

The Holy Trinity ***One God, Three Persons***

Introduction: Last week, we discussed the person of God Himself. This week, we are seeking to understand the trickiest of all doctrines: the doctrine of the Trinity. More heresies have been committed regarding this than probably anything else. So, we must be careful in our discussion today.

The closer you get to the essence of reality, language breaks down and cannot explain such reality. How much more will this be true as we seek to understand the highest of all (God Himself)?

Biblical Teaching: We serve one God who eternally exists as three persons (this makes Christianity unique).

- God is one essence (divinity), three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).
- “Triune” means “Three in oneness.”
- All three members are distinct persons but are also of one essence.
- *The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. All three are to be worshiped.*

The word “Trinity” never appears in the Bible. Problem?

Just because the word itself is not present in the Bible, it does not mean that the doctrine or concept is not present. (Church membership, for example. Or even the issue of Abortion). So, let’s see what the Scripture teaches.

• **There is One God**

- “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut 6:4).
- “I am the Lord, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me” (Isa 45:5).
- “...one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6).

• **God is Three Persons**

- “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased’” (Matt 3:16-17).
- “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).
- “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (Gen 1:26).
- The name Elohim and the plural ending (plural of majesty).

The Classic Formulation: “The Doctrine of the Trinity affirms that the one eternal God exists as 3 persons, each of the three persons are fully God and are equal in nature, glory, and power; sharing in the one Godhead. None of the three persons is dependent on the other for deity.

Rather, each is God of Himself. There are not three Gods. One God; three persons” (Greg Allison).

See The Nicene Creed & The Athanasian Creed.

Now that we know what is true, let’s look at...

Major Errors / Heresies:

1. Tri-theism / Polytheistic: Three gods.
2. Unitarianism: Jesus & the Holy Spirit are not God; God is only one person.
3. Moralistic Monarchianism / Sabellianism / Modalism: All three persons are actually the same person. There is one God who can take three forms or modes.
 1. Sabellius (3rd Century).
 2. Analogy: H₂O can be Ice, Water, or Steam.
 3. Primarily believed openly amongst oneness pentecostals (Charity Gayle; Phillips, Craig, & Dean; TD Jakes).
4. Dynamic Monarchianism / Adoptionism: One God, one person. Asserts Jesus was just a man empowered by God to be Messiah. He was adopted as God’s Son.
 1. Theodotus (AD 195).
 2. Declared heresy in 269 in Antioch.
5. Subordinationism: Only the Father is God. Other members of the Trinity are subordinate to the Father.
 1. Arianism: Jesus was created by God; therefore He is not God. “There was a time when the Son was not.”
 1. Condemned as heresy in 325 in Nicea.
 2. Pneumatomachianism: The Holy Spirit was created by God and is not God.
6. Socinianism: Jesus was a man miraculously born and at the resurrection, He obtained *some* level of equality with God.
7. Partialism: Each member of the Trinity make up one God. They are each a “part” of God. It is as if each member is a piece of the God “pie.”

Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity:

- The Early Church Affirmed the Trinitarian Godhead.
 - Justin Martyr: In the name of “God the Father, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit... they receive the washing of water.”
 - Tertullian: First one to use the word “Trinity.” He said, “three not in condition but in degree.”
 - Origen: “The Son is of the same nature with the Father.”
 - The homo-ousios nature. Arius, heretic, said “homoiousios.” It came down to one letter.
 - Athanasius: “One unbegotten God, Father... one only begotten Son but not with beginning... the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father by who’s means He filled all things.”
 - Affirms all three persons are homoousios.
- Cappadocian Fathers: Basil the Great (Bishop of Caesarea), Gregory of Nyssa (Bishop of Nyssa), and Gregory of Nazianzus (Patriarch of Constantinople).

- Council of Constantinople (381): Trinity further clarified and confirmed through the Nicene Creed.
- Filioque Clause (589) added to the Nicene Creed which further articulated that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son.
- Led to “Great Schism” between east and west in 1054.

Distinction of the Persons: One in will but distinct in roles.

Economic Trinity: Distinction in roles.

- The Father is primary in Creation, Son is primary in Salvation, and Spirit is primary in Sanctification. This, however, is not a division of labor but it is the Triune God Who creates, saves, and sanctifies.

Ontological: Distinction in Relations (Being).

- Paternity (Father): Not begotten and does not proceed.
- Sonship (Son): Eternally begotten of the Father but not created by Him.
 - Eternal submission? Only in His human nature did Christ submit to the Father.
- Procession (Spirit): Proceeds from both the Father and the Son, though not created by them or dependent on them for His divinity.
 - “The Father is He from whom, the Son is He through whom, the Spirit is He in whom all things are” (Bavinck).

Any questions?

Let’s Pray!