

The Doctrine of God

Exploring the Majesty and Mystery of the Father

April 12, 2015

A Few Notes about Theological Method

- For our theology to be Biblical, it must come from the Bible.
 - We postpone asking experiential questions until the Bible has spoken. Theology, to do its job properly, must explain experience, but it is not governed by experience.
 - We do not subvert the message of a passage by “bullying” it with our theological system. We listen and submit to what God says in each passage. We trust that the message of our orderly God (1 Corinthians 14:33) will not contradict itself, but will form a cohesive system of understanding.
 - We apply logic as a servant of the Scriptures—seeking to proclaim them clearly; we renounce any idea that logic is master of the Scriptures—casting doubt on its claims.

A Few Notes about Theological Method

- Paul instructs that we should have sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:6, cf. Titus 1:9, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 Timothy 3:15, Ephesians 4:14-15). This is an orderly system of teaching.
- We will use theological terms and labels that are not found in the Bible (e.g. Trinity, omnipresence, immutability). Those terms will only be helpful if they accurately reflect Biblical ideas.
- We will discuss different views held by other theologians. Some views might be heresy, but others will merely be differences between brothers and sisters in the Lord.
 - As always, believing what is true will be a help to our Godliness (1 Timothy 6:3).
 - We can accept many theologians as true brothers, even if they differ on secondary matters (Romans 14:1).

What to Expect Each Week

1. Prayer
2. Definition of Terms
3. Biblical Basis for the Doctrine
4. Biblical and Practical Synthesis (“How does one passage fit with another passage?” or “What about my experience of...?”)
5. Explanation of Other Major Views with Brief Critique
6. Finding This Doctrine in our Prayers and Songs
7. Application Points

Definition of Terms

- God “is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness justice, goodness, and truth.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question #1)
- The Trinity is the concept that “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.” (Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*)
- An attribute of God is something that characterizes Him, but not it cannot be called a “part” of Him.
 - E.g. oxygen and nitrogen are each part of our atmosphere. You could possibly remove one and still have the other.
 - You cannot remove one attribute of God and still have God.

Biblical Proof for the Trinity

- The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each fully God:
 - **The Father is God**
 - Matthew 6:30, 32: “But if God so clothes the grass of the field...[Y]our heavenly Father knows...”
 - John 6:27: “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.”
 - **The Son is God**
 - John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
 - Hebrews 1:8: “But of the Son *He says*, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever...”
 - **The Holy Spirit is God**
 - 1 Corinthians 3:16: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?”
 - Matthew 12:32: “...whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.”

Biblical Proof for the Trinity

- The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each fully God (cont):
 - At various points, each Person is credited with the attributes of God (e.g. eternality, omniscience, truth).
 - At various points, each Person performs acts that only God can perform.
- The Father, Son and Holy Spirit interact with one another, demonstrating that they are distinct.
 - All three are present at Christ's baptism (Matthew 3:16-17).
 - Christians are baptized in the Name of all three (Matthew 28:19).
 - The Father sent Jesus and then sent another Helper (John 14:16).
 - Jesus prayed to the Father (John 17).
 - Jesus sent the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8, 2:4).
 - The Holy Spirit intercedes to God the Father for us (Romans 8:26-27).
 - All three Persons participate in our salvation (1 Peter 1:2).

Biblical Proof for the Trinity

- There is only one God.
 - “God is three persons in one essence. The Divine essence subsists wholly and indivisibly, simultaneously and eternally, in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” – Dr. Andy Snider
 - Deuteronomy 6:4: “The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!”
 - John 10:30: “I [Jesus] and the Father are one.”
 - Romans 8:9: If someone does not have the Holy Spirit, they don’t belong to Christ.
 - Because of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 3:16 says that believers are called “the temple of God.”

Does the OT Teach the Trinity?

- God's Word is consistent, so the OT does not contradict the Trinity, at the very least.
- There are hints of the Trinity in the OT, but we are not surprised that it is not explicit. Ephesians speaks about the "mystery of Christ" (3:4) that was hidden and is now revealed "to His holy apostles and prophets" (3:5).
- Hints:
 - The OT uses plural verbs (Genesis 20:13, 35:7), pronouns (e.g. Genesis 1:26) and nouns (e.g. Genesis 1:26) for God.
 - The OT discusses three Persons interacting with One Another (e.g. Isaiah 48:16, 61:1).
 - The OT discusses God's Son (e.g. Psalm 2:7), although kings were sometimes called the sons of gods. However, no king has ever fulfilled these passages like Christ will.
 - Isaiah 9:6 is undeniable in ascribing Deity to the Son.
 - Daniel 7:13-14 speaks of the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days and receiving the kingdom.

Dangerous Denial of the Trinity

- If God the Father is not really God, then He is a liar (Isaiah 46:8-11).
- If God the Son is not really God, then He cannot pay for our sins (e.g. Hebrews 9:11-14, 10:1-14) and we should not worship Him (Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 5:9-11).
- If God the Holy Spirit is not really God, then we have no hope of resurrection in body or soul (Romans 8:9-11).

Dangerous Denial of the Trinity

- **Adoptionism** - God granted Jesus powers and then adopted him as a Son.
- **Albigenses** - Two gods: one good (Jesus) and other evil (OT God).
- **Apollinarianism** - Jesus' divine will overshadowed and replaced the human.
- **Arianism** - Jesus was a lesser, created being. **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**
- **Docetism** - Jesus was divine but only seemed to be human.
- **Gnosticism** - Jesus is a lesser spirit.
- **Kenosis** - Jesus gave up some divine attributes while on earth.
- **Marcionism** - An evil God of the O.T., good God of the N.T.
- **Modalism** - God is one person in three modes. **ONENESS PENTACOSTALISM**
- **Monarchianism** - God is one person.
- **Monophysitism** - Jesus had only one nature: divine.
- **Nestorianism** - Jesus was two persons.
- **Patricianism** - The Father suffered on the cross.
- **Socinianism** - Denial of the Trinity. Jesus is a deified man.
- **Subordinationism** - The Son is lesser than the Father in essence and or attributes.
- **Tritheism** - The Trinity is really three separate gods.

Singing of the Trinity

- The Glory of the Cross
- Holy, Holy, Holy
- Come, Thou Almighty King
- Doxology
- Wonderful, Merciful Savior

Praying in Light of the Trinity

- Just as you would try to avoid calling a friend by the wrong name, keep in mind which Person of the Trinity you are addressing!
- Pray in confidence knowing that:
 - The Father gives good things to His children (Matthew 7:7-11).
 - The Son gives us access to the Father (Romans 5:1-2).
 - The Spirit helps our prayers by interceding for us Himself (Romans 8:26-27).

Applying the Doctrine of the Trinity

- God has eternally existed in a relationship. This should cause us to value our relationships even more.
 - We can love Christ more because of His salvation (1 Peter 1:8).
 - We can love each other more, imitating Christ's love for us (1 John 4:11).
- We can seek unity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16), because the Trinity exists in perfect union. When we are united around the truth, we can overcome other differences.
- We should be prepared to defend this foundational doctrine against those who oppose it.
 - Jehovah's Witnesses
 - Mormons
 - Oneness Pentecostals
 - Unitarians
 - Christian Scientists
 - Certain Churches of God
 - T.D. Jakes