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BUILDING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AT OUR
SAVIOR'S CHURCH, OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA

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BUILDING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AT OUR
SAVIOR'S CHURCH, OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA

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To Kelly,
my constant support
and loving companion

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PREFACE

The inspiration to begin and complete this project came from numerous individuals. Four years ago I read Bruce Ware's book, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Roles, Relationship, and Relevance*. Ware's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, which included practical ramifications for the local church, ignited a passion in my heart to equip members of my own church with a thorough knowledge of trinitarianism. Ware's book not only equipped me with a greater understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity in general, but also evoked a renewed sense of awe concerning the nature of God in particular. Thankfully, the inspiration I received was not only derived from pages that Dr. Ware wrote, but also involved his one-on-one professional oversight of my entire project. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Ware for the scholarly wisdom and pastoral insights he has provided.

I also received a tremendous amount of inspiration from my colleague, Joe Tyrpark, with whom I had the privilege of studying during the course of my doctoral studies at Southern. Joe provided timely counsel and wisdom during the initial stages of this project. Likewise, I am grateful for Dr. Jeff Walters, whose passion for the local church is unprecedented. His heart for the growth and health of the local church provided a necessary anchor for the weighty theological truth discussed and applied in this project.

Of course, I could not have completed this project without the participation of members from Our Savior's Church. I am grateful for the time they dedicated to this

project, along with their desire to see unity established within the local church.

Accordingly, the participants' passion and commitment to this project was refreshing and demonstrated that love for weighty doctrine and practical application can coexist in the life of the church.

My wife, Kelly, has been a constant source of support since the inception of this project. In fact, from the beginning to the end, she has provided not only verbal encouragement, but also the time and day-to-day patience required for me to complete doctoral-level work. Although Kelly is gifted and graced in many ways, she has provided the women of our church with an example concerning the nature of godly humility and biblical submission. In this regard, Kelly has enabled me to speak and teach from experience concerning the blessing of walking in a unity that is patterned after the triune nature of God.

Scott Lewis Adams

Opelousas, Louisiana

December 2013

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip members at Our Savior's Church with the knowledge of biblical trinitarianism for the purpose of creating a unified community.

Goals

Four goals served to evaluate the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was that members of Our Savior's Church would understand biblical trinitarianism. While the majority of them believe in the historic, orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, very few were able to articulate its details in conversation or apply it in the life of the local church. Therefore, one of the focal points of this project involved outlining the contours of the nature of God, with special emphasis on explicating both His oneness and plurality, for the intellectual and spiritual growth of the congregation.

The second goal was for the church community to practice biblical unity and oneness. Such unity must involve, at a basic level, agreement in doctrine, moral standards, and philosophy of ministry. Part and parcel of the fulfillment of this goal involved the members of the church gaining an understanding of how the persons of the Godhead relate to one another and function within the triadic community.

The third goal was for members of Our Savior's Church to appreciate the variety of gifts, personalities, graces, and callings represented in church community. A

commonly held presupposition was that oneness and unity require conformity in every respect. However, this project sought to demonstrate that diversity and distinction are essential elements to effectual unity in the life of the local church. The church may be unified under a common vision, but the vision will not likely come to pass unless all the variety of gifts is in operation.

The fourth goal was for me, as the associate pastor, to become more effective in promoting unity and oneness within the church. For this goal to be accomplished I had to necessarily understand, appreciate, and submit myself to the trinitarian implications I wished to unpack in this project. Further, I hoped to gain more knowledge and skill regarding how to encourage and promote diversity within the community of believers. This required obtaining a keen awareness of the variety of gifts, personalities, and graces in the church and how they practically work together to fulfill God's vision for the church.

Ministry Context

Our Savior's Church is located in Opelousas, Louisiana, approximately seventy-five miles west of Baton Rouge. Established in 1720, Opelousas is the third oldest town in Louisiana. According to the 2011 census, the town of Opelousas occupies approximately eight square miles and consists of 16,668 people. The United States Census Bureau reports that 75 percent of the town's population is African American, 22 percent is white, and the remaining 3 percent consists of Indian Americans, Asians, and those who classify themselves as two or more races. Moreover, the median household

income is approximately \$19,000 with 45 percent of the population falling under the poverty level.¹

Our Savior's Church is best characterized as one church with three local campuses in Lafayette, Broussard, and Opelousas. The Opelousas church was birthed as a result of a key relationship that developed between the football coach of Westminster Christian Academy, Tommy Baddon, and the senior pastor, Eugene Reiszner. Baddon attended the Lafayette campus for five years and regularly vocalized his desire for a church in his home town of Opelousas. Accordingly, Reiszner and Baddon met regularly to discuss the possibility of such an endeavor and sought additional counsel from the elders. In August of 2009, the congregation of the Lafayette campus decided to release Eugene of his responsibilities for the task of establishing a new church in the Opelousas community.

In January of 2010, the church began meeting at Westminster Christian Academy for Sunday service. For the first few weeks, the average weekly attendance held steady around 40 people. However, this number began to grow steadily in the months to come, which required the church to host multiple services. In the last two years (2011- 2012), the church has grown to approximately 750 regular attendees. The massive amount of growth necessitated a larger Sunday meeting venue. In January of 2012, the church leadership secured a movie theatre that was built in the 1930s that nicely accommodates the present population of the church.

A significant amount of this growth is directly related to the church's contemporary style of worship, relevant preaching, community focus, and racial diversity. Accordingly, awareness of the church has come primarily through word-of-mouth and personal invitation. The nature of such communication fits well within such a

¹“Opelousas (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau,” <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22/2258045.html> (accessed October 7, 2012).

small, closely knitted community. Moreover, the church sends out invitations and creative advertisements through the mail to bring awareness to special services that occur throughout the year.

The present population of the church is diverse, representing a dominant concentration of Caucasians and African-Americans. This diversity is very rare in the city of Opelousas, where the majority of the population is African American. Additionally, the present population of the church consists of people from a variety of religious backgrounds including Baptist, Catholic, and Pentecostal. While the town of Opelousas remains segregated, Our Savior's Church has established an unprecedented standard of racial equality and ecclesiastical unity that has attracted many to the church and the Gospel.

Every Wednesday night approximately 100 women meet for a Bible study that is led by the pastor's wife. Also, around 30 men gather on Wednesday mornings at 6 o'clock for Bible study at a local coffee shop. Almost every week church staff members receive reports concerning salvations and spiritual renewal among the people of the community. Astonishingly, 45 people were baptized during the Sunday morning services on September 16, 2012. Many of the decisions occurred spontaneously as a result of a sermon that the pastor preached concerning the nature of the new birth.

The accelerated growth of the church has not occurred without varying degrees of challenges. For example, while there are many people willing to serve in the church, the expedited nature of the church's growth has made administration and communication very challenging. Specifically, men and women serving in various departments have experienced a great deal of frustration concerning the lack of scheduling and training that is required to perform efficiently. Frustration has also been experienced by those serving on the greeting, security, and the set-up teams.

Further, until my arrival on September 5, 2012, the senior pastor was responsible for the vast majority of counseling, leadership training, vision-casting, and

preaching. The enormity of the tasks at hand placed a tremendous strain on his ability to lead the church as effectively as he could have if an assistant pastor had been present.

In spite of the large amount of internal candidates for leadership, the elders decided that it was necessary to hire someone from outside of the church who could assist the lead pastor on a fulltime basis. After being informed about the church's need and undergoing an interview process, I received a call from the pastor informing me that he would like to offer me the job as his associate pastor. I accepted the offer and moved from Frisco, Texas, to Lafayette within three weeks.

My responsibilities include aiding the process of new-member assimilation, teaching biblical foundations class, providing oversight for Sunday morning service operations and ministries, and counseling. In recent days, I have devoted a significant amount of time establishing internal structure for departments within the church and training team leaders who can provide oversight for their respective area of ministry. Additionally, I also work directly with staff members of the Lafayette and Broussard campuses and provide ministerial support when needed.

Rationale

Numerous New Testament passages emphasize the necessity of unity within the community of believers.² Perhaps one of the most powerful pleas for oneness is seen in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer located in John 17. In this passage, Jesus prays to His father and asks that believers may be one even as they are one (v. 22). Jesus' statement reflects His desire for believers to experience oneness with each other in a manner that is patterned after His oneness with the Father.

²All Scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

Further, John 17:22 contains theological and ecclesiastical implications. It provides both a theological foundation and practical rationale for applying the doctrine of the Trinity in the local church. This verse is not explicitly trinitarian, but it does provoke a trinitarian explanation since Jesus is presented as distinct from the Father to whom He prays. Jesus and the Father are immanently one, yet remain logically distinguishable from each other in both role and function.

Most of the members desired to see unity achieved and maintained but are unable to cite biblical support for it. Therefore, there was a tremendous need to ground this desire in more than mere common sense. The unity that most desire is legitimate, but must be established from the objective foundation of Scripture. The last year was an especially appropriate time for this project to occur since a significant number of the members of the church are new in their faith and somewhat ignorant of certain biblical imperatives.

The method employed to achieve unity involved structured teaching sessions that were designed to provide doctrinal instruction concerning the Trinity. From this foundation class participants received instruction concerning how trinitarian implications practically applied in our church. Specifically, the mission and vision of the church, the nature of spiritual gifts, instruction concerning how to find a place of service in the church, and biblical instruction on how to handle offense were covered in detail. Of course, the ultimate goal was to work toward creating an ecclesiastical atmosphere of unity and oneness.

Definitions

In this project the term “oneness” was used repeatedly. The meaning of this term is straightforward enough, but a word of clarification concerning how this term applied in the context of the local church is necessary. The goal was not for each member of the church to look the same, talk the same, or act the same without qualification. Ecclesiastical oneness involves being doctrinally, morally, relationally, sacramentally, and ministerially united, while also allowing for diversity in terms of race, gifting, perspective, placement, and more. Therefore, while the primary focus of this project was unity and oneness, a significant amount of space and attention was devoted to how diversity is maintained and appreciated within the unified body.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of this project were as follows. The length of this project was fifteen weeks: two weeks to evaluate specific causes of disunity within the local body, an eight-week class that provided doctrinal education and practical training, three weeks of personal and corporate implementation, and two weeks that evaluated the outcomes of the project. Thus, while the overall time frame was adequate to incorporate the necessary didactic and educational elements, it proved inadequate in determining the full effects of the project.

The delimitation of this project involved the number of people who participated. The number was limited to 8 people. These participants were members of the church who have attended the church for at least six months. This required time-frame was necessary to demonstrate an appropriate amount of interest and dedication to the church in general and its unity in particular.

CHAPTER 2

A TRINITARIAN FOUNDATION FOR UNITY

The doctrine of the Trinity has received a significant amount of scholarly attention since the patristic era. Sermons, books, articles, and lectures have been produced that enunciate with pedantic precision how Yahweh is one, yet eternally exists in three distinct persons. However, less attention has been given to evaluating how trinitarian implications apply in the life of the local church. In this chapter I will outline the historical, biblical, and theological contours of the doctrine of the Trinity and demonstrate how it serves as a theological foundation for ecclesiastical unity and diversity.¹

Historical Trinitarian Developments

A careful examination of the early church era demonstrates that the doctrine of the Trinity did not develop in a vacuum. The theological and religious climate of the first

¹This chapter specifically addresses how the doctrine of the Trinity relates to and forms the basis of unity and diversity within the context of marriage and the local church. While some believe such a quest is quixotic at best and futile at worst, Fred Sanders is right in his summary and conclusion of the matter. He states, “In the hotly contested field of the theology of gender relations, evangelical theologians would be well advised to exercise great caution in the way they make their appeals to the doctrine of the Trinity. I am tempted to call for multilateral disarmament in this arms race, asking both sides to declare a temporary moratorium on invoking trinitarian warrant for their positions on gender relations. That, however, is unrealistic, because the fact is that scripture itself does make use of analogies and appeals that cross over the line between trinitarian relations and human gender relations, and responsible theologians must account for this biblical witness (1 Corinthians 11 is the most obvious crux). What is needed in this area is some sense of perspective and balance” (Fred Sanders, “The State of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Evangelical Theology,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47 [2005]: 166). This chapter will follow Sander’s advice and will aim at gaining perspective and balance through exegetical conclusions rather than philosophical speculation.

century AD, which included Roman polytheism on the one hand, and Jewish monotheism on the other, provided the soil from which the doctrine of the Trinity grew. Of course, the raw data for this doctrine was scattered throughout and firmly established in both the Old and New Testament documents in varying degree and frequency, but a fully developed understanding of the Trinity would take years to develop due to various cultural and theological factors.

In fact, the path from monotheism to biblical trinitarianism was not as simple as some suppose and was paved with numerous theological detours and exegetical dead-ends. The primary reason for this uneasy transition involved the theological and philosophical challenges that arose in attempts to understand and explain the nature of the Son and His relationship with the Father. There was no doubt in the mind of a first-century Jew that God the Father was fully and exclusively divine; but what about the Son and the Holy Spirit? Bruce Ware states the complexity of the problem in simple terms, “Clearly, both testaments are monotheistic, but the New Testament especially taught truths about Jesus and the Holy Spirit that raised questions in the minds of thoughtful early Christians.”²

From the first century forward, numerous attempts were made to annunciate how monotheistic statements in Scripture could be reconciled with passages that seemed to imply the deity of both the Son and the Spirit. Further, many people wrestled with the nature of the Son’s relationship with the Father. Is it personal in time and space only or is it eternal in nature? What is the nature of the Son’s submission to the Father? Is the Son

²Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationship, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 24.

ontologically or functionally subordinate? These are questions that generations of post-apostolic theologians and philosophers wrestled with for generations.

Strides toward Definition and Clarity

During the era of the post-apostolic fathers,³ the primary concern was maintaining a strict monotheism against the paganism of the day. And although there was a general consensus that Jesus Christ is divine, there was little if any attempt to explain the nature of His relationship with the Father. J. N. D. Kelly notes that the Apostolic Fathers “appear as witnesses to the traditional faith rather than interpreters striving to understand it.”⁴

The apologists⁵ were those who contributed to the doctrine of *Logos* Christianity. They were strict monotheists who sought to provide more intellectually stimulating arguments concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son. According to Kelly, fundamental to the apologists’ theology was that “as pre-existent, Christ was the Father’s thought of mind, and that, as manifested in creation and revelation.”⁶ The nature of the Father’s relationship with the Son is not personal per se, but is likened to the relationship between the mind and a thought that proceeds forth from it. Although the apologists may have undermined the personal nature of the Son and his relationship with the Father, Kelly states, “That the *Logos* was one in essence with the

³J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 90-94. Here, Kelly cites Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Papias.

⁴Ibid., 90.

⁵Ibid., 97-99. Kelly cites Justin Martyr, Quadratus, Aristides, Tatian, and Athenagoras.

⁶Ibid., 95.

Father, inseparable in His fundamental being from Him as much as after His generation as prior to it, the *Apologists* were never weary of reiterating.”⁷

Tertullian contributed to the trinitarian discussion in numerous ways. By popularizing the term “Trinity” (*trinitas*) and referring to the Son and Spirit as “persons,” Tertullian provided helpful, clarifying language that would be used up to the present day. By evoking notions of both plurality and personhood, these terms established philosophical and theological barriers to modalism.⁸ The fact that the equally divine persons can be ordered (first, second, and third) establishes the simultaneous, triadic nature and revelation of God. Moreover, in keeping with the language of Irenaeus, Tertullian stressed God’s actions in the “economy” of creation, redemption, and revelation, thereby elucidating the distinct roles and functions of the divine persons. The implications are enormous: God is one, yet eternally and distinguishably three as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Up until the middle of the third century AD, there was some suggestion of subordination within the Trinity. Alongside Justin Martyr who advocated the belief that Jesus is a second God, worshipped in secondary rank was the position advanced by Origen who viewed the Trinity as a membership of hierarchal order. However, in contradistinction to Justin and Tertullian who taught that the Father generated the Son and Spirit just before creation, Origen believed that the Son and the Spirit are generated eternally.⁹ It may be rightly argued that both attempts toward trinitarian development

⁷Ibid., 101.

⁸Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 101.

were influenced by the desire to combat polytheism and to preserve monotheism within the Christian faith. Although Origen may be faulted for his doctrine of subordination, he led a clear path in trinitarian thought that logically distinguished the members of the Godhead.

Furthermore, the third-century movement known as Sabellianism stressed the unity of the Godhead to an extent that precluded the simultaneous existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Philip Schaff notes the essence of Sabellianism: “While the other Monarchians confine their inquiry to the relation of Father and Son, Sabellius embraces the Holy Spirit in His speculation, and reaches a Trinity, not a simultaneous Trinity of essence, however, but only a successive Trinity of revelation.”¹⁰ In Sabellius’ view, God does not subsist of three eternally distinct persons. Rather, the one God reveals Himself to the world in three distinct manifestations (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Jesus was a manifestation, or mode, of God who, although possessed all the qualities of God-ness, did not exist as an eternally distinct person alongside the Father and Holy Spirit.

While the errors of Sabellius were egregious enough, the most destructive view concerning the nature of the *Logos* is seen in the theology of the Arians. In the beginning of the fourth-century, Arius (AD 256-336), a presbyter in Alexandria, clashed with Bishop Alexander over the issue of whether or not the *Logos* is co-eternal with God. Unfortunately, there are very few extant original sources that retain the words of Arius. However, Athanasius (AD 297-373) provides extremely relevant data concerning Arius

⁹Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Zondervan, 2006), 80.

¹⁰Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 2:581-83.

and his beliefs. In his first of *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Athanasius quotes from the *Extracts from the Thalia of Arius* and cites Arius's words concerning the Father and Son, "'God was not always a Father;' but 'once was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards He became a Father.' 'The Son was not always;' for, whereas all things were made out of nothing, and all existing creatures and works were made, so the Word of God Himself was made 'out of nothing, and once He was not.'"¹¹

The implications are clear: Jesus was created by the Father and became a son to Him. His son-ship, therefore, is not eternal, but rather temporal. Athanasius wrote in response:

Whence then this your discovery? Why do ye, as 'the heathen, rage, and imagine vain phrases against the Lord and against His Christ?' For no Holy Scripture has used such language of the Saviour, but rather 'always' and 'eternal' and coexistent always with the Father.' For 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'¹²

Athanasius insisted that the Son is *homoousios*; Christ possessed the identically same nature as the Father. His preexistence does not merely precede the created order, but is eternal in nature and essence. Moreover, although the compromised position of *homoiousios* party led by Eusebius of Caesarea gained some support at Nicaea, the majority followed the *homoousios* view and Athanasius's position won the day. It is reported that all but two bishops signed the creed. The conclusion of the council resulted in the Nicene Creed, which states in part:

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance (*ek tes ousias*) of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true

¹¹Athanasius, *Select Works and Letters*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 4:308.

¹²*Ibid.*, 313.

God, begotten not made, of the same substance with the Father (*homoousion to patri*), through whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth.¹³

After much debate, turmoil, and dissension, the church had in her possession a definitive creed concerning the Son's relationship to the Father. Later in AD 381 at the Council of Constantinople, a consensus was reached concerning the Holy Spirit that He too is co-eternal and co-equal. Although the biblical data speaks clearly enough, these creeds contained specific, explicit statements concerning the nature of God that have been cited and recited for over fifteen hundred years.

Scriptural Evidence for Trinitarian Conclusions

As noted, trinitarian formulations and distinctions were forged and illuminated against the backdrop of Jewish monotheism. Ware notes, "In agreement with their Jewish heritage, the early church affirmed as strongly as ever that there is only one God, that the God of the Old Testament was the same God as the God of the Christians, and that both Old and New Testaments taught clearly that true religion must be monotheistic."¹⁴

Scriptural Monotheism

Since their national inauguration, the people of Israel proclaimed with divine authority that Yahweh is the only God. This proclamation provided the immediate audience with the motivation for righteous living within the covenant community of God (Exod 20:1-3), but also provided latter generations with a monotheistic foundation from which to interpret and understand trinitarian passages. Therefore, while the examples

¹³H. Leclercq, "The First Council of Nicaea," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11044a.htm> (accessed March 15, 2012).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 29.

below are not exhaustive, they demonstrate a uniformity of monotheistic belief within the scriptural witness, dispensational distinctions notwithstanding.

One of the most definitive statements concerning Israel's monotheistic conviction is located in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses writes in 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Christopher J.H. Wright notes that within this statement "there is a polemical intent to define God wholly different from the multitude of gods that surround Israel. . . . He is one God, our God, and Yahweh is His personal name. On this understanding, the emphasis lies on Yahweh's singularity."¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann states additionally: "The key phrase may be rendered as 'YHWH is one,' in order to stress the unity of Yahweh who cannot be divided or parceled out; or it may be translated 'YHWH alone,' in order to accent YHWH's demand for exclusive, uncompromising loyalty from Israel."¹⁶ Whether the emphasis rests upon singularity of existence or unity of essence, Israel's God was viewed in terms of His oneness and was to be worshipped accordingly.

In the eighth century BC, the prophet Isaiah records and declares the words of Yahweh, who states, "I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God" (Isa 45:5). This statement is consonant with antecedent statements concerning Yahweh's singularity but expands the point further by ruling out the existence of equals to Yahweh.

According to the prophet, there exists no one with the power and ability to call and equip King Cyrus for the task at hand. The same concept is reiterated in verse six by

¹⁵Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 96.

¹⁶Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 83.

the phrase, “there is no other.” John Goldingay states, “To say ‘there is no other’ is to deny that there are many gods who share in such responsibilities, as Babylon believed, as well as to deny that there are two forces of light and darkness, as Persians believed. There is no power beyond Yahweh.”¹⁷ Although the people of Israel were at times inconsistent in the application of their belief in monotheism, the doctrine of the exclusivity of Yahweh was a firm, ubiquitous component of inspired Hebrew revelation.

Accordingly, monotheistic statements are likewise embedded in the divinely inspired statements of the New Testament. The apostle Paul writes, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). He states elsewhere, “[t]here is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4-6). Finally, James writes, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (Jas 2:19)!

New Testament Trinitarianism

However, the New Testament also contains statements that seem to indicate that the Son, along with the Holy Spirit, is likewise fully God. Some suggest that these statements contradict Israel’s monotheistic beliefs and therefore must be rejected or reinterpreted (e.g., Islam). Others interpret these statements in a manner that presents Jesus as a divine being, but lacking in co-equality with the Father (e.g., Arianism).

¹⁷John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 263.

However, a careful analysis of key New Testament passages reveals that the one God of Israel exists eternally and equally in three divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the clearest New Testament evidence concerning the deity and eternal nature of the Son is seen in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Here John employs the same phraseology used by Moses in Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning”) to demonstrate the supremacy of the *Logos* in relation to the creation and its relationship to God. Raymond Brown notes, “This is not, as in Genesis, the beginning of creation, for creation comes in verse three. Rather, ‘the beginning’ refers to the period before creation and is a designation, more qualitative than temporal, of the sphere of God.”¹⁸ In other words, although the phrase “the beginning” usually refers to the sequential temporality, John’s usage of this phrase denotes the eternal dimension of the *Logos* that transcends the created, temporal realm.

Next, John insists that “the Word was God.” John’s theology of the *Logos* stands in sharp contrast to Philo who taught that the *Logos* was created by God.¹⁹ For John, the *Logos* who was with God was simultaneously God. If God is eternal, then logically the *Logos* is likewise eternal. Those who deny the eternity of the *Logos* in this verse must logically deny the eternity of God. Since, for John, God’s eternity is presupposed, he sees no need to offer an exhaustive defense of the eternity of the

¹⁸Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (New York: DoubleDay, 1966), 4.

¹⁹F. F. Bruce rightly notes, “The true background to John’s thought and language is found not in Greek philosophy but in Hebrew revelation. The ‘Word of God’ in the Old Testament denotes God in action, especially in creation, revelation, and deliverance” (F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 29).

Logos. In short, his main argument for the eternity of the *Logos* rests upon his understanding of the eternity of God.

Accordingly, John's carefully constructed statement will not allow for the assertion that John, by his omission of an article preceding God, is merely referring to certain qualities of "God-ness" or that the *Logos* is a sort of heavenly being.²⁰ In essence, some argue that John was simply stating that Jesus was divine, but not equal with God. However, Carson rightly notes that "there is a perfectly serviceable word in Greek for 'divine' (namely '*theios*') More importantly, there are many places in the New Testament where the predicate noun has no article, and yet is specific (see John 1:49; 8:39; 17:17, Rom 14:17; Gal 4:25; Rev 1:20)."²¹ John's careful choice of words demonstrates that John was not merely referring to Jesus as a divine being, but as a co-equal member of the Godhead. Moreover, John's statement contains crucial theological ingredients for the doctrine of the Trinity that is more fully developed throughout the New Testament.²²

Most puzzling to some first-century monotheists is how eternal life is related to the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ as in John 17:3. Jesus states, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

²⁰This assertion ignores and breaks Colwell's rule, which states that sentences with the linking verb "to be" (*eimi*), a definite predicated pronoun, will usually drop the definite article when it precedes the verb, but the subject of the sentence, if definite, will retain the definite article. See John Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 35.

²¹D. A. Carson and Douglass Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 117.

²²Numerous other Scriptures imply the deity of the Son, including, but not limited to, Christ is God (Rom 9:5), Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9, 12-13; 14:5-9; 2 Cor 4:5; 12:8-10; Phil 2:9-11; Col 2:6; 1 Tim 6:3; Titus 2:13), Christ is presented as the "image of God" (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) who exists in the form of God (Phil 2:5), and the fullness of God is said to dwell in Him (Col 1:19; 2:9).

However, it is important to note that John's train of thought is congruent with the Christological umbrella²³ raised in 1:1. For John, Jesus, the One who was in the beginning with God (*pros ton theon*) as God, is the ultimate self-disclosure of God. Moreover, a grammatical and theological juxtaposition of 1:1 and 17:3 reveals that John views the Father and the Son as equally divine in essence and being. Eternal life occurs by epistemic awareness of and belief in the one who was with God in the beginning. In short, since only God can grant eternal life, the Son (*Logos*) must necessarily be viewed as equal with God.²⁴

A key Pauline passage that contributes to trinitarian theology is located in his letter to the Colossians in 1:15-16. Paul writes, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ 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." This particular passage clearly elucidates that Jesus, the Son, is not a created, ontologically subordinate being to the Father. Rather, Jesus is the "image" (*eikon*) of God insofar as He personally represents and manifests the Father to the world, contra Arius who held that Jesus was the created creator, the term

²³Andreas J. Kostenberger in *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1999), 51.

²⁴Although John's use of the *Logos* is limited to the first chapter of his Gospel, there are other phrases that are employed by John throughout his Gospel that supplement this term. For example, John's Gospel famously records the "I am" (Gr. *ego eimi*) statements of Jesus. Raymond Brown notes that there are three types of uses of this phrase in the fourth Gospel, including (1) the absolute usage with no predicate (8:24; 28; 58; 19); (2) the usage where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed (6:20; 18:5); and (3) the usage with a predicate nominative (5:35, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25). See Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I-XII*, 533-35. It is most likely that the Johannine use of *ego eimi* without the predicate is associated with the divine name of God in the Old Testament.

“firstborn” (*prototokos*) is better understood as having reference to privilege rather than birth.²⁵ Jesus is not the firstborn part of the whole creation, but as the NIV correctly translates, He is the “firstborn over all creation.” Thus, Jesus maintains a position over and above creation, a place of absolute preeminence.

Furthermore, Genesis 1:1 indicates God (the Father, presumably) is responsible for the creation of the world. However, in Colossians 1:16, Paul indicates that “all things” were created “by him (the Son).” Richard Melick states concerning the matter:

Theologically, a clear distinction is to be made between the work of the Father and the Son. The Father, of course, has a significant relationship to creation. He is presented as the architect; he determined to bring it into existence. The Son, Jesus, actually brought the plans into existence. The Spirit, finally, does the actual work of applying the plans in a hands-on relationship to creation.²⁶

Since, therefore, the collective witness of Scripture posits the existence of one God who created all things, it is logical to conclude from Genesis 1:1 and Colossians 1:16 that the Father and the Son are equal in essence and power, yet maintain differing roles with respect to the creation. In context, Paul’s simple point is to highlight the supremacy of the Son in general, and His role in the creation event in particular; but in doing so he likewise highlights the equality of the Son with the Father and makes a significant contribution to trinitarian theology.

Various Scriptures are used to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son. Perhaps the clearest passage is located in Acts 5:3-4. Here the

²⁵This is confirmed by the LXX where passages such as Exod 4:22 and Jer 31:9 stress privilege rather than birth.

²⁶Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 217.

Scriptures indicate that Ananias and Sapphira sold some of their property and received the proceeds, yet withheld their earning while claiming to have given it away. Peter responded by saying, “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? ⁴ 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). Peter indicates that lying to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God.

Accordingly, Hebrews 9:14 states that “Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” is the means by which the believer’s conscience is purified. According to this passage, the “eternal Spirit” empowered Jesus in both his life and his atoning death on the cross. Ware notes, “The Spirit that worked within Him all through His life empowered Him to obey the Father and go to the cross. This was God’s work in Christ, and it was accomplished in Him by the eternal Spirit.”²⁷ This evidence led the Cappadocian Fathers (e.g., Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus), along with countless other believers, to the scripturally informed conclusion that the Holy Spirit, along with the Father and Son, is fully God.²⁸

While numerous other passages can be cited, the ones outlined above serve to demonstrate that the biblical authors viewed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as fully

²⁷Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*, 39.

²⁸Some have questioned whether the Holy Spirit may be properly understood as a distinct person instead of a “power” or “force.” In response to this question, Wayne Grudem insightfully notes, “there are places in the New Testament where the masculine pronoun ‘he’ (*ekeinos*) is applied to the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14), which one would not expect from the rules of Greek grammar, for the word ‘spirit’ is neuter, not masculine, and would ordinarily be referred to with the neuter pronoun *ekeino*” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 232).

divine. In short, the doctrine of the Trinity posits the eternal existence of three equal persons (*hypostasis*) who each share in the one undivided essence. Therefore Paul is able to say, “May God be with you” by offering a trinitarian benediction in these words: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14).

Evidence for Unity and Diversity

With the analysis provided above in mind, it is important to note that personal distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate exclusively to the manner by which they relate *to each other and to the creation*.²⁹ Therefore, it may be said that the Trinity subsists of ontologically³⁰ equal persons who are functionally³¹ subordinate in their roles with respect to the creation. For example, neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit died for the sins of the world. This work was reserved for the Son. Similarly, neither the Father nor the Son was sent to apply redemption and provide empowerment for believers. This role is reserved for the Holy Spirit. Yet, while each maintains a distinct role in creation and redemption, they are ontologically equal and eternally unified with one another.

²⁹Ibid., 251.

³⁰Ontology pertains to the nature of being and/or reality. Thus, in speaking of the Trinity, it is correct to state that the persons are equal in their “being.”

³¹The meaning of the term “functional subordination” pertains to the nature of how the divine persons relate to and function within the order of the world. It has been suggested by some feminists that subordination in role necessarily implies subordination of personhood, since role determines essence. But this assertion is baseless and finds no place in orthodox trinitarian theology, which posits equality in personhood regardless of role or function. What is true of trinitarian distinctions is also true in gender distinctions.

Evidence from Jesus' Teachings

As will be demonstrated below, a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity not only brings about an awareness of the true nature and essence of God, but also provides the theological basis for ecclesiastical unity and diversity. Practical implications concerning the unity and diversity between the persons of the Trinity are seen throughout the New Testament in varying degrees. For example, Jesus states in His prayer to the Father:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20-23)

This passage, along with others (Matt 3:16-17; Matt 26:39-42; Luke 23:34), rules out the modalistic assertion of a successive rather than simultaneous Trinity as Jesus is clearly presented as a distinct person from the Father. Such distinction is not merely temporal, but extends to include “the glory” Jesus had with the Father “before the world existed” (John 17:5).

Jesus' desire for unity among believers is expressed in the phrase “may all be one” (*pantes hen esin*). Interestingly, the analogy given by Jesus for such oneness and unity is related directly to the Father being “in” Jesus (*en emoi*) and Jesus being “in” the Father (*kago en soi*).³² Although distinct in personhood, the Father is “in the Son”³³ in the

³²Jesus also defends his oneness with the Father in John 10:30 and 14:6-11, 20.

³³Beginning in the sixth century AD, the term *perichoresis* began to be used in order to explain how the members of the Trinity may be “in” one another. McGrath states concerning this term that “the concept of *perichoresis* allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of ‘a

sense that He is the one working through Jesus in word and deed (John 14:10) during His earthly ministry. Yet, the Son (*Logos*) was the one who was with God in the beginning (1:1), acting as the agent of creation (Col 1:16). While He may be viewed as being “with” the Father before the world was created, the Father was “in” the Son, and the Son was fully submitted to the Father. Thus they may be viewed as distinct persons who assume differing roles with respect to the creation act and to the created order. Yet, they are one in nature, intent, and purpose. Carson notes, “The Father and the Son are distinguishable (the pre-incarnate Word is ‘with’ God, 1:1; the Son prays to His Father; the Father commissions and sends, while the Son obeys), yet they are one.”³⁴

Further, Jesus prays that believers will be brought to unity as a result of the glory given to them. Particularly, in John’s gospel the glory of God is seen in the incarnate Christ (1:14; 2:11; 11:40). In the case of the wedding at Cana, Jesus’ glory is clearly seen in the miracle he performed of turning water into wine. In the case of Lazarus, God’s glory is revealed in the Son through the miracle of resurrection. John also presents Jesus’ *doxa* as something yet to be revealed, most specifically in his cross-death (John 7:39; cf. 12:23; 13:31; 16:14),³⁵ but also in the resurrection that was “the mighty act of God par excellence.”³⁶

community of being,’ in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the other and is penetrated by them” (Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 64). Noteworthy is the fact that the historical and theological development of this concept was made possible in light of a *homoousios* understanding of the persons of the Trinity in general and the eternal, undivided essence of the Trinity in particular.

³⁴D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 568.

³⁵Jan van der Watt insightfully writes, “Glory is defined in terms of the cross-events, while the cross-events are again described in terms of glorification. It should be noted that the lexicographical potential of the word *δοξα* does not include the meaning of ‘cross’ or ‘cross-events’; neither does John link glory and cross syntactically. The link between cross and glory is in each case contextual” (Jan van der

In each instance above, the glory of God, which involves a revelation of his being and nature, is made known through Jesus' words and deeds. The Father and Son are not at odds in this enterprise, but share equally in the glory and the subsequent praise that is given. Moreover, the oneness of the Father and the Son, along with the glory they share and mediate, serves as an appropriate foundation for the oneness that believers are to experience with one another.

Evidence from Paul's Epistles

A similar cry for unity and oneness is echoed by Paul in his letter to the Philippians. He writes,

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil 2:1-4)

Interestingly, the appeal of verse one finds its basis in the Philippian's trinitarian experience of God.³⁷ In Paul's view, encouragement, comfort, affection, and sympathy are qualities that, if present, flow forth from the Philippian's new life in Christ and their participation in the Spirit. Bruce notes, "From His (Christ's) risen life they draw encouragement and strength, for they participate in it. They have received the Spirit of

Watt, "Double Entendre in the Gospel According to John"). The author provided me a copy of this article, without indicating a date or publisher. Van der Watt, a highly respected European scholar, served as my supervisor during previous doctoral work.

³⁶Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 504.

³⁷Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 83.

Christ, binding them together in a fellowship of love; He dwells within them both as individuals and as a company of believers.”³⁸

If they received encouragement, it resulted from being in Christ while suffering (1:29-30). If they received comfort, it resulted because of their experience of the love of God. And if they experienced any participation (or “fellowship with”) with the Spirit, it resulted because of the antecedent activities of God through the Son. Thus, Paul provides the Philippian community with, at the very least, a binitarian framework (Christ and Spirit) from which to form a unified congregation.

While Paul was already joyful over the Philippian congregation (1:4), his desire is that they complete his joy (*plerosate mou ten charan*) by “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (2:2). Moreover, a vital component to achieving such oneness involves doing nothing out of “selfish ambition” (*eritheian*) or “conceit” (*kenodoxian*), but in humility the Philippians are to consider others more significant than themselves (v. 3), by looking to each other’s interests (v. 4). Paul grounds his desire (vv. 3-4) in the example set by Christ. He writes,

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. (2:5-8)

Paul’s desire is that the Philippians assume a mindset that is available to them in light of Christ’s example. Here, Christ is presented as the direct antithesis of *eritheian* and

³⁸F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 11 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 61.

kenodoxian. Christ was “in the form of God,” but “did not count equality with God something to be grasped” (v. 6). Gordon Fee notes concerning the term “form”: “Since *morphe* can denote ‘form’ or ‘shape’ in terms of both the external features by which something is recognized and the characteristics and qualities that are essential to it, it was precisely the right word to characterize both the reality (His being in God) and the metaphor (His taking on the role of a slave).”³⁹ Inherent to the meaning of the phrase “in the form of God” is the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ.⁴⁰ He possessed the qualities of God-ness and attributes of Godlikeness before the world was created (John 1:1), yet did not consider this high position something to be *harpagmos* (to “seize, steal, snatch, take away”).⁴¹ That is, Christ did not seek to “grasp” equality with God, but instead He “emptied Himself” of His exalted status by assuming the role of a slave.⁴² Christ did not empty Himself of divinity or Godlikeness, but rather poured out His life in humility by taking on “human form” and by dying a criminal’s death on a Roman cross. The corollary of such humiliation is Christ’s exaltation by the Father and the reception of the name that is above every name (2:9).

³⁹Fee, *Philippians*, 93.

⁴⁰Bruce notes that “possession in the form implies participation in essence” (Bruce, *Philippians*, 68).

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 94.

⁴²Bruce states further that “the point is that [Christ] did not treat His equality with God as an excuse for self-assertion of self-aggrandizement; on the contrary, He treated it an occasion for renouncing every advantage or privilege that might have accrued to Him thereby, as an opportunity for self-impoverishment and unreserved self-sacrifice” (Bruce, *Philippians*, 69).

The trinitarian nature of this passage provides a foundation for ecclesiastical unity and like-mindedness. Christ, who is the divine and eternal *Logos* who is co-equal with the Father (John 1:1), surrendered His rights and kingly status in obedience to God, for the good of the world. The implications are clear: if Christ, the one through whom all things were created (Col 1:16), humbled Himself in this manner, then His disciples should follow suit with the same attitude. Believers are called to surrender and lay aside rights they would otherwise enjoy for the sake of Christ and the good of his body, the Church. To the degree this occurs, the local body of Christ will consist of a membership that, although not in complete agreement in every area and on every topic, is unified and like-minded in daily and congregational life.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the historical, biblical, and theological contours of the doctrine of the Trinity and demonstrated how it serves as a theological foundation for ecclesiastical unity. Although the term “Trinity” is not located in the Scriptures, the concept is firmly established in both the Old and New Testaments. Building upon the bedrock of Hebrew monotheism, various New Testament passages serve to demonstrate that along with the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-equal and co-eternal persons of the Godhead. Their relationship with one another consists of oneness in nature and essence, but distinction in role and function. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity provides a firm foundation of both unity and diversity in the context of the local church.

CHAPTER 3

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNITY

This chapter is devoted to seeking to achieve ecclesiastical unity through the establishment of a trinitarian conceptual framework. While the content of this chapter is not exhaustive, it does address key components that may either contribute to or detract from oneness within the church including gender roles, spiritual gifts, corporate worship, and church membership. Each component will be addressed in light of trinitarian principles for the purpose of building a unified local church congregation.

Toward a Biblical Approach

At a basic level, an effective approach to establishing ecclesiastical unity is embrative of biblical presuppositions concerning the existence of God, the effects of sin, and the primacy of reconciliation through Christ.¹ In fact, the biblical prescription for establishing unity within the church is appreciated only when biblical propositions concerning the cause of disunity are embraced. Moreover, models of unity that exclude the above components automatically fall outside the parameters of Scripture, the apostolic Church, and by necessity, the purpose of this project.

¹Pierre Burgelin states the following concerning the dynamic nature of reconciliation in history: “The Bible does not offer itself to us a law to be imposed, but as a continuing history of the relation between God and his people, of the reconciliation of men with God and of men with men, in Jesus Christ. This is the heart and core of the Church’s faith” (Pierre Burgelin, *Unity and the Mission of the Church* [Geneva: John Knox, 1960], 13).

Fundamentally, biblical unity finds its appropriate expression within the community of God's people, the Church, who are one in Christ. Bromiley notes,

This new unity is not one of mere good will, or common interests, or ecclesiastical organization. It is a unity of expansion because of contraction. It is a unity in the one seed (Gal 3:16) who has come as the true Israelite and indeed the second Adam (Rom 5:12-13). The old and estranged men are made one in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:15). The one Jesus Christ is the basis of the unity of his people.²

However, the cumulative biblical witness concerning the basis of and means to ecclesiastical unity involves not only the work of the Son, but each member of the triadic community: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. John Armstrong notes, "Unity in Christ—rooted in the triune love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is clearly a major theme of the New Testament writings. The biblical doctrine of our inclusion in Christ created both a new ethnic and a new community."³ Thus, while Christ is the central figure of redemptive history, a holistic approach toward biblical unity embraces the full trinitarian revelatory spectrum.

Therefore, the need within the church involves the establishment of a "conceptual framework"⁴ that views life in general and the church in particular with the triune nature of God, and all that this nature implies, in mind. It involves embracing and applying trinitarian concepts such as oneness, unity, diversity, and personhood with the

²Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), s.v. "Unity," by G. W. Bromiley.

³John H. Armstrong, *Your Church is Too Small: Why Unity in Christ's Mission is Vital to the Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 48.

⁴The *Business Dictionary* defines this phrase as a "theoretical structure of assumptions, principles, and rules that holds together the ideas comprising a broad concept." My use of the phrase is consonant with the definition provided above; it involves establishing "trinitarian" principles that provide theoretical structure" for the otherwise broad concept of "unity." See "What Is Conceptual Framework? Definition and Meaning," *The Business Dictionary*, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/conceptual-framework.html> (accessed January 21, 2013)

aim of promoting Godlike unity within the church. This framework esteems the triune nature of God apart from creation,⁵ yet seeks in a biblical manner to apply the wondrous reality of God's nature to the created order.

However, this framework also involves understanding and embracing what the Scriptures state concerning the role(s) of mankind who alone maintains the privilege of being made "in the image of God." Moses writes concerning the creation event:

Then God said, 'Let us⁶ 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. (Gen 1:26-27)

While there has been much dispute concerning what the image entails, in light of the context of Genesis 1-2, John Walton is right to suggest that

the image is a physical manifestation of divine essence that bears the function of that which it represents; this gives the image-bearer the capacity to reflect the attributes of the one represented and act on his behalf. . . He (mankind) is a physical representative of God rather than a physical representation of what God looks like. As such he bears the essence of God, reflects his attributes, and acts on his behalf. In the context of Genesis 1, people act of God's behalf by ruling and subduing.⁷

⁵In a rather insightful manner, Cornelius Plantinga states the following concerning God's existence apart from creation: "It's true that God cannot be God without relationships, but it doesn't follow that God needs a world in order to have them. After all, God has the endless dance of perichoresis, the ceaseless exchange of vitality, the infinite expense of spirit upon spirit in superlative, triplicate consciousness. To speak plainly, from eternity God has a communal life and didn't need to create a world to get one" (Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 22).

⁶There has been much debate concerning the precise meaning of the plural phrase "let us." In his book, *Last Things First*, Fesko outlines three of the most popular interpretations. These include (1) God is speaking to His heavenly court, (2) it is a reference to God's plural majesty, and (3) it is an inchoate reference to the Trinity. While none of the suggestions are without issue, the third option is probable, but not provable. See J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007), 40.

⁷John Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 131.

In short, given the interrelationship between God and man, the image of God in man is the vehicle through which the nature of God is expressed and articulated. Therefore, mankind carries the responsibility of reflecting the interior life of the Trinity in the exterior affairs of life, especially within the church community.

Bruce Ware notes further:

If we are thus to represent God and reflect who he is in our relationships and activities, part of this involves reflecting the ways in which the triune persons relate to one another. As we see the love relationship among the trinitarian persons, we should seek the same kind of love to be expressed among us, God's people. And as we see harmony expressed amidst differing roles and responsibilities among the members of the Trinity, we should seek this same kind of harmony as we acknowledge varying gifting and activities within the Body of Christ.⁸

With the dual framework involving the nature of God and the role of man in mind, the following sections are devoted to discussing how trinitarian implications serve to promote and achieve unity in the life of the local church.

Trinitarian Implications for the Church

Marriage

It may be argued that unity within the church begins with a clear understanding of the equality that exists between a man and a woman who are both made in the "image of God" (Gen 1:26-27). Raymond Ortlund Jr. notes simply; "Man and women are equal in the sense that they bear God's image equally."⁹ That is, the image of God is impressed upon each sex, both male and female, without discrimination. Neither party may claim a

⁸Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationship, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 133.

⁹Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 95.

greater degree of God-likeness than the other, nor may they boast of a higher degree of glory. They are fully equal in this regard.

It is in the vein of male/female equality that the theme of oneness and unity become functionally apparent. Interestingly, the first instance of covenantal unity occurred subsequent to the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. Moses states the following in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Waltke notes concerning the implications of this verse: "God's intention that marriage be monogamous is implied the complete unity and profound solidarity of the relationship."¹⁰ Robert Andrews expounds further: "Jesus quotes this verse in his discussion with the Pharisees on the subject of divorce. Paul then quotes it twice in his epistles, once when discussing the one-flesh relationship of a husband and wife as parallel to Christ's relationship to the church, and once, surprisingly enough, as a reason to abstain from sex with a prostitute."¹¹ Thus, concepts such as oneness, exclusivity, and unity are part and parcel of God's design for the marriage covenant.

However, notwithstanding qualities of equality and oneness, each person is responsible for different roles within the marriage. The wife, who is in no way inferior to her husband, is a helpmate to him (Gen 2:20) and is called to submit to him as her head (Eph 5:22).¹² The husband is called to love his wife and cherish her in a manner that

¹⁰Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 90.

¹¹Robert Andrews, *The Family: God's Weapon for Victory* (Rice, WA: Sentinel, 1995), 61.

¹²Raymond Ortlund's definition of male-headship is worthy of attention. He writes, "In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction" (Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship," 99).

reflects Christ's love for the Church (Eph 5:25). Such love refuses to "grasp" (*harpagmos*) certain rights and privileges (Phil 2:6-7), but is humble and accepting of lowly service and care. Furthermore, Peter reminds husbands that they are to live with their wives "in an understanding way" and to honor them as the "weaker vessel" (1 Pet 3:7).

While the above principles are straightforward enough, an ontologically equal, functionally subordinate Trinity of persons provides an expanded basis for both authority and equality within the marriage covenant.¹³ For the husband to lead is for him to be like God. For the husband to love is for him to be like Jesus. For the wife to submit to her husband is for her to be like the Holy Spirit. For all believers to be humble is for them to be like Christ in attitude and action. To experience oneness in the midst of diversity and distinction is to be utterly reflective of trinitarian life. When modeled in a biblical fashion, marital authority and submission provides intimacy and oneness that is patterned after the triune God. Moreover, husbands and wives who fulfill their God-ordained roles within the home provide both a foundation and example for the genre of unity that is to be modeled by members within the church.

¹³Not everyone agrees that a biblical case can be made for functional subordination as a model for submission in gender roles. Kevin Giles states, "No one before 1970 had ever spoken of *eternal* role subordination, and orthodoxy has never endorsed the eternal subordination of the Son of God in work, operations, functions, or authority that can somehow be accepted without compromising ontological equality. . . . Historic orthodoxy has always insisted that if the Son is eternally subordinated in his works/operations/functions or authority then he must be ontologically subordinated and vice-versa" (Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelical Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 38-39, 58).

Church Leadership

In recent times there has been a surge in the amount of literature that views female submission in any context as outdated at best and unethical at worst. Of course, such an attitude is expected in the secular arena,¹⁴ but certain theologians within Christianity have encouraged feministic impulses that essentially ignore or reinterpret biblical imperatives concerning female submission. Anne Clifford summarizes feminist sentiment succinctly: “All Christian feminist theologies share a distinguishing principle: patriarchy and androcentrism in their many forms conflict with a faith in God whom Christian revelation proclaims to be love itself.”¹⁵ Clifford’s hermeneutic assumes at the outset that the logical corollary of complementarian theology is the secondary ranking of women. However, a careful, unbiased inspection of the biblical data reveals that nothing could be further from the truth.

Surprising to some, the doctrine of the Trinity provides the proper foundation for the roles of both men and women, equally.¹⁶ It has been suggested by some

¹⁴Gareth Morgan states, “Organizations often segment opportunity structures and job markets in ways that enable men to achieve positions of prestige and power more easily than women. It is sometimes called the ‘glass ceiling’ effect. Women can see opportunities at the top of their organizations, but the path is often blocked by gender bias” (Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006], 186).

¹⁵Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (New York: Orbis, 2005), 30.

¹⁶Michael F. Bird and Robert Shillaker argue that it is futile to use the Trinity as a model for complementarianism. They state, “Even if one grants that the Son is indeed eternally subordinate to the Father, that does nothing whatsoever to prove that women should be restricted from certain ministries. There may be compatibility between an equality of nature and an accompanying differentiation in rank within the Trinity or even in human relationships. But that does nothing to prove that rank must necessarily be determined by gender. Moreover, even if one grants the eternal subordination of the Son, one could still use the Trinity as a theological justification for egalitarianism. For instance, in John 10:32, 37, it is reported that Jesus does the works of the Father. In John 5 (vv. 20-23, 27), the Father entrusts his authority to execute judgment to the Son and the authority to impart life is now expressed in the works of the Son. If the Son assumes the functions and authority of the Father and does the works of the Father with the Father's

theologians that 1 Corinthians 11:3 is one of the clearest examples of male headship patterned after the triune nature of God.¹⁷ Paul states, “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” Ware notes in response: “Role relations between men and women, generally, and role relations in the church, particularly, are important according to Paul because they are meant to reflect the more ultimate realities of Christ’s headship over mankind, and the Father’s headship over Christ.”¹⁸

Such headship is most clearly demonstrated in the context of the ancient practice of head covering. Apparently some women in the Corinthian congregation prayed and prophesied without proper head covering (11:4-7), which likely involved allowing their hair to flow down the back instead of wearing it in a bun.¹⁹ For a woman to

permission, then by analogy, a woman, although she is subordinate to her husband, can do the works of the husband, she can exercise a similar authority, role, and prerogatives” (Michael F. Bird and Robert E. Shillaker, “Subordination in the Trinity and Gender Roles: A Response to Recent Discussion,” *Trinity Journal* 29, no. 2 [2008]: 282). This statement is arbitrary at best. The Father’s granting of authority to the Son in no way justifies the assertion that women may assume the same or similar role of authority that men possess. Bird and Shillaker acknowledge that the Father “entrusts” authority and grants “permission” to the Son, but fail to recognize that these very actions serve as analogues concerning the functional and hierarchal distinction between them. It is logical to assume that men and women can be entrusted with the same roles and authority, but this is not what the biblical authors prescribe. It may be granted that the doctrine of the Trinity does not explicitly address gender roles, but by establishing authority and rank within the personhood of God, the doctrine does provide a general framework for their arrangement that is elucidated and expanded throughout Scriptures (e.g., Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:12).

¹⁷Michael Reeves states eloquently concerning headship, “The shape of the Father-Son relationship (the headship) begins a gracious cascade, like a waterfall of love: as the Father is the lover and the head of the Son, so the Son goes out to be the lover and the head of the church. ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,’ the Son says (John 15:9).” Reeves continues, “That dynamic is also to be replicated in marriages, husbands being the heads of their wives, loving them as Christ the Head loves his bride, the church. He is the lover, she is the beloved. Like the church, then, wives are not left to earn the love of their husbands; they can enjoy it as something lavished on them freely, unconditionally and maximally” (Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012], 28).

¹⁸Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 148.

allow her hair to flow down in this manner inevitably conveyed sexual availability, which is antithetical to the marriage covenant in general and to the practice of marital submission in particular.

Conversely, by covering their heads, the women in Corinth demonstrated their submission to the male leaders within the home and the church. Thomas Schreiner notes that “women can pray and prophesy in public, but they must do so with a demeanor and attitude that supports male headship because in that culture wearing a head-covering communicated a submissive demeanor and feminine adornment.”²⁰ Thus, the authority structure provided in 11:3, along with Paul’s command for female head-covering in public worship (11:4-7), provides ample evidence of the God-ordained pattern of submission that is to exist between men and women, husbands and wives.

Confirmation of the proper authority structure is located in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Although Paul does explicitly state that elders must be men, the concept of male leadership is clear enough given the context of 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The primary evidence involves Paul’s repetitive use of masculine term “he,” along with the actions and qualities that follow (e.g., “He must manage,” “He must not be,” “He must be thought well of”). The same pattern is also seen in Titus 1:5-9.

Likewise, Paul states in 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” Paul’s statement does not mean that women have no role whatsoever in the life of the local church, or that they are

¹⁹Thomas Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 125-26.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 132.

secondary in rank of quality. Women may disciple and teach other women as men disciple and teach other men. They may also prophesy, pray, and perform a wide variety of administrative functions that are extremely valuable to the local church. Rather, since women are not entrusted with the role of headship, they may not preside in an authoritative position that involves governance over or the teaching of men.

Moreover, the trinitarian implications are clear. Just as there is equality in essence between the divine persons, so there is equality in essence between male and female. However, as the Son submits to the Father's headship, women are called to submit to their husbands who lead the home and to the male elders who lead the local church. Accordingly, just as there is functional distinction in role within the divine triadic community, so is there functional distinction between believers within the ecclesiastical community. And just as the members of the Trinity are unified, so the believers in the local church may be unified when God-ordained roles are recognized and biblical submission is practiced.

Spiritual Gifts

Perhaps one of the most common causes of disunity in church involves spiritual gifts, especially the so-called miraculous gifts (1 Cor 12:6-11). This reality was true at the church in Corinth and the same also holds true in many contemporary evangelical churches. As a result, there is no shortage of literature written on this subject.

On the one hand, many evangelical Christians are convinced that the miraculous gifts have ceased. This group typically views modern-day claims of

miraculous, pneumatic activity as delusional and counterfeit.²¹ On the other hand, certain charismatics accuse cessationists of assuming the role of modern-day Pharisees.²² Thus, the most common tendencies concerning this controversial issue include abuse or abstinence, optimism or skepticism, with the inevitable corollary of division and disunity among member of the body of Christ.

While attempting to reconcile the differences that exist concerning the gifts of the Spirit is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to address how a robust view of the triune nature of God can serve to unite those who stand in theological opposition to one another and to correct abuses that occur.

Although the Spirit is co-equal with both the Father and Son, his primary tasks involve assisting in carrying out the work of the Father and bringing glory to the Son (John 8:28-29; Acts 10:38; John 16:12-14).²³ Thus, the Spirit does not maintain a position in the spotlight, nor does he desire to bring glory to himself. Rather, he assumes an invisible, backstage role characterized by support and help. Ware notes, “Amazingly, even though the Spirit has identically the same nature as the Father and Son, even though

²¹In his highly controversial treatment of the charismatic movement, John MacArthur addresses claims concerning the modern-day operation of spiritual gifts. He writes concerning the gift of tongues in particular, “I am convinced by history, theology, and the Bible that tongues ceased in the apostolic age. And when it happened, they terminated altogether. The contemporary charismatic movement does not represent a revival of biblical tongues. It is an aberration similar to the practice of counterfeit tongues at Corinth” (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 231).

²²In his book *Quenching the Spirit*, William DeArteaga offers a thoughtful analysis of the cessationist claims of John MacArthur, Dave Hunt, Hank Hanegraaff, and others. Arteaga is of the opinion that many of the modern attempts to debunk claims of the miraculous are pharisaical in nature and guilty of quenching the Spirit. See William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit* (Orlando: Creation House, 1996), 16-26.

²³Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 105-07.

he is fully and equally God, yet he willingly accepts this behind-the-scenes position in nearly everything the triune God does.”²⁴ Hence, in light of this reality, an obsessive, prolonged focus on the work(s) or gifts of the Spirit is unbiblical and misguided. An authentic work of the Spirit never occurs merely for the sake of the Spirit or for the one in possession of a particular gift, but ultimately for the glorification of the other members of the Trinity.²⁵

Insofar as the local body of Christ is concerned, Paul views the work of the Spirit as provoking a unifying, rather than a dis-unifying effect. He writes, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” (1 Cor 12:4-6). Gordon Fee notes that the diversity present in the Corinthian community “reflects the nature of God and is therefore true evidence of the work of the one God in their midst.”²⁶ In fact, Paul states that the manifestation of the Spirit occurs for the “common good,” which is most presumably the good of the entire church community (v. 7).

²⁴Ibid., 104.

²⁵In his own era, Jonathan Edwards strove to understand and discern what constituted an authentic work of the Spirit. His treatment of the issue may be considered prophetic in nature, for many of the “signs” that occurred in eighteenth century reappeared with greater intensity in the twentieth century. For Edwards, the sign of divine authenticity lies *first* in esteem for the historical person and work of Christ. Edwards writes, “When the operation is such as to raise their esteem of that Jesus who was born of the Virgin, and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; and seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of that the Gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God, and the Savior of men; it is a true sign that it is the true and right Spirit” (Jonathan Edwards, *The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005], 266).

²⁶Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 41.

Obviously, a congregation divided over which gifts are presently available will fail to promote and experience the “common good.” Therefore, each local church must decide which gifts they believe are available today and establish guidelines for their operation. Although not every gift will be manifest in every congregation, the ones that do manifest serve to remind the members of the nature of God and His intentions for their community. As this occurs, the church may in fact experience unity and rejoice over the presence of the Spirit in their midst

Moreover, the doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that, although believers possess differing gifts and maintain differing convictions, they can be unified within the context of the local church community. One congregation may be convinced the gifts have ceased, while another congregation may be convinced of their present-day continuation. One member may possess the gift to teach, while another member may possess the gift of hospitality (Rom 12:3-8). One person may be empowered by the Spirit with wisdom, while another may be equipped with the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12:6-10).

Whatever a person’s convictions and gifts are, Jesus’ prayer to the Father (John 17:20-23) serves to demonstrate that distinction in personhood does not preclude unity of brotherhood. Believers are commissioned by Jesus to be unified in a manner that mirrors and reflects his relationship with the Father. Since there is no belittlement of the roles and distinction within the life of the Trinity, there should be none in the life of the local church community. Just as each member of the Trinity esteems, and is esteemed by the others, so should members of the local church esteem one another. To the degree this occurs, the unity of the interior life of the Trinity is replicated in the exterior life of the local church.

Worship

Within Christianity there exists a wide variety of preferences and convictions concerning the style, nature, and content of worship,²⁷ particularly as it pertains to the music incorporated into Sunday morning services.²⁸ Some people are convinced that worship must involve singing hymns only, while others opt for a much broader spectrum that includes singing contemporary songs accompanied by a host of musical instruments. Accordingly, some people selectively opt for one person to lead the congregation in worship, while others prefer that a plethora of musicians lead the service. Some people believe that at least five worship songs must be sung, while others are permissive of a shorter musical selection.

Moreover, many Christians have strong opinion concerning how worship must take place, but allow for different forms and expressions to take place within their own church context as long as parameters are set in place.²⁹ But many believers insist that any

²⁷Of course, biblical worship is much broader in scope involving every arena of life (Rom 12:1-2). Unfortunately, some contemporary Christian writers often state without qualification that worship primarily involves Sunday morning music. This is the case in Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson's most recent book. Here, the authors discuss the nature of worship with virtually no attention given to other crucial aspects of the "worship" service. Notwithstanding, for the intentions of this project I have purposefully limited my focus to Sunday morning/evening worship services with music style and song selection primarily in mind. See Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches, How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 78-79.

²⁸George Barna notes accordingly that the "styles of music used in church services vary tremendously. Nearly half of all Protestant churches (46 percent) offer at least one service featuring traditional worship music-hymns and other tunes utilizing a choir, an organ or congregational singing of that music. Just as prolific is the number of churches (43 percent) using "blended" music—a combination of two or more different music styles within the same service. Less common styles used include rock or contemporary Christian (used in 24 percent of churches), praise and worship (in 8 percent of churches) and gospel (in 7 percent of churches)" ("Focus On 'Worship Wars' Hides the Real Issues Regarding Connection to God," The Barna Group, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/85-focus-on-qworship-warsq-hides-the-real-issues-regarding-connection-to-god> (accessed January 16, 2013).

²⁹In these cases it is common that the elders of the church schedule various types of worship services that accommodate the preferences of the members. For example, at College Hills Church of Christ,

musical expression not in conformity to their conviction is deviant and unbiblical. In many of these cases, difference of opinion inevitably leads to a church split.

While the application of one solution will not likely solve this complex and controversial issue, the doctrine of the Trinity provides an objective foundation for authentic worship to occur in the lives of all believers. In his own day, Jesus entered into a worship-war when he encountered a woman from Samaria who held an inadequate view concerning the true nature of worship. The Samaritan woman states, “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship” (4:20). Jesus responds, “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (vv. 23-24). John Piper notes the following concerning the meaning of the phrase “in spirit and truth”: “I take ‘in spirit’ to mean that this true worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit and is happening mainly as an inward, spiritual event, not mainly as an outward, bodily event. And I take ‘in truth’ to mean that this true worship is a response to true views of God and is shaped and guided by true views of God.”³⁰ In light of Jesus’ ministry and mission, geographical locations and external rites were no longer relevant (i.e., neither Gerizim nor Jerusalem). The relevant issue was objective worship grounded

a church in Lebanon, Tennessee, that has historically been known for their stance against musical instruments, the leaders decided to schedule two types of services: an acapella, hymn only worship service and a contemporary worship service that included modern worship songs and a full musical band. To date, the compromise has caused great unity within the church and is being modeled in other Church of Christ congregations.

³⁰John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 219.

in the person and work of Jesus. As noted by Robert Letham, “[W]ith reference to ‘truth,’ do we have to look any further than John’s record of Jesus as the embodiment of truth (14:6), as the true light coming into the world (1:9), ‘full of grace and truth’ (1:14), who as a result brought grace and truth into this world (1:17)?”³¹

Moreover, worship is directed toward the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, on the basis of the Son’s revelation of truth.³² Thus, worship is ultimately trinitarian in nature, trinitarian in scope, and trinitarian in outlook. The Son and the Spirit work in conjunction with one another to provide believers with the truth and power required to worship God rightly. Ware notes accordingly, “Worship is deeply satisfying and correctly expressed to the glory of this triune God only after it is exercised within this trinitarian framework.”³³

The primary focus of the contemporary church, then, should not involve specific styles of worship or center around specific preferences of instruments. The primary focus should be ensuring that song selections and choice of instruments reflect a heart attitude that seeks to magnify the triune God. The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that differences in private and corporate expressions of worship are permissible insofar as the object of worship is God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the practical outcome will vary from congregation to congregation, the trinitarian framework outlined in this project should at the very least evoke a sense of renewed respect for the wide variety of expressions of worship that are present within the body of Christ.

³¹Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 416.

³²Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 155.

³³*Ibid.*, 155.

Accordingly, the doctrine of the Trinity reminds believers that the nature of worship is deeply personal, yet is inextricably connected to and expressed within the community of believers. While worship is initiated from within the heart, it is designed to be expressed in the corporate life of the local church. Just as the divine persons experience unified communion within the Godhead, so must the people of God seek unified relationships with one another as they seek to worship the triune God. Trinitarian worship must, therefore, be communal in nature and embrative of diversity in the midst of unity.

Church Membership

While the general concept of church membership is straightforward enough for most people, the actual requirements for membership vary from church to church. Throughout history there have been numerous approaches to church membership that required either too much or too little of candidates. For example, Gregory Wills notes concerning the qualification for church membership in the ante-bellum period,

Baptist doctrine gave each church authority to manage its fellowship and adopt its own constitution, consisting of a covenant, articles of faith, and decorum. In their covenants, church members pledged themselves to submit to the laws of Christ. In their articles of faith they declared their commitment to Calvinist theology, antipedobaptism, and congregational church order.³⁴

Many modern believers scoff at the requirements above and insist on a much broader set of qualifications for membership. In fact, some suggest that simple faith in Christ is sufficient grounds for identifying someone as a member of the body of Christ.

³⁴Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20.

Notwithstanding, the leadership of the local church must seek to agree upon criteria that define the membership process if unity is to occur. If qualifications for membership are vague or non-existent, disunity is the inevitable corollary.

At Saddleback Church in Lake Forest California, Rick Warren and the elders ask key questions that define their membership process. The first and most important question is “What does God expect from members of his church?”³⁵ Mark Dever, provides a succinct answer to this question. He writes,

Fundamentally, church membership entails a life of repentance and belief. The church is intended to be the community of those who have been born again. God’s grace in our life, granting us repentance and faith is signaled by two things: 1) In action initially by baptism and 2) In writing by signing a statement of faith and church covenant.³⁶

These requirements are fulfilled by the work of the Spirit in regeneration, enabling men to “see” and “enter” the kingdom (John 3:3, 5).³⁷ Once the new birth occurs, believers are commanded to be baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). Noteworthy is the fact that the term “name” is singular rather than plural, which is reflective of the monotheistic nature of God. At the same time, the enumeration of the three-fold pattern is reflective of diversity and distinction within the Godhead; a diversity that constitutes a true, undivided unity.³⁸

³⁵Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growing without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 311.

³⁶Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 159-60.

³⁷It is vital that every local church strive to both establish and preserve a regenerated membership. James Hamilton recommends that every professing believer should undergo a “pastoral conversation” in order to (1) determine whether or not the individual can articulate the Gospel on his own with no prompts from the pastor and (2) hear or see some evidence of the fruit of faith. See James M. Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 166.

³⁸Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 40.

The same Spirit likewise empowers the process of sanctification (Rom 15:16; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Thess 2:13). Just as the members of the Trinity are holy within the community of the Godhead, so members of the body of Christ are commanded to live holy within their own respective communities. A life of holiness grants a professing believer a place of functional membership in the local church. However, when a professing believer persists in a lifestyle of sin, he or she must be removed from the membership through church discipline (1 Cor 5:12-13; 2 Cor 2:6). In short, God's requirement for membership involves a profession of faith that is evidenced by a lifestyle of holiness that is reflective of trinitarian life. When sin occurs, confession of sin³⁹ and renewal of faith are the key components to regaining a right standing with God in general and a claim to church membership in particular.

But within the context of the local church there are other criteria that must be discussed, agreed upon, and implemented if unity is to occur. As noted above, there are numerous facets within the church that provide particular occasion for disunity including gender roles, church leadership, the operation of spiritual gifts, and the nature of corporate worship. Perhaps the most appropriate manner to create an atmosphere of unity involves establishing a membership process that outlines the church's convictions concerning each of these areas with trinitarian implications in mind.

In most cases, a trinitarian membership model will lead to exclusivity in matters pertaining to personal holiness, gender roles, the substance of worship, salvation

³⁹Mark Dever and Paul Alexander note insightfully, "Confessing our sins to one another makes us bring our sin out into the light, where they can be dealt with in the context of mutually sanctifying relationships in which people are strengthening each other through prayer, encouragement, and application of the word" (Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005], 68).

through Christ alone, etc. In other cases, a trinitarian model may lead to a greater degree of inclusivity within the body of Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity, when understood and applied correctly, does not promote the creation of a rigid, monolithic community where everyone agrees on every topic. Instead, this doctrine may in fact serve to promote the creation of a body of believers who, although are united in the core doctrines of the faith, humbly appreciate and esteem differences that exist in the roles, responsibilities, and personalities of the members.

Furthermore, the fundamental question that must be asked is, “How does the nature of the triune God relate to and determine the nature of the local church?” This is a comprehensive question that presupposes the superiority of God’s revelation of himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Accordingly, this question assumes that our interaction with one another is best defined by the interaction of the members of the triune community. All too often, believers are guilty of seeking unity for purposes that are self-serving. The doctrine of the Trinity establishes a trajectory away from self and movement toward others who are made in the image of God. To the degree this occurs, the glory of the nature of the triune God will be demonstrated in unity of the local church.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to establish a conceptual framework that views life in general and the church in particular with the triune nature of God, and all that this nature implies, in mind. While the content of this chapter is not exhaustive, it does address key components that may either contribute to or detract from oneness within the church including gender roles, spiritual gifts, corporate worship, and biblical church

membership. The following chapter is devoted to outlining elements of the ministry research project that took place at Our Savior's Church.

CHAPTER 4

ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

In February of 2013, I sought to enlist various members of Our Savior's Church to participate in my Doctor of Ministry research project. The primary purpose for this project was to equip members at Our Savior's Church with the knowledge of biblical trinitarianism for the purpose of creating a unified church community. This purpose was designed to be fulfilled through the accomplishment of four goals. The first goal was that members of Our Savior's Church understand biblical trinitarianism. The second goal was for the church community to practice biblical unity and oneness. The third goal was that members appreciate the variety of gifts, personalities, graces, and callings represented in church community. The fourth goal was for me, as the associate pastor, to become more effective in promoting unity and oneness within the church.

Weeks 1 and 2: Enlistment and Examination

During the course of two weeks I identified and sought after potential candidates for the ministry research activities. I selectively chose eight members from the church who had attended for at least six months. I sought to enlist mature participants who fell between the ages of twenty to sixty-five years old. My preference was to enlist participants who had not received any formal theological education, although this was not a requirement. Moreover, I sought to enlist men and women who represented a wide variety of vocational backgrounds and church-related responsibilities. Care was taken to

ensure that the participants were knowledgeable enough to speak accurately and effectively about current issues within the church. After speaking with the lead pastor and solidifying my list, I approached the candidates in order to inform them about the ministry project and to request their participation. However, upon hearing about the seminar from the participants I selected, other church members approached me and requested to enlist and participate. Thankfully each of these members fit within the criteria I established at the outset of the project. Thus, it was my pleasure to grant them permission to participate.

After enlisting the candidates and informing them about the ministry project schedule, I secured a proper meeting location for the eight-week seminar. Within walking distance of the church is a newly renovated coffee shop that perfectly accommodated the needs of the seminar. Specifically, the upstairs section of the coffee shop contained a conference room that was ideal for teaching, conducting interviews, answering questionnaires, and performing examinations.

Since the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological foundation for this project, I required that each class participant complete a basic doctrinal examination that assessed his or her knowledge of the Trinity and how the divine persons relate to one another. Thus, this examination enabled me to know where each person stood on key doctrinal issues that pertain to the nature of God and unity within the church. The nature of the examination consisted of a True/False section that included the following statements:

1. The Old Testament Scriptures teach that there is one God.
2. Paul uses the term “Trinity” in his epistles.
3. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are three gods.

4. Belief in the Trinity should not be considered essential for church membership.

The participants' answers to the examination demonstrated how informed they were concerning key issues that related to this ministry project.

Second, I required each class participant to complete a survey that asked questions concerning the degree of importance that unity maintains in the success and fruitfulness of the local church. This survey required that participants cite Scripture(s) in support of their position. A sample of the questions included the following:

1. Why is unity within the local church so important?
2. What is the scriptural foundation for unity within the church?
3. What is your understanding of the role of women in the church?
4. May they serve as elders/pastors? Why or why not?

The goal was to gather information concerning the participants' understanding of unity in the local church.

Third, each participant was assigned the task of examining the history of Our Savior's Church in order to highlight points of unity and disunity along the way. A sample of the questions included the following:

1. How did the church begin?
2. How was unity achieved at the initial stage of the church?
3. Discuss some of the observable points of disunity in the last two years. What was the cause? Was the issue resolved? If so, how? If not, why not?

Care was taken to avoid exposing or uncovering specific people. The goal of this assignment was to highlight general examples in order to offer a precise application of trinitarian principles. Questions were asked concerning the participants' perception of

unity or disunity in the church and how they felt that greater unity could be achieved in the church.

Week 3: Monotheism and Trinitarianism

The research group met for the first seminar on Saturday, March 2, from 2:00 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. at Java Square Café. I chose this particular location because it provided a more relaxed and intimate atmosphere that is conducive to discussion and learning. Moreover, due to the high number of Bible studies and other activities taking place throughout the week, I decided that Saturday would be the most appropriate time to meet. All but two of the participants who agreed to attend the seminar were present for a total of 6 in attendance. Each of the subsequent seminars was held at the same location for the duration of the project.

At the outset I was fully aware that most of the participants were ignorant of and disinterested in many of the terms, phrases, and concepts employed in the field of theology. Likely, such ignorance and disinterest stems from fallacious views of the nature of theology in general. In my experience at Our Savior's Church, many congregants are under the impression that theological study is unnecessary because it is impractical and difficult to apply. Therefore, I spent the first ten minutes of the first seminar assuring them that this is certainly not the case with the doctrine of the Trinity. I cited a few examples of how theology and doctrine are extremely practical and absolutely necessary for the health of the local church.

Next I presented a basic teaching concerning the nature of God as he is revealed in the Old and New Testament. By citing and interacting with Old and New Testament passages, I laid a solid monotheistic foundation and firmly established in their

minds that Hebrews and Christians alike have always believed in one God. Further, I stressed to the participants how this foundation is indispensable for understanding the trinitarian passages that were discussed later in the first seminar (see Appendix 2).

During the first seminar, I presented the New Testament evidence concerning the deity of the Son and the Spirit. By providing an exegesis of key passages, I sought to demonstrate the full divinity and full equality of each person in a manner that is consonant with monotheism. Accordingly, I demonstrated that the biblical authors viewed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as God (see Appendix 2).

I led a discussion with the participants concerning the meaning of the terms that served to elucidate how God is one, yet three. Unsurprisingly, all of the participants were ignorant of the terminology, which provided a rich learning moment for each of them. The outline included the following key terms: person, ontological equality, immanent trinity, and economic Trinity.

Week 4: Historical Overview

At the second seminar I provided an outline concerning the historical developments of the Trinity. I began with a review of biblical statements concerning the Trinity already covered and then provided an analysis of how the early church fathers addressed questions concerning the nature and relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The aim was to demonstrate that formulations of the Trinity evolved in time as Christian thinkers became more precise in their terminology and definitions. Although I did not include a timeline in the seminar handouts, I did cover relevant dates from the death of Christ (AD 33) to the council at Nicaea (AD 325). This enabled the participants to obtain a clearer understanding of the chronology of the period under discussion.

Likewise, I discussed the early heresies of Subordinationism, Modalism, and Arianism. I spent a brief amount of time outlining modern-day expressions of these ancient heresies and examined key Scriptures that refute them.

The outline involved a discussion of several post-apostolic fathers, including Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Arius, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Eusebius of Nicomedia.

Week 5: A Foundation for Unity

The majority of the third seminar was devoted to discussing key texts that provide a foundation for unity and diversity within in the life of the local church.

Building upon the foundation of a Trinity that subsists of ontologically equal persons who are functionally subordinate in their roles with respect to the creation, I offered an exegesis of John 17:20-23, which states,

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

The primary aim was to explain how the nature of Christ's relationship with the Father provides a precedent for believer's relationship with one another. Further, my desire was for the participants to recognize that the church must not seek to establish a context of unity and diversity merely for the sake of functional success. Rather, concepts such as unity and diversity are of tremendous importance because they originate with and flow forth from the very nature of God.

During the third seminar I included evidence from the apostle Paul concerning how ecclesiastical unity and oneness are achieved through trinitarian implications. The primary text was Philippians 2:1-8, which states,

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 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.

My exegesis of this passage included a detailed discussion concerning the attention that Paul gives to the members of the Trinity, most specifically the Son and the Spirit.

Accordingly, I sought to demonstrate from this passage how Jesus embodied the true nature of selflessness and humility. As the second member of the Trinity, he chose to lay aside his glory for the sake of others. Moreover, I spoke in detail concerning how Jesus' condescension in this regard serves as the example par excellence of the humility that believers are to model in the church.

I presented the following five questions for reflection and discussion:

1. In what practical ways would your marriage improve if you modeled Jesus' example of humility?
2. In what practical ways would your relationship with other people change if you actively sought after their interests before your own?
3. With Philippians 2:1-4 in mind, what is the primary purpose of spiritual gifts?
4. Why do you believe Jesus' example of humility is difficult for believers to follow?
5. How does humility promote unity?

The answers provided from the participants demonstrated that they reflected on the questions in a meaningful manner.

Week 6: Confronting Heresy

The fourth seminar was lighter in content and shorter in duration. Thus the majority of our time together consisted of interacting with various scriptural texts that seem to contradict the doctrine of the Trinity including John 14:28, Colossians 1:15-16, Matthew 3:11, Mark 13:32 and Acts 10:38. The aim was to address the “apparent” contradictions these texts present in a meaningful manner. Surprisingly, the majority of the seminar participants did not view these passages as contradictory in any manner and were able to interpret them in a manner consistent with the orthodox position.

Moreover, a secondary goal of this seminar was equip the participants with the knowledge that is necessary to refute the claims of those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity. We surveyed the beliefs of the following religions: Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, United Pentecostalism, and Islam. Instead of offering an in-depth analysis of these religions, I centered my teaching upon texts that the above religions distort and demonstrated the inconsistent nature of their exegetical methodology.

I asked the following four questions to generate discussion:

1. Why is it difficult for some people to explain the doctrine of the Trinity?
2. Why do many Christians avoid sharing their faith with those of other faiths?
3. What are the implications of viewing Jesus, the Son, as a created being?
4. Should we include someone into church membership who holds a heretical view of the Trinity?

Week 7: Who's Who

The first four weeks of seminars were devoted to teaching biblical trinitarianism to the participants. Week 7's focus, however, primarily consisted of instruction on how to practically achieve and maintain unity within the church. Specifically, I outlined some of the more controversial, potentially divisive components of church life, including gender roles and spiritual gifts. But before I went into great detail about these components, I noted the necessity of developing a trinitarian conceptual framework from which to address unity and division in the church. I did not labor too long on this point, but simply remind the participants that concepts such as such oneness, unity, diversity, and personhood, are part and parcel of trinitarian theology and local church life.

Furthermore, I provided an explanation concerning what it means to be created "in the image of God." My explanation involved a basic exegesis of Genesis 1:26-27, which states,

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.

My aim was not only to explicate the meaning of the image of God in man, but to also to demonstrate how this image is the vehicle through which various aspects of God's nature are articulated. Accordingly, I discussed how the nature of God is reflected in the marriage covenant (Gen 2:24) and stressed that it is difficult to achieve unity in the church if unity and oneness do not occur between husband and wife. And unity between

husband and wife involves recognizing and appreciating the following points, which I taught in detail:

1. Male and female, husband and wife bear God's image equally (Gen 1:26-27).
2. Insofar as the nature of man is concerned, neither male nor female is superior.
3. However, God's design involves functional distinctions in roles and responsibilities (Gen 2:20).
4. The husband is the head of the home, but his leadership must involve a love that is patterned after Christ's love for the church (Eph 5:25).

Moreover, I presented the biblical model for gender roles in the church and defined the egalitarian and complementarian positions. Careful attention was devoted to discussing the nature of eldership and leadership roles from pertinent texts such as 1 Corinthians 11:3-15, 1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-7, and Titus 1:7-9. I offered an exegesis of each passage in order to demonstrate that the complementarian position is the logical corollary of trinitarian implications.

Last, I presented the following five questions for reflection and discussion:

1. In your view, how convincing is the male-eldership position?
2. Why do you believe churches are divided on the issue of gender roles?
3. In your view, what is the catalyst behind feminism in America?
4. What is the most effective manner to help someone overcome an offense concerning this issue of gender roles in the church?
5. In what ways can the leadership of the church work to value women and cultivate their gifts and talents?

Week 8: Dealing with Diversity

At the beginning of the sixth seminar, I offered an overview and summary of the previous few weeks. This ensured that the pertinent issues were fresh in their minds

before we proceeded. This time of review and group discussion demonstrated that each participant had developed a clear understanding of how the doctrine of the Trinity forms the basis of unity within the body of Christ. But during this seminar my primary aim was to discuss key points of diversity that occur within the church and how trinitarian principles apply. I asked the participants' opinions concerning the reason for disunity within the body of Christ. The examples presented ranged from "lack of humility and submission" to the "misapplication of doctrine." However, virtually everyone agreed that pride is the underlying cause of all disunity within the church.

We then moved to the topic of spiritual gifts and how they are to function within the church. I offered an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 that centered upon the nature of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian assembly. Special attention was given to defining the gifts of speaking in tongues, faith, healing, and working of miracles. Accordingly, I outlined the cessationist and continuationist positions and discussed strengths and weaknesses of each view. An in-class survey revealed the presence of participants from both perspectives.

But most importantly, careful attention was given concerning how the Spirit works to promote "the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). My desire was for the participants to note that spiritual gifts are the means through which people are ministered to, edified, and ultimately brought to unity. Furthermore, I asked the participants if they had discovered their spiritual gifts. Interestingly, about half responded in the affirmative. I informed those who responded negatively that I would email them a spiritual gifts assessment test to take at their leisure. I encouraged, but did not require, the participants to write down

ways in which they could use their gifts to promote the common good of Our Savior's Church.

Since there is controversy surrounding the nature of worship, I devoted the second half of this seminar to discussing how the participants could promote greater unity through the application of trinitarian principles. While a host of passages serve to define the nature of worship, I taught exclusively from John 4:1-26 and discussed the following historical/exegetical components: (1) the tension between Jews and Samaritans (v. 9), (2) the nature of the gift offered by Jesus (vv. 10-14), (3) the controversy concerning the proper place of worship (v. 20), (4) the meaning of worship "in spirit and truth" (vv. 20-24), (5) the explicit mention of the Father, Jesus, along with an allusion to the Spirit (vv. 23-24), (6) Jesus as the new "place" of worship.

Further, I asked that each participant ponder the following six questions and be ready to discuss them at the following seminar:

1. Why do we typically relegate worship to Sunday morning music/songs?
2. According to John 4, what is required for true worship to occur?
3. What are the roles of the Son and Spirit in worship?
4. In light of John 4, how should we address differences that exist concerning preferences in worship style and song selection? How are we to determine the correct approach to components of worship that the Bible does not address?
5. How does John 4 alter your view of worship?
6. How can the Sunday morning worship at our church become more Christ-centered?

The ultimate goal is for the participants to become more embrative of the different styles of worship insofar as they appropriately center upon God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Week 9: Dealing with an Offense

During the seventh seminar I offered an exegesis of Matthew 18:15-20 for the purpose of illustrating how to handle offenses that occur within the body of Christ. While I believe that the church will grow in oneness as a result of my ministry project, there will always be instances of disunity and division. Therefore, the goal was to equip each participant with knowledge of the steps that are required for unity to be restored when an offense occurs.

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus states,

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

My explanation of this passage involved the following:

1. The three-fold approach to handling an offense
2. The nature and consequence of each approach
3. The meaning of “tell it to the church”
4. The meaning of “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”
5. The meaning of “binding”
6. I asked the following questions for discussion:
7. What do most people have the tendency to do when offended?
8. Why does Jesus require that we approach the one who has offended us privately?

9. What typically occurs when we neglect the Matthew 18 pattern?
10. How does Matthew 18 practically promote unity in the church?

Week 10: Church Membership

During the eighth seminar we discussed the nature and purpose of church membership and how it serves to promote greater unity within the church. The aim of this seminar involved helping the participants understand that church membership is more than merely attending a church; it begins with adherence to certain doctrinal truths held by the church, but also includes willingness to serve within the church.

There has been some confusion concerning the nature of church membership, most likely due to the lack of teaching and communication on this vital subject. Also, there have only been two membership classes in the last year. This is rather unfortunate since the church has grown tremendously during this time. In my view, the promotion of biblical church membership is one of the greatest needs in the church. Therefore I labored to establish the biblical precedent for a church membership process that aimed at the establishment of a unified church community.

I presented the participants with a key question offered by Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose-Driven Church*: “What does God expect from members of his church?”¹ I then sought to define and discuss the following components of church membership:

1. Regeneration (John 3:1-5)
2. Baptism (Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 12:13)

¹Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growing without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 311.

3. Church discipline (1 Cor 5:12-13; 2 Cor 2:6)
4. Agreement in matters pertaining to ministry philosophy and practice
5. The mission/vision of the church

Building upon the components above, I reiterated the need for a trinitarian conceptual framework that includes the principles of oneness and diversity, but also the practices of inclusion and exclusion (based on the doctrines of church discipline and repentance). Much of this time was devoted to answering questions concerning how our particular church views homosexuality in general and whether we allow practicing homosexuals to attend our church. I informed the participants that homosexuals are welcome to attend our Sunday morning services, but we do not allow them to become members or assume any leadership role until repentance has occurred. I also stressed that the same standard applies to heterosexuals who are engaged in a life of open moral compromise and sin.

Interestingly, three of the seminar participants requested that I spend additional time elaborating the nature of the “new birth” and how one is able to have assurance of salvation. I led them through a basic exegesis of John 3:1-6 and 1 John 3:8-9 for the purpose of demonstrating that the man or woman who becomes born-again by the Spirit of God will not live in willful, ongoing sin. Seasons of darkness befall many Christians, but the truly regenerated believer will experience godly conviction and sorrow leading to a new direction in life. In short, I explained that both repentance of sin and faith in Christ are evidences that a person is a true child of God.

I also asked the following three questions to generate discussion:

1. How might a trinitarian membership model lead to exclusivity in matters pertaining to personal holiness, gender roles, the substance of worship, salvation through Christ alone, etc.?
2. How might a trinitarian model lead to a greater degree of inclusivity within the body of Christ?
3. How thorough should the membership process be? Should we require doctrinal questionnaires? How rigid should we be in terms of matters of holiness and purity?

The responses provided by the participants demonstrated that they had achieved a greater understanding of and a greater appreciation for biblical church membership. In fact, virtually every participant agreed that they had never thought through the nature of church membership until this seminar.

Weeks 11 through 13: Corporate and Personal Implementation

During this period, participants sought to apply the theological education they received in their own lives and took practical steps toward applying it in the life of the church. Such application ranged from personal examination and repentance when necessary to becoming corporate unifiers in both word and deed. I requested that each participant agree, including myself, to the following exercises:

1. Examine your life and prayerfully consider how to become a more effective promoter of unity within your marriage.
2. Strategically consider how you can promote unity within the departments/ministries you lead at church.
3. Consider how you can outwardly demonstrate a greater appreciation for people who possess different gifts than you.
4. Examine your present relationships and consider if there are any unresolved offenses you need to address.

5. Seek to apply insights and/or revelations you received in a prompt manner.
6. Write down significant experiences and/or insights from the exercise and email them to Scott Adams (scott.adams@oscfamily.com).

Weeks 14 and 15: Evaluation

During this period, I evaluated the overall effectiveness of the project. The goal was to ascertain whether or not the participants were able to evoke and inspire a greater degree of unity based on the instruction and training they received.

A questionnaire, which consisted of similar questions presented prior to the first seminar, was administered to assess how each participant's views on the Trinity changed and how his or her knowledge was expanded. This questionnaire was administered through email and with two weeks allotted for completion. Various factors were taken into consideration in order to assess the effectiveness of the ministry research project, including the post-seminar questionnaire results, the overall sentiment of the participants as evidenced by post-seminar interviews, and the tangible, practical increase of unity within the church community as evidenced in marriages, personal relationships, and ministry departments.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

This chapter serves to conclude the ministry project. The implementation of the ministry project began on February 16, 2013 and was officially completed on June 1st of the same year. The ministry project included two weeks of preparation and participant selection, eight weeks of theological education and training, three weeks of personal and corporate implementation, and two weeks of evaluation.

This chapter is devoted to the following components: First, I will restate and evaluate the purpose of the project and its four goals. Second, I will evaluate the project in light of its apparent strengths and weaknesses and offer suggestions for improvement. Third, I will present theological insights I gained from the project concerning God, His word, and his church. Last, I will share how this project has impacted me personally and professionally.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip members at Our Savior's Church with the knowledge of biblical trinitarianism for the purpose of creating a unified community. This purpose was originally forged in the context of a church community that was largely ignorant of how biblical trinitarianism relates to church unity. As noted in chapter 1, the church has experienced a tremendous amount of growth in the last three years. A significant amount of the growth may be attributed to people transitioning in from other

churches, but it is also the corollary of numerous community-oriented events aimed at reaching the unchurched. In short, the relevance of the project's purpose is elucidated only when viewed against the church's development and accelerated growth.

As the post-seminar evaluation scores demonstrated (see next section directly below), the participants displayed some ignorance regarding the doctrine of the Trinity in general, but also how this doctrine serves as the foundation for church unity in particular. Such ignorance will likely increase as more unknowledgeable believers and unbelievers attend the church on a regular basis. Further, it is probable, but not provable that instances of disunity will continue to increase as the number of members who are unknowledgeable of biblical trinitarianism increases. Moreover, in light of my own observation and the data provided by the seminar participants, the purpose of this project was relevant, necessary, and justifiable.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

As noted in chapter one, the first goal was that members of Our Savior's Church would understand biblical trinitarianism. The second goal was for the church community to practice biblical unity and oneness. The third goal was for members of Our Savior's Church to appreciate the variety of gifts, personalities, graces, and callings represented in church community. The fourth goal was for me, as the associate pastor, to become more effective in promoting unity and oneness. These goals are best categorized as "knowledge-based" and "application-oriented," respectively.

The seminar included the participation of the following church members:

Christy Castille: Team Leader of First Impressions Ministry

Troy Thibodeaux: Team Leader of the Ushers and Greeters

Robin Leblanc: Team Leader of the Prayer Team

Josh Mesa: Former Associate Pastor at Our Savior's Church

Eric Amy: Team Leader of Outreach and Evangelism

Randy and Karen Castille: Team Leaders of Pastor Helps

Janet Docuet: Local Middle-School Instructor

A doctrinal exam/questionnaire was administered to each of the above participants at the beginning and end of the seminar period. This examination, and the answers provided, was intended to gauge whether or not the project's "knowledge-based" goals were fulfilled. The examination presented questions that related to the doctrine of the Trinity, spiritual gifts, the nature of worship, and the current status of unity or disunity within the church.

Knowledge-Based Evaluation

The following section provides an analysis of the pre and post-seminar examination results. The first section contained eleven statements that were either true or false. Each question was exclusively related to the doctrine of the Trinity. The results are represented in the table below.

The participants performed surprisingly well on the pre-seminar true or false questions. No one missed more than two questions. However, it is unclear from this section whether or not the participants truly knew the answer to the questions or if they offered an educated guess. In a best-case scenario, the scores reflected that the participants were knowledgeable of basic trinitarian truths. Although the pre-seminar

scores were more positive than I anticipated they would be, there was room for improvement.

Table 1. Pre- and post-evaluation results

Participants	Pre-Seminar Score	Post-Seminar Score	Change
Christy	9/11	9/11	0
Troy	9/11	9/11	0
Robin	9/11	11/11	+2
Josh	11/11	11/11	0
Eric	9/11	8/11	-1
Karen	11/11	10/11	-1
Janet	11/11	11/11	0
Randy	11/11	Absent ¹	

Even more surprising was the fact that the lowest score (8/11) occurred on the post-seminar examination. This may have reflected that some of the participants experienced a slight degree of confusion concerning trinitarian terminology and/or concepts. For example, question 11 states, “There is no human analogy that accurately describes the Trinity.” Eric marked “T” on the first examination, but “F” on the second

¹Randy withdrew from participating in the ministry project for an unknown reason during week 13.

examination. His incorrect answer is not heretical, nor does it indicate that he does not have a firm grasp on the nature of God. Rather, it is possible that Eric answered in this manner because I mentioned that some people present earthly illustrations to promote clarity concerning how the divine persons relate to one another. An important caveat that I noted, and one that he may have not heard, was that there is no sufficient human analogue that accurately describes the Trinity.

Another example includes Troy's perception of the Holy Spirit. Question 11 states, "The Holy Spirit is best understood as a force." Troy marked "F" on the first evaluation, but noted parenthetically, "The Holy Spirit is a divine energy or power." On the second evaluation he marked the same question as "T." In this instance, it seemed that Troy was attempting to present language that accurately described his conception of the Holy Spirit without realizing that the terms he employed were virtually synonymous with the term presented on the exam, which is erroneous. In my estimation, Troy's faulty understanding concerning the personal nature of the Holy Spirit is due to his absence from multiple seminars. Furthermore, the results presented above demonstrated that more data was needed to make an accurate assessment concerning whether the participants grew in their knowledge and understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The second section contained ten short-answer questions concerning the local church, the doctrine of the Trinity, spiritual gifts, worship, and church unity. The overall aim was to evaluate both the correctness and thoroughness of each participant's response. The answers provided by the participants ranged from simplistic to sufficient on both the pre and post-seminar exams. However, in some cases, the participants' answer on the

post-seminar exam demonstrated an increased usage of Scripture and/or trinitarian language.

For example, Robin wrote on her first exam concerning the scriptural foundation for unity in the church: “There are many [Scriptures]. One is to love one another. God speaks of it all through his word.” Sadly, she did not offer even one chapter or verse. However, on the second exam she offered a much more thoughtful answer, citing John 17:22-23 as the foundation to all Christian unity.

Accordingly, Karen’s first answer to the question “Why is unity within the local church so important?” was rather shallow. She wrote, “Church should be a blessing to the community, joining together all things possible. . . .Without unity there will be discord.” However, the answer she provided on the second exam was more thoughtful and biblical. She wrote, “We are to model Jesus and be examples to others. Believers are commissioned by Jesus to be unified in a manner that mirrors and reflects His relationship with the Father. Believers are called to surrender and lay aside rights they would otherwise enjoy for the sake of Christ and the good of His Body, the church.”

A third example involves Christy’s answer to the question “How does the doctrine of the Trinity apply in the local church?” She wrote, “Every part of the church from the pastor to the nursery worker has equal importance in helping to further the Gospel and helping the church to be a whole.” While this answer is undoubtedly correct, it is detached from the trinitarian principles that were presented at the weekly seminars. However, Christy’s post-seminar response was much more relevant to the purposes of the ministry project. She wrote, “The pastor is the head of the church, but yields to and

respects the elders and the congregation. This model is based on the same respect, love, and glorifying as seen in the Trinity.”

Similarly, Janet’s post-seminar examination reveals an increased understanding concerning how the Trinity serves as a foundation for unity in the church. On the pre-seminar examination, she simply cites John 17:20-23 as the foundation for unity in the local church. However, she offers a more thoughtful, trinitarian response on the second examination. She wrote, “God has ordained a pattern that he has established for us to follow within himself. The Father is the head, but the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in essence and one is not greater than the other with all playing a very important and distinctive role in promoting unity.”

Moreover, a juxtaposition of the examination answers reveals that, by the end of the seminar period, the participants employed trinitarian terminology more liberally, grasped the nature of the relationship between the members of the Trinity more firmly, and expounded how trinitarian principles directly apply to unity in the church more clearly. In short, the second section of the examination demonstrates that at least half of the participants grew in their knowledge of biblical trinitarianism.

Application-Oriented Evaluation

The participants were required to answer the following questions: (1) How did the seminar equip you to promote biblical unity and oneness? and (2) Do you feel a greater appreciation for the variety of gifts, personalities, graces, and callings represented in church community? If so, how has the appreciation been applied? The answers they provided served to gauge whether the application-oriented goals of the project were

fulfilled. Although all of the seminar participants submitted answers to the questions below, I chose to outline only the most thoughtful responses.

Karen provided a response that demonstrated her willingness and desire to apply trinitarian principles. In response to the first questions, she wrote, “As the discussion took place about how the Trinity related to marriages, I agreed fully and thought I was doing good until God decided to showed me areas in which I was submitting, but not fully like I should be to Randy. Since then, I have made those changes and I see results already.”

Janet’s response was also noteworthy:

Pastor Scott also taught me about the submission assignments of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. I now understand that God submits to himself within himself; that Jesus submits to the Father, but the Father doesn’t submit to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit submits to Jesus and the Father. I learned that God is not only a model of unity that we see and need to embrace and practice, but a great role model of submission. To help us grasp an understanding of what submission and unity means, Pastor Scott used the roles and positions of men and women or husband and wives as examples. This really painted a better picture for me. If a woman submits to her husband and her husband reflects the character of Christ, there is unity.

Janet also included a short testimony concerning how she applied this knowledge at a local school where she teaches Health and Physical Education. She wrote,

I taught a lesson to them on the different roles of the man and woman in a marriage and even in a relationship before marriage. I am hoping that I have helped them to see that there is more than one role to play in relationship and that none is greater and have equal importance. I brought it down to their level, and I think many received and understood it.

Josh offered a thoughtful response that reflects upon how the content of the seminars inspired a greater urgency for oneness in his marriage. He wrote,

This seminar helped me focus more on the effects of my actions as they relate to biblical unity. One example is how my wife and I have practically focused on defining our individual roles, strengths and weaknesses. By doing so, we are better able to achieve oneness in our relationship by identifying areas that do not line up

with the truth. Now we can be the helpmates to each other that we need to be, and in doing so, become more unified.

Karen, in response to the second questions, noted in response to this question:

As for leading a department/business and interacting with people; leading Sunday school, youth groups, (and did plays, skits and dramas), women bible study and prayer and , working as office manager and dental assistant, I have learned to encourage others to use the gifts and talents that God anoints them with. I also learned how every person's personality is ordained by God for a specific purpose.

Josh noted similarly,

I definitely feel a greater appreciation for the variety of gifts, personalities, graces and callings in our church community. Now more than ever, I realize how vital others are to achieving any goal, especially the purpose and vision of the local church. I am more comfortable asking others for help, and also differing to others when I am asked for help in an area in which I am not the strongest. I see the importance of focusing on my strengths and not spreading myself too thin.

Synthesis of the Data

The True/False section of the examination merely demonstrated that the participants possessed a cursory understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, the thoughtful answers provided on the short-answer sections demonstrated more clearly and compellingly that Robin, Karen, Christy, Janet, and Josh grew in their knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity and how trinitarian principles apply in the life of the local church. Furthermore, a careful comparison of the cumulative data, along with my personal interaction with the participants, revealed that the participants noted above possessed a greater confidence in their ability to articulate how practical church unity is derived from the triune nature of God.

Personal Assessment

Below are post-seminar exercises I committed to perform in order to become a more effective promoter of unity and oneness.

Examine Your Life and Prayerfully Consider How to Become a More Effective Promoter of Unity within Your Marriage

Upon examination of my role and responsibilities as a husband and father, I discovered two key ways to become an effective promoter of unity in the context of my family. First, it is very important that my wife and I model unity before our children. In more recent days, we have respectfully disagreed on specific matters with our children within distance to observe. Needless to say, this sort of verbal engagement gives the appearance of disunity and disharmony. My strategy for correcting this matter involves (a) refraining from engaging in a conversation that contains any degree of disagreement with our children in close proximity and (b) proactively scheduling a time to privately discuss the matters at hand.

Second, my wife and I share many of the same convictions concerning our financial managements. However, there are times when we both experience uncertainty concerning certain financial matters, such as the most efficient manner to save for retirement. The inevitable result is insecurity, and in many cases, disunity. As the head of our home, I believe that it is my responsibility to obtain the knowledge and discipline required to become a more efficient and informed steward of the money God has entrusted to us.

Therefore, the strategy I constructed for correcting this issue involves hiring a financial advisor who can offer professional advice concerning a retirement fund.

Second, it involves modifying our current budget to create a greater degree of financial margin. Third, it involves regularly scheduled times when my wife and I discuss our financial goals and evaluate our progress. I am confident that my wife and I will experience a greater sense of unity by implementing these simple steps.

**Consider How You Can Promote Unity within
the Departments or Ministries You
Lead at Church**

In two key ways I can promote greater unity in the departments that I lead. First, I will invite department volunteers to participate in quarterly celebration dinners. My aim at these events would be to (a) show honor and appreciation to each person for his or her service, (b) to recognize each individual person's unique gifts, and (c) create a greater appreciation for the entire team of volunteers.

Second, in recent weeks, some of the volunteers have become tired and disgruntled, which has led to some relational friction and disunity. The primary reason for this involves the recent transition into our new church building and poor planning/scheduling. After surveying the issue, I am committed to creating a new volunteer-schedule that incorporates a greater number of team-leaders who can relieve those who are currently burned out. Additionally, I will schedule a private meeting with the team-leaders in order for them to speak freely about their concerns. The goal is to alleviate the relational friction and ministerial burnout that many team-leaders and volunteers have experienced.

**Consider How You Can Outwardly Demonstrate
a Greater Appreciation for People Who Possess
Different Gifts Than You**

In recent days, a new addition was made to our church staff. The lead pastor hired an executive assistant who assumed many of my current responsibilities. Within a few days it became evident that this individual is gifted in ways that I am not. He is administrative and highly organized. In the past, my first reaction would have been to feel a sense of insecurity. However, in this instance I resolved to honor this new pastor and joyfully submit to any new suggestions he may have (Rom 12:10). I resolved to serve without my own interests in mind (Phil 2:4) and sought to agree with this pastor as often as possible (1 Cor 1:10). In short, I resolved to model the attitude of Christ, “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” (Phil 2:6-7).

**Examine Your Present Relationships and
Consider If There Are Any Unresolved
Offenses You Need to Address**

After surveying my marriage, ministry, and relationships, there were no unresolved offenses that needed to be addressed.

Strengths of the Project

The primary strength of the ministry project involved the structured nature of the seminars and the consistent in-depth teaching that was provided. Some of the participants have been exposed to the doctrine of Trinity before, but teaching this doctrine in an eight-week format fostered a learning environment that was uniquely edifying. From my perspective, the repetitious nature of seminar, which involved the

consistent usage precise trinitarian language, enabled the participants to grasp biblical truths that were otherwise foreign and vague. For example, none of the participants used phrases like “equality” and “submission” in a trinitarian context before the third seminar. However, after hearing these terms and grappling with their meaning over the course of multiple seminars, the participants used them freely and correctly in group discussions in subsequent weeks.

In my presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity, I attempted to use language and terms that were understandable to the layman. However, I intentionally introduced many terms and concepts that were significantly challenging to most of the participants. The goal was for each participant’s vocabulary and cognitive faculties to be stretched and enhanced. My assumption that the participants were more intelligent than they gave themselves credit for proved true, but only because they accepted the challenge to attend the seminars and engage the materials presented. Upon completion of the seminars, virtually all of the participants demonstrated visible signs of increased confidence in their cognitive abilities.

Second, the ministry project provided a context in which the nature and purpose of doctrine could be stressed and expounded. Although the elders and deacons of Our Savior’s Church are committed to sound doctrine, the expedited growth of the congregation has made it rather difficult to provide a consistent context for doctrinal education. In my view, the weekly life-group meetings and the membership process has not sufficed. Therefore, the implementation of my ministry project was timely, especially for church members who have long desired for doctrinal teaching to become a regular component of church life. In short, the ministry project proved my initial assumption,

namely, that many people within my church context desire teaching that is doctrinal in nature. Many of our members desire to establish and ground their convictions about the nature of God in the Scriptures instead of merely relying on inspirational sermons and daily devotionals (although there is an appropriate place for both).

Third, the dialogical nature of the seminars served to reinforce and flesh-out the scriptural truths that I presented each week and provided the participants with an opportunity to share their insights with one another. This aspect of the ministry project was edifying both to the participants and to me. Numerous discussions occurred during the seminar that centered upon the consequence of unrepentant sin, personal offense, and heresy in the local church. A few of the participants shared testimonies concerning their experiences in these matters and the inevitable relational damage that ensued. Virtually everyone in the room had a story to tell. Unsurprisingly, by the end of the discussion period there was a greater sense of unity among all the seminar participants.

Weaknesses of the Project

The primary weaknesses of the ministry project involved the timing of the instructional seminars. Specifically, the first seminar began within days of the launch of a new home-group series and during a time in which community festivals and parties were occurring. As a result, various participants were not able to attend a few of the seminars, which in turn, inhibited the learning process. In one case the impact was significant. It is not difficult to grasp why being absent for a seminar that centered upon unity within the Godhead would hinder a participant from grasping how the doctrine of the Trinity serves as a foundation for church unity. Thankfully, on a few occasions I was able to re-teach certain portions of the materials to those who were absent. But, those who missed two or

more consecutive weeks were forced to catch up on their own, through other means.

Notwithstanding, although the timing of the seminar was not ideal, a careful survey of the 2013 calendar revealed the notable lack of a more suitable time for the seminars to occur.

Second, the ministry project did not include a large enough amount of participants to significantly influence the congregation in the manner I had anticipated. The underlying assumption of this ministry project is that perdurable change occurs through the influence of the pastors and core leadership. As noted in the fourth chapter, I enlisted participants who have attended the church for a minimum of six months and serve or lead in some capacity. However, it is difficult to create significant unity in a church of this size by the implementation of a ministry project that involved eight people. Our Savior's Church congregation has grown significantly in a short amount of time (from 30 to approximately 700 people in three years). With such growth have come numerous relational and departmental challenges that demand more than what a small pastoral staff can accommodate. While the participants testified to experiencing notable personal and relational growth, this did not translate into significant corporate unity.

Third, the short duration of the ministry project relative to the size of the congregation and the number of people who participated in the seminar proved to be a weakness of the ministry project. In my estimation, it would likely require four to five months of consistent teaching and application for the goals of the project to be fulfilled in the manner I had anticipated. Additionally, more time would be needed to evaluate the outcomes of the ministry project. It is rather difficult to discern the full effects of the ministry project in a few weeks due to the many variables that were present including, but not limited to, the participants' attendance at church, the nature and frequency of church-

related events that the seminar participants could attend, my ministry schedule and pastoral responsibilities, etc. Furthermore, it is likely, but not provable that more visible signs of unity will be seen in the life of the church in days to come as the participants continue to apply the knowledge they accumulated during the seminars.

Fourth, the lead pastor's lack of awareness of and participation in the ministry project proved to be a significant weakness. In the present context, the lead pastor has tremendous influence both in the church and the community at large. Therefore, it would have been tremendously beneficial if he had publicly reinforced the principles I taught in the private seminars. Initially, I considered involving him at some level in the project. However, after considering the demands of his position, I decided that such involvement would not be possible or beneficial.

What I Would Do Differently

In light of the weaknesses noted above, I would modify my ministry project in several ways. First, I would wait to implement the ministry project until the lead pastor could be directly involved in the seminars and the corporate application of the principles taught therein. I would not suggest that he be involved in every seminar, but at the very least I would require him to be at the first two in order to give authentication to my goals and intentions. This would prove to be very helpful in light of the fact that I have served only nine months at Our Savior's Church and have limited influence.

Second, I would ask permission from the Doctor of Ministry program director to lengthen the ministry project considerably, perhaps one to three months. A lengthened time-frame would include bi-weekly follow-up with the seminar participants in order to offer encouragement, to remind them of the project's goals, and to assess their progress

along the way. At the end of the ministry project implementation I would summon the lead pastor, the pastoral staff, and the seminar participants to a round-table to discuss each person's perspective concerning whether the goals were fulfilled. In my view, a broader inclusion of people in such a discussion would likely give a broader, more precise assessment of whether or not the project's goals were fulfilled.

Third, I would seek to enlist more participants in the ministry project. As noted in the fourth chapter, I established fairly strict criteria concerning who would participate in the seminars. In retrospect, I would certainly invite core pastors and leaders in the church, but I would also invite numerous people who serve within various departments of the church. In other words, I would not only invite department/ministry leaders, but those people who are busy doing the work of the ministry in the church and community. In fact, I would seek to enlist as many people in the ministry departments as possible in hopes to create unity in more timely, comprehensive fashion.

Fourth, I would require that each participant read Bruce Ware's book *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationship, Roles, and Relevance*. The inclusion of this requirement would benefit the participants by reinforcing and enhancing the truths they learned during the weekly seminars. Further, I would construct an outline of verses related to the doctrine of the Trinity for the participants to memorize throughout the duration of the ministry project. The goal would be to saturate the participants' minds and hearts with the Scriptures for the sake of personal edification and ministerial effectiveness.

Theological Reflections

This ministry project served to reinforce the notion that teaching is the best method to learning; one must learn in order to teach, but much is learned through the process of teaching. In-depth research, coupled with the consistent study of the Scriptures enabled me to grow in my understanding of the doctrine I taught on a weekly basis. But as I taught, greater clarity came to the topic at hand. Although I had read a significant amount of literature on the doctrine of the Trinity prior to the ministry project, the discipline of writing and teaching these truths in the context of the local church brought a whole new appreciation for the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Second, I now possess a greater understanding concerning the applicability of the nature of God. Of course, unity is important in the context of personal relationships, corporate business, and in local church life. However, oftentimes people seek unity without greater justification than personal edification and/or corporate efficiency. I have sought for many years to be a man who promotes relational unity in every aspect of life. However, prior to this project I grounded my desire for unity in the fact that it is personally advantageous. But in my research of the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly from John 17:20-23, I was brought to the realization that the foundation for all unity, whether material, marital, corporate, or ecclesiastical, is the triune God. The people of God should seek to be unified because the God whom they serve is perfectly and eternally unified in every respect.

In short, I now have a greater appreciation, not only for the nature of God apart from creation, but also with respect to how his nature serves as a foundation for human

activity within the creation. I must seek to be a promoter of unity within my marriage, in the church, and in the community because the nature of God justifies and demands it.

Third, although I have taken courses in the discipline of biblical theology, this ministry project evoked a new degree of respect for the discipline, and the discipline, in turn, evoked a new sense of awe concerning the immutable, yet utterly consistent unfolding of the nature of God throughout the Scriptures.

Of course, biblical theology plays a crucial role in the interpretive process. According to Cornelius Van Til, “Biblical theology takes the fruits of exegesis and organizes them into various units and traces the revelation of God in Scripture in its historical development. It brings out the theology of each part of God’s Word as it has been brought to us at different stages, by means of various authors”² Although some view it as an end in itself, a closer examination reveals that it can also be a means to an end. According to Hamilton, “Some today are referring biblical theology as a ‘bridge discipline’ that connects exegesis and systematic theology.”³ This is a helpful way of viewing it. Without biblical theology, the systematic theologian is left only with the text and the fruits of exegesis. But the bridge provided by biblical theology allows the historical and theological conclusions of the biblical authors to flow into a helpful concentrated system, in the present case, concerning the nature of God.

Accordingly, the ministry project forced me to view the doctrine of the Trinity, perhaps for the first time, through the lens provided by biblical theology. I was forced to

²Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1974), 17.

³James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 47.

reckon with the nature of God from a horizontal, rather than vertical point-of-view. In the past year, I have traveled across the bridge provided by the discipline of biblical theology. In crossing I gained a greater appreciation for the contextual and covenantal landscape in which the doctrine of the Trinity grew. Now that I have crossed safely to the other side, standing firmer in my systematic convictions, I feel more equipped to lead others on the journey.

Fourth, this ministry project served to demonstrate that regenerated members of the church are fed and sustained by substance, not mere inspirational simplicity. Given the nature of the church I serve in, which is saturated in leadership and evangelistic training, I am often tempted to refrain from teaching truths that may be viewed as too deep or difficult to understand. While it is my personal responsibility to shun this tendency and teach the whole counsel of God with authority, the enthusiastic response(s) of seminar participants provided a fresh reminder that many believers do desire growth in their understanding of the nature of God, even if such growth comes slowly and with some cognitive discomfort.

Personal Reflections

The ministry project has provoked a significant degree of personal, relational, and vocational growth. The very nature of the ministry project has demanded that I practice an elevated level of self-discipline, particularly as it pertains to the precision of my thoughts, consistency in my teaching-schedule, and my leadership of people. Theological writing can be challenging enough, but organizing, synthesizing, and seeking to apply theological truths in a particular, local context encompasses an elevated level of

challenges. I have not only had to organize my thoughts in a coherent manner, but I have also had to provide an organized structure in which learning could take place. Such activities have stretched, challenged, and enhanced me in a unique manner never experienced prior to the inauguration of the ministry project.

Second, Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "[a]ll Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" has never had more relevance to my ministry than it does presently. As alluded to above, numerous members within my church are convinced that a doctrine like the Trinity, although true and biblical, should not be the focus of one's teaching on a regular basis. Their fear is that this doctrine is impractical and therefore unhelpful for the edification of the local church. However, upon completion of the ministry project this unbiblical notion was dispelled once and for all in many people's minds. But more importantly, it was dispelled in mine.

I was compelled to repent of my pragmatic tendencies and renew my commitment to the trustworthiness of the Scriptures in general, but to Paul's words to Timothy in particular. My present conviction is that "all Scripture," even those that seem mysterious beyond human understanding is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

Third, this ministry project has served to rekindle the love I have for Christian education. I have experienced a great desire to teach since my conversion in August of 2000 and have thankfully been given many opportunities to do so. However, in recent years the vicissitudes of life and ministry have prevented me from teaching on a

consistent basis. The outcomes of the ministry project, which included personal edification from writing and teaching, coupled with tremendously encouraging feedback from the seminar participants, reconfirmed my gift of teaching the Scriptures in the context of the local church. Moreover, I was challenged to continue my theological upon completion of the Doctor of Ministry program. Such education will entail enrolling in a PhD program in the field of New Testament theology.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered an analysis of the research ministry project. In my view, the research data demonstrates that the project's purpose and goals were fulfilled with varying degrees of success. While the project has numerous weaknesses that are in need of modification, I am persuaded that the project was a necessary, fruitful endeavor. Members of Our Savior's Church were equipped with knowledge of biblical trinitarianism for the purpose of creating and maintaining a unified community.

Moreover, I am eternally grateful for the opportunity of teaching the wondrous realities of the triune God to the eight people who participated in the ministry project. It was a joy and delight to witness the cognitive and spiritual growth that occurred in the lives of the participants over the course of fifteen weeks. Although the examination scores varied, virtually all of the participants outwardly displayed an elevated sense of awe and wonder concerning the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As a result of the ministry project, I pray that the inner life of the Trinity will be replicated for years to come in the marriages and relationships that comprise Our Savior's Church, Opelousas, Louisiana, all for the glory of God.

APPENDIX 1

PRE-SEMINAR EVALUATION

Research Instruments

Pre and Post-course Examination

I. Agreement to Participate

The examination you are about to participate in is designed to gather data concerning the unity of Our Savior's Church. The examination was prepared by Scott Adams for the purpose of initiating and completing a Doctor of Ministry project. Other than your name, there will be no request for the names of members or congregants who have participated in the communal life at Our Savior's Church. All information you provide will be kept extremely confidential, including, but not limited to, your name, age, doctrinal position, opinions about the church, etc. By your completion of this questionnaire, and signing your name below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

-Name: _____

-Signature: _____

-Age: _____

Today's Date: _____

II. A survey of belief and practice

True or False

1. The Old Testament Scriptures teach that there is one God _____.
2. Paul uses the term "Trinity" in his epistles _____.
3. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are three gods _____.

4. Belief in the Trinity should not be considered essential for church membership_____.
5. The New Testament is not clear concerning the nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit_____.
6. The Holy Spirit is best understood as a “force” _____.
7. Belief in the full divinity of Christ is not essential for salvation_____.
8. Jehovah’s Witness theology is compatible with orthodox Christianity_____.
9. When used in reference to the Trinity, the term “person” means “human-like”_____.
10. The doctrine of the Trinity is clearly taught in both the Old and New Testaments_____.
11. There is no human analogy that accurately describes the Trinity_____.

Short answer

1. Why is unity within the local church so important?

2. What is the scriptural foundation for unity within the church?

3. How does the doctrine of the Trinity apply in the local church?

4. What is your understanding of the role of women in the church? May they serve as elders/pastors? Why or why not?

5. What is your view concerning spiritual gifts? Are all the gifts in operation today? If so, how are they to be used? What is their purpose?

6. In your view, what is most biblical manner to worship in a Sunday morning worship service?

7. What is the purpose of church membership? What are the qualifications to become a member?

8. How is the church required to handle instances of unrepentant, gross sin in the life of one of its members?

9. On a scale from 1-10, cite your perception of the current state of unity at Our Savior's Church.

1	5	10
weak unity	moderate unity	strong unity

10. On a scale from 1-10, cite how important doctrinal unity is for the local church.

1	5	10
not important	somewhat important	very important

III. Interview Questions

1. How did Our Savior's Church begin?

2. How has unity been achieved/maintained within the church?

3. List some of the observable points of disunity in the last two years. What was the cause? Was the issue resolved? If so, how? If not, why not?

4. How has unity been maintained as new challenges have arisen?

5. What advice you can give to see greater unity achieved at Our Savior's Church.

6. In your opinion, how important is doctrine in the church?

7. In your opinion, is there a need for courses/classes (within the church) that focus on doctrinal/scriptural issues?

8. How knowledgeable are you concerning topics such as the nature of God and the Trinity?

9. In what ways do you hope to grow as a result of participating in this project?

10. Can you identify any points of hesitation or fear concerning being involved in this project/research?

APPENDIX 2

FIRST SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Monotheism

- **Definition:**

“Monotheism (from the Greek *monos* "only," and *theos* "god") is a word coined in comparatively modern times to designate belief in the one supreme God, the Creator and Lord of the world, the eternal Spirit, All-powerful, All-wise, and All-good, the Rewarder of good and the Punisher of evil, the Source of our happiness and perfection. It is opposed to Polytheism, which is belief in more gods than one, and to Atheism, which is disbelief in any deity whatsoever.” (New Advent Encyclopedia)

- **Scriptural Support:**

- Genesis 1-2

- Exodus 20:1-3

- Deuteronomy 6:4

- Isaiah 45:5

- I Timothy 2:5

- James 2:19

- Since their national inauguration, the people of Israel proclaimed with divine authority that Yahweh is the only God. This proclamation provided the immediate audience with the motivation for righteous living within the covenant community of God (Exod 20:1-3), but also provided latter generations with a monotheistic foundation from which to interpret and understand trinitarian passages. Therefore, while the examples below are not exhaustive, they demonstrate a uniformity of monotheistic belief within the scriptural witness, dispensational distinctions notwithstanding.

- One of the most definitive statements concerning Israel’s monotheistic conviction is located in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses writes in 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” Christopher J.H. Wright notes that within this statement, “there is a polemical intent to define God wholly different from the multitude of gods that surround Israel. . . . He is one God, our God, and Yahweh is His personal name. On this understanding, the emphasis lies on Yahweh’s singularity.”¹ Walter Brueggemann states additionally, “The key phrase may be rendered as ‘YHWH is one,’ in order to stress the unity of Yahweh who cannot be divided or parceled out; or it may be translated ‘YHWH alone,’ in order to accent YHWH’s demand for exclusive, uncompromising loyalty from Israel.”² Whether the emphasis rests upon singularity of existence or unity of essence, Israel’s God was viewed in terms of His oneness and was to be worshipped accordingly.
- In the eighth century BC, the prophet Isaiah records and declares the words of Yahweh, who states, “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (Isa 45:5). This statement is consonant with antecedent statements concerning Yahweh’s singularity but expands the point further by ruling out the existence of equals to Yahweh. According to the prophet, there exists no one with the power and ability to call and equip King Cyrus for the task at hand. The same concept is reiterated in verse 6 by the phrase, “there is no other.” John Goldingay states, “To say ‘there is no other’ is to deny that there are many gods who share in such responsibilities, as Babylon believed, as well as to deny that there are two forces of light and darkness, as Persians believed. There is no power beyond Yahweh.”³ Although the people of Israel were at times inconsistent in the application of their belief in monotheism, the doctrine of the exclusivity of Yahweh was a firm, ubiquitous component of inspired Hebrew revelation.
- Accordingly, monotheistic statements are likewise embedded in the divinely inspired statements of the New Testament. The apostle Paul writes, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim 2:5). He states elsewhere, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4-6). Finally, James writes, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (Jas 2:19)!

¹Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 96.

²Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 83.

³John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 13 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 263.

II. Trinitarianism

-Father: Genesis 1:1 and Deuteronomy 6:4

-Son: John 1:1 and Colossians 1:15-16

-Holy Spirit: Acts 5:3-4 and Hebrews 9:14

- The New Testament also contains statements that seem to indicate that the Son, along with the Holy Spirit, is likewise fully God. Some suggest that these statements contradict Israel's monotheistic beliefs and therefore must be rejected or reinterpreted (Islam). Others interpret these statements in a manner that presents Jesus as a divine being, but lacking in co-equality with the Father (Arianism). However, a careful analysis of key New Testament passages reveals that the one God of Israel exists eternally and equally in three divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Perhaps the clearest New Testament evidence concerning the deity and eternal nature of the Son is seen in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Here John employs the same phraseology used by Moses in Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning") to demonstrate the supremacy of the *Logos* in relation to the creation and its relationship to God. Raymond Brown notes, "This is not, as in Genesis, the beginning of creation, for creation comes in verse three. Rather, 'the beginning' refers to the period before creation and is a designation, more qualitative than temporal, of the sphere of God."⁴ In other words, although the phrase "the beginning" usually refers to the sequential temporality, John's usage of this phrase denotes the eternal dimension of the *Logos* that transcends the created, temporal realm.
- Next, John insists that "the Word was God." John's theology of the *Logos* stands in sharp contrast to Philo who taught that the *Logos* was created by God.⁵ For John, the *Logos* who was with God was simultaneously God. If God is eternal, then logically the *Logos* is likewise eternal. Those who deny the eternity of the *Logos* in this verse must logically deny the eternity of God. Since, for John, God's eternity is presupposed, he sees no need to offer an exhaustive defense of the eternity of the *Logos*. In short, his main argument for the eternity of the *Logos* rests upon his understanding of the eternity of God.

⁴Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 4.

⁵F. F. Bruce rightly notes, "The true background to John's thought and language is found not in Greek philosophy but in Hebrew revelation. The 'Word of God' in the Old Testament denotes God in action, especially in creation, revelation, and deliverance." (F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 29).

- Accordingly, John’s carefully constructed statement will not allow for the assertion that John, by his omission of an article preceding God, is merely referring to certain qualities of “God-ness” or that the *Logos* is a sort of heavenly being. In essence, some argue that John was simply stating that Jesus was divine, but not equal with God. However, Carson rightly notes that, “There is a perfectly serviceable word in Greek for ‘divine’ (namely ‘*theios*’) More importantly, there are many places in the New Testament where the predicate noun has no article, and yet is specific (see John 1:49; 8:39; 17:17, Rom 14:17; Gal 4:25; Rev 1:20).”⁶ John’s careful choice of words demonstrates that John was not merely referring to Jesus as a divine being, but as a co-equal member of the Godhead. Moreover, John’s statement contains crucial theological ingredients for the doctrine of the Trinity which is more fully developed throughout the New Testament.⁷
- Most puzzling to some first-century monotheists is how eternal life is related to the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ as in John 17:3. Jesus states, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” However, it is important to note that John’s train of thought is congruent with the Christological umbrella⁸ raised in 1:1. For John, Jesus, the One who was in the beginning with God as God, is the ultimate self-disclosure of God. Moreover, a grammatical and theological juxtaposition of 1:1 and 17:3 reveals that John views the Father and the Son as equally divine in essence and being. Eternal life occurs by epistemic awareness of and belief in the one who was with God in the beginning. In short, since only God can grant eternal life, the Son (*Logos*) must necessarily be viewed as equal with God.⁹
- A key Pauline passage that contributes to trinitarian theology is located in his letter to the Colossians in 1:15-16. Paul writes, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven

⁶D. A. Carson and Douglass Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 117.

⁷Numerous other Scriptures imply the deity of the Son including, but not limited to Christ is God (Rom 9:5). Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9, 12-13; 14:5-9; 2 Cor 4:5; 12:8-10; Phil 2:9-11; Col 2:6; 1 Tim 6:3; Titus 2:13). Christ is presented as the “image of God” (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) who exists in the form of God (Phil 2:5). The fullness of God is said to dwell in Him (Col 1:19; 2:9).

⁸Andreas J. Kostenberger in *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1999), 51.

⁹Although John’s usage of the *Logos* is limited to the first chapter of his Gospel, there are other phrases that are employed by John throughout his Gospel that supplement this term. For example, John’s Gospel famously records the “I am” (Gr. *ego eimi*) statements of Jesus. Brown (pp. 533-535) notes that there are three types of uses of this phrase in the fourth Gospel, including (1) the absolute usage with no predicate (8:24; 28; 58; 19) (2) the usage where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed (6:20; 18:5) and (3) the usage with a predicate nominative (5:35, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25). It is most likely that the Johannine use of *ego eimi* without the predicate is associated with the divine name of God in the Old Testament. See Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 533-35.

and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” This particular passage elucidates rather clearly that Jesus, the Son, is not a created, ontologically subordinate being to the Father. Rather, Jesus is the “image” of God insofar as He personally represents and manifests the Father to the world, contra Arius who held that Jesus was the created creator, the term “firstborn” is better understood as having reference to privilege rather than birth.¹⁰ Jesus is not the firstborn part of the whole creation, but as the NIV correctly translates, He is the “firstborn over all creation.” Thus, Jesus maintains a position over and above creation, a place of absolute preeminence.

- Furthermore, Genesis 1:1 indicates God (the Father, presumably) is responsible for the creation of the world. However, in Colossians 1:16 Paul indicates that “all things” were created “by him (the Son).” Richard Melick states concerning the matter, “Theologically, a clear distinction is to be made between the work of the Father and the Son. The Father, of course, has a significant relationship to creation. He is presented as the architect; he determined to bring it into existence. The Son, Jesus, actually brought the plans into existence. The Spirit, finally, does the actual work of applying the plans in a hands-on relationship to creation.”¹¹
- Since, therefore, the collective witness of Scripture posits the existence of one God who created all things, it is logical to conclude from Genesis 1:1 and Colossians 1:16 that the Father and the Son are equal in essence and power, yet maintain differing roles with respect to the creation. In context, Paul’s simple point is to highlight the supremacy of the Son in general, and His role in the creation event in particular; but in doing so he likewise highlights the equality of the Son with the Father and makes a significant contribution to trinitarian theology.
- Various Scriptures are used to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son. Perhaps the clearest passage is located in Acts 5:3-4. Here the Scriptures indicate that Ananias and Sapphira sold some of their property and received the proceeds, yet withheld their earning while claiming to have given it away. Peter responded by saying, “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? ⁴ 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). Peter indicates that lying to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God.

¹⁰This is confirmed by the LXX, where passages as Exod 4:22 and Jer 31:9 stress privilege rather than birth.

¹¹Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 217.

- Accordingly, Hebrews 9:14 states that “Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” is the means by which the believer’s conscience is purified. According to this passage, the “eternal Spirit” empowered Jesus in both his life and his atoning death on the cross. Ware notes, “The Spirit that worked within Him all through His life empowered Him to obey the Father and go to the cross. This was God’s work in Christ, and it was accomplished in Him by the eternal Spirit.”¹² This evidence led the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus), along with countless other believers, to the scripturally informed conclusion that the Holy Spirit, along with the Father and Son, is fully God.
- While numerous other passages can be cited, the ones outlined above serve to demonstrate that the biblical authors viewed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as fully divine. In short, the doctrine of the Trinity posits the eternal existence of three equal persons (Gk *hypostasis*) who each share in the one undivided essence. Therefore Paul is able to say, “May God be with you” by offering a trinitarian benediction in these words, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14).

III. Key Terms

- **Person:** A term used in reference to the distinct, personal qualities of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.
- **Ontological Equality:** A term used in reference to identify the sameness and equality of nature concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **Immanent Trinity:** A term used in reference to the existence of God apart from the world.
- **Economic Trinity:** A term used to describe how the persons of the Trinity relate to the world/created order.

¹²Ware, *Father Son and Holy Spirit*, 39.

APPENDIX 3

SECOND SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Review

II. Historical Development of the Trinity

- A careful examination of the early church era demonstrates that the doctrine of the Trinity did not develop in a vacuum. The theological and religious climate of the first century AD, which included Roman polytheism on the one hand, and Jewish monotheism on the other, provided the soil from which the doctrine of the Trinity grew. Of course, the raw data for this doctrine was scattered throughout and firmly established in both the Old and New Testament documents in varying degree and frequency, but a fully developed understanding of the Trinity would take years to develop due to various cultural and theological factors.
- In fact, the path from monotheism to biblical trinitarianism was not as simple as some suppose and was paved with numerous theological detours and exegetical dead-ends. The primary reason for this uneasy transition involved the theological and philosophical challenges that arose in attempts to understand and explain the nature of the Son and His relationship with the Father. There was no doubt in the mind of a first-century Jew that God the Father was fully and exclusively divine; but what about the Son and the Holy Spirit?
- From the first-century forward, numerous attempts were made to annunciate how monotheistic statements in Scripture could be reconciled with passages that seemed to imply the deity of both the Son and the Spirit. Further, many people wrestled with the nature of the Son's relationship with the Father. Is it personal in time and space only or is it eternal in nature? What is the nature of the Son's submission to the Father? Is the Son ontologically or functionally subordinate? These are questions that generations of post-apostolic theologians and philosophers wrestled with for generations.

III. Strides Toward Definition and Clarity

- During the era of **the post-apostolic fathers**,¹ the primary concern was maintaining a strict monotheism against the paganism of the day. And although there was a general consensus that Jesus Christ is divine, there was little if any attempt to explain the nature of His relationship with the Father.
- **The apologists**² were those who contributed to the doctrine of *Logos* Christianity. They were strict monotheists who sought to provide more intellectually stimulating arguments concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son. According to J. N. D. Kelly, fundamental to the apologists' theology was that "as pre-existent, Christ was the Father's thought of mind, and that, as manifested in creation and revelation."³ The nature of the Father's relationship with the Son is not personal per se, but is likened to the relationship between the mind and a thought that proceeds forth from it. Although the apologists may have undermined the personal nature of the Son and His relationship with the Father, Kelly states, "That the *Logos* was one in essence with the Father, inseparable in His fundamental being from Him as much as after His generation as prior to it, the *Apologists* were never weary of reiterating."⁴
- **Tertullian** contributed to the trinitarian discussion in numerous ways. By coining the term "Trinity" (*trinitas*) and referring to the Son and Spirit as "persons," Tertullian provided helpful, clarifying language that would be used up to the present day. By evoking notions of both plurality and personhood, these terms established philosophical and theological barriers to modalism.⁵ The fact that the equally divine persons can be ordered (first, second, and third) establishes the simultaneous, triadic nature and revelation of God. Moreover, in keeping with the language of Irenaeus, Tertullian stressed God's actions in the "economy" of creation, redemption, and revelation, thereby elucidating the distinct roles and functions of the divine persons. The implications are enormous: God is one, yet eternally and distinguishably three as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Up until the middle of the third century AD, there was some suggestion of subordination within the Trinity. Alongside **Justin Martyr** who advocated the belief that Jesus is a second God, worshipped in secondary rank was the position

¹J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 90-94. Here, Kelly cites Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Papias.

²Ibid., 97-99. Kelly cites Justin Martyr, Quadratus, Aristides, Tatian, and Athenagoras.

³Ibid., 95.

⁴Ibid., 101.

⁵Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 101.

advanced by Origen who viewed the Trinity as a membership of hierarchal order. However, in contradistinction to Justin and Tertullian who taught that the Father generated the Son and Spirit just before creation, **Origen** believed that the Son and the Spirit are generated eternally.⁶ It may be rightly argued that both attempts toward trinitarian development were influenced by the desire to combat polytheism and to preserve monotheism within the Christian faith. Although Origen may be faulted for his doctrine of subordination, he led a clear path in trinitarian thought that logically distinguished the members of the Godhead.

- Furthermore, the third-century movement known as **Sabellianism** stressed the unity of the Godhead to an extent that precluded the simultaneous existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Philip Schaff notes the essence of Sabellianism, “While the other Monarchians confine their inquiry to the relation of Father and Son, Sabellius embraces the Holy Spirit in His speculation, and reaches a Trinity, not a simultaneous Trinity of essence, however, but only a successive Trinity of revelation.”⁷ In Sabellius’ view, God does not subsist of three eternally distinct persons; rather the one God reveals Himself to the world in three distinct manifestations (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Jesus was a manifestation, or mode, of God who, although possessed all the qualities of God-ness, did not exist as an eternally distinct person alongside the Father and Holy Spirit.
- While the errors of Sabellius were egregious enough, the most destructive view concerning the nature of the *Logos* is seen in the theology of **the Arians**. In the beginning of the fourth-century, Arius (AD 256-336), a presbyter in Alexandria, clashed with Bishop Alexander over the issue of whether or not the *Logos* is co-eternal with God. Unfortunately, there are very few extant original sources that retain the words of Arius. However, Athanasius (AD 297-373) provides extremely relevant data concerning Arius and his beliefs. In his first of *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Athanasius quotes from the *Extracts from the Thalia of Arius* and cites Arius’s words concerning the Father and Son, “God was not always a Father; but once was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards He became a Father. The Son was not always; for, whereas all things were made out of nothing, and all existing creatures and works were made, so the Word of God Himself was made ‘out of nothing, and once He was not.’”⁸
- The implications are clear: Jesus was created by the Father and became a son to Him. His son-ship, therefore, is not eternal, but rather temporal. Athanasius wrote in response, “Whence then this your discovery? Why do ye, as ‘the heathen, rage,

80. ⁶Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Zondervan, 2006),

⁷Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 2:581-83.

⁸Saint Athanasius, *Select Works and Letters*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 4:308.

and imagine vain phrases against the Lord and against His Christ?’ For no Holy Scripture has used such language of the Saviour, but rather ‘always’ and ‘eternal’ and coexistent always with the Father.’ For ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’⁹

- **Athanasius** insisted that the Son is *homoousios*; Christ possessed the identically same nature as the Father. His preexistence does not merely precede the created order, but is eternal in nature and essence. Moreover, although the compromised position of *homoiousios* party led by Eusebius of Caesarea gained some support at Nicaea, the majority followed the *homoousios* view and Athanasius’s position won the day. It is reported that all but two bishops signed the creed.
- The conclusion of the council resulted in **the Nicene Creed** which states in part, “We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance (*ek tes ousias*) of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of the same substance with the Father (*homoousion to patri*), through whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth” After much debate, turmoil, and dissension, the church had in her possession a definitive creed concerning the Son’s relationship to the Father. Later in AD 381 at **the Council of Constantinople**, a consensus was reached concerning the Holy Spirit that He too is co-eternal and co-equal. Although the biblical data speaks clearly enough, these creeds contained specific, explicit statements concerning the nature of God that have been cited and recited for over fifteen-hundred years.

⁹Ibid., 313.

APPENDIX 4

THIRD SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Review

II. Jesus' Plea for Church Unity

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” (John 17:20-23)

- This passage, along with others (Matt 3:16-17; Matt 26:39-42; Luke 23:34), rule out the modalistic assertion of a successive rather than simultaneous Trinity as Jesus is clearly presented as a distinct person from the Father. Such distinction is not merely temporal, but extends to include “the glory” Jesus had with the Father “before the world existed.” (John 17:5)
- Jesus’ desire for unity among believers is expressed in the phrase “may all be one.” Interestingly, the analogy given by Jesus for such oneness and unity is related directly to the Father being “in” Jesus and Jesus being “in” the Father.¹ Although distinct in personhood, the Father is “in the Son”² in the sense that He is the one working through Jesus in word and deed (John 14:10) during His earthly ministry. Yet, the Son (*Logos*) was the one who was with God in the beginning (1:1) acting as the agent of creation (Col 1:16). While He may be viewed as being

¹Jesus also defends His oneness with the Father in John 10:30, and 14:6-11, 20.

²Beginning in the sixth century AD, the term *perichoresis* began to be used in order to explain how the members of the Trinity may be “in” one another. Alister McGrath, states concerning this term, “The concept of *perichoresis* allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of ‘a community of being,’ in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the other and is penetrated by them.” (Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 64). Noteworthy is the fact that the historical and theological development of this concept was made possible in light of a *homoousios* understanding of the persons of the Trinity in general and the eternal, undivided essence of the Trinity in particular.

“with” the Father before the world was created, the Father was “in” the Son, and the Son was fully submitted to the Father. Thus they may be viewed as distinct persons who assume differing roles with respect to the creation act and to the created order; yet they are one in nature, intent, and purpose. Carson notes, “The Father and the Son are distinguishable (the pre-incarnate Word is ‘with’ God, 1:1; the Son prays to His Father; the Father commissions and sends, while the Son obeys), yet they are one.”³

- Further, Jesus prays that believers will be brought to unity as a result of the glory given to them. Particularly, in John’s gospel the glory of God is seen in the incarnate Christ (1:14; 2:11; 11:40). In the case of the wedding at Cana, Jesus’ glory is clearly seen in the miracle he performed of turning water into wine. In the case of Lazarus, God’s glory is revealed in the Son through the miracle of resurrection. John also presents Jesus’ *dóxa* as something yet to be revealed, most specifically in his cross-death (John 7:39; cf. 12:23; 13:31; 16:14),⁴ but also in the resurrection which was “the mighty act of God par excellence.”⁵
- In each instance above, the glory of God, which involves a revelation of his being and nature, is made known through Jesus’ words and deeds. The Father and Son are not at odds in this enterprise, but share equally in the glory and the subsequent praise that is given. Moreover, the oneness of the Father and the Son, along with the glory they share and mediate, serves as an appropriate foundation for the oneness that believers are to experience with one another.

III. A Plea from Paul

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
(Philippians 2:1-4)

³D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 568.

⁴Jan van der Watt insightfully writes, “Glory is defined in terms of the cross-events, while the cross-events are again described in terms of glorification. It should be noted that the lexicographical potential of the word *δοξα* does not include the meaning of ‘cross’ or ‘cross-events’; neither does John link glory and cross syntactically. The link between cross and glory is in each case contextual” (Jan van der Watt, “Double Entendre in the Gospel According to John”). The author provided me a copy of this article, without indicating a date or publisher. Van der Watt, a highly respected European scholar, served as my supervisor during previous doctoral work.

⁵Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 504.

- Interestingly, the appeal of verse one finds its basis in the Philippian's trinitarian experience of God.⁶ In Paul's view, encouragement, comfort, affection, and sympathy are qualities that, if present, flow forth from the Philippian's new life in Christ and their participation in the Spirit. Bruce notes, "From His (Christ's) risen life they draw encouragement and strength, for they participate in it. They have received the Spirit of Christ, binding them together in a fellowship of love; He dwells within them both as individuals and as a company of believers."⁷
- If they received encouragement, it resulted from being in Christ while suffering (1:29-30). If they received comfort, it resulted because of their experience of the love of God (presumably). And if they experienced any participation (or "fellowship with") with the Spirit, it resulted because of the antecedent activities of God through the Son. Thus, Paul provides the Philippian community with, at the very least, a binitarian framework (Christ and Spirit) from which to form a unified congregation.
- While Paul was already joyful over the Philippian congregation (1:4), his desire is that they complete his joy by "being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (2:2). Moreover, a vital component to achieving such oneness involves doing nothing out of "selfish ambition" or "conceit," but in humility the Philippians are to consider others more significant than themselves (v. 3), by looking to each other's interests (v. 4). Paul grounds his desire (vv. 3-4) in the example set by Christ. He writes,

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. (2:5-8)

- Paul's desire is that the Philippians assume a mindset that is available to them in light of Christ's example. Christ was "in the form of God," but "did not count equality with God something to be grasped" (v. 6). Gordon Fee notes concerning the term "form":

Since *morphe* can denote 'form' or 'shape' in terms of both the external features by which something is recognized and the characteristics and qualities that are essential to it, it was precisely the right word to characterize both the reality (His being in God) and the metaphor (His taking on the role of a slave).⁸

⁶Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 83.

⁷F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 11 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 61.

- Inherent to the meaning of the phrase “in the form of God” is the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ.⁹ He possessed the qualities of God-ness and attributes of Godlikeness before the world was created (John 1:1), yet did not consider this high position something to be *harpagmos* (to “seize, steal, snatch, take away”¹⁰). That is, Christ did not seek to “grasp” equality with God, but instead He “emptied Himself” of His exalted status by assuming the role of a slave.¹¹ Christ did not empty Himself of divinity or Godlikeness, but rather poured out His life in humility by taking on “human form” and by dying a criminal’s death on a Roman cross. The corollary of such humiliation is Christ’s exaltation by the Father and the reception of the name that is above every name (2:9).
- The trinitarian nature of this passage provides a foundation for ecclesiastical unity and like-mindedness. Christ, who is the divine and eternal *Logos* who is co-equal with the Father (John 1:1), surrendered His rights and kingly status in obedience to God, for the good of the world. The implications are clear: if Christ, the one through whom all things were created (Col 1:16), humbled Himself in this manner, then His disciples should follow suit with the same attitude. Believers are called to surrender and lay aside rights they would otherwise enjoy for the sake of Christ and the good of His Body, the Church. To the degree this occurs, the local Body of Christ will consist of a membership that, although not in complete agreement in every area and on every topic, is unified and like-minded in daily and congregational life.

IV. Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- In what practical ways would your marriage improve if you modeled Jesus’ example of humility?
- In what practical ways would your relationship with other people change if you actively sought after their interests before your own?
- With Philippians 2:1-4 in mind, what is the primary purpose of spiritual gifts?

⁸Fee, *Philippians*, 93.

⁹Bruce notes that “possession in the form implies participation in essence” (Bruce, *Philippians*, 68).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹Bruce states further that “the point is that [Christ] did not treat His equality with God as an excuse for self-assertion of self-aggrandizement; on the contrary, He treated it an occasion for renouncing every advantage or privilege that might have accrued to Him thereby, as an opportunity for self-improvement and unreserved self-sacrifice.” Bruce, *Philippians*, 69.

- Why do you believe Jesus' example of humility is difficult for believers to follow?
- How does humility promote unity?

APPENDIX 5

FOURTH SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Review

II. Examination of “Problem Passages”

- John 14:28
- Colossians 1:15-16
- Matthew 3:11
- Mark 13:32
- Acts 10:38

III. Overview of Popular Anti-Trinitarian Religions

- Mormonism
- Jehovah’s Witnesses
- United Pentecostalism
- Islam

IV. Questions for Reflection

- Why is difficult for some people to explain the doctrine of the Trinity?
- Why do many Christians avoid sharing their faith with those of other faiths?
- What are the implications of viewing Jesus, the Son, as a created being?

APPENDIX 6

FIFTH SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Review

II. Integration and Application of Trinitarian Principles

- The Triune nature of God is articulated and expressed through mankind. “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.” (Gen 1:26-27)
- It may be argued that unity within the church begins with a clear understanding of the equality that exists between a man and a woman who are both made in the “image of God” (Gen 1:26-27). That is, the image of God is impressed upon each sex, both male and female, without discrimination. Neither party may claim a greater degree of God-likeness than the other, nor may they boast of a higher degree of glory. They are fully equal in this regard.
- It is in the vein of male/female equality that the theme of oneness and unity become functionally apparent. Interestingly, the first instance of covenantal unity occurred subsequent to the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib. Moses states in Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Bruce Waltke notes concerning the implications of this verse, “God’s intention that marriage be monogamous is implied the complete unity and profound solidarity of the relationship.”¹ Robert Andrews expounds further, “Jesus quotes this verse in his discussion with the Pharisees on the subject of divorce. Paul then quotes it twice in his epistles, once when discussing the one-flesh relationship of a husband and wife as parallel to Christ’s relationship to the church, and once, surprisingly enough, as a reason to abstain from sex with a prostitute.”² Thus, concepts such as oneness, exclusivity, and unity are part and parcel of God’s design for the marriage covenant.

¹Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 90.

²Robert Andrews, *The Family: God’s Weapon for Victory* (Rice, WA: Sentinel, 1995), 61.

- However, notwithstanding qualities of equality and oneness, each person is responsible for different roles within the marriage. The wife, who is in no way inferior to her husband, is a helpmate to him (Gen 2:20) and is called to submit to him as her head (Eph 5:22). The husband is called to love his wife and cherish her in a manner that reflects Christ's love for the Church (Eph 5:25). Such love refuses to "grasp" (*harpagmos*) certain rights and privileges (Phil 2:6-7), but is humble and accepting of lowly service and care. Furthermore, Peter reminds husbands that they are to live with their wives "in an understanding way" and to honor them as the "weaker vessel" (I Peter 3:7).
- While the above principles are straightforward enough, an appropriately nuanced manner, an ontologically equal, functionally subordinate Trinity of persons provides an expanded basis for both authority and equality within the marriage covenant.³ For the husband to lead is for him to be like God. For the husband to love is for him to be like Jesus. For the wife to submit to her husband is for her to be like the Holy Spirit. For all believers to be humble is for them to be like Christ in attitude and action. To experience oneness in the midst of diversity and distinction is to be utterly reflective of trinitarian life. When modeled in a biblical fashion, marital authority and submission provides intimacy and oneness that is patterned after the triune God. Moreover, husbands and wives who fulfill their God-ordained roles within the home provide both a foundation and example for the genre of unity that is to be modeled by members within the church.

III. Practical Implications

- Male and female, husband and wife bear God's image equally (Gen 1:26-27).
- Insofar as the nature of man is concerned, neither male nor female is superior.
- However, God's design involves functional distinctions in roles and responsibilities (Gen 2:20).
- The husband is the head of the home, but his leadership must involve a love that is patterned after Christ's love for the church (Eph 5:25).
- Notwithstanding, the wife is commanded to respect her husband as the head of the home (Eph 5:22-23) and the leader of his family.

³Not everyone agrees that a biblical case can be made for functional subordination as a model for submission in gender roles. Kevin Giles states, "[n]o one before 1970 had ever spoken of *eternal* role subordination, and orthodoxy has never endorsed the eternal subordination of the Son of God in work, operations, functions, or authority that can somehow be accepted without compromising ontological equality. . . . Historic orthodoxy has always insisted that if the Son is eternally subordinated in his works/operations/functions or authority then he must be ontologically subordinated and vice-versa" (Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelical Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 38-39, 58).

IV. Church Government

- In recent times there has been a surge in the amount of literature that views female submission in any context as outdated at best and unethical at worst. Of course, such an attitude is expected in the secular arena,⁴ but certain theologians within Christianity have encouraged feministic impulses that essentially ignore or reinterpret biblical imperatives concerning female submission. Anne Clifford summarizes feminist sentiment succinctly, “All Christian feminist theologies share a distinguishing principle: patriarchy and androcentrism in their many forms conflict with a faith in God whom Christian revelation proclaims to be love itself.”⁵ Clifford’s hermeneutic assumes at the outset that the logical corollary of complementarian theology is the secondary ranking of women. However, a careful, unbiased inspection of the biblical data reveals that nothing could be further from the truth.
- Surprising to some, the doctrine of the Trinity provides the proper foundation for the roles of both men and women, equally. It has been suggested by some theologians that I Corinthians 11:3 is one of the clearest examples of male headship patterned after the triune nature of God.⁶ Paul states, “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” Ware notes in response, “Role relations between men and women, generally, and role relations in the church, particularly, are important according to Paul because they are meant to reflect the more ultimate realities of Christ’s headship over mankind, and the Father’s headship over Christ.”⁷
- Such headship is most clearly demonstrated in the context of the ancient practice of head-covering. Apparently some women in the Corinthian congregation prayed and prophesied without proper head covering (11:4-7), which likely involved

⁴Gareth Morgan states, “Organizations often segment opportunity structures and job markets in ways that enable men to achieve positions of prestige and power more easily than women. It is sometimes called the ‘glass ceiling’ effect. Women can see opportunities at the top of their organizations, but the path is often blocked by gender bias” (Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006], 186).

⁵Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (New York: Orbis, 2005), 30.

⁶Michael Reeves states eloquently concerning headship: “The shape of the Father-Son relationship (the headship) begins a gracious cascade, like a waterfall of love: as the Father is the lover and the head of the Son, so the Son goes out to be the lover and the head of the church. ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,’ the Son says (John 15:9).” Reeves continues, “That dynamic is also to be replicated in marriages, husbands being the heads of their wives, loving them as Christ the Head loves his bride, the church. He is the lover, she is the beloved. Like the church, then, wives are not left to earn the love of their husbands; they can enjoy it as something lavished on them freely, unconditionally and maximally” (Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012], 28).

⁷Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 148.

allowing their hair to flow down the back instead of wearing it in a bun.⁸ For a woman to allow her hair to flow down in this manner inevitably conveyed sexual availability, which is antithetical to the marriage covenant in general and to the practice of marital submission in particular.

- Conversely, by covering their heads, the women in Corinth demonstrated their submission to the male leaders within the home and the church. Thomas Schreiner notes that, “Women can pray and prophesy in public, but they must do so with a demeanor and attitude that supports male headship because in that culture wearing a head-covering communicated a submissive demeanor and feminine adornment.”⁹ Thus, the authority structure provided in 11:3, along with Paul’s command for female head-covering in public worship (11:4-7), provides ample evidence of the God-ordained pattern of submission that is to exist between men and women, husbands and wives.
- Confirmation of the proper authority structure is located in I Timothy 3:1-7. Although Paul does explicitly state that elders must be men, the concept of male leadership is clear enough given the context of I Timothy 3:1-7. The primary evidence involves Paul’s repetitive use of masculine term “he,” along with the actions and qualities that follow (e.g., “He must manage,” “He must not be,” “He must be thought well of”). The same pattern is also seen in Titus 1:5-9.
- Likewise, Paul states in I Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” Paul’s statement does not mean that women have no role whatsoever in the life of the local church, or that they are secondary in rank of quality. Women may disciple and teach other women as men disciple and teach other men. They may also prophesy, pray, and perform a wide variety of administrative functions that are extremely valuable to the local church. Rather, since women are not entrusted with the role of headship, they may not preside in an authoritative position that involves governance over or the teaching of men.
- Moreover, the trinitarian implications are clear: Just as there is equality in essence between the divine persons, so there is equality in essence between male and female. However, as the Son submits to the Father’s headship, women are called to submit to their husbands who lead the home and to the male elders who lead the local church. Accordingly, just as there is functional distinction in role within the divine triadic community, so is there functional distinction between believers within the ecclesiastical community. And just as the members of the Trinity are

⁸Thomas Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 125-26.

⁹Ibid., 132.

unified, so the believers in the local church may be unified when God-ordained roles are recognized and biblical submission is practiced.

V. Questions for Reflection

- In your view, how convincing is the male-eldership argument?
- Why do you believe churches are divided on the issue of gender roles?
- In your view, what is the catalyst behind feminism in America?
- What is the most effective manner to help someone overcome an offense concerning this issue?
- In what ways can the leadership of the church work to value women and cultivate their gifts and talents?

APPENDIX 7

SIXTH SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Review

II. Exegesis of I Corinthians 12:1-11

III. Point of Unity/Disunity: Spiritual Gifts

- On the one hand, many evangelical Christians are convinced that the miraculous gifts have ceased. This group typically views modern-day claims of miraculous, pneumatic activity as delusional and counterfeit.¹ On the other hand, certain charismatics accuse cessationists of assuming the role of modern-day Pharisees.² Thus, the most common tendencies concerning this controversial issue include abuse or abstinence, optimism or skepticism, with the inevitable corollary of division and disunity among member of the Body of Christ.
- While attempting to reconcile the differences that exist concerning the gifts of the Spirit is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to address how a robust view of the triune nature of God can serve to unite those who stand in theological opposition to one another and to correct abuses that occur. Although the Spirit is co-equal with both the Father and Son, his primary task involves assisting in carrying out the work of the Father and bringing glory to the Son (John 8:28-29; Acts 10:38; John 16:12-14, respectively).³ Thus, the Spirit does not maintain a position in the spotlight, nor does he desire to bring glory to Himself. Rather, he

¹In his highly controversial treatment of the charismatic movement, John MacArthur addresses claims concerning the modern-day operation of spiritual gifts. He writes concerning the gift of tongues in particular, “I am convinced by history, theology, and the Bible that tongues ceased in the apostolic age. And when it happened, they terminated altogether. The contemporary charismatic movement does not represent a revival of biblical tongues. It is an aberration similar to the practice of counterfeit tongues at Corinth” (John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 231).

²In his book, *Quenching the Spirit*, William DeArteaga offers a thoughtful analysis of the cessationist claims of John MacArthur, Dave hunt, Hank Hanegraaff, and others. Arteaga is of the opinion that many of the modern attempts to debunk claims of the miraculous are pharisaical in nature and guilty of quenching the Spirit. See William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit* (Orlando: Creation House, 1996), 16-26.

³Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationship, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 105-07.

assumes an invisible, backstage role characterized by support and help. Bruce Ware notes, “Amazingly, even though the Spirit has identically the same nature as the Father and Son, even though he is fully and equally God, yet he willingly accepts this behind-the-scenes position in nearly everything the triune God does.”⁴ Hence, in light of this reality, an obsessive, prolonged focus on the work(s) or gifts of the Spirit is unbiblical and misguided. An authentic work of the Spirit never occurs merely for the sake of the Spirit or for the one in possession of a particular gift, but ultimately for the glorification of the other members of the Trinity.⁵

- Insofar as the local Body of Christ is concerned, Paul views the work of the Spirit as provoking a unifying, rather than a dis-unifying effect. He writes, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone (I Cor 12:4-6).” Gordon Fee notes that the diversity present in the Corinthian community “reflects the nature of God and is therefore true evidence of the work of the one God in their midst.”⁶ In fact, Paul states that the manifestation of the Spirit occurs for the “common good,” which is most presumably the good of the entire church community (12:7).
- Obviously, a congregation divided over which gifts are presently available will fail to promote and experience the “common good.” Therefore, each local church must decide which gifts they believe are available today and establish guidelines for their operation. Although not every gift will be manifest in every congregation, the ones that do manifest serve to remind the members of the nature of God and His intentions for their community. As this occurs, the church may in fact experience unity and rejoice over the presence of the Spirit in their midst.
- The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that, although believers possess differing gifts and maintain differing convictions, they can be unified within the context of the local church community. One congregation may be convinced the gifts have ceased, while another congregation may be convinced of their present-day

⁴Ibid., 104.

⁵ In his own era, Jonathan Edwards strove to understand and discern what constituted an authentic work of the Spirit. His treatment of the issue may be considered prophetic in nature, for many of the “signs” that occurred in eighteenth century reappeared with greater intensity in the twentieth century. For Edwards, the sign of divine authenticity lies *first* in esteem for the historical person and work of Christ. Edwards writes, “When the operation is such as to raise their esteem of that Jesus who was born of the Virgin, and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; and seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of that the Gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God, and the Savior of men; it is a true sign that it is the true and right Spirit” (Jonathan Edwards, *The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards*, [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005], 2:266).

⁶Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 41.

continuation. One member may possess the gift to teach, while another member may possess the gift of hospitality (Rom 12:3-8). One person may be empowered by the Spirit with wisdom, while another may be equipped with the gift of prophecy (I Cor 12:6-10).

- Whatever a person's convictions and gifts are, Jesus' prayer to the Father (Jhn 17:20-23) serves to demonstrate that distinction in personhood does not preclude unity of brotherhood. Believers are commissioned by Jesus to be unified in a manner that mirrors and reflects his relationship with the Father. Since there is no belittlement of the roles and distinction within the life of the Trinity, there should be none in the life of the local church community. Just as each member of the Trinity esteems, and is esteemed by the others, so should members of the local church esteem one another. To the degree this occurs, the unity of the interior life of the Trinity is replicated in the exterior life of the local church.

IV. Point of Unity/Disunity: Worship

- Within Christianity there exists a wide variety of preferences and convictions concerning the style, nature, and content of worship,⁷ particularly as it pertains to the music incorporated into Sunday morning services.⁸ Some people are convinced that worship must involve singing hymns only, while others opt for a much broader spectrum that includes singing contemporary songs accompanied by a host of musical instruments. Accordingly, some people selectively opt for one person to lead the congregation in worship, while others prefer that a plethora of musicians lead the service. Some people believe that at least five worship songs must be sung, while others are permissive of a shorter musical selection.
- Moreover, many Christians have strong opinion concerning how worship must take place, but allow for different forms and expressions to take place within their own church context as long as parameters are set in place.⁹ But many believers

⁷Of course, biblical worship is much broader in scope involving every arena of life (Rom 12:1-2). Unfortunately, some contemporary Christian writers often state without qualification that worship primarily involves Sunday morning music. Notwithstanding, for the intentions of this project I have purposefully limited my focus to worship services with music style and song selection primarily in mind.

⁸George Barna notes accordingly that the "styles of music used in church services vary tremendously. Nearly half of all Protestant churches (46 percent) offer at least one service featuring traditional worship music-hymns and other tunes utilizing a choir, an organ or congregational singing of that music. Just as prolific is the number of churches (43 percent) using "blended" music - a combination of two or more different music styles within the same service. Less common styles used include rock or contemporary Christian (used in 24 percent of churches), praise and worship (in 8 percent of churches) and gospel (in 7 percent of churches)" ("Focus On 'Worship Wars' Hides the Real Issues Regarding Connection to God," The Barna Group, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/85-focus-on-qworship-warsq-hides-the-real-issues-regarding-connection-to-god> (accessed January 16, 2013).

⁹In these cases it is common that the elders of the church schedule various types of worship services that accommodate the preferences of the members. For example, at College Hills Church of Christ,

insist that any musical expression not in conformity to their conviction is deviant and unbiblical. In many of these cases, difference of opinion inevitably leads to a church-split.

- While the application of one solution will not likely solve this complex and controversial issue, the doctrine of the Trinity provides an objective foundation for authentic worship to occur in the lives of all believers. In his own day, Jesus entered into a worship-war when he encountered a woman from Samaria who held an inadequate view concerning the true nature of worship. The Samaritan woman states, “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship” (4:20). Jesus responds, “. . . the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (vv. 23-24). John Piper notes concerning the meaning of the phrase “in spirit and truth,”

I take ‘in spirit’ to mean that this true worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit and is happening mainly as an inward, spiritual event, not mainly as an outward, bodily event. And I take ‘in truth’ to mean that this true worship is a response to true views of God and is shaped and guided by true views of God.¹⁰

- In light of Jesus’ ministry and mission, geographical locations and external rites were no longer relevant (neither Gerizim nor Jerusalem). The relevant issue was objective worship grounded in the person and work of Jesus. As noted by Robert Letham, “[W]ith reference to ‘truth,’ do we have to look any further than John’s record of Jesus as the embodiment of truth (14:6), as the true light coming into the world (1:9), ‘full of grace and truth’ (1:14), who as a result brought grace and truth into this world (1:17)?”¹¹
- Moreover, worship is directed toward the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, on the basis of the Son’s revelation of truth.¹² Thus, worship is ultimately trinitarian in nature, trinitarian in scope, and trinitarian in outlook. The Son and

a church in Lebanon, Tennessee that has historically been known for their stance against musical instruments, the leaders decided to schedule two types of services: an acapella, hymn only worship service and a contemporary worship service that included modern worship songs and a full musical band. To date, the compromise has caused great unity to occur within the church and is being modeled in other Church of Christ congregations.

¹⁰John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 219.

¹¹Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 416.

¹²Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 155.

the Spirit work in conjunction with one another to provide believers with the truth and power required to worship God rightly. Ware notes accordingly, “Worship is deeply satisfying and correctly expressed to the glory of this triune God only after it is exercised within this trinitarian framework.”¹³

- The primary focus of the contemporary church, then, should not involve specific styles of worship or center around specific preferences of instruments. The primary focus should be ensuring that song selections and choice of instruments reflect a heart attitude that seeks to magnify the triune God. The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that differences in private and corporate expressions of worship are permissible insofar as the object of worship is God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the practical outcome will vary from congregation to congregation, the trinitarian framework outlined in this project should at the very least evoke a sense of renewed respect for the wide variety of expressions of worship that are present within the Body of Christ.
- Accordingly, the doctrine of the Trinity reminds believers that the nature of worship is deeply personal, yet is inextricably connected to and expressed within the community of believers. While worship is initiated from within the heart, it is designed to be expressed in the corporate life of the local church. Just as the divine persons experience unified communion within the Godhead, so must the people of God seek unified relationships with one another as they seek to worship the triune God.

V. Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Why do we typically relegate worship to Sunday morning music/songs?
- According to John 4, what is required for true worship to occur?
- What are the roles of the Son and Spirit in worship?
- In light of John 4, how should we address differences that exist concerning preferences in worship style and song selection? How are we to determine the correct approach to components of worship that the Bible does not address?
- How can the Sunday morning worship at our church become more Christ-centered?

¹³Ibid.

APPENDIX 8

SEVENTH SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Review

II. How to Handle Offense

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”
(Matthew 18:15-20)

III. Exegetical Analysis

- The three-fold approach to handling an offense
- The nature and consequence of each approach
- The meaning of “tell it to the church”
- The meaning of “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”
- The meaning of “binding”

IV. Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What do most people have the tendency to do when offended?
- Why does Jesus require that we approach the one who has offended us privately?

- What typically occurs when we neglect the Matthew 18 pattern?
- How does Matthew 18 practically promote unity in the church?

APPENDIX 9

EIGHTH SEMINAR HANDOUT

I. Review

II. Key Question: “What does God expect from members of his church?”

III. Key Terms/Doctrines

- Regeneration (John 3:1-5)
- Baptism (Matthew 28:19; I Corinthians 12:13)
- Church discipline (I Cor 5:12-13; II Cor 2:6)
- Agreement in matters pertaining to ministry philosophy and practice
- The mission/vision of the church

IV. Questions for discussion:

- How might a trinitarian membership model lead to exclusivity in matters pertaining to personal holiness, gender roles, the substance of worship, salvation through Christ alone, etc?
- How might a trinitarian model lead to a greater degree of inclusivity within the Body of Christ?
- How thorough should the membership process be? Should we require doctrinal questionnaires? How rigid should we be in terms of matters of holiness and purity?

V. Corporate and Personal Implementation

- Examine your life and prayerfully consider how to become a more effective promoter of unity within your marriage.
- Strategically consider how you can promote unity within the departments/ministries you lead at church.

- Consider how you can outwardly demonstrate a greater appreciation for people who possess different gifts than you.
- Examine your present relationships and consider if there are any unresolved offenses you need to address.
- Seek to apply insights and/or revelations you received in a prompt manner.
- Write down significant experiences and/or insights from the exercise and email them to Scott Adams (scott.adams@oscfamily.com).

APPENDIX 10

SPIRITUAL GIFT ASSESSMENT

Use the score sheet to rate each statement. Use a 4 for the statement that is most like you, a 3 for the statement that is often like you, a 2 for the statement that is occasionally like you, and a 1 for the statement that is least like you.

1. I like organizing services and events.
2. I enjoy starting new churches.
3. I enjoy working with my hands.
4. I can tell when someone is insincere.
5. I pray for the lost daily.
6. Encouraging others is a high priority in my life.
7. Believing God for our daily needs is important to me.
8. Influencing others for the kingdom of God through finance is important to me.
9. I look for opportunities to pray for the sick.
10. I enjoy doing the little things that others do not.
11. I enjoy having people come to my house.
12. I enjoy spending hours in prayer for other people.
13. Education is very important to me.
14. I tend to motivate others to get involved.
15. My heart hurts when I see others hurting.
16. I believe God will use me to enact His miracles.
17. I enjoy sharing the gospel with other people groups and nationalities.
18. I've devoted considerable time to mastering my voice and or instrument.
19. Caring for the hurting is paramount in my eyes.
20. The willful sin of others really aggravates me.
21. I enjoy serving behind the scenes.
22. I enjoy creating outlines of the Bible.
23. God has used me to interpret a heavenly language.
24. I enjoy the book of Proverbs more than any other book in the Bible.
25. I am passionate about managing details.
26. I prefer to pioneer new ministry projects.
27. I consider myself a craftsman or craftswoman.
28. I sense when situations are spiritually unhealthy.
29. I am greatly concerned about seeing the lost save.
30. I try to come across loving and caring.
31. Asking God for a list of big things is exciting to me.
32. I find ways to give offerings above my tithe.
33. I believe miraculous healing is for this day and age.

34. Helping others is one of my highest achievements.
35. Creating a warm and welcoming home is important to me.
36. I am burdened to pray for situations in the world.
37. People seek me out to learn more about the Kingdom of God.
38. I prefer to take the lead whenever necessary.
39. I'm very sensitive to sad stories.
40. Miracles often happen when I'm nearby.
41. Living in another country to benefit the gospel is exciting to me.
42. I desire to serve the church through worship.
43. I enjoy connecting, caring, and coaching others.
44. Confronting someone with sin in their life is not hard.
45. It bothers me when people sit around and do nothing.
46. I share Biblical truth with others in hopes of their personal growth.
47. I pray in tongues daily.
48. When I study scripture God gives me unique insights.
49. Creating a task list is easy and enjoyable for me.
50. I am attracted to ministries that start new churches.
51. Building something with my hands is very rewarding to me.
52. I can pinpoint issues or problems before others.
53. I enjoy sharing the gospel with a total stranger.
54. I look for ways to be an encouragement to other people.
55. I trust that God has my back in every situation.
56. Making more money means I can give more.
57. God has used me to bring healing to those who are sick.
58. Being a part of the process is fulfilling to me.
59. I tend to make total strangers feel at home.
60. People often describe me as a prayer warrior.
61. I enjoy knowing biblical details and helping others to understand.
62. I delegate responsibilities to accomplish tasks.
63. I am motivated to help those who are less fortunate.
64. I have a constant hunger to see God's miraculous power.
65. I focus a lot on reaching the world for Christ.
66. I gain my deepest satisfaction through leading others in vocal or instrumental worship.
67. I enjoy walking with someone in times of direst.
68. I enjoy hearing passionate and clear preaching of the truth.
69. I like to do small things that others pass over.
70. I prefer to teach the Bible topically rather than verse by verse.
71. Praying in the Spirit is encouraging and important to me.
72. When faced with difficulty I tend to make wise decisions and choices.

Assessment Totals

Score Sheet					Total	Gifts
1		25		49		A
2		26		50		B
3		27		51		C
4		28		52		D
5		29		53		E
6		30		54		F
7		31		55		G
8		32		56		H
9		33		57		I
10		34		58		J
11		35		59		K
12		36		60		L
13		37		61		M
14		38		62		N
15		39		63		O
16		40		64		P
17		41		65		Q
18		42		66		R
19		43		67		S
20		44		68		T
21		45		69		U
22		46		70		V
23		47		71		W
24		48		72		X

APPENDIX 11

POST-SEMINAR EVALUATION

Name: _____

Today's Date: ___ - ___ - ___

A survey of belief and practice

True or False

1. The Old Testament Scriptures teach that there is one God _____.
2. Paul uses the term "Trinity" in his epistles _____.
3. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are three gods _____.
4. Belief in the Trinity should not be considered essential for church membership _____.
5. The New Testament is not clear concerning the nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit _____.
6. The Holy Spirit is best understood as a "force" _____.
7. Belief in the full divinity of Christ is not essential for salvation _____.
8. Jehovah's Witness theology is compatible with orthodox Christianity _____.
9. When used in reference to the Trinity, the term "person" means "human-like" _____.
10. The doctrine of the Trinity is clearly taught in both the Old and New Testaments _____.

11. There is no human analogy that accurately describes the Trinity_____.

Short answer

12. Why is unity within the local church so important?

13. What is the scriptural foundation for unity within the church?

14. How does the doctrine of the Trinity apply in the local church?

15. What is your understanding of the role of women in the church? May they serve as elders/pastors? Why or why not?

16. What is your view concerning spiritual gifts? Are all the gifts in operation today? If so, how are they to be used? What is their purpose?

17. In your view, what is most biblical manner to worship in a Sunday morning worship service?

18. What is the purpose of church membership? What are the qualifications to become a member?

19. How is the church required to handle instances of unrepentant, gross sin in the life of one of its members?

20. On a scale from 1-10, cite your perception of the current state of unity at Our Savior's Church.

2	5	10
weak unity	moderate unity	strong unity

21. On a scale from 1-10, cite how important doctrinal unity is for the local church.

1	5	10
not important	somewhat important	very important

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AT OUR SAVIOR'S CHURCH, OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013
Chairperson: Dr. Bruce A. Ware

The purpose of this project was to equip members at Our Savior's Church with the knowledge of biblical trinitarianism for the purpose of creating a unified community.

The first chapter centers upon the ecclesiastical context in which unity is to be achieved. Attention is given to demographics, the church's history, and challenges that have arisen since the church's inception.

The second chapter provides biblical support and a theological foundation for ecclesiastical unity through the explication of the nature of the triune God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The third chapter addresses the how trinitarian concepts such as unity and diversity apply to marriage, church government, spiritual gifts, worship, and church membership.

The fourth chapter involves a detailed explanation of the implementation of the project which involves didactic instruction and personal and corporate application.

The fifth chapter concludes with an evaluation of the project's goals, along with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses the project's content and application.

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