

THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

Week 4: “God in three Persons: Blessed Trinity”

Our title comes from the popular hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Most who have been raised in the Christian faith have sung these words, accepting the unexplainable – the TRINITY!

Some have rejected Christianity because of the Trinitarian view of God (e.g. Muslims, who see Christians as polytheistic, or Jehovah’s Witnesses, who reject the divinity of Jesus).

Tonight, we attempt to answer some pointed and tricky questions:

Are there dangers in misunderstanding the Trinity?

Are the three Persons of the Trinity only a matter of semantics?

Does my understanding make any practical difference – or is just mental, theological exercise?

What does the Bible say about the Trinity?

* The word “trinity” is not in the Bible. So ... where do we get the idea??

1. The Old Testament

> Most equate God with the ENTIRE BIBLE, Jesus with the GOSPELS and the Holy Spirit with ACTS 2. So, the question is, “Is the God of the OT a triune God?”

* In the beginning, ELOHIM created ...

-- a PLURAL name with a SINGULAR verb

* God refers to Himself in the PLURAL. (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8)

-- No trinity is declared, but plurality is suggested.

-- Other options? PLURAL OF MAJESTY, ANGELS

* The ANGEL OF THE LORD – both *DISTINGUISHED* from the Lord and *IDENTIFIED* with Him!

-- Gen. 16:7-14 with Hagar

-- Exodus 3: 2-6 with Moses at the burning bush

-- Judges 13:21-22 with Manoah (Samson’s father)

* 3 Visitors: 2 Angels and the LORD!

-- Genesis 18:1,13,17,20,26,33 (esp. v.22) – 19:1

Q: Who is this character in the last two examples? The *PREINCARNATE CHRIST!*

* Psalm 45:6-7; 110:1 – what could this passage mean if not God the Father referring to God the Son? Jesus asked the Pharisees and they HAD NO ANSWER! (Mt. 22:46)

2. The New Testament: the Persons of the Trinity are named!

* Mark 1:10-11

- 1 speaks from heaven,
- 1 descends in the form of a dove
- 1 upon whom the dove descends and who hears the voice speak!

* John 14:26

* Matthew 28:19 – the Great Commission

* 1 Cor. 12:4-6

THREE IMPORTANT STATEMENTS!

> These statements summarize the Biblical teaching on the Trinity!

1. God is THREE PERSONS

- Each person is DISTINCT! (we'll look later at what distinguishes them)
- There are not merely different NAMES for the same BEING.
 - * Ex: Jn 14:26; Rom 8:27; Jn 16:7
- The Holy Spirit is PERSONAL not just a FORCE
 - * Why would we think otherwise?
 - Being filled with “Holy Spirit power”
 - The antecedent “THE”
 - * Scriptural proof: Rev. 22:17; Acts 13:2; Rom 8:26

2. Each Person is FULLY GOD

- God the Father is clearly God (never doubted)
- The divinity of Jesus is sometimes doubted.
 - * Scriptural proof: John 20:28-31; Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 2:9
- “Baptize them in the Name of the Father, the Son and ... Gabriel???”
 - * Once the Father and Son are established as God, the Trinitarian expressions in verses like Mt. 28:19 show that the HS is classified on an equal level with the Father and Son.
- Acts 5:3-4 – When you lie to the HS, you lie to God!
- John 3:5-7 – The activity of giving new birth to everyone who is born again is the work of the Holy Spirit

*** SO FAR SO GOOD ... if the Bible only taught these facts, there would be no logical problem in fitting them together. BUT ... here's where the mystery comes in ... we are not POLYTHEISTIC!!!

3. There is ONE GOD

- The “Shema” – Deut. 6:4-5
- 1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6

Q: HOW DO WE RECONCILE THESE THREE STATEMENTS???

-- The Analogies of the Trinity!

(1) H₂O – 3 forms, 1 substance

* the problem: it can't be all three at the same time

(2) HUSBAND, FATHER, SON – I am all of these and yet, one person!

* the problem: no inter-relationship

(3) 3-LEAF CLOVER – 3 parts, one clover

* the problem: each leaf is only part of the clover – in the Trinity, each part is fully God

(4) Others?

** Conclusion: All analogies fall short!

HISTORICAL (& MODERN?) ERRORS

1. Modalism (“One person who appears in different forms (or modes)”)

> Denies the personal relationships within the Trinity (ex: baptism of Jesus)

> Loses the heart of the atonement – Jesus bore the wrath of God in our place.

2. Arianism (“Christ was CREATED by God, and while greater than the rest of creation, not equal to the Father”)

> Colossians 1:15 – the “first-born” of creation?

- Christ was not “born,” but holds the RIGHTS of the first born – *leadership and authority*

> John 3:16 – Christ was “begotten”

Q: What is “begotten?”

3. Subordinationism (“The Son is eternal and divine, but INFERIOR to God the Father”)

> This idea came about as a way to protect the distinction between the 3 Persons.

4. Adoptionism (“Jesus was an ordinary man until his “adoption” at his baptism”)

> Many today fall into this category – Jesus was a great man empowered by God, just not ‘divine’)

What difference does it (understanding the Trinity) make to me? Is it not just theological ‘mumbo-jumbo?’

* If Christ isn't fully God, could he really SAVE US?

* If Christ isn't fully God, worshipping Him would be IDOLATRY

* If there are no personal relationships within God, then how can God be personal WITH US?

* Ignoring the distinct Persons of the trinity may make us miss what God OFFERS US.

Can I just substitute one person of the Trinity for another? Aren't they synonymous?

A: NO ... not exactly.

* The Persons of the Trinity have different PRIMARY FUNCTIONS in relating to the world.

God the Father: GENERATION (The Father begets the Son) / SENDING

God the Son: SUBJECTION (He is subordinate not in essence, not in relationship)

God the Holy Spirit: PROCESSION (He eternally proceeds from the Father)

* The Persons of the Trinity have ETERNALLY EXISTED as Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Why a Trinity at all?

(1) The Trinity demonstrates UNITY within DIVERSITY (1 Cor. 12:12, 14-26)

(2) The Trinity serves as a model for the mystery of MARRIAGE (1 Cor 6:16 -- the 2 become 1; Eph 5:31-32; 1 Cor. 11:3)

(3) The Relationships between the Persons of the Trinity reveal a RELATIONAL GOD!

A Challenge:

* In your worship and conversation, replace one Person of the Trinity with another. In other words, when you talk about creation, say "Jesus created" (John 1; Col. 1:16), or "the Holy Spirit created" (Gen. 1:2), instead of "God created .."

Or, when you pray, pray to the Holy Spirit.

> How can this exercise be beneficial?

> How has our society rejected the Trinity? What is the danger?