

Principles of Faith - 5

The Trinity

Is the Trinity Biblical?

- ▶ The Trinity is not specifically used as a theological term in Scripture
- ▶ However the Trinity is an idea that naturally arises when Scripture is looked at biblically.
- ▶ The term "Trinity" is a shorthand way of saying that:
 - The Father is God
 - Jesus is God
 - The Holy Spirit is God
 - Each person is fully God
 - There is only one God (the Creator of the Heavens and earth and all that is within them).

Trinity In The Old Testament

- ▶ Trinity is foreshadowed in the OT but is muted because of the need to first deal with idolatry and to establish that there was just one God
- ▶ Us/We plural passages: Elohim – pl. of El (God) not dual but plural (two persons would have a different ending)
- ▶ Many passages seem to indicate that more than one person could be called God at the same time:
- ▶ Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 11:7, Isaiah 6:8, Ps. 45:6,7 + Heb. 1:8
- ▶ Psalm 110:1, Matt 22:41-46; Is 63:10; 61:10 (H.S.) ;
- ▶ Malachi 3:1,2; Hosea 1:7 (two Lords); Is. 48:16;

Trinity In The New Testament

- ▶ The Trinity becomes clear in the New Testament
- ▶ At Jesus' baptism: Matthew 3:16-17
- ▶ Great Commission Matthew 28:19
- ▶ God= Father, Lord=Christ e.g 1 Cor. 12:4-6
- ▶ Trinitarian blessing: 2 Corinthians 3:14
- ▶ Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 Peter 1:2, Jude verses 20-21

God Is Three Persons

- ▶ God is three distinct persons
- ▶ John 1:1-2 ("with God") means distinction of the Word from the Father see also John 17:24
- ▶ 1 John 2:1 – Jesus our Advocate with the Father
- ▶ Hebrews 7:25, John 14:26, Romans 8:26,27, John 16:7
- ▶ Trinitarian passages: previous slide
- ▶ Holy Spirit is a distinct person "He" : John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-14 who is counselor and teacher (personal activities) Jn 14:26, 15:26, 16:7; Rom. 8:16, 26,27; One who knows (1 Corinthians 2:10,11) and who forbids (Acts 16:6,7) speaks (Acts 8;29, 13:2) is grieved (Eph 4:30)

Each Person Is Fully God

- ▶ The Father is clearly God
- ▶ The Son is fully God: Jn 1:1-4, Jn 20:28,29, Hebrews 1 & 2
- ▶ Col 1:15-20, 2:9, Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1, Romans 9:5, Is. 9:6
- ▶ The Holy Spirit is also fully God: Acts 5:3,4 1 Cor. 3:16;
- ▶ Ps. 139:7-8, 1 Cor 2:10,11; Jn 3:5-7 cf. 1 Jn 3:9
- ▶ God is three persons
- ▶ Each person is fully God
- ▶ But we do not teach tri-theism (three gods) but one God in three persons.

There Is One God

- ▶ Deut. 6:4-5; Ex. 15:11; 1 Kings 8:60; Is. 45:5-6, 21-22
- ▶ 1 Tim 2:5, Rom. 3:30, 1 Cor. 8:6; James 2:19;
- ▶ Thus the Scriptures teach that:
- ▶ 1. God is three persons
- ▶ 2. Each person is fully God
- ▶ 3. There is one God
- ▶ Simplistic solutions e.g. JW's must all deny at least one of the above

Errors

- ▶ Modalism / Sabellianism – three modes or forms of God (United Pentecostalism)
- ▶ Arianism – the Son is created (Jehovah's Witnesses)
- ▶ Subordinationism – Son not equal to the Father
- ▶ Adoptionism – God adopted an ordinary human Jesus as His Son.
- ▶ Read relevant passages in Grudem for the full details here
- ▶ These disputes played an important role in the formation of the Nicene Creed
- ▶ JW position is Arianism restated and mixed w. prophecy.

Different Functions

- ▶ God the Father makes the decrees
- ▶ God the Son carries out the decrees
- ▶ God the Spirit empowers, enforces & completes the decrees
- ▶ Son in Creation: Jn 1:3, Col 1:16, Ps 33:6,9; 1 Cor. 8:6, Heb 1:2
- ▶ Holy Spirit in Creation: Gen 1:2, Ps. 139:7
- ▶ Holy Spirit brings God's work to completion
- ▶ The Son obeys the Father and is sent by Him (Gal. 4:4, John 3:16, Eph. 1:9,10; John 6:38, Heb 10:5-7)
- ▶ Holy Spirit is obedient to Jesus and is sent by Him (John 15:26, 16:7)



Eternal Existence

- ▶ The persons of the Trinity eternally existed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- ▶ The Father did not become the Son and then become the Holy Spirit
- ▶ The three roles have existed since all eternity "before the foundation of the world"
- ▶ This is part of the unchangeableness of God
- ▶ Eph. 1:3-4, 3:14-15, John 1:1-5,14,18; John 17:4; Phil. 2:5-11, Rom. 8:29, see also 1 Peter 1:2 & 20;
- ▶ Prior Father-Son relationship: Jn 3:16,17; Gal 4:4
- ▶ Creates through the (already existing) Son: Jn 1:3, Heb 1:2



Eternal Existence Part 2

- ▶ The only distinctions between the members of the Trinity are the ways they relate to each other and to the rest of Creation.
- ▶ Equal in being, but subordinate in role
- ▶ The Nicene Creed is accepted "by the Church universal" as an accurate statement of what the Bible says about God.
- ▶ Every time a group has denied some aspect of the Trinity / Nicene Creed they have ended up going astray in other areas as well.



The Importance of The Trinity

- ▶ Worship: validates worship of Jesus Christ which would otherwise be idolatry (Phil. 2:9-11, Rev. 5:12-14)
- ▶ The Atonement – if Jesus is not God then he could not have borne the full wrath of God in our place
- ▶ Justification by faith – if Jesus is not God then he cannot fully save us
- ▶ Prayer – if Jesus is not God then we should not pray to Him or in His Name
- ▶ Salvation would be by a creature and not by God Himself
- ▶ Independence and personal nature of God – if God were not three persons he would be insufficient in internal relationship
- ▶ Unity of all Creation depends on unity within God first of all



Three Persons & One God

- ▶ Each person is fully God
- ▶ The Father possesses the full being of God in Himself
- ▶ The Son possesses the full being of God in Himself
- ▶ The Holy Spirit possesses the full being of God in Himself
- ▶ God's being is not divided into three equal parts belonging to the three members of the Trinity
- ▶ The personal distinctions in the Trinity are not something added onto God's real being
- ▶ The persons of the Trinity are not just three different ways of looking at the one being of God
- ▶ There are three distinct persons and the being of each person is equal to the whole being of God.



Understanding the Trinity

- ▶ The Trinity is a mystery in this life
- ▶ It is a bit like a "mapping problem" trying to map complex and infinite things in a way that can be understood by simple and finite minds (think of trying to map a spherical Earth onto a flat sheet of paper – then multiply by 100)
- ▶ Incomprehensible does not mean inaccurate or wrong (Very Rough Analogy: we do not even fully comprehend or understand our own lives yet we do indeed exist and we are who we are)
- ▶ Every attempt to simplify the mystery ends up distorting the Scriptures
- ▶ Full comprehension of the Trinity is not essential to salvation so even very simple people can be (and are) saved.
- ▶ However flat-out denying the Trinity is a sure sign of spiritual deception and error.



God Is Complex

- ▶ The complexity of the Universe proceeds from the complexity of God
- ▶ The unity in the Universe proceeds from the unity and oneness of God
- ▶ God is not a mere idea, philosophy, or conclusion, rather God is a complex, living, Triune Being.
- ▶ God can never be comprehended by a single unitary system of thought. No system of thought is ever fully complete. Godel (a German mathematician) : *For every system S there is a statement G that is true but which cannot be proved within that system.*



Application

- ▶ Unity & Diversity in God are reflected in Creation
- ▶ Marriage Gen. 1:27, 1 Cor. 6:16-20, Eph 5:31, 32 1 Cor. 11:3
- ▶ The Church – many members, one body 1 Cor. 12
- ▶ Culture – Eph. 2:16, 3:8-10, Rev. 7:9
- ▶ Unity not uniformity
- ▶ A subordinate role is not a lesser status
- ▶ Love binds all things together
- ▶ God is Love because He is Triune
- ▶ Love involves distinct Persons in relationship unity

