

Digging Deep: Exploring the Joy of Systematic Theology

Class 16: The Doctrine of God, part 12

The Trinity & Salvation

"... this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

John 17. 3

II. Our Problem

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."... So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Genesis 2. 15-17; 3.6-7

The fear of God without love is no other than the fear of devils; and all that outward respect and obedience, all that resignation, that repentance and sorrow for sin, that form in religion, that outward devotion that is performed merely from such a fear without love, is all a practical lie... The Devil once seemed to be religious from fear of torment, "When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.'" Here is the external worship. The devil is religious; he prays—he prays in a humble posture; he falls down before Christ, he lies prostrate, he prays earnestly, he cries with a loud voice; he uses humble expressions—"I beg you, do not torment me"; he uses respectful, honorable, adoring expressions—"Jesus, Son of the Most High God." Nothing was wanting but LOVE ...

Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise on Grace*

*As I bent down to look, just opposite, A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared
Bending to look on me, I started back, It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire ...*

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV

Since God is the triune God of love, we were not created simply to live under His moral code, hoping for some Paradise where He will never be. We were made to find our rest & joy in His all-satisfying fellowship. Our error is not so much that we have lived wrongly, but that we have loved wrongly.

Augustine of Hippo

II. God's Motivation

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us & sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4. 8-10

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us...

I John 3.16

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

John 10. 18

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3. 16

O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

John 17. 25-26

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one ...

John 17.22

*I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name; **my glory I give to no other** ...*

Isaiah 42.6-8

III. Christ's Accomplishment

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 2. 14-17

The wonder is that it is the Son who hangs on the cross. The Father, in his great love, sends the Son; and the Son, delighting to do the will of the Father, and sharing his Father's love, goes. Indeed, that love and delight make the Son unstoppable: he resolutely sets his face to go to Jerusalem where he will die; he rebukes Peter for even suggesting otherwise; he trembles at the thought of it, but lays his life down entirely of his own accord (Jn 10:18). For he, the Son, desires to be both the high priest and the sacrifice for sin, offering himself up to his Father through the Spirit (Heb 9:14).

It means that this God makes no third party suffer to achieve atonement. The one who dies is the lamb of God, the Son. And it means that nobody but God contributes to the work of salvation: the Father, Son and Spirit accomplish it all. Now if God were not triune, if there was no Son, no lamb of God to die in our place, then we would have to atone for our sin ourselves. We would have to provide, for God could not. But—hallelujah!—God has a Son, and in his infinite kindness he dies, paying the wages of sin, for us. It is because God is triune that the cross is such good news.

Michael Reeves, *"When I Saw the Cross, I Saw the Trinity"*