“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

—John 1:1

The doctrine of the Trinity is a mathematical absurdity. Anyone who has progressed beyond the first grade ought surely to know that one plus one plus one does not equal one—that, indeed, one is not three and three are not one. Therefore, the idea of the Trinity should be rejected out of hand.

So states the literature of a certain odd cult. In so doing, the view is expressed of numerous disbelievers in the Trinity down through the centuries; it demonstrates that, as is usually the case, those who reject the Trinity do not understand it.

Christians have never taught that one plus one plus one equals one. If that were the case, our belief in the Trinity would be somewhat like a cherry pie which is divided into three equal pieces. One plus one plus one would then equal one pie. They are still in three pieces. That is not what we believe. We do not believe that the Father is a third of God, but that they are wholly God. This puts an entirely different light upon the matter, and the truth of the subject is: one times one times one does equal one.

Christians have never said that God is three in the same sense that He is one. He is one in His spiritual essence; He is three in the distinction of personalities within the Godhead. So, the sense in which God is one and the sense in which He is three are two entirely different aspects of His being. Therefore, there is no mathematical confusion or logical absurdity at all.

The doctrine of the Trinity is basic, primal, and fundamental to our understanding of the Christian religion. In fact, the doctrine of the Trinity is distinctive of the Christian religion and
sets it apart from all other religions in the world. Some pagan religions have held and worshipped a triad—for example, the ancient pagan Egyptian religion which worshipped Isis, Osiris, and Horus; or the modern Hindu variation which worships Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. But these are not trinities; they are triads. They are not, in essence, one. The only thing that they have in common with the trinity is the concept of threeness. But the Trinity is much more than a triad. The concept of trinity means a trinal distinction of three coexisting persons with an absolute unity and oneness of essence.

If we fail to understand the Trinity, we cannot possibly understand the Christian religion. In fact, a misunderstanding of the Trinity will inevitably distort every other doctrine of the Christian religion: we will be found grossly at fault in our understanding of the person and deity of Christ, of His incarnation, of His substitutionary atonement, of his resurrection, of the doctrine of justification by faith, and of all other similar doctrines.

The most fundamental questions that could be asked of any religion, philosoph, or science are these: Is there a God? What is He like? What relationship does He bear to His universe and, therefore, to me?

I am often surprised at the way some people describe their understanding of the Trinity. They have told me that the Trinity is like water which can be liquid, or solid, or gas. That is ancient heresy. It is not the biblical teaching of the Trinity, because the same water may not be at one and the same time liquid, solid, and gas.

Another concept likens the Trinity to a person depicted in three roles. For example, today I am a pastor. When I go home I will be a father. I may go to the polling booth and there I am a citizen. This, too, is an ancient heresy known as Sabellianism, or as it was more familiarly known, Modal Monarchianism (the modes of the monarch). God, the monarch, first appeared as the Father. Then He went behind the scene, changed His costume, and came out as the Son. He disappeared again and once more reappeared as the Holy Spirit, with an appropriate change of costume. The heresy involved in that view is that there is simply one person acting under different guises, in different modes, at different times.

But the doctrine of the Trinity states that in the one essence of the Godhead there eternally coexists three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of equal power and glory, and they are equally worshipped by Christians throughout all ages.

Is there any analogy in the physical world of the doctrine of the Trinity? In his book *The Secret of the Universe*, Dr. Nathan Wood points out that if God is a trinitarian being who is the Creator of the world, then we should expect that He would leave trinitarian fingerprints upon His creation. The amazing thing is that we live in this trinitarian universe and generally never see the fingerprints at all. So we are left to find little tiny supposed illustrations, like water, ice, and gas—or maybe an egg with its yolk, its white, and its shell—none of which is an illustration of the Trinity.

But there are analogies in the natural world. In fact, we live in a trinitarian universe. Ask a scientist what the universe is composed of, and he will tell you that it is made up of space, time
and matter; these three and no more. No universe exists which does not have all three. Furthermore, we see that each of these is, in its turn, trinitarian. Space is always comprised of height, length, and width. We imagine a two-dimensional figure in our minds, but it is impossible to produce it in the physical universe. Even a line on a piece of paper has three dimensions.

Or consider the matter of time. Time always exists of past, present and future; these three and no more. Furthermore, we might note that from our perspective, time can be all past. Someday when we come to the end of time we will look back and it will all be past. At the beginning of time it was all future. We may take the existentialist’s position from the present moment and say that all time is present; there is no tomorrow, only today. And so we see that time is also triune.

The same is true of matter. According to the scientific definition, matter consists of energy in motion producing phenomena, and always these three.

So instead of looking for some isolated little illustration somewhere to describe the Trinity, we find that the entire framework of the universe in which we live is Trinitarian. It bears the unmistakable fingerprints of the Triune God.

With that in mind, may we move to what the Scripture tells us about the doctrine of the Trinity. There have been distortions of the truth about God down through the ages that are, in effect, corrected by the Trinity. Dr. A. A. Hodge points out that the three major distortions of the concept of God have been these: Deism, Pantheism and Polytheism.

Deism, from the Latin word deus (God), is the concept that was popular at the foundation of this country. Deism is the idea that God created the world, wound it up like a clock, and then went away to sit upon a cloud and meditate somewhere. It emphasizes the concept of God’s transcendence, or separation, from the universe He made. Deism says that God is not involved in this world, God is not actively participating and cannot be seen and has nothing, basically, to do with it. That is an error.

Pantheism, on the other hand, comes from the word “pan’ which means “all” and theism, the Greek word for “god.” It means that all is God; the universe is God; the only God that exists is the universe, which is a continual evolving of God. The truth that is emphasized in Pantheism is the imminence of God—that God is very present in the universe. Of course, there are gross errors in Pantheism, as it also emphasizes that since the universe and everything in it is God, that God also is evil and evil is God, as well.

The third major distortion of the idea of God is the concept of Polytheism that says there are many gods. This is the common view among the heathen. They represent these gods in different images and statues and worship them because they seek something they might see and touch and handle.

All of these concepts have a certain truth. Yes, God the Father is transcendent; He is the Creator; He is above and beyond the universe and cannot be directly seen or touched by man or approached directly, apart from some intermediary. That is true. It is also true that God is present
in the world. The Holy Spirit is very much present in our world and is active in every single cell, in every single atom. Furthermore, the truth of Polytheism is that Christ in the sublimity of His incarnation came and provided something we can see, touch, handle and hold, as the apostles declared. The image of the invisible God is vastly superior to any polytheistic pagan concept of an idol. So the errors of the doctrines of God, as set forth in Deism, Pantheism, and Polytheism, are corrected in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Some say, however, “It is not the truth that there is one God, the Father, and the Son is just a created being? He is really an exalted man who was created at some point in time and the Holy Spirit is simply an impersonal force. He is the active force of God.” A number of cults hold to this view, which is another ancient error of the Trinity. This view is called Arianism after an ancient heretic by the name of Arius. He is popular in some cultic circles today. In fact, the distinguishing mark of cults is that all of them deny the Trinity. It is sad to see how many people who attend regular churches have never progressed beyond the view that Jesus is simply a created man.

Recently a gentleman asked: “How can Jesus be God when the Scripture says that he is the Son of God?” If the Scripture says Jesus is the Son of God, that must prove, according to this gentleman, that Jesus is not God! Let us take the same logic: Does not the Bible say Jesus is the Lamb of God? If Jesus is the Lamb of God, then certainly He must not be the Son of God. Does that follow? Of course not! If you say He is the Lamb of God, I will come back and say, “No. The Bible maintains that He is the Good Shepherd.” How can He be both the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God? Of course, He is. He is the door; He is the vine; He is the way, and the truth, and many other things that are equally true.

In fact, in Hebrews 1:8 the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son and that He is God is very clearly set forth in the same verse. First, God the Father speaks to angels and then He speaks to the Son. This is how God the Father addresses the Son: “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever” (Hebrews 1:8). In the same verse, Jesus is clearly seen to be the Son of God, and God the Son. This is simply a title for His being.

The reason many people have difficulty with this concept of sonship is because we take a Western meaning of sonship. We mean by sonship, derivation, inferiority, subordination. But the Scripture uses the term “sonship” in a Semitic sense meaning “likeness of essence; sameness.” The Bible says that Jesus is the express image of the Father. We talk about a son being the “spitting image” of his father. By this we mean that what the father is like, the son is like. And that is what the Bible means. If you want to know what the Father is like, look at the Son (. In John 14:9, Jesus said to Philip: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). So when Scripture speaks of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, it is not indicating that He is subordinate to the Father, but rather that He is like the Father. We find this truth taught over and over again in the Scripture.

All Christian worship is centered in this belief in the Trinity. We sing the doxology: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” Who is this God? I wonder how many of you sing it without realizing what you are singing. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above, ye heavenly host”… praise whom?… “Praise Father,
Son, and Holy Ghost.” We baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Ghost—the one and only true God who exists.

Others have asked, “Does not the Bible teach that the Father existed before the Son, and that at some point in time Jesus came into existence?” Not at all. Rather, we discover that Jesus Christ is eternal. In John 1:1 we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Do not allow cultists to tell you that this means the Word was a God, a little God. Polytheists believe in big gods and little gods. Though they say that is what the Greek text means, most of them could not read the Greek text if their life depended on it! I assure you that it means precisely what it says: “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ which became flesh], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” He was with God in the beginning: He has always existed.

You ask, “How can that be? If He is the Son, did He not have to come into existence at some time?” No, the Church has always taught that He has externally been generated. You ask how can that be. How can the Holy Spirit eternally precede the Father? Consider the sun in the heavens. The sun is always generating light and from it always precedes heat. Can you imagine a time when the sun in the heavens existed and did not produce light? Did the sun exist for millions of years and then begin to produce light and heat? Of course not. As long as he sun has existed, it has produced light and it has produced heat. As long as God the Father has existed, the Son has been eternally generated and the Holy Spirit has been eternally proceeding from the Father.

Furthermore, the Bible states explicitly, over and over again, that Jesus Christ is God. For example, Isaiah 9:6 says, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.” When Thomas met Christ after the Resurrection, Thomas said unto Him, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:20). In Acts, Chapter 20, we read of the Church of God that He purchased with His own blood. We see also that the Father refers to the Son of God in Hebrews 1:8. Over and over again, the Scripture explicitly refers to Christ as God.

Besides, all the attributes of deity are ascribed to the Father. As Bickersteth has well said: “Is the Father eternal? Well, so is the Son who is the same yesterday, today and forever.” In Micah 5:2 we read: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” The One born in Bethlehem is one who has been existing from everlasting. The Father is eternal and the Son is eternal.

Is the Father omnipotent? So, also, is the Son omnipotent. Nothing is too hard for Him. He can do whatsoever He will. He conquers death and all things. Is the Father immutable? So is Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Is the Father almighty? So is Christ who demonstrates his almighty power by creating all things. The Scripture says, “All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). Is the Father incomprehensible? Jesus said, “… no man knoweth the Son, but the Father . . . save
the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). So all the attributes that are ascribed to the Father are also ascribed to Christ.

What about the Holy Spirit? Is he God or is he not? In Acts 5:3 we read: “But Peter said, Ananias, Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost … thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” So the Holy Spirit is God. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force like gravity or magnetism but, rather, He is a person. He has will, He has intellect, He knows, He teaches, He guides, He leads, and He may be grieved. The Holy Spirit demonstrates all the attributes of personality and, indeed, is a person, as is the Father and the Son.

The Scripture plainly teaches the basic facts upon which the doctrine of the Trinity is based— that the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and there is one God.

But some wag might say, “But the word ‘trinity’ is not found in the Scripture.” That is quite true. The word was coined by Tertullian. And yet it is equally true that the words “substitutionary atonement” are not found in the Scripture. The word incarnation is not found in the Scripture. The words Sunday school are not found in the Scripture. The words foreign missions are not found in the Scripture. But they all represent great truths which are indeed taught in the Scripture, and those four facts I mentioned—that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each God and there is but one God—are, without doubt, incontrovertibly taught in the Holy Scripture.

May I point out also that this revelation of the Trinity was not something given out all at once, but was given over a long period of progressive revelation. As the great theologian Warfield put it: It is like a richly appointed living room or chamber furnished with beautiful couches, chairs, draperies, magnificent rugs, and paintings on the wall, yet totally without light. In that period before the Old Testament, the only light was that little bit that filtered in from the starlight and the moon, hardly making anything visible at all. Then in the Old Testament it was as if a single candle had been lighted and one began to make out some of the furnishings in the room. But still obscurity covered most and darkness prevailed.

Finally, we come to the New Testament and there a brilliant chandelier—the light of Christ—is turned on. We see that nothing is added in the New Testament. It has simply revealed what was already there in the Old, because it was, first of all, necessary that the Jews come to understand the unity of God in the midst of a polytheistic heathen world before the Trinity of God could be revealed.

Furthermore, it was not necessary that the Trinity be revealed until the actual execution of the plan of salvation. It was not until the Son needed to be set forth to provide propitiation for the sins of man and then return to the Father that they together sent forth the Holy Spirit to apply that redemption, to regenerate and sanctify men. Only then was it necessary to reveal the inmost secrets of the divine nature on the triunity of God.

The Trinity was revealed, not so much by words, but by acts and by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. We do not believe in the deity of Christ because we believe in the Trinity, but rather, we believe in the Trinity because we are convinced beyond any peradventure
of a doubt of the deity of Jesus Christ, who has conquered death and demonstrated himself to be God. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), said Peter.

If you do not believe the central teaching of Christianity that has been held by all branches of the historic Church of Christ, then you are left with simply a savior who is a created being, a creature. The Bible makes very clear the fact that everywhere Jesus accepted worship from men. In fact, when the Pharisees commanded Him to cause His followers to stop worshiping Him, He said, “I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40). Jesus received the worship of men. Yet the commandment says, “Thou shalt worship the lord thy God and him only shalt thy serve” (Luke 4:8). And yet the very same term proskunetes is used constantly for the worship which Jesus Christ received; and by definition, the worship of a creature is idolatry. If Jesus Christ is not God, then every Christian in the world is an idolater!

Last, if Jesus Christ is not God, then He is not your Redeemer. For the Bible makes it very plain that no man can give a ransom for his brother. What was needed was a divine Redeemer. As St. Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said nine hundred years ago: The sin of the world is an infinite sin and requires an infinite penalty, and who shall pay it? The Redeemer must be an infinite One.

Furthermore, it is man who has sinned—not angels, oxen nor sheep nor goats, and therefore, it is man that must pay the penalty. We must have an infinite Man, a divine Redeemer: the God-man, the theanthropos Jesus Christ, who came as a man to pay an infinite penalty for the sin of the whole world. It is only because of the infinite merit of the Atonement He made that there is hope for any one of us. Deny the Trinity and you deny any hope whatsoever of any atonement for your sin, and you are left of all men most miserable—yet in your sin.

May God grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may have a new vision of the glory, majesty, and excellence of the greatest concept of God that the mind of man could ever conceive. Not some lonely barren monotheism, but a full-fledged Triune God who has lived in infinite fellowship throughout all of eternity.

The Scripture makes it plain that the essence of God is love. Can you imagine a unitarian God, with no other persons in the Godhead, who existed before the creation of the universe, from all eternity, forever and ever and ever and ever, all alone, whose essence was to love with nothing to love? Not only would such an existence be eternally boring, but it would leave such a God, whose nature was love, eternally unsatisfied and frustrated, seeking an object for that infinite nature upon whom there was that outpouring of love throughout all eternity.

May God grant us a view of the infinitely moral and sublime concept of the Triune God that from the depths of our hearts we may say,

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him all creatures here below.  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”
PRAYER: Almighty God, we pray that Thou wilt by Thy Holy Spirit reveal Thyself in all Thy
glory and majesty unto us. May we not be left with a creature to worship, with a finite creature to
redeem us. We thank Thee for the Divine Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the infinite
penalty that Thou hast paid; for the satisfaction that Thou hast rendered for all of our sins. We
cast ourselves into Thy arms knowing that he that hath seen You hath seen the Father. In Thy
holy name. Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy on January 16, 1983, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in
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