

New Life Burbank
Adult Sunday School
Fall (Sept-Nov) 2015

The Doctrine of the Trinity in History and Scripture

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Date	#	Topic
9-13	1	The Trinity Before Nicaea
9-20	2	Arius and the Council of Nicaea
9-27	3	Athanasius Against the World
10-4	4	The Final Victory of Nicene Theology
10-11	5	The Biblical Case for the Deity of Christ, Part 1
10-18	6	The Biblical Case for the Deity of Christ, Part 2
10-25	7	The Biblical Case for the Deity of the Holy Spirit
11-1	8	Three in One
11-8	9	The History of Anti-Trinitarianism
11-15	10	Answering Unitarian Scriptural Arguments
11-22		No Sunday School – Thanksgiving Luncheon
11-29	11	The Trinitarian Shape of the Gospel

Lesson 1

Sept 13, 2015

The Trinity Before Nicaea

My aims in this class are threefold:

1. Historical – to explain the history of how the church over 300 years arrived at the final formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in AD 325 and 381
2. Apologetical – to answer historical objections, e.g., the doctrine of the Trinity
 - a. Is alien to authentic Christianity and arose 300 years after Jesus
 - b. Arose because Christianity lost its Jewish roots and got infected with Greek philosophy
 - c. Was imposed on the church by the will of the Roman Emperors, esp. Constantine
3. Biblical – to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical

A concise definition of the Trinity

Shorter Catechism # 6. *How many persons are there in the godhead?* A. There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Berkhof's more elaborate definition of the Trinity (*Systematic Theology*, 87-89)

1. There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence.
2. In this one Divine Being there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
3. The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.
4. There is a certain order in the ontological Trinity: the Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third—not a chronological order but “the logical order of derivation.”
5. Personal attributes that distinguish (all transcend creaturely limitations of time/space):
 - a. The Father *begets* the Son
 - b. The Son *is begotten* of the Father
 - c. The Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son
6. The church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond human comprehension.

How much authority do the Creeds have?

- The creeds are subordinate to Scripture.
- Creeds are expansions of the NT (Matt 28:19 + 1 Cor 15:3-4) – practically every phrase is biblical, but explained with greater clarity, making biblical teaching more explicit.

The Doctrine of the Trinity Before the Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

The Matthean baptismal formula (Matt 28:19)

Other Trinity passages:

- Gospels: Matt 3:16-17; 12:18; John 14:26; 15:26
- Paul: Rom 8:11; 14:17-18; 15:30; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 4:4-6; Eph 2:18; 4:4-6

Doxologies at end of Martyrdom Accounts

The Rule of the Faith

Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107)

- “There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God” (*Ephesians* 7.2)
- “God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life” (*Ephesians* 19.3)

The Apologists

- E.g., Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165)
- Immanent Logos (thought) vs. Expressed Logos (word)

Irenaeus (fl. 175–195)

- “Without the Spirit it is impossible to behold the Word of God ... since the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God can only be obtained through the Spirit ... The Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God” (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 7, 47)

Tertullian (ca. 160–225)

- He was the first to use the term “Trinity.” There are “three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ... yet of one substance” (*Against Praxeas*, ch. 2).

Hippolytus (ca. 160–236)

Novatian (d. 258)

Origen (ca. 185–254)

- Influenced by Platonism
- Father, Son, Spirit are three distinct hypostases
- Their unity is a unity of will and purpose

Early denials of the Deity of Christ – adoptionism or psilanthropism

- Theodotus the Leather-Merchant (190)
- Artemon (3rd cent.)
- Paul of Samosata – deposed by Council of Antioch (268)

Church was convinced of several things from the very beginning:

1. There is only one God
2. The deity of Christ – and his incarnation
3. The deity of the Holy Spirit
4. God is a Triad of three persons/beings/hypostases (confusion about the best term)

It is true that the doctrine of the Trinity developed as the church came to a clearer understanding of Scripture.

Lesson 2

Sept 20, 2015

Arius and the Council of Nicaea

Timeline

303	Beginning of massive persecution under Emperor Diocletian
312	The conversion of Constantine at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in Rome
313	Edict of Milan – toleration for all religions, including Christianity
318	Beginning of the controversy over Arius in Alexandria
321	Arius deposed by an Egyptian synod
323	Epistle of Alexander of Alexandria to Alexander of Constantinople
324	Constantine defeats Licinius, gains control of East as sole Emperor
325	Council of Nicaea
336	11 year later, Constantine tried to orchestrate Arius' restoration, but Arius died suddenly
337	Death of Constantine

The Conversion of Constantine

- Two different versions
 - Lactantius – dream, then Chi-Rho on army's shields
 - Eusebius of Caesarea – cross of light in the sky, "in hoc signo vinces," then dream, then Labarum



The Controversy Over Arius

Around 318, Arius began teaching the following things about the Son:

- a. He was preexistent being who existed before creation
- b. But not eternally preexistent – “there was a time when he did not exist”
- c. He was created by God out of nothing
- d. As a creature, the Son was subject to alteration/change, i.e., capable of falling

The Creed of Nicaea (AD 325)

“We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;

“And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance (*ousia*) of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down, and became incarnate and became man, and suffered, and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and dead;

“And in the Holy Spirit.

“But as for those who say, ‘There was when he was not,’ and, ‘Before being born he was not,’ and that he came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or created, or is subject to alteration or change—these the catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.”

Observations on the Creed of Nicaea

1. The Creator-creature distinction
 - a. God the Father, “maker of all things”
 - b. Son “through whom all things came into being” (John 1:3)
2. The Son’s derivation from the Father
 - a. “Begotten ... only-begotten,” “begotten not made”
 - b. “From the substance of the Father” vs. “out of nothing”
 - c. “God from God,” etc.
3. The language of “substance” (*ousia* and *homoousios*)
 - a. *Homoousios* may not be a scriptural term, but it represents scriptural teaching.
 - i. Jesus is the Son of God. “The Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God” (Irenaeus). Being a son means having the same nature as the father who begat him.
 - ii. The sonship metaphor isn’t just about intimacy or love. It’s about begetting offspring. “The only begotten Son” (5x: John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9), esp. “the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18).
 - iii. “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).
 - iv. “The radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb 1:3) (cp. “light from light”).
 - v. “The image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).
 - vi. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

- b. What *homoousios* does not mean (Hilary, *On the Trinity* 4.4):
 - i. That the Father and the Son are the same, identical individual
 - ii. That the Father and the Son share in an antecedent essence predating both
 - iii. That the Son was formed from a severed portion of the Father's essence
4. Purpose of the incarnation of the Son: "For us and for our salvation"

False Historical Claims about the Council of Nicaea

1. "The idea of a church council was an innovation of Constantine."
2. "The emperor Constantine called the Council, presided over it, and controlled the outcome."
3. "Constantine devised the term *homoousios* and demanded it be inserted in the creed."
4. "It was a highly contested and divided vote."
5. "From the beginning, the church, being originally composed of Jewish believers in Jesus, believed that Jesus was a human Messiah. It was the Council of Nicaea that voted to make him divine."
 - Previous heretics who denied the deity of Christ were all repudiated:
 - Theodotus the Leather-Merchant (190)
 - Artemon (220s)
 - Paul of Samosata (268)
 - The "Epistle of Alexander" two years *before* the Council of Nicaea

Lesson 3

Sept 27, 2015

Athanasius Against the World

Timeline of the Life of Athanasius

- 297? Birth of Ath to a Christian family in Alexandria
- 318 Troubles with Arius start in the Church of Alexandria
- 319 Ath ordained deacon in the Church of Alexandria
- 325 Council of Nicaea; Ath attends as assistant to Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria
- 328–335 First Quiet Period (7 years)**
- 328 Death of Alexander; Ath elected Bishop of Alexandria (~30 years of age)
- 335–337 First Exile (under Constantine; in Trier in Gaul) (2 years)**
- 335 Council of Tyre (led by Eusebius of Nicomedia) condemns Ath
- 336 Constantine's attempted restoration of Arius; Arius dies suddenly
- 337 Death of Constantine; three sons: Constantine II, Constantius, and Constans
After death of Constantine, Ath's first exile ends; Ath returns to Alexandria
- 337–339 Second Quiet Period (1+ year)**
- 339–346 Second Exile (under Constantius; in Rome) (7 years)**
- 339 Eusebius of Nicomedia has the ear of Constantine's son, Constantius
Gregory intruded as Bishop of Alexandria instead of Ath
- 340 Ath vindicated by Julius, Bishop of Rome (Nicene)
- 341 Death of Eusebius of Nicomedia; Acacius of Caesarea (d. 366) takes over
- 343 Council of Sardica (requested by Julius) vindicates Ath
- 346 Constans (Nicene) gets Constantius to end Ath's second exile; Ath returns to Alexandria
- 346–356 Third Quiet Period (9 years), "The Golden Decade"**
- 350 Constans (Ath's ally) assassinated during the rebellion of Magnentius in 350.
- 352 Death of Julius (Ath's ally); Liberius, new Bishop of Rome (exiled, but caved to Arian creed)
- 353 Magnentius commits suicide; Constantius (Arian) now sole emperor for next 8 years
Synod of Arles condemns Ath
- 355 Synod of Milan condemns Ath
- 356–362 Third Exile (under Constantius; in Egyptian desert) (6 years)**
- 356 Governor Syrianus storms the Church of Theonas during worship service to arrest Ath
- 357 George, "the monster from Cappadocia" (Arian), intruded as Bishop of Alexandria
- 361 Death of Constantius (fever); Julian the Apostate becomes emperor – revival of paganism
- 362 Julian issues edict of clemency permitting all exiled bishops to return
- 362 Fourth Quiet Period (8 mos)**
- 362–363 Fourth Exile (under Julian the Apostate; in Egyptian desert) (1+ year)**
- 362 Julian tells Ath to go back into exile; his return edict didn't include him!

363 Julian killed in battle with Persians; Jovian (Nicene) becomes emperor and reinstates Ath.

363–365 Fifth Quiet Period (1+ year)

363 Ath's Council of Alexandria affirms deity of Holy Spirit.

364 Jovian dies after being emperor for only 8 months.
Valentinian (Nicene) and Valens (Arian) become co-emperors.

365–366 Fifth Exile (under Valens; hid in his father's tomb in outskirts of Alexandria) (4 months)

365 Valens (Arian) exiles Ath.; Valens retracts edict

366–373 Sixth Quiet Period (7 years)

367 39th Festal Letter listing the 27 books of the New Testament

Valens banishes Nicene bishops; begins persecution of Nicene Christians.

373 Death of Ath, 8 years before the Council of Constantinople.

The Arian Conspiracy & Laundry List of Charges against Athanasius

1. "He murdered Bishop Arsenius and practiced sorcery using the man's hand."
2. "He committed treason by threatening to stop the grain shipments to Constantinople."
3. "His election as bishop wasn't legitimate."
4. "He used violence to persecute the Melitians."

The Role of the Emperor Constantius

Assessment of Athanasius the Man

Some Athanasius Quotes

1. "If He be a creature, how is He at the same time the Creator of creatures?" (*Circular to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya* 14).
2. "The Son is other than things originate, alone the proper offspring of the Father's essence" (*Against the Arians* 1.56).
3. "The Son is not one of the creatures God is not the maker but the Father of His own Word" (*Defense of Dionysius* 21).
4. "The Father is ever Father and the Son ever Son" (*Against the Arians* 1.21).
5. "This assault upon the Son [by denying his eternal preexistence] makes the blasphemy recoil upon the Father" (*Against the Arians* 1.25).
6. "The Apostle blames the Gentiles, because they worship the creatures, saying, 'They served the creature more than' God 'the Creator.' But if these men say that the Lord is a creature, and worship Him as a creature, how do they differ from the Gentiles?" (*Circular to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya* 13).
7. "It was His will that the Summary of our faith should have the same bearing, in bidding us be baptized, not into the name of Unoriginate and originate, nor into the name of Creator and creature, but into the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" (*Against the Arians* 1.34).
8. "Let every corporeal inference be banished on this subject" (*Defense of Nicene Definition* 24).
9. "Whereas it is proper to men to beget in time, from the imperfection of their nature, God's offspring is eternal, for His nature is ever perfect" (*Against the Arians* 1.14).

Lesson 4**Oct 4, 2015****The Final Victory of Nicene Theology**Splintering*

- 353 Defeat of the usurper Magnentius; Constantius sole emperor
 357 The Blasphemy of Sirmium – banned the terms *ousia* and *homoousios*
 358 Council of Ancyra condemns Anhomoians, opts for *homoiousios*
 359 Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia
 360 Eunomius (Anhomoian) writes his *First Apology*
 361 Death of Constantius

Realignment

- 362 Athanasius returns from third exile
 363 Athanasius’s Council of Alexandria, “Tomus ad Antiochenos”
 364 Valens (Arian Emperor of the East) & Valentinian (Nicene Emperor of the West)
 Basil writes *Against Eunomius*
 365 Council of Lampsacus – the Homoiousians drop the “i” and sign off on the Nicene Creed
 366 Damasus (Nicene) becomes Bishop of Rome
 367 Valens begins to persecute the Nicene Christians
 370 Basil becomes Bishop of Caesarea
 373 Death of Athanasius.

Final Victory

- 374 Basil writes *On the Holy Spirit*.
 375 Death of Valentinian
 378 Valens killed by the Goths at the Battle of Adrianople (August)
 379 Death of Basil (Jan 1); Theodosius becomes Emperor of East
 Gregory Nazianzen’s Five Theological Orations in Constantinople
 380 Official religion of Roman Empire = “the faith of the bishops of Rome and Alexandria”
 381 Council of Constantinople

*During reign of Constantius, Arianism splintered into three parties:

Name	Position	Leader
Homoians	The Son is like (<i>homoios</i>) the Father according to the Scriptures.	Acacius of Caesarea
Anhomoians or Neo-Arians	The Son is unlike (<i>anhomoios</i>) the Father.	Eunomius
Homoiousians or Semi-Arians	The Son is like (<i>homoios</i>) the Father with respect to essence (<i>kat’ousia</i>).	Basil of Ancyra

	--	+ <i>ousia</i> (being)	<i>a+</i> (not)
<i>homos</i> (same)		homoousians	
<i>homoios</i> (similar)	homoians	homoiousians	anhomoians

The Nicene Creed

The Creed of Nicaea (325)	The Nicene Creed (381)
We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ;	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ;
By whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth];	by whom all things were made;
Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;	who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;
He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven;	he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead;
	whose kingdom shall have no end.
And in the Holy Ghost.	And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.
	In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Cappadocian fathers

Basil of Caesarea (c.330–379)

- Confrontation with Valens

Gregory Nazianzen (c.329–390)

- Basil's friend since Athens

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.394/5)

- Basil's younger brother

Did Nicene Theology Win Because of the Emperor Theodosius?

- No imperial edict would have had sticking power if it had been contrary to the mind of the church.
- The Council of Lampsacus (365/6) was 14 years before Theodosius's edict.

Lesson 5**Oct 11, 2015****The Biblical Case for the Deity of Christ, Part 1**

The Sonship argument

- Sonship means identity of essence (*homoousios*).
- If Jesus is the Son of God, then he is God.
- Stephen Colbert: “The son of a duck is a duck.”
- Irenaeus: “The Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God.”

The deity of the Father

- “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things” (1 Cor 8:6)
- “Our God and Father” (Gal 1:4; Phil 4:20; 1 Thess 3:11, 13; James 1:27)
- “One God and Father, who is over all” (Eph 4:6)
- “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3)
- “God the Father” (16x: e.g., John 6:27; 1 Cor 15:24; Phil 2:11; 2 Pet 1:17; Jude 1)

Now, God the Father has a Son. Jesus is the Son of God.

Five significant “Son of God” moments in the Gospels

	Matthew	Mark	Luke
The Baptism of Jesus	3:17	1:11	3:22
Peter’s Confession	16:16	[8:29]	[9:20]
The Transfiguration of Jesus	17:5	9:7	9:35
Jesus before Caiaphas	26:62–66	14:61–64	22:67–71
The Centurion at the Crucifixion	27:54	15:39	[23:47]

Jesus claimed that he was “the Son of God”

1. Gospel of John, e.g., John 5:25; 10:36; 11:4; 19:7.
2. Matt 11:27 = Luke 10:22.
3. The parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:6 = Matt 21:37 = Luke 20:13).
4. Mark 13:32 = Matt 24:36.

His claim to be the Son of God was heard and understood by his contemporaries

1. The disciples, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matt 14:33).
2. The high priest Caiaphas.
3. The passersby at the crucifixion (Matt 27:40).
4. The demons, “You are the Son of God” (Mark 3:11; also Mark 5:7 = Luke 8:28).
5. The devil, “If you are the Son of God ...” (Matt 4:3, 6 = Luke 4:3, 9).

“Son of God” much more than “Messiah.”

1. Distinction between “Messiah” and “Son of God”
 - a. “The Christ, the Son of God” (6x: Matt 16:16; 26:63; Mark 1:1; 14:61; John 11:27; 20:31).
 - b. Not merely a “son of David kind of Messiah” but a “Son of God kind of Messiah.”
 - c. Sonship antecedent to Messiahship – see the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:17).

2. Jesus' question to the Pharisees based on Psalm 110:1 (Matt 22:41–46)
 - a. "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" (v 42).
 - b. Demands answer, "Son of God," not merely "son of David."
3. Jesus' calling God his Father
 - a. His use of the Aramaic word *Abba* (Mark 14:36)
 - b. NT depicts Jesus as speaking of God as "my/his Father" approximately 50x
 - c. He directly addresses God as "Father" 19x
 - d. Daring degree of filial intimacy
4. The Jewish charge of blasphemy
 - a. John 5:18: "He was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."
 - b. John 8:58–59: "Before Abraham was, I am."
 - c. John 10:30–36
 - d. John 19:7: "He ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."
 - e. Matt 9:3 = Mark 2:7 = Luke 5:21: "This man is blaspheming."
 - f. Matt 26:63–66 = Mark 14:61–64 = Luke 22:67–71: "He has uttered blasphemy."
 - g. Simon bar Kosiba (AD 131–135)

Jesus is the revealer or image of the Father

1. Matt 11:27 = Luke 10:22.
2. Philip (John 14:9-10).
3. "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).
4. He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15; cp. 2 Cor 4:4).
5. He is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3).
6. Basil: "The whole nature of the Father is manifest in the Son as in a seal ... In himself he reveals the Father in his entirety" (*Against Eunomius* 2.16–17).
7. Contrast with James Dunn, "There was much more to God than could be seen in and through Jesus" (*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*).
8. Contrast: "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19; cp. 2:9).

"The only begotten Son" (*monogenēs*)

1. 5x: John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9
2. ESV has "only," NIV has "one and only," but not accurate
3. Traditional rendering in KJV and NASB is "only begotten"
4. "The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18).
5. Creed of Nicaea: "... the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance (*ousia*) of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father."
6. "The Son is other than things originate, alone the proper offspring of the Father's essence" (*Against the Arians* 1.56, NPNF² 4.339).
7. "The Son is not one of the creatures God is not the maker but the Father of His own Word" (*Defense of Dionysius* 21, NPNF² 4.184).

Lesson 6

Oct 18, 2015

The Biblical Case for the Deity of Christ, Part 2

There are two main views of Jesus held by Biblical Unitarians (who deny the deity of Christ):

Socinianism – Jesus did not exist prior to his being born of the virgin Mary. He is a mere man.

Arianism – Jesus did exist prior to his incarnation, even before creation, but he is a mere creature.

There was a time when he did not exist.

Against Socinianism, the NT teaches the Preexistence of the Son

1. Preexistence in the Synoptic Gospels
 - a. Jesus' preaching of the gospel – "that is why I came forth" (Mark 1:38)
 - b. "The sunrise shall visit us from on high" (Luke 1:78)
 - c. Jesus' "I have come" pronouncements: Matt 5:17; 9:13 (= Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32); Matt 10:34-35 (= Luke 12:51); Matt 20:28 (= Mark 10:45); Luke 12:49; 19:10.
2. Preexistence in the Gospel of John
 - a. Before creation "the Word was with God," then "the Word became flesh" (John 1:1-3, 14)
 - b. He "came or descended from heaven" (John 3:13, 31; 6:38, 42, 62)
 - c. "I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me" (John 7:29)
 - d. "I came from God and I am here" (John 8:42)
 - e. "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58)
 - f. Coming "into the world," e.g., "I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (John 16:28; cp. 6:14; 11:27)
 - g. "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37)
 - h. Jesus as "the Light that has come into the world" (John 1:9; 3:19; 12:46)
 - i. "The glory that I had with you before the world began" (John 17:4-5)
 - j. "You loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24)
3. Preexistence in the Letters of John
 - a. "That which is from the beginning" (1 John 1:1)
 - b. "Eternal life ... was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1 John 1:2)
 - c. "He who is from the beginning" (2x: 1 John 2:13-14)
 - d. "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (1 John 4:2)
 - e. Conversely, anyone who denies "the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh" is a deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 7)
4. The Sending Formula in John and Paul
 - a. "God did not *send* his Son into the world to condemn" (John 3:17)
 - b. He is the one "whom the Father consecrated and *sent* into the world" (John 10:36)
 - c. "As the Father has *sent* me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21; cp. 17:18)
 - d. "God *sent* his only begotten Son into the world" (1 John 4:9)
 - e. "God sent forth his Son" (Gal 4:4; cp. Rom 8:3)

5. Preexistence in the Letters of Paul
 - a. Rom 1:3-4 = early Christian creedal formula; “Son” outside the bracket
 - b. “Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor” (2 Cor 8:9)
 - c. “Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4)
 - d. “He was in the form of God ... emptied himself ... being born” (Phil 2:5-7)
 - e. He “came into the world (1 Tim 1:15)
 - f. He “was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16)

6. Preexistence in Hebrews
 - a. “You are my Son,” and then God “brings the firstborn into the world” (Heb 1:5-6)
 - b. He “partook of flesh and blood” so that he might be a sympathetic priest (Heb 2:14-17)
 - c. “You are my Son” vs. “in the days of his flesh” (Heb 5:5-8)
 - d. Melchizedek like the Son, “having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Heb 7:3)
 - e. “When Christ came into the world ... ‘Behold, I have come to do your will’” (Heb 10:5-7)

Having refuted the Socinian view, now we must refute the Arian view by showing that the Son belongs on the Creator side of the Creator-creature distinction.

Two Tests of Ontological Deity

(1) Creation

The first quality that sets ontological deity apart from all else is creation (Jer 10:11; cp. Ps 96:5; Jer 10:16; 51:19). By definition, no creature can be the Creator of all things.

“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3, cp. v 10).

“... and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things” (1 Cor 8:6).

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:16).

“... his Son ... through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1:2).

(2) Aseity

Aseity = from “a se,” a Latin phrase meaning to have one’s being “from oneself” (Exod 3:14). The New Testament says that the Son has the attribute of aseity:

- The Father has granted the Son to have “life in himself” (John 5:26).
- Jesus is unchanging (Heb 1:11–12, quoting LXX Ps 102:25-27; cp. Heb 13:8).
- He “upholds all things by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3).
- “In him all things hold together” (Col 1:17).

The HANDS Argument (Robert Bowman Jr. & Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place* [Kregel, 2007])

Jesus shares the **Honors** due only to God (Matt 4:10; Rev 19:10)

- Jesus as object of worship (*proskyneō*) (Matt 14:33; 28:17; Lk 24:52; Rev 5:8, 14)
- Worship of Jesus commanded by God (Phil 2:10-11 [cp. Isa 45:21-23]; Heb 1:6)
- Honor equal to the Father's (John 5:23)
- Verb *latreuō*, technical term for worship (Matt 4:10 → Dan 7:14; Rev 7:15-17; 22:3)
- Doxologies: "to whom be the glory forever" (Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; 2 Pet 3:18)
- Jesus as object of
 - Prayer (John 14:14; Acts 7:59-60; 2 Cor 12:8-9)
 - Song (Eph 5:19; Rev 5:8, 11-14; "singing hymns to Christ as to a god," Pliny)
 - Faith/trust (Acts 16:31; 20:21; Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet 2:6)
 - Fear (2 Cor 5:11; Eph 5:21; Col 3:22)
 - Love (Matt 10:37; John 14:15, 21; Eph 6:24)

Jesus shares the **Attributes** of God

- Eternal preexistence (Heb 7:3; 13:8)
- Aseity (see above)
- Sovereignty (Dan 7:14; Matt 28:18; 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:20-22; Phil 3:21; 1 Pet 3:22)
- Omniscience
 - Knowing thoughts of heart (Matt 9:4; Mk 2:8; 1 Cor 4:5; Rev 2:23)
 - Knowing the future (Mk 8:31; Lk 21:20-24; John 13:11, 21-29)

Jesus shares the **Names** of God

- "God" (*theos*)
 - Six clear verses (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Tit 2:13 [cp. 2 Pet 1:1]; Heb 1:8)
 - Two uncertain verses (Rom 9:5; 1 John 5:20)
- "Lord" (*kyrios*) (Acts 2:36; Rom 10:13; Phil 2:9-11; Rev 19:16)
- "Savior" (*sotēr*) (Isa 43:11; 45:21; Hos 13:4 → John 4:42; Acts 5:31; Phil 3:20; 2 Tim 1:10; Tit 1:4; 2:13; 3:6)
- "I AM" (*egō eimi*) (LXX Exod 3:14; Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10, 25; 45:8; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6 → John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-8)
- "The First and the Last" (Isa 44:6 → Rev 22:13)

Jesus shares in the **Deeds** that only God does

- Creating (see above)
- Giving law/commandments (Matt 5:17-48; 7:28-29; 28:20; John 13:34; 14:15; 15:12)
- Granting forgiveness (Matt 9:1-8; Lk 7:48-49; Acts 5:31; Col 3:13)
- Giving life (Deut 32:39 → John 1:4; 5:21; 10:10; etc.; 1 Cor 15:45)
- Raising the dead (John 6:40, 54; 11:25)
- Sending the Spirit (John 15:26; Acts 2:33; Rom 8:9)
- Exercising final judgment (John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom 14:9-10; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:8)

Jesus shares the **Seat** of God's throne

- Psalm 110:1 ("Sit at my right hand") quoted or alluded to 22x in NT
- Heb 1:3; 8:1; Rev 3:21; 5:6

Lesson 7

Oct 25, 2015

The Biblical Case for the Deity of the Holy Spirit

Survey of “the Spirit” in OT and NT

The Hebrew word *ruach* (“breath,” “wind,” “spirit”). About 100 OT references to the Holy Spirit.

How we know the OT references to the Spirit of God are the same as the NT Spirit:

1. Matt 12:18 (Isa 42:1) → v 28
2. Jesus applied Isa 61:1 to himself (Lk 4:18)
3. Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28) → v 33
4. John 7:38 → v 39 (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28-29; Ezek 39:29; 47:1)

The Greek equivalent of *ruach* is *pneuma*. The third person of the Trinity is mentioned approximately 300 times in the NT. Main designation: “the Holy Spirit” (90x).

The arguments for the deity of the Holy Spirit

1. Trinity passages (Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2)
2. God and Spirit interchangeable
 - a. Acts 5:3-4, 9
 - b. Isa 6:9 → Acts 28:25
 - c. Jer 31:31 → Heb 10:15
 - d. Not man but God/Spirit (1 Thess 4:8; 2 Pet 1:21)
 - e. God/Spirit (Acts 10:38; Eph 2:22)
3. Divine attributes
 - a. Creator (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Ps 33:6; 104:30)
 - b. Giving life (Job 33:4; Rom 8:2, 10-11; 1 Cor 15:45)
 - c. Omniscient (Isa 40:13-14; 1 Cor 2:10-11; future: John 16:13; 1 Pet 1:11)
 - d. Omnipresent (Ps 139:7-8)
 - e. Eternal (Heb 9:14). “Either he is a creature, and therefore a slave, or else he is above creation, and shares the Kingship” (Basil).
4. Just as the Son reveals the Father, so the Spirit reveals the Son.
5. From his title, “*Holy Spirit*,” i.e., sanctifier (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2)
6. The works of the Spirit in the ministry of Christ:
 - a. His coming in the flesh was by the Spirit (Lk 1:35)
 - b. His miracles were done by the Spirit (Lk 4:18; Acts 10:38)
 - c. Jesus drove out demons by the Spirit (Matt 12:28)
 - d. Forgiveness of sins comes by the Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)
 - e. New spiritual life is by the Spirit (John 3:5; 6:63; Rom 8:2, 10)
 - f. Resurrection from the dead is by the Spirit (Rom 8:11)
 - g. The risen Christ gives the Spirit (John 7:39; Acts 2:33)

Biblical evidence that the Spirit is not a mere power or influence, but a person:

1. Masculine pronoun “he” (*ekeinos*) is used 5 times (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13-14).
2. The fact that he is called “the Comforter” (*paraklētos*) (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

3. Matt 28:19 again
4. He has personal characteristics:
 - a. Intelligence (John 14:26; 15:26; Rom 8:16; 1 Cor 2:10-11)
 - b. Will (Acts 15:28; 16:7; 1 Cor 12:11)
 - c. Affections (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30)
5. He performs personal actions:
 - a. Searching the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10)
 - b. Speaking (John 16:13; Acts 8:29; 13:2; 21:11; 1 Tim 4:1; Rev 22:17)
 - c. Testifying (John 15:26; 1 John 5:6)
 - d. Bearing witness with our spirits (Rom 8:16)
 - e. Teaching (Lk 12:12; John 14:26)
 - f. Revealing (1 Cor 2:10; Eph 3:5)
 - g. Inspiring the prophets (Zech 7:12; 2 Pet 1:21)
 - h. Deciding (“it seemed good ...” Acts 15:28)
 - i. Convicting (John 16:8)
 - j. Striving (Gen 6:3)
 - k. Interceding and helping us to pray (Rom 8:26; Jude 20)
 - l. Sealing (Eph 1:13)
 - m. Raising the dead (Rom 8:11)
6. He stands in such relations to other persons as to imply his own personality
 - a. Sending formula applied to Spirit (Lk 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Gal 4:6; 1 Pet 1:12)
 - b. His ministry defined in relation to the Son (John 16:13-15)
 - c. Christ is in us because the Spirit is in us (Eph 3:16-17; Rom 8:9-10)
 - d. “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:17-18)
 - e. It is only by the Spirit that anyone can confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:3)
7. Other things said of the Spirit which imply he is not an impersonal force
 - a. “The fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1)
 - b. “The joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6)
 - c. “Do not grieve the Spirit” (Eph 4:30; cp. Isa 63:10)
 - d. The fruit of the Spirit, which are not impersonal (Gal 5:22-23)
 - e. God’s love poured into our hearts by the Spirit (Rom 5:5)
 - f. The Spirit of adoption, by whom we crying “Abba, Father!” (Rom 8:15)
 - g. Groaning too deep for words (Rom 8:23, 26)
8. The Holy Spirit is distinguished from his own power (Luke 1:35; 4:14; Acts 10:38; Rom 15:13; 1 Cor 2:4). Try substituting “power” for “Spirit” in those verses!

Filioque (= “and the Son”)

Nicene Creed: “And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son].” First credal usage was at the Council of Toledo (589).

Arguments against the addition:

- No right to tamper with the Creed
- “who proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26b)

Arguments for the addition:

- John 15:26b has to be read in light of the first part of the verse.
- Economic Trinity based on immanent Trinity (Acts 2:33; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19).

Lesson 8

Nov 1, 2015

Three in One

We've demonstrated that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. Does that mean there are three Gods? No, God is one (Deut 6:4; Mark 12:29; Rom 3:30; Gal 3:20).

How do we reconcile the threeness of God with the oneness of God? This is THE theological conundrum of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Recall the first three points of Berkhof's definition of the doctrine of the Trinity:

1. There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence.
2. In this one Divine Being there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
3. The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.

1. The Simplicity of God

Definition: God is not composed of parts; he is not a composite being; his essence is indivisible.

Scriptural proof

- "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod 3:14) – God is pure, absolute, and perfect being
- "God is light" (1 John 1:5)
- "God is love" (1 John 4:8)
- "From him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom 11:36)
- "I the LORD do not change" (Mal 3:6)
- "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30; cp. v 38): *perichōrēsis* = mutual indwelling.

The three persons of the Godhead are not components of God, as if each person was one third of the Trinity. Rather, the one, simple, non-composite being of God exists in three persons.

2. The Eternal Generation of the Son and the Eternal Procession of the Spirit

Westminster Confession II.3: "The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."

Proof Texts for the Eternal Generation (Begetting) of the Son

- "Only begotten" (*monogenēs*) (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9)
- "He who is begotten of God" (1 John 5:18)
- "Today I have begotten you" (Psalm 2:7 → Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5)
- "Before the hills, I was brought forth" (Prov 8:22-25)
- "Whose coming forth is from of old" (Micah 5:2)
- The Father has "granted the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26)
- "I AM" in John, echoing the LXX (Exod 3:14; Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10-11; 48:12)
- "Firstborn" (Col 1:15; Heb 1:6)
- Present and imperfect tenses (John 1:1, 18; Heb 1:3)

We must apply the concept of the simplicity of God to this doctrine:

- Athanasius: “Let every corporeal inference be banished on this subject” (*De decretis* 24).
- Athanasius: “Whereas it is proper to men to beget in time, from the imperfection of their nature, God’s offspring is eternal, for His nature is ever perfect” (*Against the Arians* I.14).
- Gregory Nazianzen: The eternal generation of the Son is “beyond the sphere of time, and above the grasp of reason” (*Third Theological Oration*).

How can the Father be the cause of the Son without preceding the Son in time? Augustine explains this using the analogy of “fire” (father) and “shining” (son).

Eternal generation involves the communication of the divine essence without dividing the divine essence (simplicity of God).

Proof Texts for the Eternal Procession of the Spirit

- “who proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26)
- “The Spirit of God” (26x)
- “The eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14)
- “The Spirit who is from [ek] God” (1 Cor 2:10-12)
- Argument from the economic to the immanent Trinity

Robert Dabney: “In a word, the generation of the Son, and procession of the Spirit, however mysterious, are unavoidable corollaries from two facts. The essence of the Godhead is one; the persons are three. If these are both true, there must be some way, in which the Godhead multiplies its personal modes of subsistence, without multiplying [or dividing] its substance” (ST 209).

3. The Inseparable Operation of the Three Persons

This applies to all the works of God *ad extra*, that is, God’s external works directed toward creation:

- Gregory of Nyssa: “Every operation which extends from God to the creation, and is named according to our variable conceptions of it, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit” (*On “Not Three Gods”*).
- Augustine: “Nothing is done by the Father which is not also done by the Son and by the Holy Spirit; and nothing done by the Holy Spirit which is not also done by the Father and by the Son; and nothing done by the Son which is not also done by the Father and by the Holy Spirit” (Letter 11).

Scriptural proof

- 1 Cor 12:4-6
- 1 John 1:3; 2 Cor 13:14 (“fellowship”)
- John 5:19-23 → 16:14-15
- Example: Creation (1 Cor 8:6; John 1:3; Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30)
- Example: The resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6:4; 8:11; John 10:17-18)

The whole Trinity is involved in all phases of redemption:

- The Triune God planned: the *pactum salutis* before foundation of world
- The Triune God accomplished: the ministry of Jesus (Lk 1:35; 4:18; Matt 3:16; Acts 10:38)
- The Triune God applies: “Baptizing them in the name [singular]” (Matt 28:19)

Lesson 9

Nov 8, 2015

The History of Anti-Trinitarianism

Precursors in the Early Church

1. Adoptionism or psilanthropism – later would be called Socinian Christology
2. Arianism – began ca. AD 318

Early Modern and Modern Anti-Trinitarianism

1. Michael Servetus (1511–1553)
2. Adam Pastor (c. 1500–1570)
3. Faustus Socinus (1539–1604)
4. John Biddle (1615–1662), the Father of English Unitarianism
5. English rationalism
 - a. John Milton (1608–1674), *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*
 - b. John Locke (1632–1704), probably unitarian
 - c. Isaac Newton (1642–1726), anti-Trinitarian, probably Arian
 - d. Samuel Clarke, *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712), Arian
 - e. William Whiston (1667–1752); translator of Josephus; English Arian
6. New England Congregationalists
 - a. Charles Chauncy (1705–1787)
 - b. Joseph Priestley (1733–1804)
 - c. Harvard College & Divinity School
 - d. William Ellery Channing, “Unitarian Christianity” (1819)
 - e. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), the church’s “noxious exaggeration”
7. John Thomas (1805–1871), founder of the Christadelphians

Contemporary Unitarian Movements

1. Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound* (1998)
2. The Church of God General Conference
3. “Jewish Roots” movement—YouTube “Deity of Messiah Debate” (Joseph Good)
4. Biblical Unitarian websites
 - a. biblicalunitarian.com
 - b. christianmonotheism.com
 - c. 21stcr.org (J. Dan Gill)
 - d. trinitities.org (Dale Tuggy)
 - e. truthmattersradio.com (Sean Finnegan)
5. The Modern Arians
 - a. The Watch Tower Society, aka the Jehovah’s Witnesses (began c. 1879)
 - b. scripturaltruths.com (David Barron)
 - c. Patrick Navas

Three Major Arguments of the Biblical Unitarians

1. Jesus' quotation of the Shema (Mark 12:29) is the original Christian Creed.
2. Two key verses (John 17:3; 1 Cor 8:6) which seem to say there is only one true God, the Father, who is distinct and separate from Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is not the one true God.
3. The doctrine of the Trinity is a violation of strict monotheism.

The Four Faulty Assumptions of the Biblical Unitarians

1. Rationalism
 - a. "Nor has any mind entirely comprehended, or speech exhaustively contained the Being of God. But we sketch Him by His attributes, and so obtain a certain faint and feeble and partial idea concerning Him" (Gregory Nazianzen, *Fourth Theological Oration*).
 - b. "We cannot look at the sun himself, for by his unmixed light he is too strong for our power of perception" (Gregory Nazianzen, *Second Theological Oration*).
 - c. "The Divine Essence is ineffable and incomprehensible" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* II.2).
 - d. "The Creator is too high above us ... What then, brethren, shall we say of God? For if thou hast been able to comprehend what thou wouldest say, it is not God ... but if it be God, thou hast not comprehended it" (Augustine, *Sermon* 52).
2. Restorationism or Primitivism
 - a. This refers to the attempt to correct perceived shortcomings of the current church by using the primitive/apostolic church as a model that we have to "get back to."
 - b. The corollary to this is the concept of "the fall of the church."
3. The Harnack-Bousset Thesis
 - a. The influx of Gentiles into the church brought Hellenistic ideas into Christianity.
 - b. The problem is a chronological one—there is not enough time.
 - c. Rom 1:3-4; 1 Cor 8:6; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20 are pre-Pauline creeds or hymns.
4. Anti-Creedalism
 - a. Denies what Jesus promised: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).
 - b. Berkhof: "Since the reflection of the Church is often determined and deepened by doctrinal controversies, the formulations to which Church Councils or Synods are finally led under the guidance of the Holy Spirit often bear the earmarks of past struggles In the History of Dogma we see the Church becoming ever increasingly conscious of the riches of divine truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, mindful of her high prerogative as the pillar and ground of the truth, and engaged in the defense of the faith once delivered to the saints" (Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*, 17, 19).

Lesson 10
Nov 15, 2015

Answering Unitarian Scriptural Arguments

Some of their Points are Valid

1. Traditional verses that do not really teach the Trinity
 - a. Gen 1:26: “Let us [plural] make man”
 - b. Psalm 110:1: “The LORD says to my Lord”
 - c. 1 John 5:7-8: The Three Heavenly Witnesses
2. “God” in NT = “God the Father,” almost never “the Trinity.”
3. Subordination of the Son to the Father (John 14:28; 1 Cor 11:3; 15:28)
 - a. Ontological subordination – no
 - b. Functional or personal subordination – yes

Socinian Arguments

1. The birth narratives (Matt 1; Luke 1)
2. The real humanity of Jesus
 - a. God can’t do x; Jesus did x; therefore, Jesus is not God.
 - b. But two natures in one person (Council of Chalcedon).

Arian Arguments

1. LXX Prov 8:22: “The Lord created me”
2. John 5:26: “The Father has granted the Son to have life”
3. Col 1:15: “Firstborn of all creation”

Their Defenses Against Trinitarian Arguments

1. Ideal Preexistence (Socinian argument)
 - a. Read John 8:56-59 and tell me he is just an idea or plan!
 - b. The Son’s pre-incarnate relationship with God the Father:
 - i. John 1:1-2: “The Word was with God.”
 - ii. John 1:18: “In the bosom of the Father.”
 - iii. John 17:5: “... the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”
 - iv. John 17:24: The Father loved the Son “before the foundation of the world.”
 - v. At the creation, he was beside the Father like a master workman (Prov 8:30-31).
 - c. The I-Thou relationship between the Father and the Son, with the Father pictured as addressing the Son (Ps 2:7 + Isa 42:1; and Ps 110:1).
 - d. Prior to becoming man, he had the characteristics of a person—a mind and a will (Phil 2:5-7; 2 Cor 8:9; Heb 10:5-7)

2. The Agency (*shaliach*) Argument (Socinian and Arian argument)
 - a. Response:
 - i. Certain kind of agency—filial agency that transcends ordinary agency
 - ii. Angels functioned as agents of God, but there are limits. The Creator-creature distinction is never violated.
 - iii. As creatures, such angels never cross over into the Creator’s prerogatives, e.g.:
 1. Receiving divine worship at the command of God
 2. Participating in the creating of the universe
 3. Claiming to be God’s eternal Son
 4. Claiming equality with God
 5. Revealing the Father
 6. Forgiving sins
3. The worship of Jesus is no different than the worship of other created beings in Judaism (Socinian and Arian argument).
 - a. The worship of the “son of man” in *First Enoch*: “On that day, all the kings, the governors, the high officials, and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and raise their hopes in that Son of Man; they shall beg and plead for mercy at his feet. But the Lord of the Spirits himself will cause them to be frantic, so that they shall rush and depart from his presence. Their faces shall be filled with shame, and their countenances shall be crowned with darkness. So he will deliver them to the angels for punishments in order that vengeance shall be executed on them” (*1 En.* 62:9–11).
 - b. This passage is not describing divine worship commanded by God, but prostration.
 - c. Prostration given to creatures in the OT (e.g., 1 Sam 24:8; 2 Sam 9:6).
 - d. Worship of the “son of man” in *First Enoch* not commanded by God—deathbed conversion.
 - e. Even God can’t command worship to be given to a creature.

Lesson 11

Nov 29, 2015

The Trinitarian Shape of the Gospel

Why is it so important to have a Trinitarian conception of God rather than a Unitarian one? Because the gospel is at stake. Salvation is the work of all three persons of the Godhead (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14). But there is no Savior but God (Isa 43:11; 45:23; Hos 13:4). Therefore, all three persons must be divine. Therefore, the gospel of our salvation depends on the reality of the three-person God, the Holy Trinity.

A. Redemption Accomplished

First, born of a virgin

- a. Gal 4:4; Rom 8:3
- b. “[Christ is] a supernatural Person come into the world from the outside to redeem the sinful race” (Machen, *The Virgin Birth*, 395).

Second, he performed miracles

- a. His miracles are signs of salvation
- b. Matt 1:21; 8:17; 11:2-6

Third, he lived a perfect life and died for our sins (active and passive obedience)

- a. “The blood of God” (Acts 20:28) – *communicatio idiomatum*
- b. “We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (Rom 5:9; cp. Gal 2:20)

Fourth, he descended into hell

- a. Hell = Hades, the realm of the dead (“the gate-keepers of Hades,” LXX Job 38:17).
- b. By doing so, he destroyed death.

Fifth, he rose again from the dead

- a. Power of God: Eph 1:19-20
- b. Declaration of his divine sonship: Rom 1:4

Sixth, he ascended into heaven

- a. He is interceding for us.
- b. Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25

B. Redemption Applied

First, anthropology and the Fall

- a. Your view of redemption applied and your anthropology/doctrine of Fall go together.
- b. He raised us up with Christ from the dead (Eph 2:5).

Second, union with Christ

- a. Paul's teaching concerning our death and resurrection in union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:1-11; Eph 2:4-6; Col 2:11-13; 3:1-4; etc.) presupposes his deity.
- b. If Unitarians do believe this, they have to completely redefine union with Christ in a way that is utterly Pelagian—the imitation of Christ, rather than vital union with Christ.
- c. If Christ is a mere man, how can we participate spiritually in his death and resurrection, and how can that death and resurrection have such power to liberate, redeem, and recreate?
- d. The Son has power to give life (John 5:21; 1 Cor 15:45).
- e. And it is not just the Son but the Spirit who makes alive (Rom 8:2, 10-11).
- f. Inseparable operation of the three persons.

Third, the acme of redemption applied—adoption

- a. The goal of salvation is that we would be brought into the fellowship of the Trinity (2 Cor 13:14; 1 John 1:2), adoption as sons (Eph 1:3-6).
- b. The Son savingly reveals the Father and by his obedient sonship he brings us into his own filial relationship with the Father as sons.
- c. Only if Jesus is the divine Son of God can he reveal the Father to us and bring us to God the Father (Matt 11:27; John 1:12, 18; 17:24-25).
- d. The doctrine of adoption is central to the gospel. More, it is the apex of the gospel. J. I. Packer said adoption is “the highest privilege that the gospel offers.”
- e. Contrast this with the Unitarian understanding of salvation. God sends us a human Messiah who lives a good life thus setting for us an example that we must imitate. It is salvation by works, not by grace.
- f. The whole Trinity is involved in bringing about our adoption.
 - (1) Key text: Galatians 4:4-6
 - (2) The Father sends the Son, and the Son sends the Spirit in order to bring us into Christ, thereby adopting us as sons of God the Father through Christ by the Spirit.
 - (3) “When we become sons of God, we are joined to the sonship of the eternal Son, which is in turn the human enactment of the eternal sonship of the second person of the Trinity” (Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 157-59).
 - (4) “The Trinity is the gospel God the Father sent the Son to do something for us and the Spirit to be something in us, to bring us into the family life of God” (Sanders, 165).

In sum, “The God we are confronted with in the gospel is the Triune God” (Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 92).

- Conversely, if the God of our gospel is not the Trinitarian God, we have a false gospel.
- Without the Trinity there would be no gospel, no good news. There would be no divine Savior to accomplish redemption; no divine Spirit to apply it to us.