

**SESSION FOUR: BEHOLDING THE BEAUTY OF TRINITARIAN RELEVANCE TO THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY**  
Bruce A. Ware, Professor of Christian Theology, Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

I. Introduction

There is one and only one God, eternally existing and expressed in three divine Persons. Each is equally God, and each is fully God—not three gods but three Persons, equal in essence while differing personal expressions of the one undivided and eternal divine nature. By *nature*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each is fully God, each is equally God, and each is eternally God, since each possesses fully the one and identically same infinite, eternal, and undivided divine nature. Yet each is distinct from the other divine Persons, not in nature, but in *relations and roles*. The Father is the eternal Father of the eternally begotten Son, while the Son is the eternally begotten Son of the unbegotten Father. In and through their distinctive relations are exhibited also distinctive roles. The Father is supreme in authority, the Son under the Father, and the Spirit under the Father and the Son – eternally *one in essence*, and eternally *distinct in relations and roles*. *What a marvel the Trinity of Persons is to behold!*

II. Relevance to our Lives at Home and in the Church

A. When we see the Trinity for what it is, we do indeed marvel! We marvel at the unity of their work, we marvel at their deep and abiding love for each other, and we marvel at the authority and submission relationship that works so smoothly and perfectly in accomplishing their common work. Unity of purpose and harmony of relationships, yet with differentiation in lines of authority and submission within the Godhead – this truly is a marvel to behold. And, it provides us with many lessons, many principles, for how our lives should be lived, as those created in the image of God. What lessons can we take away for our lives and churches? Consider the following:

B. Practical Relevance of the Trinity to our Lives

1. God intends that his very nature –yes! his triune and eternal nature – be expressed in our human relationships (Gen 1:26-28; 1 Cor 11:3). The pattern of equality of essence and differentiation in role that are manifest in the Trinity provide a profound and helpful lens through which to understand human relationships. The crowning act of creation was that of man, as male and female, made in the image of God. Here, too, we see, then, the pattern of equality of essence and differentiation of role replicated, as it were, in finite and human form. The ways in which God’s authority is exercised, and the ways in which God’s humility is expressed, are awe-inspiring, and so very instructive to our lives today.
2. Eternal relationality calls for, and calls forth, a created *community* of persons, not isolated individuals who exist in close proximity, but interconnected and interdependent relational persons in community. Recall the “Let Us . . .” of Gen 1:26 and marvel!

3. Marvel at the harmonious unity of relationships within the Trinity, when Father, Son, and Spirit each participate in their unique ways but do so with one common mission, one common purpose, cooperating fully, supporting each other in their various roles, to see those common goals met. We see here, then, a *unity that is not unison, a distinction that is not discord*.
  
4. Modeling Christian leadership after the Father's exertion of leadership is radical in at least two ways. 1) Here is leadership that seeks to use one's authority and power to design a structure in which others share in some of the most important aspects of the work done, and 2) the Father's leadership also designs that great honor and praise be given to Another/Others, not himself first and foremost, even though this praise ultimately redounds to his glory (e.g., Phil 2:9-11).
  
5. One of the most marked characteristics of the Trinitarian relationships is the presence of an eternal and inherent relationship of authority and submission. Authority and submission are good for they are expressive of God. That is, *it is as Godlike to submit with joy and gladness to rightful authority, as it is Godlike to exert wise and beneficial rightful authority*. Equality of essence does not conflict with distinction of roles. In God, and among us, both must be embraced and honored. Embrace rightful authority! Embrace rightful submission!
  
6. The primary God-ordained expression of equality of essence and distinction of roles is in male/female relationships. Marriage and church are the arenas where the world is to watch the nature of God played out in visible, physical form. Is it any wonder that male/female relationships are being assaulted so vigorously?

Trinitarian roles and marriage – equality of essence and distinction of roles (Gen 2; Eph 5:22-33)

7. Trinitarian roles and the church – equality of essence and distinction of roles (1 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:12ff)
  
8. Trinitarian roles and prayer – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each rightly related (Eph 2:18)

Normative Christian prayer is prayer to the Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Spirit. Simple, but profound! Christians should think consciously of the various relations and roles of the triune Persons in their lives of prayer. Yes, indeed, all three are Persons, and so one may rightly express one's heart to each of these divine Persons – much as the disciples of Christ spoke directly with him. But, the formal pattern of prayer

follows the *taxis* in the Trinity, and in so doing, there results both Christian understanding and Christian humility.

9. Trinitarian roles and worship – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each rightly related (Phil 2:9-11; 3:3).  
Because the Father and Spirit, both from different positions and angles, shine the spotlight on the Son, Christian worship is rightly centered on Christ. His sinless life, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection and ascension are the focus of our hope and life. Yet, the Spirit must be present in power for the worship of the Son to take place (1 Cor 12:3), and when the Spirit is a work in a worshiper or worshiping congregation, Christ is honored as Lord of all (John 16:14). Through the worship of the Son, however, Christian worship acknowledges that all that the Son did, he did in obedience to the Father, and to the glory of the Father (John 17:4). Christian worship must always bear in mind the ultimate glory that belongs to the Father, but which only comes to him through the exaltation of the Son (Phil 2:11).
  
10. The Christian Gospel is inexplicable apart from the Trinity.  
Both in the accomplishment of salvation itself – which requires God to be Triune if salvation is to happen – and in the application of those gospel truths to our lives, we must engage the Trinitarian Persons. That the Father elects, the Son redeems, and Spirit regenerates are all necessary aspects of the glorious saving work of the One God.
  
11. Christian Transformation occurs through the work of the Trinity.  
The Father wills our transformation and will bring it to pass (Eph 1:4; Rom 8:29-30; 1 Thess 5:23-24), and the Son accomplished all that is necessary for its accomplishment (Eph 5:25-27), and the Spirit empowers its progressive unfolding as he directs our attention to the Son, making us increasingly like him, “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18). Our hope of growth into the likeness of Christ is a hope founded on the Trinity, as all three Persons are fully engaged in bringing about our transformation.
  
12. Because God eternally exhibits equality of essence and diversity in role, we can know that this is good! God is good, his ways are good, and his design for human life and relationships are good. If we think we know better, it is we who are deceived and endangering our well-being. Look to God, and look at God, and see in him the model for the equality and differentiation built into human life.