



## SPIRIT OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY

### Lesson 5

In the centuries after Jesus walked this earth, theologians and mystics who reflected on Jesus' life and teaching were faced with a paradox. They agreed there was only one God as their tradition had taught. But the oneness of the Creator wasn't as flat or static as they had assumed.

In Christ and through the Spirit, they came to see that God's unity was so deep and dynamic that it included diversity. And this diversity did not compromise God's unity but made it more beautiful and wonderful.

After much dialogue and debate a radically new understanding and teaching about God emerged. They had to create a whole new term to convey it: **TRINITY**. There were, naturally three parts to the teaching.

1. **Through Jesus** and His good news, they came to know and relate to God in a parental way. Like a parent, God was the source of all creation, the giver of all life and existence. God's parental love holds all creation in a family relationship. He was called **GOD THE FATHER**.

Today, perhaps God would be called both mother and father – God's parental love.

2. **In Jesus** they came to see a childness in God, a givenness of the child-life corresponding to the giving of the parent-life. If God the Father gave of God's self, the self-gift was both God and an offspring of God. God the Creator was self-expressing through the Word, which was Jesus, and who was both God and the Word, or expression of God. He is called **GOD THE SON OR GOD THE WORD**.

**3. Through *Jesus*** they also experienced the third reality – the loving, harmonious Spirit that flowed in and between and out from God the Father and God the Son. This loving and unifying presence, this primal harmony, this deep, joyful, contagious communion is called ***GOD THE SPIRIT.***

By God's parental love, through Christ's beautiful life, death and resurrection and through the Holy Spirit we are caught up into a divine communion together.

**Read: Ephesians 4:1-16**

The Trinity describes how to experience God "from the inside." This healing teaching began unleashing a revolution that is still unfolding today in at least 5 distinct but related ways.

**1. It leads us beyond violent understandings of God.**

The many Greek and Roman gods of ancient traditions were competitive and egotistical projections of human nature, glorious and gracious one minute, vindictive and cruel the next. Even the Supreme Being of monotheism was often seen as the violent patron of one nation, religion and culture, ruling by fear, making threats and crushing noncompliance.

Imagine the change when our vision of God shifts from a violent dictator to a kind and caring father who loves all and wants the best for all.

Imagine how in the Son or Word, we see God as one who identifies, serves and suffers with creation as Christ did, who would rather be tortured and killed than torture or kill.

Imagine how the image of a violent commander sending us into the world to wage war is eclipsed by the image of a gentle, healing,

reconciling, purifying, empowering Spirit who descends upon us like a dove.

**2. It leads us beyond fixed or frozen understandings of God.**

If God in Christ surprised us once, showing us we had a lot left to learn, shouldn't we expect more surprises? And if Jesus told us the Spirit would guide us into more truth when we were ready to bear it, shouldn't we expect to learn more whenever we can bear more?

In the place of a God who is removed, static, fixed and frozen, we see God as a whirling, intimate, glorious dance of eternal, creative, joyful movement.

**3. It leads us to transcend us-them, in-out thinking.**

In our dualistic thinking, we were always dividing the world into mine and yours, one and other, same and different, better and worse. In the Trinity, we move beyond dualism so that mine and yours are reconciled into ours. One and other are transformed into one another. Same and different are harmonized. Us and them are united without loss of identity.

**4. It leads us to transcend top-down or hierarchical understandings of God.**

If God the Father elevates and includes God the Son in full equality; If God the Son mirrors God the Father's self-giving and self-emptying love; and if God the Holy Spirit is honoured and welcomed as an equal this means that God is characterized by equality, empathy and generosity rather than subordination, patriarchy and hierarchy.

**5. It leads us to dispute God as exclusive and unwilling to associate with any imperfection.**

Jesus, God the Son had a habit of eating with “sinners” giving us a new vision of God. God’s holiness is drawn to unholiness the way a doctor is drawn to disease. Rather than catching disease, God’s holiness “infects” the sick with a chronic case of regenerating health. God’s holiness perfects imperfection.

**Read: John 17:1-23.**

To join the movement of the Spirit is to let our Trinitarian tradition continue to live, learn and grow....so the hostile one-versus-otherness of Earth can become more like the hospitable, one-another-ness of heaven. The Spirit leads us into vibrant diversity and joyful unity in beautiful harmony.

**Engage:** What one thought or idea from today’s lesson intrigued, provoked, disturbed, challenged or encourage you?

How has your understanding of God changed? Has it been suddenly or gradually?

How do you respond to the proposal that a deep appreciation of the Trinity can move us beyond violent, stasis, dualist, hierarchical and exclusive understandings of God?

**Activate:** If the Trinity is a way of life to be practiced, this week, try moving toward the other whenever you can – seeking to show others the honour, love and respect that are shared among Father, Son and Spirit.

**Meditate:** Ponder the words of John 17:21 “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.” Then simply hold the word US in reverence before God.