

INTRA-TRINITARIAN LOVE AS AN ESSENTIAL TEACHING WITHIN PASTORAL
MINISTRY: A POTENTIAL DETERRENT TO MAN-CENTEREDNESS

by

ROBERT HOLMAN
B.S. University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Ph.D. University of Nebraska

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ABSTRACT

There tends to be three major Trinitarian emphases within the ecumenical creeds, the Reformed confessions, most systematic theologies and the vast majority of popular Christian books. In these resources most often accessed by congregants, the Trinitarian emphases tend to be (1) assembling proof texts, and/or (2) positing Biblical defeaters of false views of the Trinity, and/or (3) viewing the Trinity from the perspective of the shared attributes of each person of the Godhead. In these works, Intra-Trinitarian love is not emphasized. In works not as often accessed by congregants, Augustine, Calvin, and Bavinck have addressed elements of intra-Trinitarian love, albeit as a secondary emphasis. In more recent writings, Carson, Sproul, Packer, Wester, Swain, and Storms have each addressed the concept more fully. While these authors contribute much in terms of understanding the concept of intra-Trinitarian love, the application of the concept of intra-Trinitarian love to the every-day life of the Christian is under-developed. That said, the teaching intra-Trinitarian love in an applied sense may be of great value in a congregant's walk. Specifically, it is assumed here that many of our congregants struggle with a man-centered perspective that centers all (or most) of the purposes of God around man. Such man-centeredness can lead to bad theology, is dishonoring onto God, and is a subtle form of idolatry that can enslave the congregant. The purpose of the proposed thesis is to defend the assertion that a systematic pastoral teaching of intra-Trinitarian Love can, by the grace of God, combat the congregant's tendency towards man-centeredness. Two questions, specifically "Why does God love me?" and "What is Christian humility?" will be assessed in view of intra-

Trinitarian love. Each question will be analyzed within a common framework: (1) why the question matters, (2) why assessing the question in view of intra-Trinitarian love is appropriate, (3) how evaluating the question in view of intra-Trinitarian love can result in a less man-centered perspective and (4) the practical implications for living and serving that may result from applying intra-Trinitarian love to the question. Finally, the context for and the limitations to be placed upon the pastoral teaching of intra-Trinitarian love will be addressed.

DEDICATION

To my loving wife Phyllis and our wonderful daughters Amberlee and Sarah for their support, their prayers, and their help in editing this thesis. I as well thank those at American Falls Community Church for their support. Finally, as in all things, may all glory be onto our great and glorious Triune God both now and forever.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A General Statement of the Assumed Problem.....	1
An Approach to the Perceived Problem.....	4
Teaching Intra-Trinitarian Love as a Proposed Partial Solution.....	7
2. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEM	9
A Validation of the Assumption that a Problem Exists.....	13
The Implications of Man-Centeredness.....	24
The Pastoral Responsibility to Respond to the Problem.....	26
3. THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR INTRA-TRINITRIAN LOVE.....	30
A Brief Summary of the Ontological Aspects of the Trinity.....	30
Intra-Trinitarian Love Defined.....	37
4. AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF THE TEACHING OF INTRA-TRINITARIAN LOVE IN CHURCH HISTORY	47
5. TWO APPLICATIONS OF THE TEACHING OF INTRA-TRINITARIAN LOVE AS A PARTIAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF MAN- CENTEREDNESS.....	58
Question 1: Why does God Love Me?	58
Practical Implications.....	77
Question 2: What is Christian Humility?	78
Practical Implications.....	87
6. CONCLUSION.....	89
Limitations to be Imposed Upon the Teaching of Inter-Trinitarian Love	89
Survey of Additional Partial Solutions to the Problem of Man-Centeredness.....	89
Summary of the Argument and Conclusions	90
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	97

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A General Statement of the Perceived Problem

The model of the universe that was posited by the Greek philosopher Ptolemy around 140 AD described the sun, moon, planets, and stars as revolving around the earth. This view of the universe survived, virtually unchallenged, for thirteen-hundred years until the early sixteenth century when astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus posited a radically different model. His model asserted that the stars only “appeared” to orbit a static earth and that, in actuality, the earth was itself orbiting around the sun. This meant that the earth was not the center of the universe. Copernicus knew well the prevailing view of the church leaders and the general public at that time; that man resided at the center of the universe. In proposing his theory, he was not just challenging orthodox science; he was challenging the established religious and cultural views of his day. His “revolution” was not appreciated at the time because so many held a general man-centered perspective that was characterized by measuring the universe from a reference position of men in general and of self in particular.

A presupposition held in this thesis is that we within the church today often view Christianity and the things of God in much the same way that those prior to Copernicus viewed the universe; that everything (or, at least, most things) revolves around us. Too often our Christian worldview consists primarily of man-centered thinking that centers all (or most of) the purposes of God around men. As Christian Smith puts it: “the Trinity, holiness, sin, and grace

have been supplanted by the language of happiness and heavenly reward.”¹ Smith calls this man-centered perspective Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which can be summarized by the belief that God’s role is to be a resource to draw from for us to achieve the central goal of life, which is to be happy and feel good about oneself.

Such thinking can lead to a distorted personal theology that is dishonoring onto God and is a subtle form of idolatry. This is not to say that man-centered thinking flows from a *purposeful* intent to be dishonoring onto God or to make idols of ourselves. It is reasonable to assert that man-centeredness is rarely the result of a conscious decision to enthrone ourselves in our thinking. Rather, man-centeredness flows from our sin nature that is naturally inclined to place self as the reference for all things. Thus, far more often than not, when we express man-centeredness in our thinking and, as a result, propagate man-centeredness in our teaching, we do so without being consciously aware of the problem. That said, irrespective of whether we are aware of the issue or not, it is asserted here that a problem with man-centeredness does, in fact, exist.

How might a man-centered worldview manifest itself in our thinking? One measure to assess the degree to which we may be struggling with man-centeredness is to evaluate the way we think of Biblical doctrine. As an example, consider the below question as it relates to the doctrine of the Trinity:

¹ Cristian Smith, *Soul Searching*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2005), 171.

“Three-in-One and One-in-Three: is this no more than a conundrum, a theological riddle, or does it radically affect our entire religious experience? What difference does it actually make to us as Christians?”²

The very question itself is tantamount evidence of man-centered thinking that measures the things of God from a reference position of self. From this perspective, it is implied that endeavoring to apprehend the beauty of Trinitarian doctrine is somehow not worthy of our time unless it “affects our religious experience” in some meaningful way as we define meaningful.

Another metric to assess the degree to which we may be struggling with man-centeredness is to evaluate how we view the atoning work of Christ. A man-centered perspective may be manifest in terms of entirely measuring the work of Christ as a means to an end; the end being our own salvation. Rather than referencing the Son’s redemptive work to the Son’s love for the Father and the desire to give Glory onto His Father, a man-centered view tends to frame Christ’s work exclusively (or nearly so) in terms of its impact on us. Such a man-centered perspective does not address so much what Christ’s atoning work teaches of the greatness of God, but instead limits Christ’s life, death, and resurrection to how it impacts us.

We all are tempted to measure the Scriptures against a filter of “what does this mean for me?” or “how does this impact me”, or “how will it affect me?” However, we need to consider that viewing the Scriptures in this way and, as a result, viewing God in this way, makes far too little of God in our minds and far too much of ourselves.

An approach to the perceived problem

² Timothy Ware, “The human person as an icon of the Trinity,” *Sobornost* Vol. 8, no. 2, 1986

What then is a proper pastoral response to the presumed problem of man-centeredness in the lives of individuals within a congregation? The issue of man-centeredness in general, and man-centered theology in particular, is just like any other spiritual problem. The proper pastoral response to these and all problems is to seek after God's grace in Christ to equip us to be used of the Lord to lovingly replace error with Biblical truth. A response much like that of a Copernican Revolution in the heart and mind of both pastor and congregant is in order. That is, just as Copernicus moved the minds of men away from thinking they were the epicenter of physical reality, what is needed is God the Holy Spirit working through pastors (and others) to proclaim Biblical truth that, by grace, He would move our hearts and minds away from thinking that we are the center of spiritual reality.

Why? Why do we need to have our hearts and minds moved away from thinking that we are at the center of spiritual reality? The general answer is that we need to realize that God and His glory resides at the center of spiritual reality, for such thinking is both true and honoring onto God. We each need God-centeredness to replace whatever man-centeredness exists within our thinking. We need to dwell upon God and His glory. With this in view, Philippians 4:8 can then serve as a reminder of our need to have the man-centeredness within us replaced with God-centeredness.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

As we dwell upon God, who *is* ultimate truth and infinite excellence, we will increasingly become more God honoring in thought, word, and deed. To be God-centered in all things should be our pre-eminent pursuit. Further, if we truly love our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we should desire for them what we desire most for ourselves. We should desire that everyone around us be increasingly freed from self so as to be more focused upon God. As such, a Biblical response to the subtle yet very serious problem of man-centeredness is warranted for two reasons. First, it is right and honoring to have our thoughts center upon our Triune God (as opposed to self). And second, a God-centered perspective will lead to God-centered attitudes that will terminate in obedience that is both for our better good and for the better good of all around us whom we love. Thus, a Biblical response to the problem of man-centeredness with the prayerful expectation of an emerging God-centeredness to take its place should be desired.

Why a Biblical response? We must adhere to the Scriptures as our fount of all truth and as our guide for living and teaching (2 Tim. 3:16). In view of this, we consider the perspectives of Calvin and Pink:

“Scripture is needed as a guide and teacher for anyone to attain to God the Creator”³

“Scripture is superior to all human wisdom”⁴

“The truth is that on everything our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed in Scripture”⁵

³ John Calvin, trans. Ford Lewis Battles and John R. Walchenbach, *Analysis of the Institutes of Christian Religion of John Calvin* (Phillipsburg, NJ, P&R Publishing, 1980), Book I, Chapter 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 8, page 44.

⁵ Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1975), Chapter 14.

To grow as an individual is to more fervently declare in thought, word, and deed, what John the Baptist declared, that “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30). To be used of the Lord as an instrument in His hands to grow others in Christ, we must seek after His grace to move us to His Word that we would declare there the truths what our brethren need to hear to address their issues. We need to address man-centeredness by endeavoring in the Lord’s power to have others increasingly dwell on things above (Phil. 4:8), to be more fully transformed (Rom. 12:2), and to have an ever-increasing thanksgiving heart overflow with praise for the God in whom we have been saved and made secure. Such growth has as its goal an incremental, day-by-day, move toward that great time whereby we will be void of concern for self and entirely enveloped in nothing but thoughts of our great and glorious God, joining in heaven the angelic chorus that declares “Holy, Holy, Holy is our God Almighty!” (Rev. 4:8). The pastor who confronts man-centeredness in his congregation in a gentle, loving and Biblical manner in the hope that God-centeredness would grow within the body will need to be dependent upon the grace of God. He will have to have his heart and mind inclined toward prayer, beseeching the glorious omnipotent God of the universe to bless him and grow him as only He in His power can, for “apart from Him, we can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). Thus, the only proper pastoral response to man-centeredness in the lives of people within our church is to prayerfully and with complete dependence upon God to preach and teach the truth. In His power, we need to replace the error of man-centered thinking with God-centered thinking, that men’s hearts would be inclined away from self and on to God.

Because a Biblical response to man-centeredness will entail teaching, reproof, and correction (2 Tim. 3:16) it is critical to seek after the Lord's grace to move us to be both loving and humble (Eph. 4:2) as we endeavor to be used of the Lord as an instrument to facilitate a move from man-centeredness to God-centeredness. We need to seek after God's grace to instill in our hearts purity of intent (1 Tim. 5:1) as we teach from the Word of God. Our desire in the role of teacher in this context should be to honor God and be a vessel of blessing in His power to be used to move others away from enslavement to self and to see God more fully.

Teaching Intra-Trinitarian Love as a Proposed Partial Solution

What then shall we teach? What content within the Scriptures can be used of the Lord to provide the Copernican Revolution that will move us from a man-centered worldview to a God-centered worldview? While there are likely many teachings that would be useful towards this goal, there is a foundational, yet rarely taught, Biblical concept that is here asserted as a wonderful means to orient others (and ourselves) away from self and towards God. That Biblical concept is called "intra-Trinitarian love." Generally, intra-Trinitarian love is the love that God the Father has for both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It is also the love that God the Son has for the Father and the Spirit, and the love that the Spirit has for the Father and Son. Intra-Trinitarian love then is the love expressed perfectly within the Persons of the Trinity towards each other.

The purpose of this thesis is to defend the assertion that a reasonable pastoral response to the problem of man-centeredness should include a systematic teaching of the concept of intra-

Trinitarian love. While the problem itself is a man-centeredness that needs to diminish within us and those around us, the focal point of the teaching of intra-Trinitarian love should largely be framed in the positive. That is, intra-Trinitarian should be taught as a means by which God can move us *towards* a more God-centered worldview.

In the next chapter (Chapter 2), a much more detailed definition of the term man-centeredness will be forwarded, both in general and as specifically applied here. Further, the presupposition itself will be tested: is there really a problem of man-centeredness in the life of individual Christians within our congregations today? A treatment of the perceived implications of the problem for the individual and a proposed rationale for why man-centeredness is a critical issue then follows. Chapter 2 will conclude by defending the assertion that there is a pastoral responsibility to respond to the problem. A detailed definition of the term intra-Trinitarian love will be forwarded in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, an assessment of the historical teaching of the concept of intra-Trinitarian love starting with Athanasius and moving to the present day will be featured. In Chapter 5, two questions will be analyzed: a) Why does God love me? and b) What is Christian humility? Each question will be addressed within a common framework: a) why does the question matter, b) how is assessing the question in view of intra-Trinitarian love appropriate, c) how can seeing this question in view of intra-Trinitarian love result in a less man-centered and a more God-centered perspective, and d) what are some practical implications. In Chapter 6, a treatment on the limitations that are to be imposed upon the teaching of intra-Trinitarian love will be followed by a listing of potential additional pastoral solutions to the problem of man-centeredness. Finally, a conclusion with a summary of the argument will be made.

CHAPTER 2

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As Robert Reymond so wisely states: “Every Christian will have either a God-centered or a man-centered worldview.”¹ With a man-centered worldview, one tends to define God based on one’s subjective *experience* of God, rather than how God is objectively revealed in the Scriptures. Man-centeredness is manifest as dependence upon self rather than God (Job 15:31). It is obsessing about self rather than denying self (Mt. 16:24-26). It is a life focused on perceived needs and wants rather than upon God’s will and purposes (Mt. 6:33). It is trusting in our own plans and expecting God to bless our plans rather than seeking God’s grace to trust in Him (Prov. 3:5; 14:12). A man-centered worldview tends to ascribe to men autonomy and capabilities that we in our fallenness do not actually possess. An absolute man-centered theological perspective is synergistic, assuming that salvation is the collective work of the will of man and the will of God.² As Tozer puts it:

“Christianity today is man-centered, not God-centered. God is made to wait patiently, even respectfully, on the whims of men. The image of God currently popular is that of a distracted Father, struggling in heartbroken desperation to get people to accept a Savior of whom they feel no need and in whom they have very little interest. To persuade these self-sufficient souls to respond to His generous offers, God will do almost anything, even using salesmanship methods and talking down to them in the chummiest way imaginable. This view of things is, of course, a kind of religious romanticism which, while it often uses flattering and sometimes embarrassing terms in praise of God, manages nevertheless to make man the star of the show.”³

¹ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson: 1998), 380.

² Most synergists will not admit that their soteriology is the combined work of both God and man, but careful analysis of their doctrinal positions make clear that it is.

³ A.W. Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1966), 27.

In the realm of worship, man-centeredness is manifest as a service designed to entertain men and to minimize man's lack of comfort in terms of content. We must share the whole counsel of God (Rom. 3:10-18), yet a man-centered perspective would have sermons and all general content focused upon a message of health, wealth, and man's general prosperity. In a man-centered worship setting, God is portrayed primarily as the facilitator of man's greater good. In man-centered worship the activities of the church are designed to meet the felt needs of the church attendee.⁴ This model endeavors to remove the religious feel from the church service. Such services are typically informal and are designed to make the attendee comfortable and feel as though the gathering is designed especially for them. It is argued that the church must center upon the individual in the pew if one wishes to attract the unchurched and get them to attend on Sundays (and entice them to stay once you do get them in the pew). This perspective is supported by research findings⁵ that indicate that only 30% of church-going adults view worship as something that should be primarily focused on God. Further, and perhaps more disconcerting, nearly 45% of American pastors under 40 years of age describe their churches as following this seeker-driven model.

Should we really have the Sunday worship service primarily focus on men, their feelings, and their comfort level? The Scriptures would suggest that the answer is "no" (Rom. 12:1-2). In all of Biblical history, spanning the entire time recorded in the Scriptures, God's Word declares that the focal point of all right worship is on God and God alone. The chosen people, the royal priesthood

⁴ John Armstrong, *The Mad Rush to Seeker Sensitive Worship* accessed July 2015, www.alliencenet.org.

⁵ George Barna, *The Barna Group: Your Partner for Information, Strategy, Execution and Transformation*, accessed June 2015, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topics>.

are, according to Peter, “to declare the praise of him who called us out of darkness into wonderful light” (1 Pe. 2:9-10). The Spirit blesses us by enabling us to look for the coming of the Lord and to prepare us, His bride, to meet Him (1 Thes. 1:10; 3:13; 4:13-18; Tit. 2:3; Col. 1:28; 4:12). To be prepared as His bride means that worship should be a blend of awe and reverence for the infinite God, and should center on the Triune God, characterized by a humbling and honest confession of sin and need. Worship centered exclusively on God is central in the life of heaven (Rev. 4:8-11; 5:9-14; 7:9-17; 11:15-18; 15:2-4; 19:1-10) and should be central in the life of the church on earth (Col. 3:17). Such God-centeredness in worship is the very definition of relevant, for nothing can be more relevant than to know better the nature of your creator and Lord. On Sundays it is most inappropriate to have a primary focus on the men in the pew — the focus should be on God. As Collins asks, “If the congregation makes itself a higher priority than God; if it is more important for them to please themselves than to please God, then their priorities are skewed and their worship malformed. Have we assembled a church, or a weekly group therapy session for narcissists?”⁶

In general then, man-centeredness places man on the throne and the things of God are measured from the perspective of men and are deemed relevant primarily, if not exclusively, in view of impact upon man. It is manifest in many ways, but the common theme is that the final goal in view is man’s quality of life, his blessedness, and his salvation. In this most subtle mode of thinking, God is often seen merely as a means to enhance the quality of man’s life.

⁶ Ken Collins, *The Case against Contemporary Worship*, accessed June 2015, http://www.kencollins.com/pray_28.htm.

In contrast, God-centeredness is a mindset whereby God is the center of the universe in our thinking rather than man. Absolute God-centeredness is here defined as one that centers upon God's sovereignty, is monergistic, assumes the depravity of man, and ascribes salvation to grace alone through Christ alone for the glory of God alone. An absolute God-centered theology centers upon the person and work of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit (Three-in-One and One-in-Three) and, in particular, the glory of the Triune God. It measures the significance of God's mighty works pre-eminently in terms what it teaches of the glorious greatness of the Triune God Himself. Here, the blessings that God pours out upon men show forth the love and mercy of God and are measured firstly in view of what these blessings teach about God and secondly focus upon thanking God for the blessings. A God-centered perspective then sees the glory of God and the declaration of that glory as the end (rather than the salvation and the edification of man as the end).

For the purpose at hand, absolute man-centeredness and absolute God-centeredness exist as extremes on a continuum. The man-centered extreme is defined here as viewing the things of God from the perspective of men alone, measuring the significance of God's mighty works exclusively in view of how that work impacts man and assuming that the purposes of God center exclusively on men. On the other extreme, on the opposite end of the continuum, resides an entirely God-centered theology. At any given moment we reside in our thinking somewhere on this continuum.

A related assumption made here is that we as a people, a redeemed people, are immersed in a Christian culture that promotes man-centeredness. Far too much of the content of our

sermons, our Christian books, and the Christian television, radio, websites, and blogs unwittingly promote man-centered thinking. Once more, it is assumed that those who propagate such teaching are well-intentioned brothers and sisters who love the Lord and desire to serve. Yet still, the content when evaluated in view of man-centered versus God-centered, gives reason for concern. As such, it is assumed that we as a people far too often reside too far upon the continuum towards man-centeredness.

A Validation of the Assumption that a Problem Exists

Is there really a problem of man-centeredness in individual Christians in our congregations? To evaluate whether there is indeed a problem of man-centeredness in the typical congregation, several issues will be addressed. First, a Biblical overview of passages pertinent to the issue will be discussed. Second, an overview of the content of the teachings of an array of influential pastors, authors, and televangelists is forwarded so as to discern whether the Christian popular culture has a significant subset of man-centeredness embodied within what it teaches. And finally, we ask the question “are we personally tempted to measure the things of God from a perspective of self?”

The Scriptures themselves provide testimony that the temptation towards man-centeredness is very real and that we will succumb to these temptations if we do not seek after the Lord’s grace to protect us from our own desire to center upon ourselves. That, as natural man, we live for self is clear in that we are commanded to no longer live for ourselves but rather are to live for the Lord (2 Cor. 5:15). Therefore, 2 Corinthians 5:15, by providing a command

not to be self-centered, establishes that the problem of self-centeredness exists. Further, we are told pointedly that there will be times of difficulty, for people will be lovers of self (2 Tim. 3:1, 2). 2 Timothy 4:3 tells us that “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” Our own passions are centered upon self and, as such, exalt man rather than God. Our sinful passions are aroused by the law and at work in our members to bear fruit for death (Rom. 7:5), so we are told to abstain from the passions of our flesh, which wage war against our soul (1 Pe. 2:11). The Scriptures warn us of the tendency towards man-centeredness in our thinking. This alone is enough to validate that the problem is real, as the Holy Bible would not warn us of a problem if that problem did not exist.

In an effort to discern whether there is a real issue with man-centeredness in our congregations, an evaluation of the content of some highly influential pastors, authors, and televangelists is in order. The teachings that come from these highly influential teachers and pastors, as seen/heard/read by tens of millions per month, constitute in large part our Christian popular culture. In this brief evaluation of the content of the man-centered teaching from specific influential individuals, it is necessary to address our motives in highlighting individuals by name. No ill intent is assumed on behalf of the teachers themselves. Those who are teaching a man-centered message may be earnestly self-deceived and unwittingly teaching a man-centered message out of ignorance of the truth or may simply be unthinking, undiscerning and, as such, parroting the false teaching that they have been taught. While the motives of the individual teachers is neither the point nor is it being questioned, what is being highlighted is the content of

the teaching itself. Do these influential church leaders contribute to a general spirit of man-centeredness within the body of Christ?

Joel Osteen is a pastor, televangelist, and author of major influence. He has sold over 10 million books and his televised messages are seen by over 20 million monthly in over 100 countries. The titles of his recent books include: a) “You Can, You Will: 8 Undeniable Qualities of a Winner,” b) “Break Out!: 5 Keys to Go Beyond Your Barriers and Live an Extraordinary Life,” and c) “It’s Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, and Increase in God’s Favor.” These books are similar to all of his books in that when God, or the works of God, are referenced, they are referenced almost exclusively in terms of impact upon men. Further, a listing of his most recent 50 sermons titles⁷ indicates that every message title, without exception, has as its focus the life experience of men and/or God facilitating man’s life experience. This man-centered mindset is as well reflected by many of his quotes, including:

“But God is waiting on you to get up on the inside. When you do your part, He’ll begin to change things and work supernaturally in your life.”⁸

It is indeed man-centered to contend that God responds to men (rather than ordains all things) and that our great God’s primary purpose is to bless and facilitate us through a symbiotic relationship where if we first do our part, He will then in turn do His part. Seemingly, a major emphasis in the teachings of Joel Osteen is to teach that the primary (if not exclusive) role of God is to facilitate a blessed life for men, helping men to become who they want to be. In this, it

⁷ Joel Osteen, <http://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/WatchOnline.aspx>.

⁸ Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (Brentwood, TN: Faith Words Publishing, 2014).

appears as though the end in view is the edification of man and God exists primarily as an efficient means to that end.

Four additional influential prosperity ministries are affecting the perspectives of, literally, tens of millions. These ministries, like that of Joel Osteen, are largely centered upon living the rich and blessed Christian life. Specifically, the ministries of Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, and Joyce Meyer are in view. Copeland⁹ emphasizes healing and the healthy life and describes the primary purpose of prayer as “equipping us to succeed.” Creflo Dollar leads a church of 30,000 members, is on radio and television in over 50 countries and emphasizes the centrality of men in the Scriptures. Dollar asserts that:

“The control center of the soul is the mind. Therefore, the mind is the battlefield and will determine whether or not we have victory or defeat in our Christian lives.”¹⁰

For Dollar, much like Copeland and Osteen, men are the controlling factor and God is the facilitator and God’s primary role is as the facilitator of men’s ambitions that man would achieve what they desire in this life. In each of Dollar’s books, the central theme (as indicated by the titles and descriptions) is living and experiencing God in such a way that we are enriched. Like Osteen, Dollar measures the person and work of the Triune God almost exclusively from the perspective of impact upon men. With a similar bent to his teaching, Benny Hinn is as well quite influential. An estimated 2 million viewers see Hinn each week on various Christian television networks including the Trinity Broadcasting Network, Daystar Television Network, Revelation

⁹ Kenneth Copeland, *You Are Healed* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1999).

¹⁰ Creflo Dollar, *The Holy Spirit, Your Financial Advisor: God's Plan for Debt-Free Money Management* (Brentwood, TN: Faith Words Publishing, 2014).

TV, Grace TV, Vision TV, INSP Networks, and The God Channel.¹¹ The man-centered perspective of Hinn is clearly evident in his saying that “God will not move unless I say it. Why? Because He has made us coworkers with Him. He set things up that way.”¹² This man-centered mindset is seen throughout this very influential teacher’s lessons. God is presented before the people as the resource from which to draw so as to succeed. Finally, Joyce Meyer has authored more than 30 books with total sales of nearly 5 million copies. She is heard by nearly 1.5 million people a week and is also man-centered in a good subset of her teachings.

This is evidenced in her contention that:

“Nobody else can develop your fruit of the Spirit. Nobody can develop your peace but you. Nobody can develop your joy but you. Nobody can develop your patience but you. Nobody can develop your discipline and self-control but you.”¹³

While Meyer does have a reasonable subset of Biblically-sound teaching that characterize her ministry, there is as well this pervasive and subtle man-centeredness that crops up whereby she places an autonomy upon men that we do not actually possess and relegates God altogether too often to the role of bread King, existing to enable us to reach our dreams.

The aforementioned authors, televangelists, and pastors are not alone in being both influential and rather man-centered in a good subset of their ministries. Some of the major

¹¹ David G. Bromley; Leah M. Hott, *Benny Hinn Ministries, World Religions & Spirituality Project VCU*, accessed July 2015, <http://www.wrs.vcu.edu/profiles/BennyHinn.htm>.

¹² Benny Hinn, *Quotes by Benny Hinn*, accessed June 2103, http://www.searchquotes.com/quotes/author/Benny_Hinn/

¹³ Joyce Meyers, accessed June 2105, (http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/8352.Joyce_Meyer?page=5).

works of TD Jakes¹⁴, Rick Warren¹⁵, Andy Stanley¹⁶, and Bill Hybels¹⁷, and many others also promote man-centeredness in their writings.

Yet further evidence of a subtle but pervasive man-centeredness in the Christian popular culture comes from the books that sell. In particular, albeit rather representative of many popular Christian books, is a book entitled *The Story*. In this book, designed to summarize the entire Bible into a “cohesive whole that is readable,” the story of the Bible is condensed into its primary essence. What is that essence? From the back cover: “God goes to great lengths to rescue lost and hurting people. That is what The Story is all about – the story of the Bible, God’s great love affair with humanity...”¹⁸ Without impugning the intentions of the authors, what is conveyed here is that the centerpiece of the Bible is God’s love for men as opposed to the reality that the centerpiece of the Bible is the glory of the Triune God declared before men and angels that He would be worshipped as the God of love that rightfully is His due. This clearly conveys once more how the things of God are so often measured exclusively (or nearly exclusively) in view of men and that God is celebrated largely in view of His facilitating men. Man, his salvation, and his prosperity in this life are the end in view in such man-centered thinking.

In summarizing the content of many of the main contributors to our Christian popular culture in the media, it is rather clear that a prevailing man-centered mindset is being promoted

¹⁴ T.D. Jakes, *Life Overflowing, 6-in-1: 6 Pillars for Abundant Living* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010).

¹⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What in the World am I here for?* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

¹⁶ Andy Stanley, *How to Be Rich: It's Not What You Have. It's What You Do With What You Have* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013) and *The Principle of Path: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

¹⁷ Bill Hybels, *Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015).

¹⁸ Max Lucado and Randy Frazee, *The Story: The Bible as one continuing story of God and His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

alongside solid Biblical principles. In some cases, the man-centeredness is obvious and forefront, while in others it is rather subtle. It seems reasonable to assert that what our congregants are likely to hear, read, watch, or look up in blogs will give our congregants a reasonably high likelihood of exposure to man-centered teaching. Given that we are prone to man-centeredness to begin with (2 Cor. 5:15; 2 Tim. 3:1, 2; Rom. 7:7; 1 Pet. 2:11), this poses a problem.

As a final category of evidence in validating that our congregants indeed have a problem with a tendency towards man-centeredness, we move to the testimony of our own hearts. We may be drawn as it appears the author of Ecclesiastes was drawn. The author of Ecclesiastes was seeking after a sense of meaning, a purpose, and a reason for living. His pursuit drew him to the “things under the sun,” which are, in fact, the things of the world. He sought in the world such things as fame, fortune, wisdom, influence, and leisure, hoping there to find in these things the purpose he was seeking in his life. In his quest, he found these things of the world to be a “chasing after the wind.” That is, he could not find purpose, reason, or meaning for his life in the world. We are tempted to interpret all this as teaching that we will not find meaning, purpose, and peace within our lives through the things of the world. Many would then move from there and teach that we will find meaning, purpose, and peace in our lives in Christ. But, a subtle yet important teaching is missing if we stop there. We must ask about the pursuit itself. Specifically, what was the pursuit of the teacher of Ecclesiastes? It was a life-long quest to find meaning for *his* own life and to find a purpose for *his* own living and to find peace for *his* own heart. Who then was the focal point of his pursuit? Himself. Who is primary in his thinking,

God and others, or himself? Himself. This is to say that the Teacher of Ecclesiastes was overwhelmingly man-centered in his life as evidenced by what he pursued.

We can determine if we are ourselves are struggling with man-centeredness by evaluating our own pursuits. Do we actively pursue meaning, purpose, and peace for ourselves? If this is our primary driving force for seeking after God, we must ask whether we are actually seeking after God or are we in reality merely seeking after the things of God. If we are primarily seeking after the things of God for our edification, then we have an issue with man-centeredness. It is true that we will find meaning and purpose and peace in Christ alone. But this meaning and this purpose and the peace we receive should not be the pursuit. Instead, the pursuit itself should be God-centered. In the framework of a God-centered pursuit, we dwell upon the greatness of the Triune God, His glory, and His attributes as they are declared in His Word that we would worship Him, stand in awe of Him, and then proclaim His greatness to all around us. In so doing, God will add to us fulfilment and we will then stand amazed that He has so blessed us. But such blessings should not be the pursuit. The pursuit should be to simply marvel at God's greatness and declare that greatness to all. Only God's grace can move us to have such a God-centered pursuit. As this transpires, as God moves us to dwell upon Him *as our pursuit*, God's grace then adds to us the blessings of meaning, purpose, and peace.

Yet another very subtle form of man-centeredness can be seen by evaluating a question. *What is the difference between celebrating our position in Christ and celebrating Christ?* If we celebrate what Christ has done for us - and stop there - we have a potential problem. The temptation is to see our position in Christ as the greatest reality and actually celebrate our

position rather than celebrate He who established us in that position. If we do this, we will be both man-centered and promoting man-centeredness. Why? Because if all we do is worship God for what He has done, we will have entirely measured the person and work of the Triune God in view of self and how we are impacted. It is salutary to praise God for what He has done. In fact, we are commanded to do so (Ps. 145:4-6). Our lives *should* be characterized by celebrating God's great deeds. Yet, if we stop there, the temptation to view the blessings in terms of us, our welfare, and our prosperity is too great. In our mind, God can then become our cosmic self-help aid who equips us to prosper. This type of thinking places us on the throne in our own mind and, in our thinking, God is thus relegated to being simply a means to bless us. That is man-centered idolatry. Instead of stopping with praising God for what He has done, *we should start there*. We should reference all blessing to His grace and love. We are to *start* by celebrating our position in Christ by thanking and praising Him for what He has done and *then* go on and praise Him for who He is. In praising Him for who He is, standing in awe of His majesty, our hearts are upon Him as is both right and honorable. This is a God-centered celebration of what God has done for us.

As we think this through, it becomes increasingly clear how man-centeredness can be both pervasive and exceedingly subtle. If we seek after God for what we receive and, as such, pursue the things of God for self, in that moment we are being man-centered. If we teach in such a way that the infinite God of the universe is framed in view of being our cosmic bread king and if we proclaim in any way that following the commands of God is motivated by the benefits we receive in so doing, we are to that extent promoting man-centeredness. Man-centeredness is like

gravity; its pull upon us as fallen (albeit redeemed) people in a fallen world is ever present, always pulling down upon us. We are drawn towards measuring all things, even the things of God, from a reference position of self. To do so is an expression of our sin nature. A man-centered way of thinking where we can unwittingly make Christianity into a means of serving self is somewhat akin to a default setting in that if we do not work to combat it (in the Lord's power) it is what we naturally do. The ever-present draw of man-centeredness can be likened to our attempting to paddle upstream against a swift current. In this illustration, our paddling upstream represents a purposeful move towards a God-centered perspective in the Lord's power (for only in His power and by His grace is a God-centered pursuit possible). Man-centeredness then is the current on the river that will sweep us in the direction of self-serving pursuit the instant our paddle goes dormant. Without God's grace, we cannot do anything but be idolatrous – with self as the idol - even in our Christianity. The point is that whenever God's grace is not, in the moment, moving us to center our thoughts, our pursuits, our perspectives, and our teaching upon Him, we will be swept up and powerless against the man-centeredness that is so central to our sin nature. We float downstream, enslaved to self and are unwitting agents of moving others towards enslavement to self.

In overall summary, the assumption that there is a problem with man-centeredness in our congregation is valid. The Scriptures warn us of the problem and provide for us Biblical solutions. That the problem is manifest within our Christian culture today is clear from the content of the books that sell, the websites and blogs that are read, and the television shows that are watched. A televangelist (or any other teacher in the media) lasts in the modern media only

if listened to, and a large subset of what is listened to (or watched) has a high percentage of man-centered content. This promotes a perspective of men and their welfare as being the epicenter of all things spiritual. Even the testimony of our own heart gives credence to the notion that man-centeredness is a pervasive and subtle problem for all of us, pastor and congregant alike. Based upon these observations, it is reasonable to assert that a very real problem exists. We are both tempted to think in a man-centered way and are immersed in man-centered Christian popular culture. Finally, while one may reasonably argue that the extent of the problem varies from congregation to congregation and person to person, if we have even one person in our assembly who is man-centered in their thinking, that constitutes one person too many. We need to seek the Lord's grace to guide us to combat any man-centeredness that is in our midst, starting with that which resides in our own heart. We must seek after God's grace through His Word to move us as away from man-centeredness and then move us further to be His instruments of grace to speak Biblical truth that those within our congregations would be moved by the Lord from man-centeredness on to God-centeredness.

The Implications of Man-Centeredness

That there is a problem with man-centeredness for pastor and congregant alike is certain. Is this, however, that big an issue? I contend that man-centeredness is something we desperately need God's grace to eradicate from our own thinking and from our teaching. We do not want to

promote man-centeredness in our congregations nor do we want to allow the man-centeredness that is already there go unabated. Why?

The extent to which our (and our brethren's) pursuits are centered upon ourselves (our peace, our comfort, our sense of purpose, our welfare, etc.) is the extent to which we place ourselves on the throne. Such thinking is dishonoring to God because we in our minds have reduced Christianity to just another means of self-fulfillment. If drugs, sex, fame, money, power, and worldly success do not satisfy men, then try Christianity. This reduces Christianity to something that is designed to satisfy man, to provide contentment, purpose, and meaning. If we cannot find it elsewhere, then find it in God. It reduces the things of God to being merely that which serves man, as though man is end of all things and Christianity is but a means of serving that end. Man-centered and idolatrous Christianity makes Christ (in our mind) a commodity. Got Jesus? Make Him your own personal Lord and Savior. It places us on the throne and Christ at our feet. Of course, none of this is possible in reality; but in our perceptions we can elevate self and relegate Christ and that which He has accomplished to nothing more than a means to an end. The end then is selfishly our own fulfillment. In reality, Christianity is not about us. It is not about our needs being met. It is not about our fulfillment. Christianity does involve us and, in Christ, our needs *are* most graciously met. And only in Christianity will we experience true fulfillment. Yet, Christianity is not pre-eminently about these things. Christianity is about the infinite God of the Universe declaring His glory, His love, His awesome grace, and His incomprehensible power in His Son that we should fall down in awe at His holiness and glory and praise Him. God is on the throne. Not us. Our satisfaction, our contentment, our purpose,

our meaning, and our fulfillment are not the point. The glorious God of the universe is the point. Christianity is about Christ who *is* the living embodiment of God's Grace. In contemplating God's greatness we *will* receive satisfaction, contentment, purpose, meaning, and fulfillment—by grace as a gift. But none of these things we receive by grace are to be pursued. We pursue the Lord and all these things are added to us. When our satisfaction, our contentment, our purpose, our meaning, and our fulfillment become the pursuit, we are in idolatrous man-centeredness, whether we are consciously aware of it or not.

Many problems flow from a man-centered view. Such thinking facilitates improper worship and does not promote either humility within the congregant nor does it elicit a proper adoration and reverence for God. Man-centered thinking leads to presuppositions (my quality of life, salvation, etc. are pre-eminent) that result in an improper view of the Word of God and this leads to a distorted theology that is dishonoring onto God and counter to the truth. Further, when we are centered upon self, we are not open to be used of the Lord to bless others by declaring His glory for we are too wrapped up in self.

Man-centeredness is indeed not only a problem, it is a problem with serious implications. What is needed is a Copernican revolution of our Christian worldview. Man must be removed from the throne of his mind and replaced in his thinking with He who is alone worthy to be enthroned: God. Nowhere should this Copernican revolution whereby God is the center of all reality be more obvious than in the worship of the church. Hence it is the responsibility and privilege of the pastor to facilitate a God-centered worldview from the pulpit and from every point of access within the local church.

The Pastoral Responsibility to Respond to the Problem

The Scriptures directly instruct the pastor of a church regarding the role of preaching and teaching. In 2 Timothy 4:2, the Holy Spirit moves Paul to instruct Timothy, as a pastor, to “preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Further, he tells Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13). Paul made sure that in his correspondence with the young pastor Timothy that he should emphasize the important role that preaching and teaching plays in the life of the church (1 Tim. 3:2; 4:6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2, 15, 24-25; 3:16-17; 4:1-2).

In the New Testament they were preaching the message of the gospel which they themselves had witnessed (1 Jn. 1:1-3). Today, our all-sufficient source for this teaching is the written Word of God (1 Pet. 1:25). All preaching and teaching must then be rooted exclusively in the Scriptures.¹⁹ The Scriptures must be taught as being inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), inerrant,²⁰ and authoritative²¹ on every issue to which it speaks. Reverence for the Word of God is paramount and serves as a basis for sound preaching.

¹⁹ Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, (Irvine, CA: Crossway Books, 1994).

²⁰ John Stott. *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982).

²¹ John MacArthur. *Hard to Believe: the high cost and infinite value of following Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2003).

Paul described his approach in ministry to the Corinthians as being without “lofty speech or (worldly) wisdom . . . knowing nothing among you except Jesus Christ,” and was delivered with “weakness, fear and much trembling, with speech and message not in plausible words of wisdom” (1 Cor. 2). His reason? “So that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:5). Under the influence of God the Holy Spirit, Paul was moved to use God’s prescribed method of preaching and teaching; the Christ-centered exposition of the glory of God directly from the Word. He did not tailor the content to appease the itching ears of his hearers, but instead dedicated his efforts to be truthful to the Scriptures. We should craft the content of the message in preaching and teaching to be exclusively in accord with the Word.

God has provided His Word to convert sinners, to cleanse hearts, to correct His people and to comfort the afflicted (1 Pet. 1:23; Jn. 17:17; Eph. 5:25-26; 2 Tim. 4:2; Rom. 15:4). He has designed His Word to be the ultimate and inerrant source of wisdom and instruction (Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:16). Moreover, it is in His living Word that His glory is most clearly declared and through that same Word that God the Holy Spirit who resides within us reveals and illumines truth and moves us to be obedient (Eph. 1:17-18; 3:18-19; 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 4:6). God has chosen the written Word to be the means by which He communicates with mankind (2 Pet. 1:21). Therefore, we must have a rich and deep appreciation of the reality of the sufficiency of Scripture to determine the content of teaching and preaching in the church.

Pastors are but instruments in His hands to be used to reach the world and to feed His sheep (Jn. 21:15-17). Pastors have been charged with the apostolic mission to declare God’s

glory (Jn. 28:19-20, Acts 16:1-3; Rom. 11:4, 1 Cor. 9:22; 2 Tim 2:2; Ja. 5:20, 1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 1:23). It is God the Holy Spirit who directs the witness of the church to the world (Acts 5:32). Thus, the active pursuit of the pastor should be for worship and the declaration of the Glory of God. Central to this pursuit is the primacy of Biblical, God-centered teaching.

Thus, it is evident that pastors need to seek after God's grace to become God-centered and need to depend upon Him daily that they would not personally drift downstream towards man-centeredness in their own thinking. Pastors need to seek after the Lord's grace to give them an increased passion and reverence for His Word. Pastors need to depend upon Him to move them to a deeper and more abiding commitment to truth. In complete dependence upon God's grace in Christ, pastors must seek after the Lord's blessing to be used as instruments to teach the Word in such a way that their brothers and sisters in Christ within their congregations would undergo a Copernican revolution of thought and see God where He actually exists; at the center of all reality, enthroned forever (Ps. 102:12).

What might be taught to move our heart towards a God-centered view and away from a man-centered perspective in the Lord's power? The concept of intra-Trinitarian love; the love within the Persons of the Trinity is an appropriate place to start. In the next few chapters the definition of the term intra-Trinitarian love, the historical teachings of the concept within church history, and an overview of how the teaching of intra-Trinitarian love can be used of the Lord to combat man-centeredness will be addressed.

CHAPTER 3

THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR INTRA-TRINITARIAN LOVE

A Brief Summary of the Ontological Aspects of the Trinity

A non-comprehensive overview of the nature of the doctrine of the Trinity is warranted as a precursor to defining the concept of intra-Trinitarian love.

For the purpose at hand, the doctrine of the Trinity is defined as follows: *There is only one God. God exists eternally as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these three persons is fully God.* This definition breaks down into three parts: 1) there is only one God, 2) the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct persons, and 3) each person is fully God.

Is there only one God? The Scriptures make this abundantly clear. Isaiah 44:6 declares, “Thus says the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.” No less than ten additional Old Testament passages assert the monotheistic reality that there is but one God (Deut. 4:35, 39; 32:39; 2 Sam. 22:32; 2 Ki. 5:15; Isa. 37:20; 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 14, 21-22; 46:9). 1 Corinthians 8:4b is chief among New Testament verses that affirm that there is but one God; “. . . there is no other God but one.” Many additional New Testament passages teach the same (Jn. 5:44; Rom. 3:30; 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5; Ja. 2:19; Jude 25). Based upon Biblical testimony, there is only one reasonable conclusion; there is but one God.

Are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each distinct persons? An attribute of distinct entities is that they can exist in relation to one another. This is not the case where there is lack of distinction. With this in view, the Father is explicitly stated to relate as father to the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:18; 6:27; 17:1, 3; 20:17; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Jn. 3; Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:17; Rev. 1:6). It was the Father who sent the Son (Jn. 3:16-17; Gal. 4:4; 1 Jn. 4:10; Jn. 1:6; 17:18; 20:21), mandating a distinct nature between Father and Son. God the Father and the Son Jesus Christ are the two witnesses of John 5:31-32 and 8:16-18. The Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22; Jn. 7:29; 8:55; 10:15). The Father speaks to the Son, and the Son speaks to the Father (Jn. 11:41-42; 12:28; 17:1-26). Each of these realities revealed in the Scriptures mandates that the Father is distinct from Jesus. Again, and consistent with the premise that the Father and the Son are distinct persons, the Father and the Son love each other (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 14:31; 15:9; 17:23-26; Mt. 3:17; 17:5; 2 Pet. 1:17).

The Holy Spirit is “another Comforter” (Jn. 14:16), was sent by Jesus (Jn. 15:26; 16:7), descended upon Jesus (Lk. 3:22) and seeks to glorify Jesus (Jn. 16:13-14). For any of this to be the case, the Holy Spirit and Jesus must be distinct from one another. Further, the Father and the Holy Spirit are as well distinct one from the other. The Father sent the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:15; 15:26) and the Holy Spirit intercedes with the Father for us (Rom. 8:26-27). As such, the Father and the Holy Spirit must be distinct. In summary, the Father is distinct from both the Son and the Spirit, and the Spirit is distinct from the Son. As such, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each distinct from one another.

Are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit Each Fully God? To assert that the Father is God is a postulate that requires no defense. To assert that both Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-equal to the Father, possessing the same essence as the Father and thereby equally God, does specific require Biblical evidence. An enormous array of Biblical testimony exists that asserts the deity of Christ. Three categories of Biblical evidence will be addressed here (even though much more Biblical evidence could be cited). First, there are over twenty explicit statements identifying Jesus as God (Is. 9:6; Ezek. 32:21; Jn. 1:1. Mk. 12:27; Lk. 20:38; Jn. 8:54; Phil. 2:13; Heb. 11:16; Mk. 12:27; Lk. 20:37-38; Jn. 3:2; 13:3; Rom. 1:21; 1 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; Jn. 1:18; Jn. 20:28. Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1, Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:11, 2:20, 3:2, 3:18; Rom. 10:9-13; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:10; 1 Pet. 2:3-4; 1 Pet. 3:13-15, 8:12-13; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5; Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:5). Second, Jesus possesses names and/or titles that can be given only to God. He is called the alpha and the omega (Rev. 1:7-8, 17b-18; 2:8, 22:13; Is. 41:4, 44:6, 48:12; Rev. 21:6). He is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14, 19:16; Dan. 4:37; 1 Tim. 6:15). He is our Shepherd (Jn. 10:11; Heb. 13:20; Ps. 23:1; Is. 40:11), and our Savior (Lk. 2:11; Jn. 4:42; Phil. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:10; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:11, 2:20, 3:2, 3:18; 1 Jn. 4:14; Is. 43:11, 45:21-22; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb.5:9; Ex. 15:2; Ps. 118:14, 21). Finally, the self-disclosure of Christ Himself provides tantamount evidence. Jesus declares Himself to be the “bread of life” (Jn. 6:35, 41, 48, 51), the “light of the world” (Jn. 8:12), the gate to heaven (Jn. 10:7, 9), the “good shepherd” (Jn. 10:11, 14), the “resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25), the “way and the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6), and the “true vine” (Jn. 15:1, 5).

None of these assertions could be made truthfully without Jesus being God. Based upon these three categories of Biblical evidence, Jesus is God.

The Holy Spirit is both a person and is personally God. He is a person for many reasons. One, He is referred to as helper (paraklêtos in John 14:16 and 1 John 2:1) which, in Greek, almost always is ascribed to a person. Second, the Holy Spirit speaks as only a person can speak (Jn. 16:13; Acts 1:16, 8:29, 10:19, 11:12, 13:2, 16:6, 20:23, 21:11, 28:25-27; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7-11, 10:15-17; 1 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; Rev. 3:6, 13, 22). Third, He can be lied to as only a person can be lied to (Acts 5:3). Fourth, He makes decisions (Acts 15:28). Fifth, He grieves (Eph. 4:30). And finally, sixth, He intercedes for Christians with the Father (Rom. 8:26). None of this is possible for a non-being or an impersonal “force”.

The Holy Spirit is not only a person that is distinct from the Father and the Son, He is co-equal with the Father and the Son and is to be exalted as God the Holy Spirit. This is clear from the Scriptures. First, the Holy Spirit possesses the incommunicable attributes that only God can possess. He is eternal, never having been created, always existing and self-existing (Heb. 9:14). Further, He is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7) and omniscient (Ps. 139:7; 1 Cor. 2:10-11). Second, He is equated with God in the Scriptures (Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17-18). Third, the Holy Spirit is involved in the works of God, including creation (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30), the incarnation (Mt. 1:18, 20; Lk 1:35), the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 1:4; 8:11), and in our salvation (Rom. 8:1-27). Fourth, even the Biblical names ascribed to the Holy Spirit speak to His deity. He is the Spirit of God (Gen. 1:2); the Spirit of the Lord God (Isa.61:1); the Spirit of our God (1 Cor.

6:11), the Spirit of the Lord (Luke 4:18; Acts 5:9); the Spirit of the Living God (2 Cor. 3:3); the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9); the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19); the Spirit of His Son (Gal 4:6); the Spirit of Truth (Jn. 14:17); the Spirit of Holiness (Rom. 1:4); the Eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14); and the Spirit of Life (Rom. 8:2). Fourth, in 1 John 5:6-9b, we read “. . . and the Spirit Himself testifies that this is true, because the Spirit is truth. There are three witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and all three give the same testimony. We believe human testimony; but God's testimony is much stronger, and He has given this testimony about his Son.” In this passage the testimony of the Holy Spirit is the testimony of God; therefore the Holy Spirit is God. Finally, the deity of the Holy Spirit is declared when in the great commission we read that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son *and of the Holy Spirit* . . .” Here the name of the Holy Spirit is equated in glory, honor, and reverence with that of the Father and the Son. Thus, it is clear from Biblical testimony that the Holy Spirit is God.

In summarizing these ontological aspects of Trinitarian doctrine, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all bear the same perfections and possess identically the infinite attributes of deity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not individually one-third God. Each of the three are fully God. The Father is not fully God alone. The Son is not fully God alone. The Holy Spirit is not fully God alone. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each fully God, while simultaneously existing together as fully God.

While sharing an identical essence, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not identical Persons. We would be in error were we to say that the Father *is* the Son or that the Son *is* the Holy Spirit. This is not the case. The Father, while fully God and of identical essence with the Son (who is also fully God) is not, in fact, the Son. Nor is the Son the Holy Spirit, even though both are fully God and of one unified essence. All three Persons of the Trinity are distinct from one another. Distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity can be made in many ways. One such way is in assessing the distinct economic roles of the Persons of the Godhead in the realm of soteriology. The Father elects individuals (Eph. 1:4). The Son, sent by the Father, lives a perfect life and dies a sacrificial and vicarious death for those the Father elected onto salvation (Isa 53, Eph. 1:7-9). We know these soteriological truths only by the illumination of God the Holy Spirit who resides in us (Eph. 1:13, 14). As illustrated in soteriology, the Persons of the Trinity have distinct roles, highlighting the reality that the Persons are themselves distinct.

In view of each Person of the Trinity being fully God and of identical essence yet being distinct Persons, we conclude that there is but one God; the eternal Three-in-One and One-in-Three.

The Triune God (Three-in -One and One-in-Three) alone:

- is self-existent, without beginning or end, infinite, outside of time, uncreated (Acts 17:24)
- possesses all glory (Acts 7:2)
- possesses all power (Job 36:12; Ps. 68:34)
- possesses all knowledge – a knowledge that is infinite, infallible and independent from creatures (Rom. 11:33)

- is the creator and sustainer of all things; is alone the fount of all being, of whom, through whom, and for whom all things are made (Rom. 11:36)
- possesses all goodness (Ps. 119:68) and is the source of all that is good
- possesses all blessedness and is the source of all blessing (1 Tim. 6:15)
- perfect in all His actions, perfect in all His motives, perfect in all His counsels, and in all His commands (Ps. 145:17; Rom. 7:12)
- possesses inherent perfection in Glory and does not stand in need of any creature He has made (Acts 17:24)
- is perfect in every attribute, complete in every perfection and through interaction with His creation can neither be made greater nor made less
- possesses inherent perfection in Glory and cannot derive glory from created beings — His perfections transcend His creatures such that His creation can but declare the Glory that He already possesses and cannot in any manner either add to or take away from that Glory whose magnitude is already infinite (Job 22:2)
- is omnipotent, free, and is not contingent on any created being (Ps. 115:3; Acts 15:18)
- is immutable; does not change (Ja. 1:17)
- is eternal (Ps. 90:12)
- is incomprehensible (Ps. 145:3)
- is almighty (Gen. 17:1; Rev. 4:8)
- is most wise (Rom. 16:27)
- is most holy (Is. 6:3)

Regarding the Persons of the Trinity:

- The Father is a person and is the cause, origin, and source of all things, visible as well as invisible. (Is. 40:28; Col. 1:16; Rom. 1:20, 25)
- The Son is a person and is the Word, the Wisdom, and the image of the Father. (Heb. 1:5, 6; Jn. 1:14, 18)
- The Holy Spirit is a person and is eternal power and might, applying the Grace of God to men, proceeding from the Father and the Son. (Jn. 15:26; Gal. 4:6)
- The distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does not divide God into three. The Scriptures teach us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each has His own subsistence distinguished by personal characteristics—yet in such a way that these three persons are only one God, equal in essence, holiness, and perfection. (Is. 6:3; Is. 5:8).

The above points are affirmed in the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and in the writings of Calvin, Luther, Edwards, and every orthodox theologian from Augustine forward (and even some earlier). Orthodox Christianity is defined by Trinitarian doctrine. With this ontological assessment of the Trinity briefly summarized, we turn to the relational aspects of Trinitarian doctrine; specifically, intra-Trinitarian love.

Intra-Trinitarian Love Defined

God is one being yet has three centers of self-consciousness within His being (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). This teaching is well represented throughout church history in many writings accessible to and designed for congregants. It is reasonable to assert then that congregants, in general, appreciate the notion that God is one in essence while existing in three persons. Congregants are generally clear in understanding that each person of the Trinity

possesses equal perfections (infinite and identical love, mercy, holiness, forgiveness, grace, justice, etc.) and equal attributes (omnipresence, omnipotence, and self-existence). Further, it is generally understood that each person of the Trinity is equally God and equally worthy of praise, adoration, and honor. What is seemingly not as well developed is an appreciation of how the Persons of the Trinity relate in a personal manner to one another. This is particularly true in terms of intra-Trinitarian love; generally defined here as the love that the persons of the Trinity have for one another.

On the inter-personal relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Ware states that:

“God is never alone. He never experiences, whether with or without the world He has made, a sense of individual isolation or loneliness. He never has been lonely or alone, in this sense, nor could He ever be, even in principle. The one God is three! He is by nature both a unity of being while also existing eternally as a *society of Persons*. God’s tri-Personal reality is as intrinsic to His existence as is the reality that He is one God who alone is God. He is a socially-related being within Himself. In this tri-Personal relationship the three persons love one another, support one another, assist one another, team with one another, honor one another, communicate with one another, and in everything respect and enjoy one another. They are in need of nothing but each other through all eternity. Such is the richness and fullness and the completion of the social relationship that exists in the Trinity.”¹

The Trinity is both “He” (emphasizing the unity within the Persons of the Trinity) and “They” (emphasizing the distinctions and inter-relations of the Persons of the Trinity, as Ware does in the above quote). Because the Trinity consists of three persons, the three distinct persons (the

¹ Bruce Ware, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway Press, 2005), 20.

“They”) can, and do, possess inter-personal relations to one another. A word of caution must, however, be noted. We cannot rightly conceive of Father and Son and Holy Spirit as if they are three individuals in the way that three distinct human beings are individuals.² The “they” of the Trinity are of identical essence, and are in complete unity of purpose, being, and nature, while possessing a single unified will. That is, the internal relations between the persons of the Trinity must be understood simultaneously in view of both “He” in unity and “they” in distinction. This makes the holy internal relationship of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unique. That said, the Triune God is indeed relational, internally, in that the Father loves the Son and Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son.

We read of the Father’s love for the Son in many places (Jn. 3:35, 5:20, 17:23, 24). There is as well both direct and indirect Biblical evidence that the Son loves the Father. In John 14:31 we read “but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father”. In view of John 14:31, we see the love of the Son onto the Father is, in part, manifest through obedience to the commands of the Father. The love the Son has for the Father is illustrated in this manner in many passages (Jn. 8:54, 12:28, 12:31, 14:13, 15:8, 17:4, 17:6 and elsewhere). As Carson points out, “the perfection of the Son's obedience (He always does what the Father has commanded Him) is grounded in His love for the Father.”³ The love that the Holy Spirit expresses to Father and Son is presumed to be analogous to the love the Son has for the Father (a contention more fully developed later). That is, as the Son’s love for the Father is

² J. Edwards, *Discourse on the Trinity*, in *Writings on the Trinity, Grace and Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 135.

³ D.A. Carson, “God’s Love and God’s Sovereignty,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156, (April-June 1999), 137.

evidenced by His obedience to the Father, so too the Holy Spirit's love for the Father and Son are evidenced by His obedience to the Father and Son (Jn. 15:26, 16:14; Gal. 4:6).

In John 17:5, Jesus addresses God as Father in terms of both relational love and shared experience in eternity past. It is thus reasonable to assert that the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father (and presumably the love between the Father and the Holy Spirit and the Son and the Holy Spirit) existed from eternity and thus is intrinsic to the Trinity. That is, intra-Trinitarian love is eternal, existing before the creation of anything and dependent upon the Triune God and the Triune God alone.

How is intra-Trinitarian love manifest between the Persons of the Trinity? The answer to this question, derived from the Scriptures, is that inter-Trinitarian love is expressed, in part, in the mutual declaration of the glory of the persons of the Trinity.

God the Father expresses His love for His Son by glorifying the Son. In John 8:54 we read, "Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me . . ." Here the Father acts to bring glory to the Son as an expression of love for the Son. How did the Father glorify the Son? The Father sent the Son to redeem a fallen people, the elect. In sending His Son, the Father provided the context for the perfect love, perfect grace, and perfect forgiveness of Christ to be on display that men and angels would praise the Son's great name. The Father, out of love for the Son, placed the Son where He would be worshipped. In John 12:23 Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." This passage is referring to Christ's sacrificial and atoning death. This death the Father willed for the Son as an

expression of the Father's love to the Son in that the Son is glorified. Because of the love of the Father for the Son, the Father has ordained that men and angels should honor and praise the Son even as they honor and praise the Father.

John 14:31 tells us that the Son expresses His love to the Father through perfect obedience to the Father in all things. The Son does this as a response to the love the Father has for the Son. The Son, through His perfect obedience unto the will of His Father, teaches and acts in such a way as to perfectly reveal the character of God before men and angels. As an expression of the Son's love for the Father, He places on display the perfections of the Father that all would revel in the Father's great glory. That is, God the Son expresses His love for the Father in glorifying the Father. This is clear from John 14:13; "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." In John 12:28, Jesus says, "Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." In John 13:31, 32 we read, "When He had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify him in Himself, and glorify Him at once." On the cross, when we see how much the Son esteems the Father, we get a glimpse the majesty of God and worship Him.

The three Persons of the Godhead are eternally united in a mutual indwelling. They are eternally united in a mutual love. In their eternal love and fellowship, they bring glory to one another. The Son brings glory to the Father by accomplishing His will. The Father brings glory to the Son by giving Him both the context and the authority to accomplish His will. The Father

sends the Holy Spirit to reveal the Son's true nature, glorifying the Son. The Son sends the Holy Spirit to reveal the Father's true nature, glorifying the Father. The Holy Spirit is glorified in revealing the glory of the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son, as an expression of love onto God the Holy Spirit, send Him to be He who reveals the Father and the Son's great glory.

In order to more fully understand intra-Trinitarian love, there is value in looking at the concept of God's desire for His own glory as expressed in the Scriptures. The connection between the concept of intra-Trinitarian love and God's passion for His own glory is not immediately obvious and needs development. The starting point is to establish that God does, in fact, desire His own Glory and His own name to be hallowed. Then, the connection to intra-Trinitarian love will be established.

Jonathon Edwards⁴ generally asserts that God's greatest passion is for His own glory. This is a reasonable assertion in view of the Scriptures. God created the world for His Glory (Isa. 43:67). God chose a people for Himself and made Israel His possession for His glory (Jer. 13:11). It was for His glory that He led His people from bondage in Egypt (Ps. 106:78), and it was also for His glory that He spared them again and again in the wilderness (Eze. 20:14). In Psalm 22:3 we read "He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Why does God regenerate His people? Why does God save men? Why does God "remove our hearts of stone and replace them with a heart of flesh" (Eze. 36:22ff)? That is, why does God, through Grace, recreate us that we should be "born again"? The answer is in Ezekiel

⁴ Jonathon Edwards, *A dissertation concerning the end for which God made the world*, Editor Jason Dollar, (Birmingham, AL: CreateSpace Publishing, 2014).

36:22-28, where we learn that God changes our hearts and saves us because of His great passion for His Name and the glory to be ascribed to His Name. Why did the Son of God come to earth? Why did He die on the cross? What was God's ultimate highest order purpose in Christ? Again, it is the Glory of God that is in primary view as we read in John 17:1, "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may be glorified."

Piper⁵ asserts that:

"From beginning to end, the driving impulse of God's heart for His glory. From creation to consummation his ultimate allegiance is to Himself. His unwavering purpose in all He does is to exalt the honor of His name and to be marveled at for His grace, His love, His mercy and His power. He is infinitely jealous for His reputation. "For my own sake, for my own sake I act, says the Lord. My glory I will not give to another!"

Now that it is established that God does, in fact, have a pre-eminent passion for His glory, we ask two questions. How then is God's passion for His Glory connected to intra-Trinitarian love? More pointedly, how does assessing the concept of God's passion for His glory enable a better and more complete understanding of how intra-Trinitarian love is defined?

God's passion for His glory can be viewed (albeit incorrectly) as being self-centered. Certainly, if we as creatures had as our highest passion our own glory we would be rightfully described as selfish. But this is not so for God, for God is Triune. As Ware puts it, "God is a society of Persons."⁶ Amazingly, the love of God for self is other-centered. The love of God for self is, in part, the love of the Father for the Son and Spirit. It is the love of the Son for the

⁵ John Piper, *Gods Passion for His Glory*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 22.

⁶ Ware, 20.

Father and the Spirit. It is the love of the Spirit for Father and Son. The love of God for self is intra-Trinitarian love and intra-Trinitarian love is an other-centered love. Carson puts it this way: “In eternity past, the Father loved the Son, and the Son loved the Father. There has always been another-orientation to the love of God.”⁷

Since intra-Trinitarian love is, in large part, expressed as mutual glorification of the Persons of the Trinity, then God’s passion for His own Glory is, in fact, other-centered not only in its nature, but in its expression. The Father’s passion is, in part, for the glory of the Son. The Son’s passion is for the Glory of the Father. The Holy Spirit’s passion is for the glory of Father and Son. Piper, in describing the views of Edwards, has pointed out other legitimate reasons to view God’s passion for His own glory as being other-centered and does not invoke the notion of intra-Trinitarian love to defend his contentions.⁸ That said, by viewing God’s passion for His glory in connection with intra-Trinitarian love, we are equipped better to see how God’s intra-Trinitarian love is, in large part, manifest. In seeing the Holy Spirit and the Son’s love for the Father expressed in bringing glory to the Father and the Spirit’s love for the Son expressed as bringing glory to the Son, we appreciate more fully that God’s intra-Trinitarian love is other-centered.

In bringing into sharper focus what the concept of intra-Trinitarian love truly is, we need to make sure that we do not make the mistake of arguing by way of analogy to such a degree that error emerges. We may be tempted to equate the love between the persons of the Trinity with

⁷ D.A. Carson *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156, (April-June 1999), 133.

⁸ John Piper, *Gods Passion for His Glory*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998).

the love that we as individuals have for one another. Such temptation need be tempered. As Sanders⁹ states, the Persons of the Trinity “are not self-sufficient entities that are theoretically separable” (like we as creatures are) and so “the Persons of the Trinity should not be thought of as three people.” Thus, we cannot fully equate the interpersonal relations of creatures to that which exist in Trinitarian perfection. The love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father and the love of the Spirit for the Father and Son are expressed in a relationship of perfection, untarnished by sin. We cannot draw from our experience of love for others and endeavor to relate fully that experience to the perfect love that is manifest within the Trinity. We return to Pink who gives us here precisely what we need to hear: “The truth is that on the love of God, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed in Scripture”¹⁰ We are to be entirely dependent upon God’s self-revelation in His Word and must not go beyond the Scriptures for gaining an apprehension of the intra-Trinitarian love of God.

In summarizing the first level elements needed to apprehend the Biblical concept of intra-Trinitarian we consider these points:

- God is a society of Persons — God’s tri-personal reality is as intrinsic to His existence as is the reality that He is one God who alone is God

⁹ Fred Sanders, “Too little or too much: Troubleshooting contemporary Trinitarianism,” *Modern Reformation*, 33, no. 6, 2014, 55.

¹⁰ Arthur Pink, *The Nature of God*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 91.

- God is one being yet has three centers of self-consciousness within His being (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit)
- the Trinity is both “He” (emphasizing the unity within the Persons of the Trinity) and “They” (emphasizing the distinctions of the Persons of the Trinity)
- the Triune God is indeed relational, internally, in that the Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son
- intra-Trinitarian love is eternal, existing before the creation of anything and dependent upon the Triune God and the Triune God alone
- intra-Trinitarian love is, in large part, expressed in the mutual declaration of the Glory of the persons of the Trinity
- God’s self-love *is* intra-Trinitarian love — and because God is a society of persons, intra-Trinitarian love is an other-centered love
- the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father and the love of the Spirit for the Father and Son are expressed in a relationship of perfection, untarnished by sin.

CHAPTER 4

AN OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING OF INTRA-TRINITARIAN LOVE IN CHURCH HISTORY

“The Scriptures do not give us a fully formulated doctrine of the Trinity but it contains the essential elements out of which this doctrine has been constructed.” Herman Bavink¹

The doctrine of the Trinity is has been developed over a span of 2000 years. The Lord’s people have highlighted various Biblical elements of this grand reality and articulated these truths in countless settings. As Bavink points out, these essential elements, when taken collectively and by the illumination of God the Holy Spirit, enable an apprehension of Trinitarian truth. This great Trinitarian truth is like a many-faceted diamond. The Trinity can be viewed from many faces of the same diamond. Assembling proof texts so as to defend the concept of the Trinity represents one face of that Trinitarian diamond. Positing Biblical defeaters of false views of the Trinity and learning of the Trinity by what it is *not* is a second facet of that diamond. Viewing the Trinity from the perspective of the shared attributes of each person of the Trinity is a third such face of the diamond. These three faces of the diamond represent the vast majority of the contributions over church history, especially earlier church history and as articulated through creeds and confessions. In this survey, the emphasis will not be placed overly on these aspects of Trinitarian doctrine. Rather, this review will emphasize a fourth facet of the diamond: the development of Trinitarian teaching centered upon the love relationship

¹ Herman Bavink, *The Doctrine of God* (Carlisle, PN: Banner of Truth Trust, Eerdmanns,1977), 274.

between the persons of the Godhead. In this walk through Church history, beginning with Athanasius, the landmark creeds and confessions and some of the church's most influential theologians will be mentioned even if they do not place any (or much) emphasis upon intra-Trinitarian love. The reason for including in this review creeds, confessions, and theologians who do not emphasize intra-Trinitarian love (along with those that do) is to establish that among the many facets of the grand Trinitarian diamond, the intra-Trinitarian love between the persons of the Godhead has been under-represented within the teachings in the church and especially so in the teachings that have been seen the most by typical congregants.

Athanasius of Alexandria (297-373) of whom St. Gregory of Nazianzus called the “pillar of the church,” was a famous defender of Nicene theology who was passionately interested in articulating truth concerning the Trinity. The Athanasian Creed has been credited to Athanasius, though it likely was crafted by his followers and others.² The Athanasian Creed has been widely used by the church since the 6th century and was the first creed to explicitly state the equality of the three persons of the Trinity. Designed to combat false teaching, the creed itself describes the Trinity in terms of the attributes of each person.³ Each person of the Trinity is described as uncreated, limitless, eternal, and omnipotent. Each perfection of the one is equally the perfection of the three and every attribute is held infinitely and perfectly by all three persons. In this creed, dedicated to describing the highest Biblical truths of the Trinity, no emphasis upon the relations between the Divine persons is addressed and thus no emphasis upon intra-Trinitarian love is embodied within the creed. This is important to note in that while intra-Trinitarian love is a

² Frederick Norris, *An Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd ed.), (New York: Garland, 1997).

³ *The Athanasian Creed*. Accessed June 2015. <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html>.

Biblical concept of great import, as an explicit teaching it was not represented in the earliest and most influential Trinitarian creed.

The Nicene Creed, originally adopted in the city of Nicaea by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and later amended at the First Council of Constantinople,⁴ was crafted to declare that which constitutes Biblical Christian orthodoxy. The Apostles Creed, as well crafted to define Christian orthodoxy, is thought to have been written by Ambrose in or around 390.⁵ The Nicene and Apostles Creeds are expressly Trinitarian but, unlike the Athanasian Creed, do not focus solely upon the nature of the Trinity. That said, neither creed touches upon the concept of intra-Trinitarian love. This is again important evidence that intra-Trinitarian love as a fundamental teaching commanded no emphasis in the early creeds.

That there is no early creedal emphasis upon the concept is not to say, however, that influential early believers had no conception of intra-Trinitarian love. Basil the Great (329-379) was a church leader who was influential and was very interested in teaching on the Trinity. Basil utilized the term *koinonia* as a partial description of love in view of the Trinity.⁶ Generally, this term means loving mutual communion between persons. Basil used this term to emphasize the loving communion between the three Persons of the Trinity. He states that “The unity of God lies in the loving communion, the *koinonia*, between the Persons of the Godhead.” In general,

⁴ William Carl Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 52–53.

⁵ Apostles' Creed in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

⁶ John D. Zizioulos. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church: Contemporary Greek Theologians Series, No 4* (London: St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1985), 134.

Basil was like many Cappadocians, centering his view of Trinitarian unity upon the mutual *koinonia* within a general analogy not unlike that of three humans in a loving relationship with one another.⁷ While such an analogy is open to criticism for being potentially oversimplified and possibly being inadequate in the extreme, Basil was careful to underline the limitations of his perspective. Basil asserted that the loving communion between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is radically different from and infinitely greater in magnitude than that which can be experienced between any three humans. This is because the *koinonia* between humans is marred by sin.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was another wildly influential theologian who held closely to a Trinitarian concept that, like the Athanasian Creed, emphasized the shared attributes of the three Persons of the Trinity. For Augustine, the shared essence of divinity of the Persons within the Trinity is best understood in view of the unity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁸ Augustine clearly viewed the divine Persons as distinct, yet he did emphasize a primary analogy of one person, not three. That said, Augustine asserts that God is love and that love is relational. Further, for Augustine, love necessitates a lover, the object that is loved, and love must pass reciprocally between lover and beloved.⁹ When Augustine applies this concept to the Trinity, the Father is seen as the Lover, the Son as the Beloved, and the Spirit as the bond of love uniting them in that love. As such, while not the primary emphasis of Augustine's view of the

⁷ Ware, Timothy; "The human person as an icon of the Trinity" *Sobornost* Vol. 8 no. 2, 1986.

⁸ *De Trinitate of St Augustine*. viii. 15. Accessed June 2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130101.htm>

⁹ *De Trinitate of St Augustine*. viii. 14. Accessed June 2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130101.htm>

Trinity, his teachings on the Trinity do represent an early appreciation of intra-Trinitarian love in seed form.

Richard of St. Victor (Scotland, 1106 -1173)¹⁰ begins his assessment of the Trinity with the idea of God as love. As he develops his treatment of love in view of the Trinity, Richard asserts that self-love is not true love. Positing that love is an exchange, he contends that to be present in its fullest form, love needs to be given and it must be mutual. By definition then, love requires a plurality of persons. According to Richard, this must be the case not only for humans but is as well true for God. As such, since God is love perfectly manifest alone prior to the creation of any other, then, at a minimum, it is necessary that God should be at least two persons. Going further, Richard asserts that love needs to be not only mutual but must also be shared. For Richard, the closed circle of mutual love between two persons still falls short of the perfection of perfect love and therefore in order that the perfection of love may exist, the two persons must share their mutual love with a third person. In taking his argument to its Trinitarian conclusion, Richard teaches that where love is perfect, then, the lover not only loves the beloved as a second self, but wishes the beloved to have the further joy of loving the third, jointly with the lover, and of being jointly loved by that third. “Shared love is properly said to exist when a third person is loved by two persons harmoniously and in community, and the affection of the two persons is fused into one affection by the flame of love for a third.”¹¹ In Richard’s Trinitarian conception, viewed within the framework of mutual love, God the Father places perfect affection upon God

¹⁰ Grover A. Zinn. *Richard of St Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 337-97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 354.

the Son. God the Son places perfect affection upon God the Father. The love from one to the other is a gift from the one to the other and is a gift that is reciprocated. The third with whom the other two share their mutual love is God the Holy Spirit, whom Richard terms *condilectus*, the “co-beloved.”¹² In his argument, the Trinity is characterized by mutual love reciprocated between God the Father and God the Son, and by shared love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this we have yet another early and rather explicit description of the Trinity that is framed by intra-Trinitarian love as a defining feature.

As church history progressed into the Reformation period, an array of Reformed creeds were crafted. The creeds, in chronological order, are: the Belgic Confession of Faith in 1561, the Heidelberg Confession in 1563, the Second Helvetic Confession in 1566, the Canons of Dort in 1619, the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647, the Westminster Shorter Catechism in 1647, and the Westminster Larger Catechism in 1648. In the sections within these confessions dedicated to Trinitarian theology, no emphasis is placed upon intra-Trinitarian love. The near exclusive emphasis reflected in the Reformed creeds and confessions is upon other attributes of the Persons of the Trinity.¹³

In the Institutes of Christian Religion by John Calvin (1509-1564), Book I, chapter 13 is dedicated to defining Trinitarian doctrine.¹⁴ Within this treatment, the primary emphasis is

¹² Ibid., 355.

¹³ *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*. Edited by Joel Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

¹⁴ Ford Lewis Battles and John R. Walchenbach: *Analysis of the Institutes of Christian Religion of John Calvin*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980).

placed upon the three facets of the Trinitarian diamond that were stated earlier: assembling proof texts, positing Biblical defeaters of false views of the Trinity (learning of the Trinity by what it is not), and viewing the Trinity from the perspective of the shared attributes of each Person of the Godhead. Calvin does have a modest emphasis placed upon intra-Trinitarian love that is undeveloped whereby he asserts that there is a loving relationship between the persons of the Godhead (I-13:20c).

Moving forward in church history into the some of the more influential thinkers of the recent past, we start our assessment with Herman Bavink (1854-1921). Bavink has clearly articulated an intra-Trinitarian love between the persons of the Godhead as an important element in the description of the Trinity. Further, Bavink asserts that the love from the Father that we receive is love that flows from the Father onto the Son. That is, we experience the love the Father has for the Son, a principle that will be developed more fully elsewhere in this thesis. Bavink states that “God is essentially and primarily the father of the Son, he loves the Son (Jn. 5:19; 10:17; 17:24; 17:26); and this love proceeds from the Father to the Son to others (Jn. 16:27; 17:26). This relation of the Father towards the Son did not originate in time, but is from eternity (Jn. 1:14; 8:38; 17:5; 17:24).”¹⁵ While Bavink does not develop the concept overly, he does allude to the reality that the love we receive from God is a love that is from Father to Son and experienced by us. This again represents an element that is crucial within the development of the concept of intra-Trinitarian love.

¹⁵ Bavink, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*, (Carlisle, PN: Banner of Truth Trust, Eerdmanns, 1977), 267.

Nowhere do Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof (1873-1957)¹⁶ or Lutheran theologian Edward Koehler (1875-1951)¹⁷ develop and expound overly upon intra-Trinitarian love in their systematic theologies. However, Arthur Pink (1886-1952) states that “the loving-kindness of God the Father towards His people is centered upon Christ.”¹⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) asserts that the love of the Father is experienced by us in view of the union we have with Christ in the power of God the Holy Spirit who resides in us.¹⁹ R.C. Sproul (1939-) states that:

“God’s character is such that He cannot ultimately love that which is unlovely. And we, in ourselves, are decidedly unlovely. Christ, however, is altogether lovely. Thus, what He loves in us, that we might be called His children, is Christ in us. So when the text says He loves us, it really means He (the Father) loves His Son.”²⁰

Sproul also asserts that God the Father really loves us because He really loves His Son, Christ Jesus our Lord. J.I. Packer (1926-) contends that the love of God towards man is sovereign, is different than the love between creatures, and is framed within the relationship of the persons within the Godhead.²¹ When taken collectively, the contributions of Pink, Lloyd-Jones, Sproul

¹⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, Eerdmanns, 1960).

¹⁷ Edward Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, (St. Louis: CPH Publishers, 1939).

¹⁸ Arthur Pink, *The Nature of God*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 67.

¹⁹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 108.

²⁰ Sproul, R.C. *Believing God: Twelve Biblical Promises Christians Struggle to Accept*, (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2009), 15.

²¹ J.I. Packer, in *Still Sovereign*, edited by T.S. Schriener and Bruce Ware, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 280.

and Packer forward critical elements regarding the teaching of intra-Trinitarian love; though none of these authors overly develop the concept and none apply the concept as is the case here.

Jonathon Edwards²² and, more recently, J.I Packer,²³ D.A. Carson,²⁴ John Piper,²⁵ and Sam Storms²⁶ have each provided more detailed and developed treatments on intra-Trinitarian love (to varying degrees and with differing emphases). While none of these authors discuss intra-Trinitarian love in the applied sense emphasized as it is here, they together add much to the general Biblical understanding of the concept. These works were addressed in Chapter 3 where the concept of intra-Trinitarian love was defined.

Finally, a survey of readily available non-scholarly Trinitarian writings primarily intended for lay-persons indicate that these works possess similar emphases as their more scholarly counterparts. Four of the more recent books upon the Trinity have no treatment of intra-Trinitarian love at all.²⁷ However in two recent works, one by Ryken²⁸ and the other by

²² Jonathon Edwards. *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings Including Observations on the Trinity*, edited by Paul Helm, (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1971).

²³ J.I Packer, *Hot Tub Religion*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1987), 38.

²⁴ D.A. Carson, "Distorting the Love of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156, (Jan-March, 1999), 3. D.A. Carson, "God's Love and God's Sovereignty." *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156, (July-Sept, 1999) 259.

²⁵ Piper, John. *Desiring God: Reflections of a Christian Hedonist*, (Sisters OR: Multnomah, 1996).

²⁶ Sam Storms, *Pleasures Forevermore: The Life-changing Power of Enjoying God*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2000).

²⁷ a) Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An introduction to the Christian Faith*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2012). b) Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2010). c) Joe Thorn, *Experiencing the Trinity: The Grace of God for the People of God*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2015). d) Allen Vander Pol, *God in Three Persons*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001).

Ware²⁹ treatments on intra-Trinitarian love are included. The former treatment is rather modest, but Bruce Ware in his book entitled *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles and Relevance* has a rather extensive treatment on intra-Trinitarian love (albeit not applied as it is here in this thesis). The contributions from these two works were addressed in Chapter 3 where the concept of intra-Trinitarian love was defined.

In summarizing this brief overview of church history leading up to today as relates to the concept of intra-Trinitarian love, an array of conclusions can be drawn. First, the predominant emphasis within church history, especially in view of creeds, confessions, and systematic theologies, centers upon other aspects of the Trinity. Specifically, the primary emphases are assembling proof texts, positing Biblical defeaters of false views of the Trinity (learning of the Trinity by what it is not) and viewing the Trinity from the perspective of the shared attributes of each person of the Godhead. This is also generally true of current and available Trinitarian writings intended for the typical congregant. Second, the influential scholars Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, Herman Bavink, and J.I Packer each allude to elements of intra-Trinitarian love in their writings, yet, none of them have intra-Trinitarian love as a primary Trinitarian emphasis. Third, Richard of St. Victor held the earliest developed view of Intra-Trinitarian love. Finally, recent theologians including Ware, Carson, Storms, Webster, and Piper do have modestly detailed treatments on the concept of intra-Trinitarian love in their descriptions of the

²⁸ Phillip Ryken and Michael LeFebvre, *Our Triune God: Living in the Love of the Three-in-One*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2011).

²⁹ Bruce Ware, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles and Relevance*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

Trinity. That said, none of these writers apply or emphasize their intra-Trinitarian conceptions as applied and as emphasized here within this thesis.

Based upon the aforementioned conclusions, a generally defensible position can be forwarded that relates to the purpose at hand. It is a relatively safe assumption to assert that the general congregant is unlikely to have a well-developed notion of what intra-Trinitarian love is and will possess an even less well-developed understanding of two very critical things: why intra-Trinitarian love matters and how it can be applied to other doctrines. The primary resources readily available to congregants do not emphasize the role of intra-Trinitarian love and absolutely no emphasis is placed upon how an understanding of major doctrines in view of intra-Trinitarian love can be a blessing to the congregant, moving their hearts from a man-centeredness to a God-centeredness.

CHAPTER 5

TWO APPLICATIONS OF THE TEACHING OF INTRA-TRINITARIAN LOVE AS A PARTIAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF MAN-CENTEREDNESS

Question 1: Why does God Love me?

Why does the Question Matter? The testimony of our own heart makes it clear that man-centeredness is an outflow of esteeming ourselves too highly. Thus, formulating arguments to connect the concept of thinking too highly of ourselves with man-centeredness is not overly necessary as the connection is self-evident. That said, if, in our minds, we see ourselves as being especially set apart from others as a recipient of God's special love based upon something we perceive we did, said, or believed, then we will be more prone to over-valuing ourselves. If we think we are loved by God because of what we did we will be more likely to possess a man-centered perspective. If it can be shown Biblically that we are loved by God, *not* on the basis of who we are or on the basis of what we have done, then a major platform upon which our man-centeredness rests will have been toppled. Therefore, assessing the question "Why does God love me?" from a Biblical perspective in view of intra-Trinitarian love is important to our goal of being a people of diminished man-centeredness.

How is Assessing the Question in view of intra-Trinitarian Love Appropriate? If it can be shown that the reason God the Father loves us is because He loves the Son and that the reason God the Son loves us is because He loves the Father, then a proper perspective of who we are should emerge. That is, if we see that God's intra-Trinitarian love is the basis for His love for us,

we will more clearly apprehend truth and our tendency towards man-centeredness should diminish. Why? It is because, in our minds, we will more clearly realize that God's love for us is of Him and not of us. Moreover, as we reflect on the reality that we are loved by God because of God and not because of us, we will marvel at the great Triune God who *is* love. This is a move in the right direction, for a diminished man-centered perspective is only the start of the process. We desire to have a less man-centered perspective for a reason: so as to have a more God-centered perspective so that the Lord would be honored. Thus, it is appropriate to evaluate the question "Why does God love me?" through the lens of intra-Trinitarian love.

How does evaluating the Question in View of Intra-Trinitarian Love Result in a less man-centered perspective? The starting point for connecting the concept of intra-Trinitarian love to the question "Why does God love me?" will be a brief assessment of certain aspects of election in relation to the atonement. From there, the connection to a diminished man-centeredness will be made culminating in a treatment of how intra-Trinitarian love in answering the question "Why does God love me?" can be used of the Lord to move pastors and congregants away from man-centeredness and towards God-centeredness.

When we consider John 17:6 in conjunction with John 17:10, we learn that as elect sinners *we are a possession*. We are a people group that belongs to both the Father and to the Son.¹ In fact, we are a possession that was given by God the Father to God the Son (Jn. 16:13, 14; 17:2, 6, 10, 11, 21, 24, 26). How so? In His great and infinite mercy and affectionate love for His Son, God the Father, from all eternity has chosen and set apart a people to be a gift onto

¹ D.A Carson, "God's Love and Sovereignty," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156, (1999), 261.

His Son (Jn. 17:6, 9-11, 21). This is foundational to the Bible and we must not neglect to consider our salvation from the perspective of the Triune God or from the considerations of the intra-Trinitarian love.

Because the Father loves the Son and expresses that love in bringing glory to the Son, He (the Father) chose the elect as a gift to the Son *for a purpose*. The purpose is that this group would be given to the Son as an ensemble of creatures, such that the Son could lovingly redeem them in the grandest display of love, mercy, and grace that exists — His atoning death at the Cross. There is great value in recognizing that we are a gift from Father onto Son. We are gift given as an expression of love from Father to Son. We are a gift given as a bride onto a Husband (Isa. 62:5; Mt. 25:1; Jn. 3:29, Rev. 18:23, 19:7, 21:2, 21:9, 22:17). In giving a group of sinners to the Son, a group of sinners in need of purification, the Father provided for the Son the context for displaying the Son's infinite mercy, love, and grace. The Father's love for the Son is thus manifest in giving the elect as a gift to His Son so that the Son would in turn redeem the people who are that gift. Thus, in the Father giving the gift of the elect onto the Son, He provided the context for the Son's glory to be both on display and declared. For, as the Son redeems us, men and angels see, revel in, and enjoy the great and infinite love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God the Son (Jn. 17:10). Therefore, in the giving, the Father, as an expression of love for His Son, has glorified the Son. Jesus is glorified in the collective redeemed group of elect sinners in the sense that in redeeming us, His infinite and awesome love and grace are marveled at and enjoyed by men and angels. The Father raised Jesus from the dead and "highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above all names (Phil. 2:9). The reason the Father did this

was the universal exaltation of the Son, so that “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and beneath the earth” (Phil. 2:10). This is an expression of the love the Father has for the Son. As such, the Son’s great glory is revealed, a gift from His Father.

As a further gift of love from the Father onto the Son, the Father sends God the Holy Spirit into our hearts, causing us to be born again (Eze. 36:22ff), implanting within us faith. The implanted faith is expressed, in part, as love for the Son. As such, the Father, through the Spirit, moves us to love and honor the Son (Rom. 5:5, 8; 2 Thes. 2:16; Jn. 17:26). In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father moves our hearts to revel in and enjoy Jesus as Lord. As such, the love of the Father for the Son is a primary factor in our being born again. For, as the Father moves us to love the Son through the Spirit, He gives onto the Son pleasure, which is an expression of the Father’s love for the Son. The Father gives to the Son a people to forever bless. In so doing, the Son takes pleasure in blessing those given to Him by His Father. In this, we infinitely benefit as we are united to the Son and exist now and forever as a people in loving relation with the Son. Our love for the Son is then a gift from the Father onto the Son. It is based upon the Father’s love for the Son. We, the elect for whom Christ died, are instruments in God the Father’s grand outworking of the intra-Trinitarian love towards His Son.

Turning to the response of the Son to the gift He received from His Father, we see that the Son cherishes the gift (Jn. 17:11; Rom. 8:37-39). Why? Because He cherishes His Father (Jn. 14:31). The Son loves us because we are a gift He received from His Father and He loves the gift (us) because He loves the Father. The Son’s love for us is rooted in His love for the Father. It is the Son’s love for the Father that moved Him to redeem the very people He received

from His Father. He prepares the elect for the Father's presence by living a perfect life so as to impute on to us His earned righteousness (Rom. 8:10; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 1:11). He prepares us by dying a sacrificial death and, in so doing, atoning for our sins, our sins having been imputed on to Christ (1 Cor. 15:3; 15:17; 1 Pet. 3:18). Further, the Son sends God the Holy Spirit into our hearts, causing us to be born again (Eze. 36:22ff), implanting within us faith. That faith is, in part, expressed as love for the Father, and is itself a gift from Son to the Father whereby we, like Christ, cry out "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6; Ro. 8:15). We are moved by the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit to love the Father. The Son desires that we revel in God's glory (Jn. 17:24) and, in seeing us revel in the glory of God, the Son derives pleasure (Jn. 17:11, 21; Zeph. 3:17). Our love for the Father is then a gift from the Son onto the Father that the Son enjoys giving. In this, we are made into a people for the Father to enjoy forever as His adopted children (Rom 8:16-21). Because the Son loves the Father, we were made whole, re-created, born again, and then — as a redeemed people in Christ — given as a gift from the Son back onto the Father. The Son, as an expression of love to His Father, has prepared a room for us in His Father's mansion (Jn. 14:2).

As Jesus was about to redeem us, He said, "By this my Father is glorified . . ." (Jn. 15:8). That which drives the events of the Cross - in the preeminent sense - is intra-Trinitarian love. Man's salvation is a means towards an end - the end being God's glory. The Triune God - each person of the Trinity - is glorified through the salvation of men. And it was motivated by intra-Trinitarian love: "I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (Jn. 17:23). Note what was said — that the world would know that "you (the Father) loved them (the "them" being you and I

and all elect sinners) even as you (the Father) loved me (the Son)." There is more: "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" (Jn. 17:26). That is, we, the elect for whom Christ died, are instruments in God the Son's grand outworking of the intra-Trinitarian love towards His Father.

Further, the Father cherishes the gift, we His redeemed adopted children purified by Christ that are returned to Him (Jn. 16:27). Note that in Romans 8, the Father is the one who loves us *in* Christ the Lord. This is profound. Because the Father loves the Son, those for whom Christ atoned, those who have received the righteousness of Christ - elect sinners - are loved. This love envelopes us as the love that the Persons of the Trinity have for one another is manifest. Therefore, we who are the gift, are cherished by the Father. The Father loves us because we are a gift He received from His Son and He loves the gift (us) because He loves His Son. The Father's love for us is then rooted in His love for the Son. As Carson says: "God does not fall in love with the elect; He does not fall in love with us; He sets His affections on us in Christ."² Further, "His love emanates from His own character; it is not dependent on the loveliness of the loved, external to Himself."³ The Father's love for us is indeed in Christ, centers within the Trinity itself, and is not centered upon who we are or what we have done in thought, word, or deed.

How then *are* we connected to this grand display of intra-Trinitarian love manifest in the atonement? A real key here is that elect sinners are *subsumed* into the great intra-Trinitarian love

² D.A Carson "God's Love and Sovereignty," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156, (999), 269.

³ *Ibid.*, 270.

of God. What does this mean? To be subsumed, formally defined, means to be included in or placed within something larger or more comprehensive, to be encompassed into something larger and of greater substance as a subordinate or component element. This is precisely the correct term for describing how we, as believers, are connected to the grand intra-Trinitarian love between the persons of the Trinity. We, as elect sinners, are subsumed into — that is, are included in, placed within and encompassed by the awesome and utterly holy intra-Trinitarian love that the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father. The Father gave us to the Son as a love offering onto the Son. God the Father honors and glorifies the Son in so doing. The Son prepares us for the Father and, in so doing, honors and glorifies the Father. The Holy Spirit serves the Father and the Son throughout the process, honoring and glorifying the Father and the Son as His expression of love onto Father and Son. We, subsumed into all of this intra-Trinitarian love are ourselves loved by the three Persons of the Trinity. We are loved however, not because of us, inherently, but because God is love and subsumed us into the intra-Trinitarian love the three Persons have for each other. Piper puts it this way:

“In John 17:24, 26, Jesus asks the Father that we might see His glory. But more than that! He asks that the very love that the Father has for the Son might be in us. Jesus prays for the highest imaginable privilege and pleasure – that we might be so filled with the fullness of God that the pleasure of God the Father in the beauty of His Son might fill us and be our pleasure in the Son. He prays that the Son Himself might be in us and thus fill us with the intimate delight He has in His Father. This is the soul’s end – the blessing beyond which no better can be imagined or conceived: an infinite, eternal, mutual, holy energy of love and pleasure between God the Father and God the Son flowing out in the person of God the Holy Spirit, and filling the souls of the redeemed with immeasurable and everlasting joy.”⁴

⁴ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God*, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Press, 1991),58.

Why then does the Son love me? In loving the Father, the Son loves the elect. Why? Because we, the elect, are a gift from the Father to the Son and the Son cherishes the gift because He cherishes the Father. As a Hebrew father would choose a bride for his son as an expression of his love to his son, so too the Father has chosen a bride (the elect) to be a gift of love to His Son. The bride is a gift to be enjoyed by the Son forever as He showers His blessings upon us.

Why then does the Father love us? Because we, the elect, given by the Father to the Son as a gift, are a gift returned to the Father by the Son. We are redeemed by the Son and are thus prepared by Christ to reside in the Father's home. Why? Because the Son loves the Father. We, the elect, are a returned and redeemed gift from the Son to the Father and the Father cherishes the gift because He cherishes the Son.

As a tangible illustration, a personal anecdotal experience is perhaps helpful. When I was about five years old, I took a month's worth of allowance money (\$4.00) and bought a plastic figurine of a smiling little boy holding flowers with an inscription that read "I don't like nobody better than you." As an expression of love to my grandmother, I gave her the figurine. She prominently displayed that figurine for thirty years and then, when she could take only a small box of her possessions with her to her nursing home, that figurine was the centerpiece of what she brought. On her death bed a few years later, she told me that figurine was her most cherished possession. I asked why, as it was but a \$4.00 gift given thirty years earlier. My grandmother's response was simple: "because it represents your love for me." She then gave the figurine back to me because she was going to be with the Lord. She stated that she wanted me to

have the figurine back so that I would always remember the great love she has for me. I have that figurine prominently displayed and cherish it because I cherish my grandmother.

The point of the illustration is that the figurine itself had little (almost no) intrinsic value. The value given to the figurine by my grandmother was entirely based upon the love she has for me. The value I ascribe to the figurine flows entirely from the love I have for my grandmother. *The figurine was cherished not because of what it was, but because of who it came from.* In connecting this illustration to the question “Why does God love me?” - we are the figurine. We, the gift from Father to Son that was returned to the Father by the Son, have little intrinsic value. We are not loved because we are lovely. As Murray says: “the child of God always remains distinct from God. Nevertheless, the elect sinner *is* in organic, vital, personal and joyous union with the Triune God, through the Son and in the Spirit.”⁵ We are loved because the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and the Spirit, in loving the Father and Son, unites us to the Son, uniting us to the Father. We are the gift exchanged, and we are loved because the givers of the gift love each other. Swain puts it this way, “The electing love of the Father, executed through the gracious condescension of the Son, is perfected in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, by whose presence we are deluged in love.”⁶

In fact, as an expression of love from the Father and the Son onto the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is charged with caring for what is most precious to the Father and Son – we who are the gift between Father and Son. God the Holy Spirit is so loved by the Father and Son that He is privileged to perfect, sanctify, and complete the gift the Father gave to the Son and the Son

⁵ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, (Great Briton: Banner Press, 1979), 79.

⁶ Scott R. Swain, *The God of the Gospel*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 195.

returned to the Father. Through the Cross, the believer — you and I, elect sinners, chosen by grace alone — are privileged to partake of and enjoy the same intra-Trinitarian love that the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father. In the power of the Spirit, the very same love that the Father has for His Son is poured upon the believer who has been purchased by the blood of His Son. And in like manner, just as the Son loves His Father, so He loves His own who have been given to Him by His Father. Piper says this: “The happiness of God [the Father] is first and foremost a happiness in His Son. Thus, when we share in the happiness of God we share in the very pleasure the Father has in His Son.”⁷ We are so blessed. But we are not loved because of us. We are loved because of Him. This is a necessary reality to apprehend in the battle against man-centeredness.

Why is understanding the reasons for God loving us of great value in the endeavor to be less man-centered? When we see that God’s love for us is rooted in Him and not us, we will likely feel somewhat minimized. That said, we clearly need a lesser view of self. We so often think that we are the point in Christianity. We often are inclined to think that Christianity consists of the salvation of men for the sake of the salvation of men. In the deep recesses of our mind, we often view our salvation as an end — and Christ’s great work as a means to that end. This type of man-centered thinking is, however, a most sinful, and perhaps *the most* sinful, manifestation of our man-centeredness. John Webster puts it this way:

“The salvation of creatures is a great affair, but not the greatest, which is God’s majesty and its promulgation. ‘He saved them for His name’s sake,’ the psalmist tells us, ‘that He might make known His mighty power’ (Ps. 106:8). Salvation occurs as part of the divine

⁷ John Piper in *Pleasures of God*, 12.

self-exposition; its final end is the reiteration of God's majesty and the glorification of God by all creatures."⁸

In reality, Christianity is not primarily about the salvation of men. Men's salvation is not an end - it is a means. Because the Son loves the Father (and because the Father loves the Son), we are saved and will eternally remain subsumed into the great love the Persons of the Trinity have for one another. The Son prepares us for the Father's presence by serving as our Prophet, our Priest, our King, our atoning sacrifice, our Savior, our intercession, our Lord — and we infinitely benefit. In all this, we are, however, not the pre-eminent point. The atonement was pre-eminently about intra-Trinitarian love and centers upon the glory of the Triune Godhead. *We are but instruments to that end.* Yet we are infinitely blessed to be such instruments. We are not the primary focal point of God's love. Yet we are infinitely blessed in being loved by God whose love for us is perfect. Upon reflection of these grand realities, we are rightly diminished in our own mind and – far more importantly – the Triune God is elevated in our hearts and minds. This is precisely what both pastor and congregant need in order for the Lord's grace to de-throne man (specifically self) and see more clearly the greatness of He who is *actually* on the throne. This is the needed Copernican Revolution, removing man from the center of the universe in our own thinking and seeing the reality of what actually is—*that God is alone upon the throne.*

As the Lord moves us through the contemplation of intra-Trinitarian love to truly see why His love is upon us, He reveals onto us that we are a possession (1 Pet. 2:9) and not the one upon the throne. When we see that we are but a possession (albeit a blessed possession), then we will

⁸ John Webster in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or Wisdom of God?*, edited by Thomas Joseph White, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, Eerdmanns, 2010), 20.

have a basis upon which to refrain from proclaiming our own centrality. Moreover, as we contemplate how God is love, with Peter, we will be moved to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). In contemplating God’s love for us in view of intra-Trinitarian love, we will see that Jesus is glorified *in us* not because of anything we have done, but rather He is glorified by what *He has done for us out of love for His Father*. We will see that God the Father derives pleasure not in what we have done in our power, but rather He derives pleasure in the steadfast love He poured into us (Mic. 7:18) in connection with the love He has for His Son. We then exist as redeemed people to be the repository of the Triune God’s blessings because He is love. And, because He is love, He loves to bless.

As we contemplate further how we are blessed in being subsumed into this great intra-Trinitarian love of God, more reasons to eschew a man-centered perspective arise. In Romans 5:5b we read “God's [the Father’s] love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” This is critical. God's love is, in the Spiritual sense, *poured* into us. It invades us and blesses us. It is not from within, as if we generated it in our own power. It is from the outside, otherwise foreign to us; implanted within us.

Why does God the Holy Spirit implant within us such love? This question is central to the issue of abating man-centeredness and flows from the question “Why does God love me?” There are three considerations in arriving at an answer. First, Proverbs 15:26 tells us that God the Father is pleased by pure thoughts emanating from us. Since it is clear that sin arises within the thoughts of our heart (Mt. 5:8; Eze. 38:10; Mt. 9:4, 15:9; Mk. 7:21) it is reasonable to then assert

that obedience originates in the pure thoughts of our heart (Phil. 2:13). Yet, we need to recognize that we cannot produce such pure thoughts in our own power apart from grace (Gen. 6:5; Jn. 15:5). As a second consideration, we are commanded to think pure thoughts (Phil. 4:8; Rom. 12:2). Pure thoughts - those that are both pleasing to the Father and commanded of us - are an act of obedience. Because we cannot have pure thoughts in our own power apart from grace, then it is clear that we cannot be obedient in our own power apart from grace (1 Cor. 2:14; Jn. 15:5-8). This leads to the third consideration. Obedience is worked within us by God the Holy Spirit, in and through God's Word illumined onto our hearts (1 Cor. 2:12-14; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27). In Ezekiel 36:27, we read: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and *cause you to walk in my statutes* and be careful to obey my rules." In Hebrews 13:20, 21 we read "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." It is the Father, working through the Holy Spirit, that literally works within us that which is pleasing in His sight. In Romans 12:1, we read: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and *pleasing to God*—this is your spiritual act of worship." This spiritual act of worship is, in fact, God the Holy Spirit working within us that which is pleasing onto the Father as an expression of the Spirit's love for the Father. It is "our" spiritual act of worship in that it is produced in us, worked through us by the Holy Spirit, and ours to enjoy. In Colossians 1:10, we are commanded to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the

knowledge of God.” Where does such fruit come from? The Holy Spirit works that fruit within us. Where does the knowledge of God the Father come from? The Holy Spirit reveals that truth within us. We need God the Holy Spirit to produce both the desire and the obedience within us by grace. This is precisely what the Holy Spirit does within our hearts whenever we are obedient in thought, word, or deed.

Why then does God the Holy Spirit implant within us the love of God? Why does God the Holy Spirit move us to pure thoughts that lead to obedience? The answer is clear. The Holy Spirit works within us the desire to be obedient and moves us to obedience itself because it is pleasing to God the Father and to God the Son. Thus, the Holy Spirit working obedience within us is an expression then of the Spirit’s love for the Father and the Son. It is God the Holy Spirit, out of His love for the Father and Son, who moves us to obedience and faith, enabling the love of God to overflow on to us for our blessing.

Is there more? Does God the Holy Spirit do more within us as an expression of His love for the Father and the Son? The Holy Spirit, residing in our heart (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:22) brings conviction of sin to the regenerate heart (Jn. 16:8-11). The Holy Spirit gives onto us regeneration, causing us to believe (Jn. 3:3-7; Tit. 3:5; Eze. 36:22ff). The Holy Spirit places the born-again person into union with Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The believer lives in the power of the Spirit and receives, as a gift, by grace and by grace alone, the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 22, 23). While the child of God may sin and grieve the Spirit, the Spirit will never leave the true believer (Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit seals the believer. Swain says this: “the Spirit is a genuinely personal agent who “seals” the Father’s love for the Son and the Son’s love for the

Father... He adds to their love by confirming the fullness of that love to us.”⁹ This ministry guarantees the security of the believer “until the day of redemption.” (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). He intercedes for us with groaning, prompting us to pray (Rom. 8:26). He searches our hearts (Rom. 8:27) and He teaches us all things (Jn. 14:26). He reminds us of all that the Son has done (Jn. 14:26). In fact, the Triune God reveals Himself to us through His Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:12-13). All of this is motivated by God the Holy Spirit’s love for the Father and the Son. In all of this, the Father and the Son are pleased and glorified. This is precisely how the intra-Trinitarian love of the Holy Spirit is manifest towards Father and Son. In all this, we are blessed.

In summary, how does evaluating the Question of “why does God love me” in view of intra-Trinitarian love result in a less man-centered perspective? An array of principles, in bullet form, will facilitate the summary.

- The Father loves us because He loves the Son
 - therefore, the Father’s love for us is not based upon us, but is based upon the intra-Trinitarian love of the Father towards the Son
 - therefore, the Father’s love for us is entirely an unmerited gift to us because the Father loves the Son
 - therefore, we cannot credit ourselves for being loved by the Father

- The Son loves us because He loves the Father
 - therefore, the Son’s love for us is not based upon us, but is based upon the intra-Trinitarian love of the Son has towards the Father

⁹ Scott R. Swain in *The God of the Gospel*, 201.

- therefore, the Son's love for us is entirely an unmerited gift to us because the Son loves the Father
- therefore, we cannot credit ourselves for being loved by the Son
- The Son moves us to love and honor the Father
 - therefore, the reason we love the Father is because the Son loves the Father
 - therefore, our love for the Father is not based upon us, but is based upon the intra-Trinitarian love of the Son has towards the Father
 - therefore, our love for the Father is entirely an unmerited gift to us because the Son loves the Father
 - therefore, we cannot credit ourselves for loving the Father
- The Father moves us to love and honor the Son
 - therefore, the reason we love the Son is because the Father loves the Son
 - therefore, our love for the Son love is not based upon us, but is based upon the intra-Trinitarian love of the Father has towards the Son
 - therefore, our love for the Son is entirely an unmerited gift to us because the Father loves the Son
 - therefore, we cannot credit ourselves for loving the Son
- God the Holy Spirit moves us to love and honor the Father and the Son
 - therefore, a further reason that we love the Father and the Son is because the Spirit loves the Father and the Son
 - therefore, there is further reason why our love for the Father and the Son is not based upon us, because it is based upon the intra-Trinitarian love of the Spirit for the Father and the Son
 - therefore, our love for the Father and the Son is an unmerited gift to us because the Spirit loves the Father and the Son
 - therefore, there is further reason why we cannot credit ourselves for loving the Father and the Son
- God the Holy Spirit, out of love for the Father and the Son, moves us to have pure thoughts and motives/desires for obedience, and, in fact, moves us to obedience:
 - therefore, because faith is commanded of us and is worked within us by the Holy Spirit as a result of intra-Trinitarian love
 - our faith is entirely an unmerited gift from God onto us
 - therefore, we cannot take credit for possessing faith
 - Therefore, since worship is commanded of us and requires obedience—and since obedience is worked within us by God the Holy Spirit out of love towards the Father and Son

- our worship is entirely an unmerited gift from God onto us
- therefore, we cannot take credit for worshipping God
- Therefore, since our growth in the Lord (our sanctification) is commanded of us and requires obedience— and since obedience is worked within us by God the Holy Spirit out of love towards the Father and Son
 - our growth (our sanctification) is entirely an unmerited gift to us
 - therefore, we cannot take credit for our sanctification

In a man-centered view, we tend to credit self for God loving us. How so? By thinking that we are somehow meritorious of His affections. But in contemplating intra-Trinitarian love we now realize that God's love for us is of Him entirely. In our man-centeredness, we as well will credit self for loving God (over against those who do not) and we will see our love as our gift to God. Yet now, in view of intra-Trinitarian love, we realize that our love for God is His gift to us. We in our man-centeredness ascribe to our choices, our wisdom, and our piety the notion that we give our faith, our worship, and our praise to God as a gift onto Him. We tend to think that our growth in the Lord is of us (over against those not growing as much or at all). But, in view of intra-Trinitarian love, we now know that our faith, our worship, our praise for God, and our growth in the Lord are all gifts from God onto us because of God's great intra-Trinitarian love. For that matter, our knowledge of God, our desire for the Word, and our willingness to serve in the body of Christ are as well God's gifts to us because of intra-Trinitarian love. None of these are our gifts to God. All of these are God's gifts to us.

All of this is granted onto us because we are subsumed into God's great intra-Trinitarian love. That is... God is love. As the Spirit moves in His love for the Father and the Son to please, honor, and glorify Father and Son, He moves us to faith, to obedient thoughts, to

obedience, to love for the Lord, and to worship and to praise Father and Son. As the Son moves in His love for the Father to please, honor, and glorify the Father, He moves us through the Spirit to faith, to obedient thoughts, to obedience, to love for the Father, and to worship and to praise for the Father. As the Father moves in His love for the Son to please, honor, and glorify the Son, He moves us through the Spirit to faith, to obedient thoughts, to obedience, to love for the Son, and to worship and to praise for the Son. Swain adds this: “the Spirit of God replicates the archetypical love of the Father and Son in God’s adopted children by including them in the circle of that love.”¹⁰ The Holy Spirit, in His love for Father and Son, has included us as subsumed participants within the mutual love of Father for Son and Son for Father. All this is done in complete Trinitarian unity. As Ware puts it:

“The three persons are never in conflict of purpose, never prideful over one’s own position or work, and they are always sharing fully the delight of being one God and accomplishing the unified purpose of God.”¹¹

The purpose of God in this intra-Trinitarian love is mutual love for one another expressed as pleasing, honoring, and placing upon display the glory of one another. We are subsumed into it all and loved. As Swain says, we are loved because God is love:

“There, even in heaven, dwells the God from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is, or ever was, proceeds... There dwells God the Spirit – the Spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God, as it were, flows out, and is breathed forth in love, and by whose immediate influence all holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of all the saints on earth and in heaven”¹²

¹⁰ Ware, in *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 202.

¹¹ Ware in *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 20.

¹² Scott R. Swain in *The God of the Gospel*, 207.

Our Triune God has given to us our faith and He has given us our love for God. All obedience that we ever exhibit is obedience that is a gift to us from God – who is love - as the outworking of intra-Trinitarian love. In all this, all glory is to be ascribed to our Triune God and our Triune God alone. In all this, we are subsumed into the love of God and are infinitely blessed.

Pride and a man-centered mindset flow from the misbegotten notions that God loves us because of us, that we love the Lord in our own power, and that we give God our obedience, our worship, and our praise onto Him as our gifts to Him. Thanksgiving onto God and sense of awe at His majesty flow from the realization that our love for Him is His gift to us. Our obedience, our worship, and our praise are His gifts to us to enjoy. As such, there is absolutely no basis for man-centeredness. Far more importantly, because this is true, there are a never-ending array of reasons to praise, honor, and stand in awe of the incredible glory of our Triune God.

If these Biblical realities are taught in a forthright and clear fashion to our congregants, then the basis for man-centeredness will crumble. By the grace of God, we will together, both pastor and congregant, be set free from the tyranny of man-centeredness for the purpose at hand. That purpose is to see more fully the glory of our Triune God and honor Him in thought, word, and deed. The extent to which we are man-centered is the extent to which we dwell upon self and measure things from the perspective of self. In this, we fail to see the greatness of God. For when we ascribe to self that which God has done for us, within our heart and mind we ascribe unto men what rightfully belongs to God. The extent to which we are man-centered is the extent

to which we fail to praise Him for what He has done and for who He is. But, as we teach and are taught the Biblical truths that flow from intra-Trinitarian love, we see that our relationship with God is one way. He gives. We receive. He contributes all. It is He who works within us that which is pleasing in His sight (Heb. 13:21). We contribute only sin. When we see this, we are very likely to be lessened within our own minds – which is a blessing. When we see that God loves us because of Him, that we love Him because He blessed us by implanting within us a love for Him, we see more fully how amazing God truly is—which is precisely the mindset that is honoring to God.

Practical Implications

The practical implications are many. First, when we are centered in our thinking upon the Lord and the reality of His great love for us as being a gift onto us that is undeserved, our heart will be inclined towards praise. This results in an emerging heart attitude of thanksgiving towards God which will impact not only how we think, but also how we act. Second, when we see His love for us as entirely an unmerited gift and that we are cherished by God entirely because of who He is, He equips us with a right attitude about the concept of love itself. With this in view, our love for others should become less conditioned on the other and more patterned after the love we ourselves have received. Third, as we see the Scriptures with intra-Trinitarian love in view, we see more clearly the Trinity in the Word and the practical reality is that a more balanced and Biblical picture of who God really is emerges. This will impact everything we do. Finally, as we consider intra-Trinitarian love and how we are subsumed into that love we realize

just how blessed we are which will prepare our hearts to love the Lord all the more. Such heart preparation is critical in the Lord equipping us to grow in Him and to prepare our hearts to serve Him by serving others. By the grace of our Lord, a systematic teaching of intra-Trinitarian love centered upon the question “Why does God love me?” can result in a meaningful move away from self and towards God.

This is, however, just the start. There are other related questions to address in view of intra-Trinitarian love. Our next question to be assessed in view of intra-Trinitarian love is a practical extension that flows from where we have been and further is designed to be used of the Lord to move us away from man-centeredness and towards God-centeredness.

Question 2: What is Christian Humility?

Why does the Question Matter? Micah 6:8, one of the few places where God is asked pointedly what He demands of us, reads as follows: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” This verse establishes the centrality of the concept of humility in Christian living. In fact, we are commanded to exercise our living with humility over twenty times in the Scriptures. We are as well taught that we are far from the Lord when we are not humble (Ps. 138:6). It is thus quite clear that humility is an important attribute to pursue in the Lord’s power, making the question generally quite important.

How is Assessing the Question in view of intra-Trinitarian Love Appropriate? When the term “humility” is defined and applied Biblically, an evaluation, in part, from the purview of intra-Trinitarian love as a guiding example for application is appropriate. Why? The love of God the Holy Spirit towards the Father and the Son is expressed, in part, as humility of the Spirit towards Father and Son. Similarly, the love of God the Son towards the Father is expressed, in part, as humility of the Son towards the Father. With this in view, intra-Trinitarian love is intimately connected to the Biblical application of the concept of humility because the Persons of the Trinity in their internal relations model humility in its purest form.

How does Evaluating the Question in View of Intra-Trinitarian Love Result in a Less Man-Centered Perspective? Our journey towards answering this question begins with a definition of the term “humility” by way of its’ use in the Scriptures. From there, an inspection of humility as expressed within the Trinity motivated by intra-Trinitarian love is addressed. What follows is an argument for how the example of intra-Trinitarian love expressed as humility, by the grace of God, can combat the man-centeredness and moves us towards God-centeredness.

Humility is important (Mic. 6:8), it is commanded of us (1 Pet. 3:8, 5:6), it is something we should seek (Zep. 2:3), it is something the Lord produces within us (Deut. 8:2, 3; Ps. 25:9), and it is something we expend effort in the Lord’s power to pursue (Ja. 4:10; Jn. 15:5). But, what is it? What, precisely *is* Christian humility?

The Biblical concept of humility is like the concept of the Trinity itself. It is like a diamond - it has many facets and can be viewed in many ways. There are at least seventeen

ways in which humility is applied in the Scriptures. Humility is expressed as not crediting self for what God has done in, through, or around us (Rom. 11:18, 12:3; 2 Cor. 3:5; Jer. 10:23). Humility is not unduly elevating one's self in one's own mind or attempting to elevate one's self in the eyes of others (Pr. 25:6; 1 Cor. 1:29; Gal 6:14). It is not letting others exalt us, knowing that we should exalt only God, for only He is worthy of exaltation (Job 7:17). Humility is not lording over others (1 Pet. 5:3). Humility is expressed as accepting instruction from others (Pr. 12:15, 10:8). It is accepting our conditions with joy, without presumption, and being content to declare the Glory of God wherever the Lord places us (Phil. 4:12; Lk. 9:58). It is having reverence before the Lord (Ec. 5:2; Isa 6:5). Humility is expressed as confessing our sins before the Lord (2 Chr. 34:27). Humility is generally not thinking too highly of ourselves (1 Cor. 3:18). It is being dependent upon God like a child (Mt 18:2-4). It is not seeking after our own pursuits, but seeking instead after what the Scriptures call us to pursue (Ja. 4:1,2a). Humility is being willing to forgo our rights and not be a stumbling block to anyone (1 Cor. 8:10ff, 9:12b). It is subjecting ourselves to the service of others (1 Pet. 5:5). Humility is being attentive to those who are in need and subjecting ourselves to hearing the needs of others and empathizing with those who are struggling, being moved to help them (Ja. 1:19; Jer. 13:15). It is realizing our inability (Ex. 3:11). Finally, humility is manifest in deferring all Glory to God (Gen. 41:16; Mk. 1:7; Jn. 3:30).

The first of two perfect models for infinite humility in deferring all glory to God is the life attitude expressed by Jesus during His earthly ministry. In John 5:30 we read, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my

own will but the will of Him who sent me.” The intra-Trinitarian love the Son has for the Father is manifest by the Son in the Son being perfectly obedient to the will of the Father (Jn. 14:13, 31). The Son does this so that we would see the glory of the Father and praise and worship the Father. This is a gift of love from the Son to the Father. The pre-eminent act of love on the behalf of Jesus towards the Father, expressed as humility towards the Father, is the combined act of His perfect life and His sacrificial death.

Philippians 2:5-8 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled** Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Why did Jesus Humble Himself in this way? He did so to redeem a people for His Father. He did so to place on display the glory of the Father who sent Him so that we would revel in that glory and God would be pleased in blessing us as His adopted children. Amazingly, on the cross, at His most profound moment of love, grace, and glory, Christ deferred all glory to His Father (Jn. 12:28, 17:4). The Son, through His perfect obedience onto the will of His Father, teaches and acts in such a way as to perfectly reveal the character of God before men and angels. That is, God the Son expresses His love for the Father in glorifying the Father.

When a Sunday school class within a church I once attended was asked to write down the primary reasons for the death of Christ, 100% responded by exclusively referencing Christ's death to the sin of men and the eternal implications that result from His sacrificial atonement, essentially measuring the cross in entirety in view of personal impact upon themselves. A

cursory internet evaluation of the same question yielded similar results. Over 95% of the first twenty webpages/blogs again referenced the death of Christ exclusively to men and the impact on men. To explain the cross in terms of sin and the impact upon men is Biblical and reflects truth, albeit an incomplete truth. While it is true that the suffering of Christ is an outpouring of God's wrath against sin, it is equally true that Christ's suffering is a beautiful act of submission and obedience by Christ motivated by the Son's intra-Trinitarian love for God the Father. This God-centered, Trinitarian reality is often not taught and is underappreciated by congregants. Referencing the events on the cross to the Son's love for the Father is a necessary teaching to make complete the congregant's understanding of Christ's death. The Scriptures make clear that the suffering of Christ was a fragrance to God. "Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). The fragrant offering is almost certainly a love offering from the Son onto the Father. The Son's desire, again an expression of His love for His Father, was as well expressed in the desire to place upon display the glory of the Father. When explaining why the Son of Man must be lifted up, Jesus, expressing perfect humility, said, "Father, glorify your name." (Jn. 12:28). In giving us a new commandment, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him" (Jn. 13:31). Christ's death and all that He did while on earth prior to His death was perfect humility towards His Father motivated to show others the love Christ has for His Father. As Jesus said, "but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn. 14:31). By Christ's death on the cross, we see God the Son's love for His Father. In this, Christ moves us to worship and honor

the Father. Christ's obedience on the cross moves us to praise the Father, that the Father would be rightly worshiped.

If we are not made aware of how much the love of the Son for the Father motivated the death of Christ on the cross, the potential for man-centered idolatry is high. Why? Because it is so natural in our sin nature to assume that the primary focus upon Christ's heart on the cross was fixed upon us – when, in fact, His primary focus was upon His Father. Apart from understanding intra-Trinitarian love in view of the cross, men may (and, in fact, most do) assume that God's love for the sinner was the exclusive love in view when Christ went to cross (when, in fact, it was not). Such thinking elevates man in his own mind well beyond what is appropriate and is an expression of man-centered lack of humility.

Returning to Philippians 2:5, we are told to "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus . . ." The humility of Christ towards the Father as an expression of love towards the Father is a perfect model for our own life. Jesus did not live a Jesus-centered life; He lived a Father-centered life. He "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself..." All that Jesus did was motivated by love for His Father and all that He did towards men was designed to unite men to His Father. The loving humility of the Son towards the Father constitutes a teaching that must be central within the church so that we as sinful creatures would not center upon self. For if God the Son, from a position of equality with the Father, did not live for self, then most certainly we as sinful creatures should not center our lives upon ourselves.

The second perfect model for humility motivated by intra-Trinitarian love is the Love of God the Holy Spirit for Father and Son. God the Holy Spirit, out of love for the Father and the Son, and with the desire to humbly obey Father and Son, has chosen to reside within our hearts (Rom. 8:9; Jn. 14:17). God the Holy Spirit has moved us to love (Gal. 4:6) and serve (Heb. 9:14) the Father. Out of love for the Son, the Holy Spirit illumines the truth of Christ to our hearts (Jn. 14:26). In all that God the Holy Spirit has done and continues to do, He defers all glory to the Father and the Son. This humility is manifest from a position of equality with the Father and Son and yet the Spirit never draws attention to self, doing all for the glory of Father and Son.

For Jesus says:

John 16:13,14 When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Whose agenda does the Holy Spirit follow? Out of great intra-Trinitarian love, He humbly follows that of the Father and the Son. In all the choices made by God the Holy Spirit, who was in primary view? Once more, the Father and the Son. Did God the Holy Spirit make choices based upon His own well-being or for His own benefit, or for His own glory? He did not. His decisions were (and are) directed towards the pleasure and the glory of the Father and the Son and are for the benefit of men whom the Spirit unites to the Father and the Son as He directs our hearts to the Father and Son. What are seemingly the motives behind the choices made by God the Holy Spirit that bless us? Once again, intra-Trinitarian love.

In assessing the intra-Trinitarian love of the Son towards the Father and the Spirit towards the Father and Son, we see perfect humility manifest as deferring all glory to the other. How then can dwelling upon this reality reduce within us the desire to be man-centered? We see perfectly modeled for us that the highest order expression of humility is to live in thought, word, and deed in such a way as to proclaim the Glory of God. The Son did all things for the glory of the Father, motivated by love for the Father. The Spirit did all things for the glory of the Father and the Son, motivated by love for the Father and the Son. For us, as redeemed sinners, we are to do all things for the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit - motivated by love for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Son humbly sacrificed self to unite others to the Father. The Spirit humbly sacrificed self to unite others to the Father and Son. For us, we are to humbly be used of the Lord as instruments of His grace to sacrifice and forego our agenda and live as vessels of blessing in the Lord's power to be used to unite others (again in the Lord's power) to our Triune God. Humility, as seen through the lens of intra-Trinitarian love, is living a God-and other-centered life in thought, word, and deed. It has been perfectly modeled for us in the Trinity – both in terms of expression and the motives behind the expression.

Contemplating the concept of humility in view of intra-Trinitarian love will combat the tendency towards being self-centered even in our conception of humility. Consider the quotes from the book “Humility: True Greatness” by C.J. Mahaney

“Humility has value because it works — and should be pursued because it works — it goes far in building respect for those who have it and inspiring trust and confidence from people around them.”¹³

“We must also clearly define true greatness for our children . . . Through our humility and showing them through our humility what true greatness really is”¹⁴

What is clear from these well-intentioned quotes is that we as Christians can be so subject to the subtlety of man-centeredness that we can (and often do) ascribe self-referential motives even to our pursuit of humility. This once more validates not only how subject we are to man-centeredness, but also how important it is to see humility through the lens of intra-Trinitarian love. The perspective espoused in the above quotes holds that we seek humility for self-serving gain. Such a motive for humility is not tenable, especially in view of seeing humility perfectly expressed in the Trinity. When we see the motives for humble action in the Son and in the Spirit, we see God- and other-centered living motivated out of love. This shows that there *is* no self in humility.

Teaching this reality will combat man-centeredness in many ways. As we dwell on the humility of the Son and the Spirit, we will see the love of God more clearly and that should move us to be awe-struck. And, when we are marveling at our Triune God’s great love, we are not focused on self. As we reflect on the humility of the Son and the Spirit in comparison to our own lack of humility, we will see laid bare before us our own self-centeredness. More pointedly,

¹³ C.J. Mahaney, *Humility: True Greatness*, (Sisters OR: Multnomah Press, 2005), 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

seeing humility perfectly modeled through the lens of intra-Trinitarian love, we will see what we are to aspire to in the Lord's power.

Practical Implications

Once more, the practical implications are many. First, a very practical implication of seeing humility through the lens of intra-Trinitarian love flows from recognizing just how necessary a Copernican revolution of our Spiritual life is and that we must seek after the Lord's power to become more honoring to our God. This leads to a second practical implication; a redirected life of dependence upon God. As we contemplate Christian humility as modeled within the love of the Persons of the Trinity, we will be drawn to seek His grace to equip us to lead a God- and other-centered life. Third, in contemplating intra-Trinitarian love, we will realize that even in the pursuit to be more God-centered we are completely dependent upon grace. Thus a practical implication is an enriched prayer life dedicated towards seeking the Lord to more fully move us towards obedience and humility. In that prayer life, we will be moved to seek after His grace to remove ourselves from the throne of our mind. Moreover, such contemplation will move us to realize that our Triune God is alone enthroned. Such recognition will lead to praise and a heart made ready to love the Lord and others. In seeing intra-Trinitarian love expressed as humility, our view of God and our view of self will be changed and this change will modify both how we think and how we walk among our brethren in this life.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Limitations to be Imposed upon the Teaching of Inter-Trinitarian Love

Intra-Trinitarian love is but one of no less than four types of love expressed by God in the Scriptures. One category of Biblical love centers upon the providential love that God has for His creation (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). A second is His general love for the world and is expressed as common grace towards both elect and non-elect (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:2). A third is His love towards the elect (Deut. 7:7, 8; 10:14, 15; Eph. 5:25). Intra-Trinitarian love should not be taught isolated from these other aspects or expressions of God's love, even in the endeavor to combat man-centeredness. Further, the other types of God's love are also of great value in understanding the praiseworthiness of God and can, in conjunction with the teaching of intra-Trinitarian love, be used to combat man-centeredness. Thus, as a precursor to summarizing the overall arguments posited here, the teaching of intra-Trinitarian love should be placed in its proper relation to the other expressions of God's love. Further, intra-Trinitarian love should not be taught as if it is the only teaching that combats man-centeredness.

Survey of Additional Partial Solutions to the Problem of Man-Centeredness

It can be argued that the teaching of unconditional election is a potentially effective way to combat man-centeredness in our thinking. Further, the teaching of the doctrines of grace, in particular that we are saved by grace alone is as well of value towards this goal. Finally, a

systematic teaching of the difference between synergism and monergism is insightful in revealing that man-centered thinking is both un-Biblical and dishonoring onto God. No defense of these statements is offered here, for such is beyond the scope of this work. That said, the teaching of intra-Trinitarian love, as amazing a deterrent to man-centered thinking as it is, is not alone as a Biblical concept that is potentially effective.

Summary of the Argument and Conclusions

A presupposition held in this work is that we within the church today too often view Christianity and the things of God in much the same way that those prior to Copernicus viewed the universe; that all things revolve around us. We too often view our salvation and our prosperity in this life as the end and our Triune God as a means to that end. This type of thinking places man and man's welfare on the throne and relegates God to be but a powerful facilitator of man in his quest to live a blessed life on the path to heaven. Further, in our man-centeredness, we tend to credit ourselves for what God has done in and through us. In our man-centeredness, we tend to view our love for God as our gift onto God. We tend to view our faith and our obedience as our gifts onto God. Men often teach that believers are in "partnership" with God and that God is our "co-pilot." Well-intentioned authors even assert that the central story of the Bible is God's love for men (rather than God's glory shown forth, in part, by His love). When we think in this man-centered way, we illicitly elevate self and do not render on to God the honor that is His due. Such man-centered thinking leads to improper worship and does not promote humility nor does it elicit a proper adoration and reverence for God.

We need to seek after God's grace to move us to be God-centered and depend upon Him daily that we would not personally drift downstream towards man-centeredness in our own thinking. In complete dependence upon God's grace in Christ, we must seek after the Lord's blessing to be used as His instruments to teach the Word in such a way that both we and our brothers and sisters in Christ would undergo a Copernican revolution of thought and see God where He actually exists; at the center of all reality, enthroned forever (Ps. 102:12). That is, just as Copernicus moved the minds of enlightened men away from thinking that they were the epicenter of physical reality, what is needed is God the Holy Spirit working through pastors (and others) to teach Biblical truth that, by grace, He would move us away from thinking that we are the center of spiritual reality.

The assertion here is that the systematic teaching of intra-Trinitarian love can provide a very God-centered context in which the grace of the Lord can both combat man-centeredness and promote God-centeredness. Intra-Trinitarian love is based upon the Triune God being relational internally, in that the Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son. Intra-Trinitarian love is eternal, existing before the creation of anything, and dependent upon the Triune God and the Triune God alone. This infinite and other-centered intra-Trinitarian love is expressed in the mutual declaration of the glory of the Persons of the Trinity, one for the other. It is as well expressed in each Person bringing joy to the other. The love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father and the love of the Spirit for the Father and Son are expressed in a relationship of perfection, untarnished by sin. In this love, the Father gave onto the Son a gift of a fallen people,

we the elect, to be the bride of Christ. The Son, out of love for the Father, redeemed that bride and returned them, now redeemed and purified, as a gift of love to the Father to enjoy as His adopted children. God the Holy Spirit, out of His love for the Father and Son, moves us to obedience and faith, enabling the love of God to overflow onto us for our blessing and the Father and Son's pleasure. We, as elect and redeemed sinners, are thus gifts given as expressions of love between the Persons of the Trinity and are subsumed into the infinite intra-Trinitarian love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

How are we subsumed into this great love? The Father loves us because we are a gift of love from His Son, whom the Father cherishes. The Son loves us because we are a gift of love from His Father and because He loves and cherishes His Father, He loves and cherishes us. As an expression of love from Son onto Father, the Son moves us to love and honor the Father. As an expression of love to His Son, the Father moves us to love and honor the Son. Out of love for Father and Son, God the Holy Spirit moves us to love and honor the Father and the Son. God the Holy Spirit, again out of love for the Father and the Son, moves us to have pure thoughts and motives/desires for obedience, and, in fact, moves us to obedience. In all this, we are undeservedly blessed having contributed nothing of our own. We are taken up into this great intra-Trinitarian love as that love pours over and into us.

In a man-centered view, we tend to credit self for God loving us, thinking that we are somehow meritorious of His affections. But in contemplating intra-Trinitarian love we should now realize more fully that God's love for us is of Him entirely. In man-centered thinking, the Bible can be summarized as being primarily about our salvation and the fact that we are loved.

However, with an appreciation of intra-Trinitarian love, we should now more fully realize that the Bible's central story is the glory of the Triune God who is love. Man's salvation is but a means to place upon display the Triune God's glorious love. Any self-referential view that places man along with God as the centerpiece of the Scriptures should be seen as idolatrous in view of intra-Trinitarian love. In our struggle with man-centeredness, we too often credit self for loving God, seeing our love as our gift to God. Yet now, in view of intra-Trinitarian love, we should realize more clearly that our love for God is His gift to us. We in our man-centeredness, often ascribe to our choices, our wisdom, and our piety, the notion that we give our faith, our worship, and our praise to God as a gift onto Him. But, in view of intra-Trinitarian love, we now must prayerfully consider that our faith, our worship, and our praise for God are all gifts from God onto us that flows from God's great intra-Trinitarian love. Further, our knowledge of God, our desire for the Word, and our willingness to serve in the body of Christ are as well God's gifts to us as an outworking of intra-Trinitarian love. All that is good within us is a gift from God to us that flows to us because of God and God alone because our Triune God *is* love. In view of these realities, we should realize more clearly that the love God has for us speaks nothing commendable of us, but it speaks much of God and His greatness.

God gives out of love because He is love and we, undeservedly, receive the blessings that flow from that love. We are not in partnership with God. God is omnipotent, omniscient, entirely perfect, and infinitely above we who are but creatures. *We are, however, amazingly blessed creatures*, privileged to gaze upon God's greatness as He reveals the wonders of His love to our heart, subsuming us into His intra-Trinitarian love that we would marvel at Him and enjoy

Him forever. We are undeserving and contribute nothing but sin to this amazing relationship that we have with God. The Father has established us in Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Son has established us in the Father in the power of the Spirit. We are established in a love relationship with God that is 100% of Him. We are established in a relationship that will never end (Rom. 8:37-39) because God is love. In this outpouring of love between Father and Son and Holy Spirit, this grand intra-Trinitarian love that spills over and upon us, we receive as gifts from our Triune God the very faith we express, the love we have for God, and all the obedience that has ever been or will ever be worked within us.

It is argued here that if these truths are taught with gentleness and kindness then men (both pastor and congregant alike), in the power of the Spirit, will see that we cannot credit self for playing any role whatsoever in our relationship with God. The platform for man-centeredness, the misbegotten notion that we contribute and, based upon that contribution, are in relationship with God, will crumble in view of dwelling upon intra-Trinitarian love. In the place of man-centeredness will be an emerging God-centeredness. Further, a gentle, humble, and affirming teaching of intra-Trinitarian love in a systematic way will combat man-centeredness in that we will see the love of God expressed as humility more clearly. In seeing the humility of the Son and the Holy Spirit perfectly modeled through the lens of intra-Trinitarian love, we will see what we are to aspire to in the Lord's power. The Son in His earthly ministry did everything out of love for the Father so as to please His Father and declare the Father's Glory, sacrificially giving so as to unite others to the Father. The Son never sought after His own glory nor did He live for Himself. The Holy Spirit does everything out of love for the Father and the Son so as to

please the Father and the Son and to declare the Father and the Son's Glory, sacrificially giving so as to unite others to the Father and the Son. God the Holy Spirit never sought after His own glory and never lived for self. Thus, in contemplating this loving relation within the Trinity, we have a perfect humility modeled before us. Therefore, we are to do everything out of love for our Triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit – our great God of love who is three-in-one and one-in-three. We are to live so as to please the Father, Son, and Spirit. Our greatest desire should be to declare the glory of each Person of the Trinity, sacrificially giving (in the Lord's power) so as to unite others to our Triune God. We should not seek after glory for ourselves and we should live to be vessels of blessings to unite others to our Triune God.

In all this, however, we cannot take one step closer to God in our own power. We cannot take one step away from our enslavement to man-centeredness on our own. Thus, the argument posited here is that only God, by grace, because He is love, can move our hearts towards Him and away from self. The Copernican revolution that dethrones man and rightly places God in our thinking where He actually resides – on the throne – is a revolution of God's grace and God's grace alone. It will not be our effort that will make the difference. If a difference is to be made, it will be God who makes that difference. It will not be the methods or the approach that prevails. Only God can move us to see that He alone is on the throne. Only God can move us away from man-centeredness. God does, however, work through means, and the preached Word is such a means. In this, it is asserted that preaching and teaching through the Word with an emphasis upon intra-Trinitarian love is an approach pastors (and others) should prayerfully consider in hopes that the God of all grace would bless and guide.

Any move to center upon intra-Trinitarian love in our own walk and in our teaching ministry must be bathed in prayer. We need to pray that the God of the universe would move each of us to appreciate the great reality that God *is* love. Our prayer should be that God's grace worked through His Word would free us from the self-imposed man-centeredness that plagues us so that we would then dwell upon Him, love Him all the more, and declare His excellencies into the lives of those in our midst. The prayer should be that those in the pews would see that they are loved by God because God is love. Our prayer should be that God would humble us by this realization and move us to love God by loving others. We should pray that He would cause us to love others with the love He has poured upon us that flows from intra-Trinitarian love. Finally, in all this, may all glory and all honor be onto our Triune God, both now and forever.

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