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**Briefing 47: Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.**

Dear friends,

The New Year is often a time for taking stock of our lives and making personal improvements. I've lost count of how many different advertising campaigns I've heard on the radio suggesting that people either give up smoking, or give up meat or give up alcohol for January.

I'm sure there are merits in all of those things, and speaking personally my keep fit regime has moved up a notch since the New Year. But as the apostle Paul says, life is more than food and the body more than clothes, and what is most important is our spiritual lives. Two tweets I saw recently brought this to mind. One person, after seeing that his smart phone told him that his daily usage averaged 3 hours per day, commented **that we do not lack time, just the will to use it wisely**. Unsurprisingly, he recommended reading the Bible - and said that just 20 minutes a day would mean that the whole of the Bible is read in the year. What a great achievement that would be.

Another person I follow, speaking on prayer - something else we often fail at – made the point that if we want to pray more, the best way is to think of God more and to get to know him better. That way we will want to pray, because we will be more enamoured by the God who made us and who saved us. Hopefully as we continue to work through the New City Catechism in these columns, and at St Nicholas, our knowledge and love of God will increase, and we will all be keener to read his word and spend time with him in prayer.

### **New City Catechism Question 3: How many persons are there in God?**

A few years ago in our services at St Nicholas we watched some short videos produced by Speak Life. (You can still watch them all on their YouTube channel (see [Speak Life - YouTube](#) ) The series we looked at were Thorny Questions; questions that people often ask when trying to dismiss the Christian faith or consider its claims.

In one of those short videos about other religions, the claim that "*all religions are simply different paths up the same mountain to God*" was discussed and shown to be utterly ridiculous. Not only is there no agreement in the world's religions about how one approaches God, or what the reward for reaching him would be, but there is no agreement on what God himself is like. Each faith makes its own claim to truth when it comes to what God is like, and central to the Christian description of God is that **there are 3 persons in one God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit**.

The Trinitarian nature of God, as revealed to us in the Scriptures, is unique. No other religion describes God in this way. In fact, Islam goes out of its way to say that God is definitely and utterly not 3 persons, and has some strong words to say about those who think it!

Famously, of course, the word Trinity is not in the Bible. But although the word may be missing, the doctrine is clearly present. We see the Trinity at work in creation; as God the Father creates the world through the Word of God (the Son- see John 1), with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. (*You might also want to have a look at Genesis 1:26 – 27*) We see the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus: the Son of God stands in the water with the voice of the Father echoing down from Heaven as the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. And in the great commission, Jesus sends the disciples out to make disciples of all nations, "*baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" (Matthew 28:19) And of course there are many, many passages which show us that the Father is God, that the Holy Spirit is God and that Jesus, the Son, is God.

But apart from stretching the brains of Christians across the ages, the doctrine of the Trinity is absolutely vital to our faith. You see if God the Father is not fully God, ruler, creator, sustainer (see question 2!) then he is not worthy of our worship, because there will be a being greater than him. But he is God; he is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything, and so he is the one who rightfully deserves our love, obedience and heartfelt worship.

If Jesus the Son is not fully God, then Jesus is a liar and the New Testament is unreliable, and we are in the dark about what God is like. I don't have time here to list all the occasions when Jesus either acted with the power of God, spoke with the authority of God or clearly explained that he was God, but do read John chapter 1 if you are

unsure. What's more, unless Jesus was fully divine, and so morally perfect, then his death on the cross in our place did not win our salvation, and we are still in our sin and facing a lost eternity.

And if the Holy Spirit is not fully God, then we can have no confidence in any of the Scriptures being true, because it was the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of the Bible to record exactly the right words so that God's truth would be told. And if the Holy Spirit is not fully God, then we can also have no confidence in God's work in our lives. For if it is not the Holy Spirit of God inhabiting and empowering, changing us, and assuring us of God's love, then who is it?

There is one final reason why the Trinity is so important, because it means that love was present in the Godhead before creation. If God were simply a solitary being, then whilst he might have the capacity to love, he could not love until he created something to love. And so there would be no love until creation came into being. But the God of the Bible has always existed as an eternal and glorious unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And therefore, from the beginning of time, God has loved, and so we can truly say that God is love.

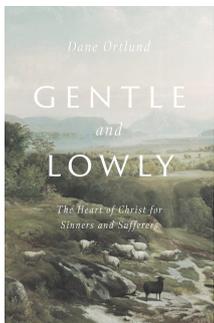
And how wonderful that this eternal love within the divine family is now available to us. We see it as the Son leaves the glory of heaven to come to earth to be our saviour. We experience it as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and lives. One day we will be enveloped in the fullness of God's eternal love for all eternity. What a wonderful hope we have. And what a glorious God we worship!

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*

## IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**COME AND PRAY TOGETHER!** Our next early morning prayer meeting will be on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> January at 7am. Contact [churchwardens@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk](mailto:churchwardens@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk) for a link. Our next Wednesday evening prayer gathering will be on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> February, when we will be joined by a representative of Crosslinks who oversee Rachael and Bernie's work in Uganda.



**LENT COURSE:** Last few days to get your orders in for our Lent book and study guide- please order by Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January. Dane Ortland's excellent book 'Gentle and Lowly- The Heart of Christ for Sufferers and Sinners' won high praise as perhaps the best Christian book of 2020, and it will be our Lent book for 2021. The 23 short chapters and booklet of accompanying notes and questions will help us grasp the wonder and depth of the heart of Jesus for us in a new way. The course will be perfect for personal reflection, or homegroup discussions, but I'd encourage you to make the time to talk through each chapter with 1 or 2 others, perhaps over the telephone, over a WhatsApp call or a Zoom link. The book is hardback and very new, but we've found a great source for discounted books making the price just £10 per set. Please sign up in church or email me or call me to place your order.

**CORNHILL MISSION:** In February we were expecting a team of students from the Cornhill Bible course to join us for 4 days of mission activities in the parish. Those plans have been cancelled. However, there will be a programme of events online. Please pray for us as we plan and prepare these events. And as the programme is announced, please make every effort to invite your non-Christian friends and family along.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR PRIVATE PRAYER.** St Nicholas will be open for private prayer for 3 sessions a week: Tuesdays from 2 – 4pm, Wednesdays 12 noon – 2pm, and Thursdays 10am – 12 noon.

**IDENTITY COURSE:** Starting Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February and running for 7 weeks, this free course works through John's gospel to investigate the identity of Jesus and the implications for us when we discover who he is. The course is engaging and entertaining and offers plenty of room for questions and discussions, and whilst it is designed for those investigating Christianity for the first time, it would be great for anyone simply wanting a refresher. **Sadly this will now need to start online via ZOOM** rather than in church, but we will switch if the restrictions are eased. More details can be found by contacting Dave or by visiting <http://www.identitycourse.com/index.asp>

**CHILDREN'S WORK ON SUNDAYS:** Under tiers 4 and 5, we are unable to hold separate children's work in church. However, activity packs will be available to tie in with the talk and the question from the New City Catechism, so do bring your children along. We love to see them and they are part of our family.