Well, the main idea for what we'll be studying together the next couple of weeks on the Trinity is threefold. If our hope is found in the Triune God, then we must know and love Him in His Trinity. If we must know and love Him in His Trinity, then we must know about His Trinity, and if we must know and love Him in His Trinity, then we must believe in His Trinity. In short, true believers will love and embrace the triune God in all His fullness. The first three words of that last statement will show you how essential it is.

Ignorance or Arrogance?

If you're not sure what I mean, what if I would've said, "true believers will be pre-millennial as to their eschatology?" Or, "true believers will not practice infant baptism?" Or, "true believers will celebrate the Lord's Supper every week, not once a month?" Or, "true believers will have churches led by pastor-elders?" Or, "true believers will only have male deacons?" That's kind of out of place, because in saying "true believers will," I'm saying that if you don't, then you're not a true believer, right? Now follow what I just said. True believers will love and embrace the Triune God in all His fullness. I don't mean by that, that everybody that comes to saving faith is going to have a theologian's grasp on what the Trinity is all about. I don't mean that at all. But, you see, there's a difference between being inaccurate *out of ignorance* and being inaccurate *out of arrogance*. We've all been inaccurate out of our ignorance. There's been times when we've said, in the past, "Well, I believe this." And, as we've been further instructed by God, by His Word, and led by His Spirit, we come to realize, "Oh, how did I ever think that?" So it's one thing to be ignorant or misled out of ignorance; it's another thing to be so out of arrogance, and arrogance is where somebody says, "Hey, I've studied it all, I know it all and I reject the concept of the Trinity. I believe Jesus was just a man." In that case, there is no hope. And so, that's what I mean that true believers will love and embrace the triune God in all His fullness.

God, in His sovereign plan, will lead those who are His in the truth as it relates to the central doctrines of the faith. So we're talking about a non-negotiable issue. The doctrine of the Trinity sits at the throne of God along with other non-negotiable doctrines, such as, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus Christ bodily. So, to know the God of the Bible is to know a Triune God, and to deny a Triune God is to deny the God of the Bible (and thus to deny one's own eternal salvation).

To Love God is to Really Know Him

Theologian James White is from my hometown. He put it this way: He said, "The goal of the Christian life, including the goal of Christian study and scholarship, is always the same - Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And then he asks the question,

“Do we long for a true knowledge of Christ? When we sing, ‘Lord, I want to know You’, do we really mean it, and then, take advantage of the ways He has given us to attain this true knowledge of Him? To know Christ truly is to know the Trinity, for God has not revealed Himself in such a way as to allow us to have a true and balanced knowledge of the Father outside of such knowledge of the Son, all of which comes to us through the Spirit. A person who wants to know Jesus must, due to the nature of God’s revelation, know Him as He is related to the Father and the Spirit. We must know, love, and understand the Trinity to be fully and completely Christian. This is why we say the Trinity is the greatest of God’s revealed truths.”

So if that’s true, then we must do what we can to know God in His fullness. If we say that we love Him, then as the saying goes, to love Him is to know Him. Or to know Him is to love Him. It would be like me saying, “I love my wife” and then I put absolutely no effort forth in knowing anything about her. Getting to know her personality, getting to know her intimately, getting to know what she’s like. Well, if that were true, then my words, that “I love my wife” would ring a little bit hollow. So, as those who love God, those who love Jesus Christ, we must be those who put forth a little bit of effort to understand in a little better detail, a little more accurately what God is like, what Jesus Christ is like.

Definitions of the Trinity

Now, I want to give you just a few sort-of-scholarly definitions of the Trinity. And I just want you to listen to these and then I’m going to give you a very simple definition and that’s the one I really want you to memorize. I want to keep it simple.

Here’s one from theologian John Dick:

“While there is only one divine nature, there are three subsistences, or persons, called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Who possess, not a similar, but the same numerical essence, and the distinction between them is not merely nominal, but real.”

How about one from Louis Berkhof, who follows an order of A to F:

- A) There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence.
- B) In this one Divine Being there are three persons, or individual subsistences, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- C) The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.
- D) The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the Divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.
- E) There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished, and
- F) The church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.

How about one or two more? W. Robert Cook, out of Portland, Oregon:

“There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence. The term “essence” refers to God’s essential being, or nature. In this one Being, there are three persons, or three individual subsistences, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are to be viewed as personal self-distinctions in the divine essence, or substance. The whole undivided essence of God belongs to each of the three persons. Thus, there is no subordination regarding the essential being of any person, although there is an economical or administrative subordination.”

Oh, I’ll explain some of this later. Oh, here’s a little bit of an easier one by Wayne Grudem, out of Phoenix Seminary:

“God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In each person is fully God and there is one God.”

A little better? Now, here’s my simple definition: *“God is one as to essence, three as to person.”* Now, you think you can remember that? That’s why I gave you all those hard ones. Memorize this: God is one as to essence, three as to person. Now, notice the definition doesn’t say, “Gods (plural) are...”, but “God (singular) is...”. And it doesn’t say that there’s one person and three persons; that would be contradictory. It doesn’t say there is one essence and three essences; that would be contradictory. But there’s one essence and three persons which is non-contradictory. And, if you hang on here, and kind of file that, we’ll get into what all of that means when we talk about essence and person.

Introduction to the History of the Doctrine

Now before we get into the biblical support for the Triunity of God which we’ll do next week, I thought it would be good to spend the rest of our time looking at the doctrine historically. How did the church, from its inception to the present, deal with and understand the issue of the Triunity of God? I think it’s safe to say that the Christian Church, from its earliest times to the present, has uncompromisingly believed and taught that God is a Triunity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even if early on that belief was more implicit than explicit. And this was really a by-product in the church’s belief in the oneness of God and the divinity of Jesus Christ, and, you see, that’s where the tension began.

Jewish and Christian Monotheism

The early Christians were certainly monotheistic. They believed in one God, as did those who were of the orthodox Jewish community. Yet, you’re confronted with this issue, “Who is Jesus Christ?” We believe in one God, yet we have the Messiah, Who exhibits the attributes of God, the Messiah Who is called with titles of divinity, and the Messiah Who even called Himself God in John 8:58. He called Himself Yahweh. So, what do we do when we have a monotheistic belief in one God and yet we have Jesus Christ, whom we believe to be God? Well, we don’t believe in two gods, and so

we've got to kind of grapple with those sort of issues, and that's what the early church did. It was really the issue of the person of Jesus Christ.

Materialistic Dualism

You see, cults are nothing new – had them in the first and second centuries, such as those who went by the name gnostics, or docetists, those who denied that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. Those were the first attacks against the person of Christ, and they were really related to a belief that He was, indeed, divine. They believed in what was called a "materialistic dualism," that is, they believed that anything that was human, or fleshly, or material, by nature had to be evil. And the only thing that could be good and holy and pure would be that which is spirit. Well, what do you do with this God-man Jesus Christ? God takes upon Himself human flesh? You see, if you were of that persuasion, of materialistic dualism, you would say, "That could never happen, because flesh is evil; God is good." So they came up with a doctrine that said Jesus only *appeared* to be human. He wasn't really human; He just appeared to be so. And, of course, this turned the work of Christ into an illusion. If He only appeared to be human, then maybe He only appeared to suffer and die. And if He only appeared to suffer and die, then maybe our salvation only appears to be a salvation that has no basis in reality. But, you see, these were some of the issues that the early church had to deal with early on.

False Teachers Everywhere

False teachers were prevalent. They were so pervasive in the fourth century that Gregory of Nyssa wrote about how they could be found everywhere. This is what he wrote back in the 300's, he said:

“Every place in the city is full of them - the alleys, the crossroads, the forums, the squares, garment sellers, money changers, food vendors - they're all at it. If you ask for change, they philosophize for you about the nature of Christ. If you inquire about the price of bread, the answer is the Father is greater and the Son inferior. If you speak about whether the bath is ready, they express the opinion that the Son was made out of nothing.”

That would be like stopping at Wegman's and after you ask for a pound of salami from the deli manager, he doesn't respond with, "How thin would you like that cut?" and, "By the way, Jesus is only a man." And then you go over to Wal-Mart and the gal in the photo department doesn't say, "Matte, or glossy finish?" No, rather, she says, "The Trinity is a pagan belief." And then you go to MacDonald's and pull into the drive-thru and instead of hearing, "Welcome to MacDonald's, may I take your order?" you hear, "Welcome to MacDonald's, Big Macs aren't eternal and neither is Jesus Christ." That's almost what it was like in the fourth century. And it shows that Satan has been at work from the beginning of time.

All false doctrine is demon doctrine according to 1 Timothy 4:1. False teachers plagued Israel, they plagued the church from the time of Christ through the apostles on throughout church history, as is true today. But, you see, the focus early on was on the person and work of Jesus Christ. You see,

false teachers weren't focused so much on God, the Father or on the Holy Spirit, rather they focused their attacks in the first couple of centuries on Jesus Christ, denying first of all that He was truly human, and then secondly, a little later, they started denying that He was truly divine. And so the church responded by refuting those errors which in turn caused the church to formulate what, in fact, the Bible taught about Christ: in His person, Who He was, and, in His work, what He came to do.

How the Church Formulates its Understanding of Doctrine

There's no doubt in my mind that the early church was Trinitarian, even if it was implicitly so, at first. In other words, they hadn't formulated it into some sort of a systematic belief (looking at how the Members related to each other and what all of that means). In the same way, with their belief that Jesus Christ was God, they believed it even though they hadn't formulated it into a systematic whole (looking at the pre-existence of Christ, how He existed eternally, how He appeared in the Old Testament, how does Father and Son relate to one another, both in time and in eternity). You see, they hadn't dealt with all the implications of their belief. But it's important that you understand that it almost always takes attacks against the truth for people who uphold the truth to get together and put in writing what is the truth. In other words, early church councils and even doctrinal statements aren't a result of a bunch of men getting together and saying, "Well, let's take the bull by the horns and let's tell everybody else what the church believes and let's make up a bunch of stuff. And we'll flagellate anyone who disagrees with us." That's not grounded in historical reality. The truth is, what brought these men together were attacks against the truth, and as you have false teachers going out and spreading their error, those who uphold the truth have to come together, and band together in fellowship, and say, "Hey, we need to get together. We need to get together as the Church of Jesus Christ and set in writing what is true about Jesus Christ from the Bible. What is true about the Trinity from the Bible? What is true about how many books there are in the Bible?" You see, it was in response to false teaching that the church took upon itself the banner of systematizing and writing down what is true.

The Example of Marcion

You can look at things such as Marcion who was an early church heretic. Marcion denied the authority of the Old Testament. Marcion denied much of the authority of the New Testament. Marcion had a very small Bible! It consisted of the letters of Paul, minus, I believe, Hebrews and the pastoral epistles and the gospel of Luke. That was his entire Bible! Well, you can see, if you've got a guy going out there with this sort of belief, and then spreading all sorts of errors based on that belief, and starting rival churches, and you see it start to grow, you can see, then, how the true church is going to say, "Boy, we need to get together and put a line in the sand and say, 'OK, yes, we accept the authority of the 39 books of the Old Testament', 'Yes, we accept the authority of these 27 books in the New Testament.'" You can see how that can happen. And that's pretty much how the church has always dealt with false teaching. So in the same way, it was attacks against the true doctrine of Who Jesus Christ is in the Trinity that compelled the church to put in writing what it is that it believes about those things.

Early References to God as a Triunity

Now some cultists will say that the church made up the doctrine of the Trinity in the third or fourth century. Some of them will even say the church borrowed from pagan Greek belief, or from Hinduism with its "Trimurti," and that's simply not true. For one thing, the test of any teaching is whether it's found in Scripture. Number one, God's Word always trumps church history and councils. However, we do find that the post-apostolic church, that is, the church immediately after the death of the last apostle, did uphold the Trinity. And we have evidence that dates as early as the first part of the second century, only about a generation or so removed from the death of the last apostle. For example the letter of Barnabas, which dates to the early second century, affirms a Trinity of God the Father, Christ the pre-existing Lord and Judge, and the Holy Spirit, Who prepares hearts for salvation. Athenagoras, about 177 AD, defended the doctrine of the Trinity as an essential part of the faith of the church. Later in the second century you have the Didache ("didache" means teaching) and that was an early church instruction manual. It was discovered in the late 1800's in Constantinople and it indicates that the church believed in a Triune God. It was the second century theologian, Theophilus who was the first to use the term "Trinity" (*trias*,) and he used it of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Irenaeus, about 190 AD wrote against the heresy of the Gnostics and claimed that the one Creator and Redeemer, God subsists as Father, Son and Spirit. And then, you have Tertullian, who in around 200 AD wrote extensively on the Trinity. And Tertullian claimed that God is a unity of substance with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, distinct divine persons within the substance of the one God.

Arius and Athanasius

Well, early in the fourth century, a man by the name of Arius shows up. He was an elder in Alexandria who came to the false conclusion, and I'm quoting the man himself,

"If the Father begat the Son, He that was begotten had a beginning of existence, and from this it is evident there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows that He had His subsistence from nothing."

In other words, Arius contended that Jesus Christ was a created being, and therefore, not God. Arius was quite a promoter so he had as his favorite slogan set to a popular tune and soon nearly everyone in Alexandria was singing, "There was a time when the son was not." Well, Arius had his thorn in the flesh – a dwarfly-looking young man with dark skin and a red beard by the name of Athanasius. It's been said that Athanasius could have been the patron saint of stubbornness. Athanasius, only in his early twenties, was bishop of Alexandria. And according to history, Athanasius never gave up on anything. He once grabbed the bridle of the horse upon which the Roman emperor Constantine sat, and refused to let go until Constantine conceded to him a theological point. Well, by God's providential plan, Athanasius also would not give up his opposition to Arius which led to Arius' belief, Arianism, being branded heresy at the councils of Nicea in 325, and Constantinople in 391. The result is a statement that reads,

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, together with the Father and the Son, He is worshiped and glorified.”

Augustine to the 1689 Baptist Confession

Then you have St. Augustine who was most prolific at that point in writing about the Trinity. He composed his masterful work, *De Trinitate*, between 399 and 419 AD. Well, we could go on into the Middle Ages with men such as Thomas Aquinas; we could move on to the 14-1600's, with the Reformation and men like Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, and Tyndale, all men who upheld and defended the Triunity of God. You can look at recent confessions of faith or, rather, recent ones such as the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, 1530, the Lutheran Formula of Concord of 1577, the Anglican 39 Articles of 1563, the Westminster Confession of 1546, and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith – all passionately, unreservedly upholding the Triunity of God. (It's reflected in our own doctrinal statement, which says that “We, at Clarkson Community Church, believe in one sovereign God, Who exists as three co-eternal, co-equal persons, God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit.”)

A Preview as to Our Approach

Now, we've said that the test of any teaching is, number one, is it biblical? Creeds, councils, and the collective teaching of the church is important and it carries weight. The church is the pillar and support of the truth. But creeds and councils are still bound by the plain teaching of Scripture, and are, therefore, only useful, in as much as they reflect what the Bible teaches. And so this is how we're going to attack this issue from God's Word beginning next week. I'll just give you a little bit of a preview. Three essential elements of the Triunity of God – we could call these "three pillars of the faith." And if you remove any one of the three pillars, the entire edifice is going to fall. You have to uphold all three of them.

- *Pillar number one: God is one as to essence.* God is one in unity. Yes, we uphold monotheism.
- *Pillar number two: God is three as to Person.* God is three in distinction. Yes, we uphold the divinity of God the Father, we uphold the divinity of God the Son, and we uphold the divinity of God the Holy Spirit.
- *Pillar number three, each Person is fully God.* That is, God is complete in each person. It's not that the Holy Spirit is a third God, Jesus Christ is a third God and the Father is one-third God, therefore you have a whole. That's not what it is at all! Each Person is fully and completely God.

Now, what was our main idea? Bring it back full circle. Well, we said that as Christians, our hope is found in the *electing grace of the Father, the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, and the saving grace*

of the Son. And that comes right out of 1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 2. And as it relates to the doctrine of God's Triunity we put it this way, in kind of a three-fold statement:

1. If our hope is found in the triune God, then we must know and love Him in His Triunity,
2. . . . and if we must know and love Him in His Triunity, then we must know about His Triunity,
3. . . . and if we must know and love Him in His Triunity, then we must believe in His Triunity.

Conclusion

As the Athanasian Creed of the 4th and 5th centuries put it, "He that would be saved, must thus think of the Trinity." So we're brought back to the very central issue of our passage in 1 Peter:

Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, with the sanctification of the Holy Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood.

Have you been chosen by the Father? Have you been sanctified by the Spirit? Have you been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ? Well, if so, there's no greater thing to be thankful for, is there? And if you haven't, or if you're not sure, I would invite you to come to the Triune God. I would invite you to come as only one can, that is, on God's terms, as God leads by His Holy Spirit, as God would draw you to forsake your sin, to forsake your religion, your disbelief, whatever it is, and to simply embrace the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and say, "*Yes, I believe that this is the One who died for me. The life that I can't live, He lived. The death that I deserved, He took. And by believing in Him and following Him, I'll have eternal life. I'll be a new creation in Jesus Christ - that wrought by the sovereign God of the universe -- hope in the sovereign Source of our salvation.*" And so, if you haven't done so, I would invite you, even now, as God leads to come to Him in saving faith.

Let's pray . . . *Loving Lord, we have certainly covered a lot of ground this morning – and a lot of it just by way of introduction - [as we've] looked at some history [and] some definitions. And now, Lord, there's much more to go and this is one of those issues that we certainly sort of park on a lot of information at first, and, Lord, I know that the goal of preaching isn't solely information, it's also to move the heart. And yet, Lord, if our hearts are to be moved they must be first instructed and we want to lay that foundation as well. And I pray, Lord, that You will help us as a church to grow in our understanding of who you are which certainly encompasses the fact the you are a Triune God. We embrace one Lord, one Savior and we love you in the mystery of your fullness. And, Father, I pray, Lord, that anyone listening who is outside the scope of your family and is convicted by the power of your Word and the power of your Spirit, I pray, Lord, that you might draw these to yourself, knowing that it's not on the basis of any works that we've done, not on the basis of our religiosity; each one of us stands condemned in our sin, none of us can certainly be good enough or religious enough to merit salvation before you. And that's simply why Jesus Christ came, to die*

for the sins of the ungodly, that through believing in Him they might have life. And so, Lord, I pray that you might bring life into any, Lord, that have it not. Thank you again for this time. We pray, Lord, that you'll bless this day - the beginning of a new week. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.