
Your Questions about the Triune God

SCOTT HOEZEE

Here on *Groundwork*, we dig into scripture, and as a result of all that digging, each program gives out lots of information. We always hope that what any given episode talks about answers questions our listeners already have been asking, perhaps, about a given Bible passage. But once in a while, we like tackling the actual questions you listeners send in; and so, on this episode, we will look at some of those listener questions. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, as we just noted, our listeners' ideas and questions and suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs...they guide our topics all year long; and we appreciate people who send us emails, letters, Facebook messages. It helps to inform our blogs and our on-air content; but we do like to dedicate an episode or two every year to directly answering, on air, questions that we got; and today, we are going to have several questions, Darrell; and yet, we have kind of collected these because all of these questions that we have gotten in the last year are about the triune nature of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, it can be really tricky. Don't feel bad if you are a little confused by the doctrine of the Trinity, because, I mean, no one fully understands it. It has a mystery component to it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

However, God has revealed some things to help us to grasp what he is trying to get to us, condescending to our level, knowing our limitations; and this question...it says: Are Jesus and God one person? Scott, the Bible has been clear from the beginning to end that there is only one God. I mean, even in Isaiah 45:5, God says: I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. So, Christians don't believe in three gods; we don't believe that there is more than one God. The question is not whether God is one, but how does the oneness relate to us in the way scripture teaches about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that is the bigger essence of the questions being asked.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so the listener question is: Are Jesus and God one person? That is a vital question, as you just said. It was also a question that the early Church asked. You know, as we know, for the first few centuries of the Christian Church, there was a lot of persecution going on from the Roman Empire; and one of the results of that was the Church couldn't be very public, and believers had to gather in secret for fear of violence from Rome; but once the Emperor Constantine himself became a Christian believer...

DARRELL DELANEY

The fourth century...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the Church could come out of hiding; and so once believers and theologians and pastors started talking more openly about the Christian faith, they found out: Oh, they disagreed on some things. They had some things they had to figure out. One of the first big topics they had to figure out was the very nature of God. So, with some early councils, like the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 AD and the later Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, the Church really hammered out what we now call the doctrine of the Trinity.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, we had to understand the nature of the Godhead, and how do they function with one another. I mean, when Jesus walked this earth, he consistently related to God as his Father...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

In the way that he distinctively said it; and so, I mean, in John 17:1 he says: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your son may glorify you. And Jesus is not talking to himself. He is talking to another divine person of the Trinity; and the unity between them is so strong, he says: I and the Father are one. He does not say: I *am* the Father.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He says: I and the Father are one in essence, in purpose, in mission; and so, there is the distinction that Jesus makes in scripture there for Father and Son.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as you said, from a very famous verse in Deuteronomy 6: ⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Yes, we believe God in trinity, but we still believe in the oneness of God. We are still monotheists; but as any good Jehovah's Witness will tell you, the actual word *trinity* isn't in the Bible. So, where does it come from then? Well, they are right; the word *trinity* isn't in the Bible, but the building blocks for the doctrine of the Trinity are in there, and here is one very important building block: Matthew 28: ¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him...

Now, these are monotheistic Jews. They know that to worship anyone other than God is idolatry, and now they are worshiping Jesus, but we don't think it was idolatry.

DARRELL DELANEY

It definitely was not idolatry. I mean, it was actually a fulfillment of scripture for Jesus the Son to be glorified in this moment; and so, we see that he accepts worship, and he doesn't rebuke them for the

worship...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he also, in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, he says: All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me; therefore, go and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I commanded you. So, you see the doctrine of the Trinity's building blocks in the trinitarian language there, and you also see it in the epistles.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; here is Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1, the very beginning: Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. ²We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus [Christ]. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and deep conviction.

That is 1 Thessalonians 1. So, here we go. Paul treats Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as distinct persons within the one God we worship; and so now, we can directly answer the listener question we just started with: Are Jesus and God one person? And the answer is no. The Orthodox Christian faith as articulated in things like the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed make it clear that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons, but as you said, Darrell, their unity is so all-encompassing that they still only form one God.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing that you just mentioned there. I do want to go back to the gospels again, because in Luke 3, when Jesus is baptized, we see heaven opening, the Father's voice, and then the Spirit alighting on him like a dove in that moment; and the Father says: This is my Son whom I love and in whom I am well pleased. You have the Godhead right there in that moment. They are not all in one person, so to speak, but they are...the Godhead is right there in that moment. So, it is also the building blocks for the Trinity to show that they are distinct persons, but they are equal in essence and in mission. So, they go and that is what we teach.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and there are two equal but opposite errors on the Trinity that the Church has rejected. One is called modalism; and that lays the claim that God is only one person, but he plays different roles at different times. You know, that would be like saying: Well, one man is a husband and a father and a plumber...

DARRELL DELANEY

Actor, director, producer...yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the problem is he is still only one person. We need three persons for the Trinity. The opposite error you mentioned earlier is tritheism, that says that the Father is his own God, the Son is a separate God, the Spirit...we have three gods. No, we need three persons...we need one God. The Athanasian Creed was written to help keep pastors...early Church pastors...in line. They would memorize the Athanasian Creed, and it says there: We worship one God in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity; neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. For the Person of the Father is a distinct Person; the Person of the Son is another; and that of the Holy Spirit is still another; but the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one. Their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal.

So, we need the three distinct persons, but who together form only one God because their unity is that strong.

DARRELL DELANEY

In 1 John 5:7 it says: (paraphrased) There are three that testify, the water, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one. If you look down into the footnote there, it does say: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, a lot of people sometimes go to that verse to actually talk about the Trinity, because the word *trinity*, of course, we know it is not in there, but we still see that it is possible to talk about the Godhead.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as you said earlier, Darrell, there; now we have gone to the Athanasian Creed. We got it all settled. No mystery left. Ah, no; we have not settled it. There is a lot of mystery, and mystery can be a very beautiful thing as well. We have done, by the way, a whole series on the Holy Trinity. If you go to groundworkonline.com and search Trinity, you will find we did a whole series of *Groundwork* programs a while back.

We've got more to talk about, and we have another listener question to get to; so, we will do that in a second. Stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, I want to read an e-mail that we got from a listener: I recently stumbled upon your website. I listened to your explanation on Isaiah 9, about *everlasting Father*. This has always been a struggle for me, because as a Christian, there are so many songs that I hear that say: I only worship Jesus and no other; and I feel as though I am neglecting the Father. I constantly pray for God to show me and give me peace on this. Verses like the one in Isaiah and the one I would love to hear your comments on seem to keep me stuck. My question is: Can you explain 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

Well, we have had some past series on the Trinity. We referred to that earlier. We have had a series that touched on 1 Corinthians 15: "Stand Firm in the Reality of Christ's Resurrection." So, there are some things on the *Groundwork* website already that you could look for, but obviously there is more to say in answer to this very heartfelt question.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in order to get the context of what the listener question was, we want to go back to those verses in 1 Corinthians 15 and read them so that we can get a better aspect of what is being asked. So, let's read that. It says: ²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all things die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Okay, so, a difficult passage; and so if the listener feels confused by it, you are in good company across the whole history of the Church. One thing we need to remember is that sometimes in a passage like this, Darrell, when Paul just says: *God*, he really means God the Father.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Clearly, there is Jesus the Son and God the Father. He does mention the Father here; but sometimes when Paul just says God, he means the First Person of the Trinity. So, that helps a little bit to clear up some of the confusion. Of course, the main purpose of 1 Corinthians 15 is that some in the Corinthian congregation had been influenced by the Greek world, which rejected the idea of the resurrection of the body. They didn't want a resurrection of the body. The Greeks thought it would be good to get rid of your body at death, and nobody would ever want it back. So, the Corinthians had been influenced and said: Well, maybe there is no such thing as the resurrection of the body; and the whole purpose of 1 Corinthians 15 is Paul saying: Oh, yes, there is. Jesus got a body back, and you will, too. And this is our hope, and it is a good thing, because the resurrection of the body affirms the original goodness of God's creation.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Jesus resurrecting in the body is actually a fulfillment of the promise that we will also be resurrected in the body. It is also a fulfillment of the promise that salvation has been made perfect and the price has been paid; but then, there are some things happening in the verse that talks about what is being subjected; what is being handed over; who is under whom; and I think that most people misunderstand that, even though the Son and the Father are equal in essence and in mission, they have functional roles, and the Son has chosen to...like a military term...submit under the Father...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is a decision he has made. Just like he told Pontius Pilate: No one takes my life. I lay it down and I take it up again. And so, because he understands in great humility the perfect essence of what humility is, he submits himself to the Father, hands the kingdom over to the Father. That does not mean he is less than the Father...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It just means that he is choosing a submission role. That is what he is called to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The orthodox view of the Church has always been that each of the divine persons is involved in everything God does. Nobody in God ever does anything out on their own. Nobody goes rogue. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are always working together and in tandem. But as you say, they have different roles. The Father didn't become a human in the womb of Mary; the Holy Spirit did not become a human in the womb of Mary; only the Son did. Now, it is not the Son who energizes and gives gifts to the Church. That is the Holy Spirit's job—that is his assignment, right? So, there is one God; they do one work; but they have different assignments. Even when we pray, the Spirit brings our request to Jesus, who is the Mediator—the go-between; Jesus presents it to the Father. Every time we pray, we are involving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is a lovely, lovely thing to think about.

But now, let's get, really, to the one part of the listener question we just heard, and that is: What do we do when we have so many songs we sing in church that seem to mention only Jesus and not the Father, and I guess, not the Spirit. Are we neglecting Father and Spirit if we just kind of direct songs to Jesus?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think we do neglect a little bit. I think that...I mean, when we used to use a lot of hymns and a lot of old songs from the Psalter, they had some equal theology there, where the Father would get acknowledged, the Son would get acknowledged, the Spirit would get...maybe not acknowledged as much, but definitely acknowledged; so, sometimes in contemporary songs most of the people focus on Jesus; and Jesus, because he is humble, I think he is going to distribute that glory to the Father and the Spirit...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But at the same time, we need to do better as worship leaders. We need to do better as churches to emphasize the other aspects of God, so that people can have a fuller theology when they are singing. I think that is part of it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I think so.

DARRELL DELANEY

We need to do a better job at that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I mean, right. You worship Jesus, you worship the Father and the Spirit too. I mean, you cannot separate them; you get one, you get the other two; but right; thoughtful worship planners will work on that; and you know, we used to kind of have it hardwired in to the Reformed worship services that I grew up in in the Christian Reformed Church: never did a Sunday go by when we didn't sing the *Gloria Patri*: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be; world without end. Amen. Amen.

We sang that every, every week, and it was sort of like a weekly primer on: Hey, we worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not just Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, or sometimes the more Pentecostal churches: Not just Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit...all three.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, the liturgical scholar, John Witvliet, defines Christian worship as being a time of trinitarian *new covenant renewal*. So, in other words, Witvliet is saying that worship every week should rehearse for us the core teachings of scripture; recapitulate the whole salvation history story; and certainly, one of those core teachings...I think we would agree, Darrell, would be the fact that we believe we worship a triune God.

DARRELL DELANEY

And when we do that, Scott, we actually align ourselves with what is happening in heaven anyway: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth (already) as it is in heaven (already). So that we are aligning ourselves in that way. It is a very tricky question. I wish we had more time to get into detail on it, but we do not; but we have more Trinity-related questions as we close out the program. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and this a listener question program, where we have gathered up three or four questions that we have received in the last year; and interestingly, all of them have something to do with the Trinity.

So, here is the next one, Darrell. A listener wrote in: A visiting pastor said everyone who was baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit needed to be rebaptized in the name of Jesus only, and that is why their prayers were not being answered. It has bothered me, and I cannot find scripture to confirm, because when I asked about it, he said that that is what the disciples did. So...but I think I should believe the words of Jesus more than how the disciples did it. In other words, this listener is asking: Help. How are we supposed to be baptized? We do have a *Groundwork* on baptism. If you go to groundworkonline.com and put in the search term: baptism, you will find it. But we are going to talk more about it here.

DARRELL DELANEY

The listener raises a heartfelt question, Scott. If I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, does it somehow not count or something?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And could it really be why prayers feel unanswered? Let's just start with the fact that baptism is not a magic formula.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is not a password you have to recite in a certain way to unlock blessings from God; but baptism is God's action first before it is ours. Titus 3:5 reminds us of that. It says that God saved us, not because of our righteous things that we have done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. So, the power of baptism lies in God's promise and not in our performance or saying the exact words or saying the exact syllables; but the suggestion that a person's prayers are ineffective because of the wording used can be very damaging as well, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; with all due respect to the visiting pastor to whom the listener refers, this person was wrong. It is incorrect. First of all, we don't believe in rebaptisms. *If* the original baptism in any way was done as Jesus himself instructed in Matthew 28, a passage we have looked at before. Jesus said: Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That is from the lips of Jesus. So, it works for me. So, of course we need to baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and if somebody is, then that baptism counts. It took. It does not need to be redone; and by the way, since that is exactly what Jesus said, Darrell, I think...despite what, again, this visiting pastor said...I think we can assume that the disciples turned apostles who heard those words followed them when they baptized. Now, it is true that in the book of Acts you can find a lot of passages that they say: You must be baptized in the name of Jesus, right? Okay, that is true, but that does not mean that when they actually did the baptisms, they didn't say: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because then they were following and obeying the very words of Jesus himself.

DARRELL DELANEY

I do believe that in regard to that, even though sometimes we take the scripture fundamentally and literally, I think some scholars also believe that when you say: Baptize in the name of Jesus, it was shorthand for the Godhead—shorthand for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because there is no way that the disciples are going to deviate from what Jesus said to do in the great commission before his ascension and do their own thing. They are going to do exactly what he said to do in exactly the way he said to do it. And so, being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit not only brings the trinitarian aspect in, but it has nothing to do with why your prayers are not being answered.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is whole different thing. That is an oversimplification of issues and problems in people's lives and reasons why. We don't know why God does not answer prayers all the time, but we cannot simplify it to we didn't say the right formula.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and by the way, to this visiting pastor's point that you had to be baptized in the name of Jesus alone, well here is an interesting passage from Acts 8, starting at verse 14: When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Huh, okay; there it is. They were *only* baptized in the name of Jesus and it wasn't complete. They also had to be baptized in the name of the Spirit; and as you just said, Darrell, they would have obeyed Jesus, Father as well. You need to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Only one of them is not a complete, valid baptism; which is why, from the earliest days of the Christian Church, Darrell, liturgical litanies and forms always included baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is true. So, if you look at this passage you just talked about here in Acts 8, the baptism in the name of Jesus is a repentance baptism...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That John the Baptist had done before; and so, you do need the baptism of repentance. It is actually, you know, God I am sorry for my sins. I need you to come into my heart and I want to live for you. I need your help to change my ways. But then, you still need the baptism of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit in order to live the life out of gratitude for what God has called you to do; and so, this is the way that the Reformed tradition believes and teaches, and this is what we believe the scripture teaches.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we also said earlier that the Trinity always...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...are always involved in everything God does; and that certainly includes baptism. So, of course you mention all three because all three are active in the sacrament of baptism. All three are active in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, right? Well, as we close out this listener question program, maybe we can get the practical of a few things. What does the doctrine of the Trinity mean? You know, it is kind of funny, some people probably think you cannot think of anything more impractical than the doctrine of the Trinity. Talk about theological ivory towers; this is not practical; but it actually is. There are a couple of different things we could say that our belief in a triune God implies, and Darrell, the first one is that as we apprehend the Trinity, what is the glue that holds Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together? Among other things: Love. They love each other, and that is to become a model of our love for each other—our unity in the Church.

DARRELL DELANEY

Love and unity is the perfect unity and diversity picture: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is a diagram that is all over that we use to teach that shows that they are not each other, but also, they are God; but also the essence of the love and unity that the *perichoresis* is—that is what we say, it is a *perichoresis*—where we get the word *choreography* from. It is the dance that they do together, and they invite the believer, they invite the creation into that dance of unity and of love.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus says that in the high priestly prayer in John 17: ^{20b}I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. So, Jesus says: the way I am in the Father, you have to be in the Father and we are all involved in this. Then, the second thing that we can say very briefly as we come to the close here: There is an old Latin phrase called *Deus pro nobis*, which means God for us. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are constantly working in our lives to assure us, to reassure us, to bring us our salvation, to give us spiritual gifts to grow spiritual fruit. God is on our side. The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us: God is on our side. And boy, this is not some dusty piece of trinitarian theology; that is heartwarming: *Deus pro nobis*—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are for us—they are on our side.

DARRELL DELANEY

God is with us; God is helping us; God is caring for us; and we always remember that; and definitely, this beautiful thing that makes us want to say: Thanks be to God, which is how we usually end these programs, is to think about how the triune God loves us and inspires us to demonstrate what that love is for everyone else. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you. Make suggestions for future programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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