

# CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

## *Lesson 8 Part 2*

### Creeds not Chaos The Trinity and the Early Church

A few years ago my wife and I decided to enter the computer age and so we visited the local bookstore to see if there were any books which might help us master those skills which every elementary school student is now able to exercise with the greatest ease. We did in fact come across a book whose title was not aimed to massage the ego but was designed to spell out its purpose- it was called, 'Windows for Dummies'. We thought the description pretty well summed us up and so we decided to buy it. Without doubt this was the book for us. In relatively simple and, as they say, 'user friendly' terms, the mysteries of word processors began to be unraveled. How grateful we were for 'Windows for Dummies'!

The documents Christians call 'creeds' are a bit like that. The word creed comes from the Latin word 'credo' which means, 'I believe.' What is called the 'Nicene Creed' (its full and correct title is the 'Niceano-Constantinopolitan Creed'-which sounds like a special flavor of Italian ice cream) is one such document used by Christians the world over. The original Nicene Creed proper was formulated in 325 and then expanded in Constantinople in 381. Its purpose was not to say *everything* about what Christians believe, but rather to help Christians get a handle on the basics- especially when it comes to thinking about God correctly as Trinity. These creeds were carefully and thoughtfully put together for two main reasons. The first was to express the essentials of the Christian faith- what all Christians everywhere believed, which is why they are referred to as the 'Catholic creeds' in the sense of being universal (as when we say 'I have catholic tastes in music'). The second was to counter wrong views about the Christian faith which would soon lead people in a totally different direction and so into different religion altogether. Thus there was a drawing of the boundaries of the faith, subscribing orthodoxy. The early Church therefore had a straight choice- creeds or chaos. Thankfully they opted for the creeds.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'While later church theologians would use philosophical terms and words not seen in the Bible (like 'Trinity'), they were not trying to *add* to God's revelation of himself, as if Scripture was insufficient; they were trying to express the truth of who God is as revealed in Scripture. Particularly, they were trying to articulate Scripture's message in the face of those who were distorting it one way or another- and for each new distortion a new

By the time the Bible was complete, when it came to beliefs about God Christians everywhere shared some basic convictions:

- There is only *one* God. ‘You believe that there is One God’ says the apostle James-(James 2:19), echoing the Shema of Dt 6:4.
- Salvation has a threefold source- the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. ‘To God’s chosen people-chosen according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, through the sanctifying work of *the Spirit*, for obedience to *Jesus Christ*, sprinkled with his blood- (1 Peter 1:2).
- Jesus Christ is God. The apostle Paul writes that Jesus human ancestry can be traced back to Abraham, and that this ‘Christ *is God* over all, for ever praised Amen.’ (Romans 9:5).
- The Holy Spirit is a person. When Ananias and Sapphira in the early church decided to sell some property and keep some of the money back for themselves and yet claimed they had given it to the church, the apostle Peter first says to Ananias, ‘You have not lied to men but *God*.’ Then to his wife Sapphira, ‘How could you agree to test the *Spirit* of the *Lord*?’ - Acts 5: 4/9.

The Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Holy Spirit-they are all distinct and yet one as God- hence the ‘grace’ of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13: 14,

‘May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.’

So far so good you might think. However, you would not be surprised to discover that all of this proved to be a bit of a brain teaser for the early church in trying to figure out how it all fitted together. You would also not be surprised to hear that very early on some folk started to go off the theological rails. For example, some said that Father, Son and Spirit were but different names for the same person, like Melvin Tinker, The Vicar and the Pastor of St John, Newland, are different names for me. This heresy is called ‘modalism’ or ‘modalistic monarchianism’ or ‘Sabellianism’ after Sabellius who taught this in Rome in the 3rd century. Others taught that Jesus only *became* God’s Son by adoption after the resurrection. This is referred to as the heresy of

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language of response was needed.’ Michael Reeves, *The Good God* (Paternoster, 2012), pp. x-xi

‘adoptionism’ or ‘dynamic monarchianism.’ This was the teaching of a group very early on in church history called the ‘Ebionites’. And so you can see why it was important to get down to some serious thinking about how basic beliefs could be put together and expressed in ways which made sense and faithfully reflected Scriptural revelation.

When I studied theology at Oxford University, one of my tutors was a Jesuit priest who resided at a college called Campion Hall. As I climbed the stairway leading to his room each Wednesday afternoon for my tutorial during Hilary Term, I used to pass a large painting of a man and a small boy on the beach by the sea. The painting portrayed a story which went like this:

Once the great 4th century theologian, Bishop Augustine of Hippo, was doing some work on the Trinity. As he walked along the beach one day in order to clear his mind, he came across a small boy pouring sea water into a hole in the sand. Augustine watched the lad for some time and then asked: ‘What do you think you are you doing?’ ‘Why’ said the boy, ‘I am pouring the Mediterranean sea into my hole.’ ‘Don’t be silly’ said Augustine, ‘You can’t fit the sea into that little hole. You are wasting your time.’ To which little boy retorted, ‘Well, so are you wasting your time, trying to write a book about God!’

One smart boy! This apocryphal story does, however, makes an important point, namely, as mere humans we can never get God completely taped any more than a little boy can get the whole Mediterranean Sea into a hole on the beach. However, it doesn’t mean it is not worthwhile attempting *some* understanding of God- after all, I guess it could be argued that the boy did manage to get *some* of the Mediterranean into his hole! Likewise, we might at least expect to know *something* of God if not *everything* about him, especially since it is God who has taken the initiative to make himself known by special revelation. And this is precisely what some of the early church fathers tried to do with varying degrees of success.

### **Tertullian (The Lawyer who could do anything!)<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> ‘No one earlier than Tertullian and few besides Tertullian, prior to the outbreak of the Arian controversy, seem to have succeeded in giving anything like a tenable expression to this potential Trinitarianism, If Tertullian may not be accredited with the invention of the doctrine of the Trinity, it may yet be that it was through him that the elements of the doctrine first obtained something like its scientific adjustment, and that he may not unfairly, therefore, be accounted the original form in a sense somewhat similar to that in which Augustine may be accounted the originator of the doctrines of original sin and sovereign grace, Anselm the doctrine of satisfaction, and Luther the doctrine of

One of the earliest people God raised up for this task was Tertullian, a layman who lived in Carthage, located in North Africa between 160 and 220 AD. Tertullian was one of those rare individuals who seemed to be able to do anything. He was a lawyer by profession, but also had some learning in medicine and military affairs. He wrote in Latin and is sometimes described as ‘the father of Latin Christianity’.

Tertullian had to deal with the teaching of a man called Praxeas. We know nothing about him except what Tertullian tells us. Praxeas appeared to teach that the Son had no independent existence and that the Father and the Son were really one and the same being. Praxeas was quite crude in the way he put this. He taught that it was God the Father who descended into the Virgin’s womb in order to become his own Son and so it was God the Father who died on the cross (this heresy is called *Patripassianism* – in that it was the ‘Father’ (*pater*) who suffered (*passio*)). That is really getting your wires crossed, for if Jesus is the Father then to whom was he praying while on earth- himself?!

Tertullian came from Carthage North Africa but could just as easily have come from Carthage Texas because his reaction was blunt and to the point. He accused Praxeas of, ‘doing the devil’s work at Rome. That he had exiled the Holy Spirit and crucified the Father.’ Just as, ‘You don’t mess with Texas’ you didn’t mess with good old Tertullian either! Accordingly, Tertullian set to work laying the foundations for what we know today as belief in the Trinity. This was simply a bringing together in a thought-out fashion what the Bible taught- a ‘theology for dummies’ if you will.

Affirming that God is one and yet the Father is distinct from the Son and the Spirit, Tertullian gave the church the tools to use in order to piece the picture together. He was the first person to use the word ‘Trinity’ (*trinitas*) with its association of ‘Tri- unity’. Not three-ness but ‘three-in-one-ness.’ He also spoke of God’s ‘essence’ or ‘being’ or ‘substance’ (*substantiae*). He said that the three are three ‘not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as he is one God.’<sup>3</sup>

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all share the same essence- or if you like that which made them God- their ‘Godness’. The names

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justification by faith’, B.B. Warfield, cited in Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B.B. Warfield: a Systematic Survey* (Inter Varsity Press, 2010), p. 192

<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 2 (PL 2:180)

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are not ciphers referring to one God under three different guises, but represent real, eternal *distinctions* within the Godhead.

Tertullian went on to use a very important term to help distinguish the way in which God is one in such a way that he is also three; and the term was 'person' (*personae*). He wrote 'The three persons are of One, by unity of essence.'<sup>4</sup> As we now sing, 'God in three persons, blessed Trinity.'

But there were several problems which meant that Tertullian was not completely happy with what he had written (nor was the rest of the Church for that matter). In Latin the term 'person' (*personae*) originally meant a 'mask' (Greek '*prosopon*') which an individual actor would wear to perform a certain part. So you could have one actor performing several different roles in a single play. He would just swap the mask according to the character he was taking on in any particular scene. It is like today when we speak of someone adopting a certain 'persona'. Now you can see how this could be misunderstood when applied to God. It could be taken that there was only one solitary God (perceived as a monarch, hence the use of the term 'monarchianism') but who according to what he was doing appeared in different guises- one moment as a Creator, the next moment as Redeemer or Sanctifier. Of course Tertullian didn't mean that, in fact that was what he was vigorously *opposing* in tackling Praxeas. Later the term came to mean virtually an individual, as a human person was separate from every other human person. But Tertullian didn't mean that either because otherwise you end up with three divine beings- tritheism. What this illustrates is the limitation of human language as we try and capture and express something wholly unique relating to God. In Tertullian's day there were three classifications: things, animals or persons. God was neither a thing, nor an animal and so that only left 'person'. Since persons were capable of love and affection and the Biblical data certainly portrays God in these terms, it seemed a logical choice. All in all, Tertullian did a remarkable job.

### **Athanasius *Contra Mundum* (against the world)**

The next significant figure to appear on the scene was an Egyptian called Athanasius (295?-373) who in 328 AD was appointed Bishop of Alexandria. This was a man with guts because for years he stood more or less alone sticking to the belief that Jesus was truly divine when most of the church leadership had ditched the idea- hence the description of Athanasius being 'contra mundum'- 'against the world'. Like Tertullian much of his creative

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<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, Praxeas 4 (PL:2:182-83)

theological work was the result of countering a heretic, this time a priest from Alexandria called Arius around 318 AD. Arius was the great, great, great..... granddaddy of the Jehovah's Witnesses for he taught that Jesus was not eternally the Son of God. His famous statement about the Son of God which caused such a furor ran, there 'was a time when he was not'. For Arius, Jesus was a creature, not an ordinary creature to be sure, but a kind of 'super-creature', not man, nor God, but the highest kind of creature *through* whom God related to the world. Athanasius wasn't going to have any of that and in 325 AD he (as a junior minister at the time called a deacon) and a group of church leaders (bishops) gathered in the town of Nicaea, now Iznik on the west coast of Turkey. There they produced what came to be known as the Nicene Creed. The key phrase which nailed the lid in the coffin of Arius is the declaration, we believe 'In one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, begotten as only begotten of the father, that is of the substance (*ousia*) with the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, both things in heaven and things on earth; who for us and our salvation came down and was incarnate and became man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead.'

And just to make sure the Arians were completely skewered, an anathema or curse was attached, 'But those who say, "There was a time when he did not exist," and "Before being begotten he did not exist," and that he came into being from non-existence, or who allege that the Son of God is of another *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or who is alterable or changeable, these the Catholic and Apostolic Church condemns.'

This meant that God the Son had always existed and was *eternally* begotten of the Father, so there never was a time (if there is 'time' in eternity) when he did not exist. What is more he was of one substance with the Father- that is, he was equally God, not a different substance *like* God the Father, but truly God. In the Greek, the difference between the two words consists of a difference in one letter 'iota' 'i'. For Athanasius, Jesus was "consubstantial, (*homoousios*) with the Father" – 'one'. For the compromisers, the so-called 'Semi-Arians', Jesus was *homoiousios* with the Father, 'like'. But that one letter makes all the difference in the world; after all there is only one letter difference between the words *theist* and *atheist*! In the Creed the difference is between Jesus being Creator and him being a creature.

This is Bible's teaching. In Hebrews 1 v 3 we read,

‘The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being (*hypostasis*).’

Those two statements balance each other perfectly, each emphasizing a different aspect of the deity of Christ. On the one hand there is an inseparable *unity* between God the Father and God the Son for he is the ‘radiance of God’s glory’ Now, can you imagine a lamp being lit without the filament glowing? Or the sun shining without its rays radiating? Of course not, the two always go together. So it is here.<sup>5</sup> Jesus is co-eternal with God. There never was a moment when the Father existed without the Son. God cannot be glorious without Christ being there for he is the radiance of his glory. But that truth of the co-eternal nature of Christ is balanced with what is stressed in the next phrase, ‘he is the exact representation of his being.’ The idea is that of a *distinct personhood*. That word ‘representation’ speaks of a precise copy, like when you stamp a seal in wax. So whilst sharing the divine nature *with* the Father, Jesus is *not* the Father, by his own distinctive personhood he perfectly mirrors to us what the Father is like. Note that Jesus is ‘the exact representation of his being’ which means that every aspect of the divine character is embodied in Jesus. In Jesus do we see someone who is tender with the broken hearted? So is the Father. In Jesus do we see someone who has total control over nature? So does the Father. In Jesus do we see someone who hates sin and all that corrupts and demeans people and is determined to do something about it? So does the Father. We are not to play one off against the other in our minds, as if God the Father is a bullying God associated with the Old Testament and Jesus represented the kind God we see in the New (which was the view of another heretic called Marcion). Jesus is, if you will, ‘the human face of God’.

Something needs to be said about the term ‘*hypostasis*’ (when for example the Creed speaks against those ‘who allege that the Son of God is of another *hypostasis* or *ousia*’) as this can be a little confusing. At the time of Nicaea in 325 it had a range of different meanings, from ‘distinct existence’ to ‘underlying reality’ in which case the terms ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis’ were considered to be more or less synonymous. The point being made is that God

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<sup>5</sup> This is the argument of the Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa who commented on this passage, ‘as the light from the lamp is of the nature of that which sheds the brightness, and is united with it (for as soon as the lamp appears that come from it shines out simultaneously), so in this place the Apostle would have us consider both that the Son is of the Father, and that the Father is never without the Son; for it is impossible that glory should be without radiance, as it is impossible that the lamp should be without brightness.’ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol V, p.338*

the Son was of the same 'nature' as God the Father- both having the same *divine* nature.<sup>6</sup>

In 362 AD at the Council of Alexandria, Athanasius brought a bit more clarity (sanity?) to the discussion. Here the applied meaning of hypostasis changed. It was agreed that God is one being (*ousia*) and three persons (*hypostasia*). God alone is *ousia*- personal and active, a belief derived from God's own self-designation in Exodus 3 as YHWH ('I AM'), not some impersonal generic being (like humanity). And yet he also reveals himself as possessing coinherent relations of three persons (*hypostasia*). Again, we are back to 'God in three persons, blessed Trinity'.

So far a lot has been said about God the Father and God the Son, (not surprisingly as it was the identity of Jesus that was in dispute) but what about God the Holy Spirit? The only thing that was said in the creed Athanasius and others put together in 325 was, 'We believe in the Holy Spirit' which doesn't tell you all that much. But in 381 AD another meeting took place in Constantinople which was to give us the creed Anglicans use in their communion service (which is referred to as the 'Nicene Creed', but its not as we have seen is the 'Niceano-Constantinopolitan Creed'). Here we have the expanded clause,

'I believe in the Holy Spirit, **the Lord**, the giver of life, who **proceeds** from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is **worshipped** and glorified. He has **spoken** through the prophets.'

There we have it spelt out for dummies! The Holy Spirit is a person- he has spoken. It is persons who speak. The Holy Spirit is God equal to the Father and the Son, for 'He is *worshipped* and glorified.' We are also told of the Spirit's work, he 'gives life'- natural life (*bios*) but also spiritual life (*zoe*), for he is the one who gives people new birth as they turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the agent of revelation- he has 'spoken through *the prophets*', and so in effect he is the ultimate author of the Bible- he inspired it, literally, 'breathed out its words', according to Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16. Also he is the one who *proceeds* from the Father and the Son. Although equal in being- equally God, there is nonetheless an order within the Trinity. The Son is eternally *begotten* of the Father, the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son. The fact that there is order within the Godhead doesn't mean there is inferiority; it is an order of equals, but it is still an order.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Leatham, *The Holy Trinity In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (P&R publishing 2004), pp.118-120)



## Cappadocian Fathers (or, 'We are family')

Most of what we have been thinking about regarding the Trinity has been as a result of theologians in the first few centuries who were in the Western Church, but there was a group of theologians in the Eastern church during the fourth century who had some very valuable insights. They lived in Cappadocia, (now modern day Turkey) and so are referred to as the 'Cappadocian Fathers'. The 'big three' being, Basil of Caesarea (330-379); Gregory of Nazianzus (330-391) and Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa (335-400). In fact Mark Lanier's stone chapel is a reconstruction of a 500 A.D. church in Tomarza, which was in the region of Cappadocia. These three theologians were involved in the Council of Constantinople and were the ones mainly responsible for the statement on the Holy Spirit. In fact it was Gregory of Nazianzus who stressed that the great word which at Nicaea was applied to the Son must also be applied to the Holy Spirit:

'What, then? Is the Spirit God? Most certainly. Well, then, is he consubstantial (homoousios)? Yes, if he is God'<sup>7</sup>.

The big idea that came from Cappadocians was that God could be construed as a *community* of three persons (hypostasia). The unity and diversity was maintained by the idea of community and inter-relatedness of the different members. Basil of Caesarea described God as 'a sort of continuous and indivisible community.' Whose reality is 'a new and paradoxical conception of united separation and separated unity.'<sup>8</sup> Therefore, God's being is seen as a being in *personal communion*. What the one true God is towards us as he has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (what is sometimes called the 'economic Trinity') he is within himself (the 'essential Trinity'). God is 'persons-in-relation', which, when you think about it, so are we, with the male and female relation in marriage and especially in sexual intercourse and becoming 'one flesh' in some measure reflecting this unity-in- distinction. Some (like Karl Barth) argue that this is the 'picture' for understanding what it means to be made in 'God's image' (Gn 1:27).

Thinking about the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we need to consider how they 'indwell each other. In John 14:10-11 we read:

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<sup>7</sup> The Fifth Theological Oration, X.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Colin E Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991), p.96

‘<sup>10</sup>Don't you believe that I am *in* the Father, and that the Father is *in* me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living *in* me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup>Believe me when I say that I am *in* the Father and the Father is *in* me.’

This reveals the special and intimate nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son such that to encounter the one is to simultaneously encounter the other. If you are in the presence of the Son you are *also* in the presence of the Father for the Son *mediates* his presence. This means that we are not to think of Father and Son as two individuals who have an existence *independent* of each other. Rather, their identity (who they are) arises out of their relationship to each other. God the Father is *Father* by virtue of the fact that he has an eternally begotten Son. The Son is *Son* by virtue of the fact that he is eternally begotten of the Father. And yet they remain distinct persons, for you need at least two centers of consciousness to love- a lover and a beloved. This mutual indwelling which ensures the unity of the Godhead whilst still respecting the distinctiveness of persons has been given a name by the Eastern Church theologians (which goes back to John of Damascus in the 8th century), it is called ‘*perichoresis*’. The theologian Miroslav Volf describes it as ‘co-inherence in one another without any coalescence or commixture.’<sup>9</sup>

The Holy Spirit, it is argued, *is* the perichoresis of the Father and the Son. The writer Tom Smail describes it like this:

‘The “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14) revealed in God’s relating to us reflects that “fellowship” within the life of God.....The Spirit can be seen as the person who mediates, sustains and enables the love between the Father and the Son, so that by his personal action he both unites them in an inexpressibly close way but at the same time constitutes himself as “the space” between them so that they do not collapse into each other but remain in their distinct personal integrity over against each other.’<sup>10</sup>

He goes on to write:

‘This is what we see happening in the baptism of Jesus, where the Father gives himself to the Son in giving him his Spirit and remains distinct from the incarnate Son in his heavenly glory. He is thus the

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<sup>9</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, NY: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 209

<sup>10</sup> Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity* (Paternoster, 2005), p.100

Spirit who, by simultaneously relating and maintaining the distinct personhood of the other two, is not reduced to a relationship but is to be seen as the person who completes and unites the godhead in his relating of the Father to the Son.’

That is a wonderful picture, which resonates much with what C.S. Lewis called ‘the great dance’.

I tend to think of the perichoresis of the persons of the Trinity like the magnificent figure skating of Torvill and Dean who in the 1984 Winter Olympics at Sarajevo became the highest scoring figure skaters of all time scoring twelve perfect 6.0’s. Their Bolero set was simply entrancing and delicious. They moved together in perfect symmetry, although distinct persons, they actually danced as one, not only between themselves but with the music. It was almost Trinitarian in that the two persons matched each other perfectly, creating a masterpiece of movement, appearing free and yet set, with the music paralleling the Holy Spirit in enabling the two to dance together to the delight of millions. It is only a picture, but I hope a helpful one of the great ‘dance of the Divine’.

The thought might be going through your mind: ‘This is all very interesting but not very practical.’ That is where you would be wrong. Is there anything more vital than love? Because of the Trinity Christians can say that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16) in a way that the Muslim cannot and for this reason: For someone to love, you have to have an *object* to love. So who did God love before the world and human beings were made? For the Muslim the answer is, no one, and therefore Allah, who is singular God, cannot be eternally love. But the Christian, pointing to the Trinity can say , ‘Of course God is eternally love for the Father has always loved the Son with a burning intensity, and the Son has loved the Father with the deepest devotion possible and all of this united by the love of Holy Spirit. What is more, when people become Christians they are caught up in the great dance of love which exists within the being of the Godhead.’ If you are here this morning as a believer, the Father loves you as much as he loves the Son for through him you have been adopted into his family. The Son loved you so much that he gave his life for you on a cross. And the Spirit has set his heart upon you and came into you so that one day he will take you up into the very heavens itself so that you can experience that cascading divine love in ever increasing degrees of glory into all eternity.

Because God is Triune and is love we can be certain that heaven is completely a place of love since that is where the Triune God is (Revelation 5:1-6). And because of this truth about the Trinity, the ‘divine community of love’, the

great Jonathan Edwards can conclude his sermon ‘Heaven is a place of love’ with these words:

‘And all of this in a garden of love, the Paradise of God, where everything has a cast of holy love, and everything conspires to promote and stir up love, and nothing to interrupt its exercises; where everything is fitted by an all-wise God for the enjoyment of love under the greatest advantages. And all of this shall be without fading beauty of the objects beloved, or any decaying of love in the lover, and any satiety in the faculty which enjoys love. O! What tranquility may we conclude there is such a world as this!’<sup>11</sup>

We can be sure there is such a world because there is such a God who as Father, Son and Holy Spirit *is* love.

### POINTS FOR HOME

- Richard Sibbes who was a Puritan and a contemporary of Shakespeare said that our view of God shapes us deeply such that we become what we worship. We have seen that God is not cold and static but warm in grace and overflowing in love. His ‘being’ (*hypostasis*) leads to outflowing (*ekstasis*, *ek=*out, *stasis=*being). He is an outgoing, loving, life-giving being. As individuals and as a church let us seek to become like the one we worship.
- The Cappadocians construed God as a ‘community of love’. Resolve to find ways that you will seek to build your church into such a Trinitarian community.
- If ‘heaven is a place of love’ because there dwells the Trinitarian God who is love, how might you this week seek through prayer and practice to ensure that something of that heaven can be tasted here on earth?

### HOME WORK

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<sup>11</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, 385 (New Haven, Yale, 1992)

To recap, we are memorizing 1 John this year in the English Standard Version. That amounts to two verses a week. To be current, we need to have memorized 1 John 1:1-2:2. One chapter down, four to go!

**1John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

**1:5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**1John 2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. **3** And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **4** Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a

liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. <sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

<sup>9</sup> Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

<sup>10</sup> Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. <sup>11</sup> But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. <sup>12</sup> I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.