

# Week Nine

The Trinity

# The Trinity

- God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God
- The word “Trinity” is not found in scripture, but used to describe these three truths from scripture
  - God is three persons
  - Each person is fully God, including all attributes discussed for the past two weeks
  - There is one God

# The Trinity is Progressively Revealed in Scripture

- Although not explicitly found in the Old Testament, several passages suggest/imply that God exists in more than one person
- “Us”
  - “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26)
  - “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:22)
  - “Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language” (Gen 11:7)
  - “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa 6:8) (note I & us)
  - Each of these most likely refer to trinity, not:
    - Majesty, kingly speech
    - Angels

# Two “Gods” in Same Phrase

- “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever...you love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy” (Ps 45:6-7)
  - Two people are called “God”
  - Quoted in Hebrews 1:8
- “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’” (Ps 110:1)
  - Two “Lords”
  - Quoted by Jesus in Matt 22:41-46 to confuse the Pharisees

# Other Distinct Persons in the OT

- God's people "rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit" (Isa 63:10)
  - Suggests the Holy Spirit is separate from God
  - Applies emotional capabilities to the Holy Spirit
- "The Lord of hosts" & "the Lord whom you seek" (Mal 3:1-2)
- "Lord" and "God" (Hos 1:7)
- "And now the Lord God has sent Me and His Spirit" (Isaiah 48:16)
  - The NT identifies Jesus as God's true servant
  - If this is spoken by Jesus then all three persons of the trinity are referred to

# NT Multiple Persons References

- With the coming of the Son of God to earth (mysteries revealed), it should be expected that more explicit teaching on the Trinitarian nature of God be given
- “the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matt 3:16-17)
- “and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19)
- “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood” (1 Pet 1:2)

# More NT References

- Normally, NT authors use “God” for God the Father and “Lord” for God the Son
  - “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but the same God who inspires them all in every one.” (1 Cor 12:4-6)
  - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14)
  - “But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20-21)

# Do NOT Use 1 John 5:7

- KJV translation – “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one”
- Based on a few unreliable manuscripts
  - The earliest is from the 14<sup>th</sup> century
  - All earlier manuscripts do not have this including ones from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries
  - The KJV & NKJV are the only translations that include it

# God is Three Distinct Persons

- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” (John 1:1-2)
- “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26)
- The Holy Spirit intercedes for us to God the Father (Rom 8:27)
- “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7)

# Is the Holy Spirit a Distinct Person?

- He is put in a coordinate relationship with the Father and the Son (Matt 28:19, 1 Cor 12:4-6, 2 Cor 13:14, Eph 4:4-6, 1 Pet 1:2)
- A masculine pronoun is used for the Holy Spirit instead of a neuter (which is what would be expected of a “force”)
- Personal activities are ascribed to the Holy Spirit
  - Teaching, bearing witness, interceding, searching the depths of God, knowing the thoughts of God, willing to distribute some gifts to some people and others to others, forbidding certain activities, speaking, evaluating and approving a wise course action, grieved by sin
- Many aforementioned scriptures would simply not make sense if He isn't a person

# Each Person is Fully God

- God the Father is fully God (this is rarely disputed)
- God the Son is fully God
  - John 1:1-4
    - Echoes Gen 1:1
    - God the Son was always fully God
    - Jehovah's Witness translate "was a god"
      - Not supported by any scholars outside of their cult
      - Good discussion in notes on page 234
  - "My Lord and my God" John 20:28
  - Jesus is the "Exact representation" of God (Hebrews 1:3)
  - Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)
  - "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!" (Rom 9:5)

# Each Person is Fully God

- The Holy Spirit is fully God
  - Recall discussion about Him being a distinct person
  - “Whither shall I go from your Spirit?...If I ascend to heaven, You are there!” (Ps 139:7-8) → Omnipresence
  - “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:10-11) → Omniscience
  - “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5) → the act of giving new birth

# There is One God

- Almost never disputed – tons of scriptures to support this
- “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4)
- “Who is like you, O Lord, among the Gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Ex 15:11)
- Solomon prays “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other” (1 Kings 8:60)
- “I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (Is 45:5)
- “There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and Savior; there is none besides me” (Is 45:21)
- “There is one God” (1 Tim 2:5)
- “God is one” (Rom 3:30)
- “There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6)
- “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder” (James 2:19)

# Simplistic Teachings to This Have Failed

- Definition
  - God is three persons
  - Each person is fully God
  - There is one God
- Denying any one of these invalidates what we see in scripture
- Analogies all fall short
  - Three-leaf clover, a tree, water
  - Farmer-mayor-elder, intellect-emotion-will
- If all three members of the Trinity are equally and fully divine, then they have all existed for all eternity, and God has existed as a Trinity...He cannot be other than He is (pg 241)

# Trinitarian Mistakes (1)

- Modalism
  - God is one person who appears in three different forms (or modes)
  - Denys the personal relationships in the Trinity
- Arianism
  - Denies the fully deity of the Son and Holy Spirit
    - “only begotten Son” (John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9)
      - While we do not know exactly what “begotten” means, we know it does not mean created
      - Nicene Creed (325 ad) affirms that Christ was “begotten, not made”
    - “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15)
      - Christ has the rights & privileges of a firstborn
  - Both the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople affirmed homoousios
    - Homoousios – of the same nature
    - Homoiousios – of similar nature

# Trinitarian Mistakes (2)

- Subordinationism
  - The Son is eternal (not created) and divine, but not equal to the Father in being or attributes
  - Early church father Origen (185-254 A.D.) was an advocate
  - Another early church father, Athanasius (293-373 A.D.) fought hard against this (and Arianism)
  - “He was hounded through five exiles embracing seventeen years of flight and hiding...(but) almost single-handedly Athanasius saved the Church from pagan intellectualism” (pg 245)
- Adoptionism
  - Jesus lived as an ordinary man until His baptism, but then God “adopted” Jesus as His “Son” and conferred supernatural powers on him
  - This line of thought never gained momentum
- Theism – denies that there is only one God; not advocated by any modern Christian groups

# The Filioque Clause

- Filioque – Latin for “and from the Son”
  - Was not part of the original Nicene Creed
  - This phrase began to be added in 589 at a regional church council in Toledo (what is now Spain)
  - Locally was approved in 1017
  - Refers to the eternal relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Son (scripture never explicitly addresses this)
- This argument came to a head in 1054 when both the eastern (now Roman Catholic) and western (now Orthodox) areas wanted the pope to come from their respective areas
- Note – the western church is probably more right

# Why is the Trinity so Important?

- If Jesus is a created being, how could He have paid for our sins? Eternal salvation paid for without God?
- If Jesus is not God, can we really trust Him to save us?
- If Jesus is not infinite God, should we pray to Him?
- The interpersonal relationships between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit would no longer be an example to our relationships
- The example of unity no longer exists, then we have no basis for thinking that there can be ultimate unity among any diverse elements in the universe

# Relationship Between 3 Persons

- They have different functions
  - Creation
    - God the Father speaks the creative words
    - God the Son carries out the decrees
    - The Holy Spirit “moves” or “hovers” over the waters, apparently sustaining
  - Redemption
    - God the Father planned
    - God the Son was sent and paid for our sins
    - The Holy Spirit applies redemption to us
- The only difference between the members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to creation (pg 250)

# The Distinct Roles Have Existed for Eternity

- The roles define the person
  - If the roles changed, then they would be who They are
- Unchangeableness of God
- Creeds have all supported this theology
  - Creeds are not scripture, but rather a well-ordered arrangement of the facts of scripture
  - While creeds add nothing to scripture, they support it in the sense that the Church supported this theology
- Remember, priority is not superiority

# Athanasian Creed

...We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another. But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty. What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit. Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit. The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite. Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit: And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal; as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited. Almighty is the Father; almighty is the Son; almighty is the Spirit: And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty. Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God: And yet there are not three gods, but one God. Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord: And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord. As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords...

# But I Still Don't Understand It!

- The word *person* is used to speak of the differences in relationship, not because we fully understand what is meant, but it is better than not saying anything at all (pg 255)
  - It is not correct for us to say we do not understand it at all
  - It is not a contradiction, but it is a mystery
  - We are unable to put all of the various biblical teachings into a comprehensible teaching
- It is a kind of existence far different from anything we have experienced
- It is the incomprehensible glory of the Godhead

# Application

- Ready to give answers to cults
  - Mormons - Jesus is God's physical, literal son (along with Lucifer)
  - Jehovah's Witness - Jesus is God's first created being
  - Islam - Jesus was not God - just a great prophet
- Unity and diversity are seen in His creation
  - Marriage
  - Church
  - Spiritual gifts in the church
  - Races
  - Social organizations

# Reading For Next Week

- Chapter 15
  - Creation
    - Homework – questions 1-7 (all)