

WEEK TWENTY-TWO

The Trinity

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To meditate on the three Persons of the Godhead is to walk in thought through the garden eastward in Eden and to tread on holy ground. Our sincerest effort to grasp the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity must remain forever futile, and only by deepest reverence can it be saved from actual presumption.

Some persons who reject all they cannot explain have denied that God is a Trinity. Subjecting the Most High to their cold, level-eyed scrutiny, they conclude that it is impossible that He could be both One and Three. These forget that their whole life is enshrouded in mystery. They fail to consider that any real explanation of even the simplest phenomenon in nature lies hidden in obscurity and can no more be explained than can the mystery of the Godhead.

Every man lives by faith, the nonbeliever as well as the saint; the one by faith in natural laws and the other by faith in God. Every man throughout his

entire life constantly accepts without understanding. The most learned sage can be reduced to silence with one simple question, "What?" The answer to that question lies forever in the abyss of unknowing beyond any man's ability to discover. "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof," but mortal man never.

The Church has not hesitated to teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Without pretending to understand, she has given her witness, she has repeated what the Holy Scriptures teach. Some deny that the Scriptures teach the Trinity of the Godhead on the ground that the whole idea of trinity in unity is a contradiction in terms; but since we cannot understand the fall of a leaf by the roadside or the hatching of a robin's egg in the nest yonder, why should the Trinity be a problem to us? "We think more loftily of God," says Michael de Molinos, "by knowing that He is incomprehensible, and above

our understanding, than by conceiving Him under any image, and creature beauty, according to our rude understanding."

Not all who called themselves Christians through the centuries were Trinitarians, but as the presence of God in the fiery pillar glowed above the camp of Israel throughout the wilderness journey, saying to all the world, "These are My people," so belief in the Trinity has since the days of the apostles shone above the Church of the Firstborn as she journeyed down the years. Purity and power have followed this faith.

What God declares the believer heart confesses without the need of further proof. Indeed, to seek proof is to admit doubt, and to obtain proof is to render faith superfluous. Everyone who possesses the gift of faith will recognize the wisdom of those daring words of one of the early Church fathers. "I believe that Christ died for me because it is incredible; I believe that He rose from the dead because it is impossible."

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST:
THE TRINITY

OPPONENTS OF THE TRINITY

2 John 1:7: Who has entered into the world? _____

Jude 1:4: What do condemned me deny? _____

The concept of the Trinity is probably one of the most difficult concepts for some to grasp. Yet as we find this truth revealed in Scripture, we are bound to accept it by faith, regardless of how well we understand it.

Some who cannot readily understand the Trinity, many have denied it altogether. The unsaved man does not want to believe what he cannot understand.

Romans 3:4: Can man's disbelief negate God's truth? _____

OBJECTIONS TO THE TRINITY

One of the first marks of a cult or false religion is the denial of the doctrine of the Trinity. Walter Martin explains the typical approach of a cult in dealing with the Trinity. "The historic doctrine of the Trinity is seldom, if ever, considered without careful redefinition."

The Mormons

Mormons teach that Jesus is the result of a physical encounter between Elohim (a Hebrew name for God) and Mary.

Usually the Mormon website avoids this controversial subject. However, a recent article by Jeffery Holland blatantly denies the trinity.

"I think it is accurate to say we believe They are one in every significant and eternal aspect imaginable except believing Them to be three persons combined in one substance, a Trinitarian notion never set forth in the scriptures because it is not true."

Holland and the Mormons teach polytheism

or the false doctrine of more than one God. By teaching that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not one, Mormons teach that there are at least three Gods. Listen to his declaration on the Mormon web site: "We declare it is self-evident from the scriptures that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are separate persons, three divine beings."

We will prove this to be Scripturally untrue.

John 5:7: Who is one? _____

Like others who choose to deny the Trinity, he credits the doctrine of the trinity to early church creeds and falsely alleges that it is not found in the Bible. Although early theologians may have ascribed the name "trinity" to this doctrine the teaching is clearly biblical and was understood by the New Testament Apostles who taught it in their writings.

The Jehovah's Witnesses

One of their famous publications, "Let God Be True," addresses the doctrine of the Trinity in the following manner. "Sincere persons who want to know the true God and serve Him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God"

The official web site of the Jehovah's Witnesses contains a blasphemous article entitled, "Should You Believe in the Trinity?"

"Others, however, say that the Trinity doctrine is false, that Almighty God stands alone as a separate, eternal, and all-powerful being. They say that Jesus in his pre human existence was, like the angels, a separate spirit person created by God, and for this reason he must have had a beginning. They teach that Jesus has never been Almighty God's equal in any sense."

Revelation 1:8: Who is the Almighty? _____

Revelation 11:17: What title is given to Jesus? _____

Later in the article they falsely conclude, "JESUS never claimed to be God. Everything he said about himself indicates that he did not consider himself equal to God in any way—not in power, not in knowledge, not in age."

Can you find any Scriptures from last weeks study to contradict This statement? _____

As we study the Scriptures we will see that their claim is patently false.

The "Jesus Only" Movement

This is also referred to as Oneness Theology. The official church of the oneness movement is the United Pentecostal Church (UPCI). The UPCI was formed in 1945 when they broke away from the Holiness-Pentecostal movement which began in 1901. According to their own web site this division was primarily over a UPCI's denial of the Trinity.

Those who hold to Oneness Theology accuse Trinitarians of polytheism. It is difficult to understand their position. They appear to see God revealing Himself in phases; First He was the Father, Then He was the Son, then He became the Holy Spirit. Their difficulty may be that they do not see God as all three all at once for all time.

The Modern Bible Versions

As we will note later in this study, the doctrine of the Trinity is formed primarily by a comprehensive study of Scripture rather than a single "proof text." However, the strongest, most succinct passage to give support to this truth is 1 John 5:7,8.

Based on the Westcott and Hort Greek texts, most if not all modern translations tamper with verse seven. In "scholarly" debates over this issue, the text in question is referred to as the Johannine Comma. If you have access to any modern versions, compare this passage in the KJV and note the discrepancies below or on a separate sheet of paper.

Day
1

APPLICATION

What is the greatest truth you have learned from God's Word today and how can you apply it to your life?

DEFINITIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Those who choose to deny the Trinity are prone to credit the doctrine of the Trinity to early church creeds and falsely allege that it is not found in the Bible. This is simply an unimpressive debate tactic. There are many words which do not appear in the Bible that are commonly held to be true. The word deity is nowhere found in the Scriptures, yet it would be ludicrous to deny the deity of God.

Likewise, trinity, is simply a word that describes a profound truth clearly taught in the Scriptures. It describes a complex truth uniformly taught throughout the Scriptures. Although early theologians may have ascribed the name "trinity" to this doctrine, the teaching is clearly biblical and was understood by the New Testament Apostles who taught it in their writings.

2 Peter 3:15-18: Who wrests (twists) the Scriptures? _____

Why should we beware? _____

Although the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, its doctrine is clearly taught. The use of the word that describes this biblical truth began in the late second century with Theophilus. (A.D. 168-183) It is formed from the Greek word *trias*. He was soon followed by Tertullian, in A.D. 220, who used the Latin word *trinitas*. The word was used to briefly express a detailed doctrine taught by our Lord and His apostles.

Because the doctrine of the trinity is somewhat difficult to express in few words. However, you would do well to consider the following definitions.

"There is but one God, but in the unity of this Godhead, there are three separate, identifiable, persons of the same substance, attributes, power and eternity, whom we know as God the Father, God the Son

(Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit." – Dr. Harry Carr

"We worship one God in the Trinity, and the Trinity in unity; we distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance....The entire three persons are coeternal and coequal with one another, so that...we worship complete unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity." Athenasian Creed

"The unity of God as subsisting in three distinct Persons." – Easton's Bible Dictionary

Each of these definitions describes a complicated blending of unity and distinction. Many have erred by emphasizing one of these attributes at the expense of the other. Mormons stress the distinction of the three and replace the unity of God with Tritheism, or three separate gods, with one purpose. Unitarians however, sacrifice the obvious distinctions and accept only the unity of God. The UPCI, discussed earlier, seems to have followed this course.

Although it may be difficult for us to comprehend both aspects at once, we must accept it as true because the Bible teaches it. A person who determines not to believe what he cannot comprehend will be condemned to a life of darkness. For if a man is determined to understand light before he will see, he would be forced to live with his eyes closed. See John 1:5.

Isaiah 55:8-9: What is the difference between our thoughts and God's? _____

Does our inability to fully comprehend relieve us of the responsibility to believe God's Word? _____

Yesterday and today have been spent primarily laying a foundation for the biblical truth of the Trinity. Tomorrow we will begin examining the Scriptural support in more detail. However, it would be fitting

to first observe some practical illustrations to help us comprehend what we are about to discover in God's Word.

Good Bible teachers have learned to follow Jesus' example of teaching heavenly truths through earthly examples. A parable is simply an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. However, we will find that while some object lessons may help us to understand this truth, they all fall short of conveying it completely.

The Example of the Egg.

An egg is a single object. Yet we know that it has three component parts that make up the whole: the shell, the white and the yoke. However, this illustration breaks down because the shell is not the yoke, which is not the white. While all three form one unit, the parts are not equal to each other.

The Example of Water.

Water illustrates the Trinity through its various forms: solid, liquid and gas. This illustration breaks down because water cannot be in all three states at once.

The Example of a Flame.

When three candles are lit and their flames united, it is impossible to distinguish the three flames from each other. They are united as one. When separated they do not lose their identity. However, at separation, they are no longer one.

While these examples aid us in our understanding they are insufficient to completely illustrate the trinity because there is nothing else like it in the world! God is unique!

DAY
2

APPLICATION

What is the greatest truth you have learned from God's Word today and how can you apply it to your life?

UNITY OR ONENESS

We will examine the biblical teaching of the Trinity in the following order. First we will note the unity of God. Second we will explore the distinct persons of God. Thirdly we will note verses that declare both the unity and distinctness of God. Finally, we will observe several verses containing the Trinitarian formula.

THE UNITY OF GOD

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is commonly called the *shema*, meaning to hear. It was important for Israel to recognize that there is one true God and only one. Many of the surrounding nations were prone to invent a different god for every occasion. Israel was to recognize Jehovah as the one true God and Him alone.

Deuteronomy 6:4: Write this verse below.

This passage clearly lays a foundation for the Trinity. There is but one God and as we learned last week, Jesus is God. If there is but one God who is the Father and Jesus is God also, then the Father and Son must be one in essence. There is no other explanation without contradiction.

Mark 12:29-30: What Old Testament passage was Jesus quoting? _____

Deuteronomy 4:35: Are there any gods besides the LORD (Jehovah)? _____

If there are no God's besides one, that being Jehovah, then anyone else to whom the Scriptures attribute divine qualities must be the same God.

Isaiah 46:9: Are there any other Gods? _____

Is there even anyone like God? _____

Since these Old Testament passages clearly indicate that there is but one God anyone that the New Testament declares to be God must be that same God. As we will examine more thoroughly tomorrow, Jesus is clearly revealed to be God. Last week's study demonstrated His deity without a doubt. Therefore, the Father and Son must be one in essence. When we begin to factor the Holy Ghost into this equation we are forced to acknowledge that the Bible plainly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine of one God is called monotheism. *Mono* means one and *theo* means God.

Polytheism is the belief in more than one god. The Greeks and many others were famous for this. They would create a god for every event or element. There was a god of fire and a god of water. They would appoint a god of the sun and one for the moon. One web site lists 370 false Greek gods with over 646 names. This type of superstition is both confusing and contradictory. It lacks a true final authority. Their gods are merely powerful beings with exaggerated and sinful passions. Paul encountered them on Mars Hill.

Acts 17:16-34: How did Paul describe the men of Athens? _____

What inscription did Paul notice? _____

Who did Paul declare this to be? _____

1 Corinthians 8:4-6: How many gods does the world have? _____

How many God's do Christians acknowledge? _____

God is one is essence manifesting Himself as three distinct persons:

1. The Father: Jehovah,
2. The Son: Jesus Christ,
3. The Holy Spirit: Comforter

These are three distinct manifestations of the same God. Another way to help understand this is through simple human relationships. Again, this illustration will fall short of the true picture of the Trinity but may still open our understanding a little.

I am one person but appear to others in various capacities. I am a husband to my wife, father to my sons and a pastor to my congregation. These are three manifestations of one person. The Trinity is more complex than that but perhaps this brings you one step closer to understanding.

Zechariah 14:9: His name is and shall be _____.

These verses do not allow for more than one God. God is one and there is only one God. Therefore, anyone else in Scripture declared to be God must be this same God. If Jesus is God then He is the same God that created the heavens and earth, parted the Red Sea and so forth. If the Holy Spirit is God, then He too is of the same substance. If either can claim to be God and not be of the same substance, then there would be multiple Gods and the above Scriptures would be void.

DAY
3

APPLICATION

What is the greatest truth you have learned from God's Word today and how can you apply it to your life?

THE DISTINCT PERSONS OF THE TRINITY

According to yesterday's lesson who are the three distinct Persons of the Godhead?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Since the following Scriptures clearly teach that each is God and we know that there is only one God, the only conclusion we can make is that they are the same God.

God the Father

There is very little debate over this. However, we will note a few Scriptures that support this truth.

1 Corinthians 8:6: What is the Father? _____

Matthew 5:16: Where does the Father dwell? _____

Matthew 11:25: Who is Lord of heaven? _____

Who reveals truth? _____

John 6:27: What title is given to God? _____

1 Corinthians 15:24: What two names are used interchangeably? _____

Philippians 2:11: Who is the Father? _____

Matthew 23:9: Why is it a sin to call a priest Father? _____

It could not be more evident from the Scriptures that God is referred to as the Father.

God the Son

The devil is not strictly opposed to sinners recognizing God the Father, so long as he can compel them to deny God the Son.

Satan viciously attacks the deity of Christ.

If he can confuse and distort this truth he can prevent a lost soul from believing and receiving Jesus Christ as his/her Saviour.

The devil doesn't mind if people believe that Jesus was a good man, a prophet or even a son of God. He would even rather have people believe that He is a god along with others than that He is God incarnate (in the flesh). However, there are multiple verses declaring His deity, which would require Him to be of the same substance as the Father. Though we studied this in depth last week, let's review.

John 1:1 & 14: What was in the beginning? _____

What was the Word? _____

What did the Word become? _____

This passage clearly portrays Jesus as God from the beginning, manifest in the flesh as the only begotten of the Son of God.

Matthew 16:16: How does Peter acknowledge His deity? _____

John 20:27-29: What does Thomas call Jesus? _____

Did Jesus receive this worship or rebuke Thomas for it? _____

Colossians 1:15: Who is the image of God? _____

2 Peter 1:1: What or Who else does Peter call God? _____

1 John 5:20: Who does John proclaim as the true God? _____

Matthew 1:22-23: What does His name, Emmanuel mean? _____

Colossians 2:9: What dwells in Jesus? _____

As we learned last week, Jesus had powers and attributes that belong only to God. These include the authority to forgive sin, create the world, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability and the right to receive worship. It could not be more evident from Scriptures that Jesus is God. If the Father is God and Jesus is God and there is only one God, then they must be one in substance.

The Holy Spirit

A Trinity would not be complete without three. The Holy Spirit cannot be ignored in any discussion of the Trinity.

A few misguided souls attempt advance the idea that the Holy Spirit is not a person but a force. However, this is easily dismissed when we realize that the Scriptures use personal pronouns in reference to Him. Furthermore, a force cannot hear or speak.

John 16:13: How many times are the personal pronouns he and himself used to describe the Holy Spirit? _____

Note the following Scriptures that reveal the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:3-4: Lying to the Holy Ghost is lying to _____.

2 Corinthians 3:17: Who is that Spirit? _____

Ephesians 4:30: He is referred to as the Spirit of _____.

The Scriptures plainly tell us that there is one God. They also proclaim the Father, the Son and the Spirit to be God. Therefore, they all must be one and the same. This clear teaching of the Bible is known as the doctrine of the Trinity.

DAY
4

APPLICATION

What is the greatest truth you have learned from God's Word today and how can you apply it to your life?

THE UNITY OF THE TRINITY

Yesterday we saw the distinctions within the Trinity. By this we mean that we can see God distinctly in three persons: the Father, Son and Spirit.

In the following passages we will see at least two distinct members of the Trinity in the same passage but declared to be one. I call these *united distinctions*.

John 10:30: Who is one? _____

Addressing the elders at Ephesus, Paul admonishes them to care for the flock. In the following passage we find all three members of the Trinity. What is especially noteworthy is the connection Paul makes between God the Father and Jesus Christ. It clearly identifies Jesus as God!

Acts 20:28: According to this passage, Who purchased the church with His own blood? _____

Isn't it interesting that Paul did not say "Jesus?" He specifically said God. Paul could make no clearer statement that he regarded Jesus as God in the flesh!

John 14:9: How were the first century disciples, like Philip, able to see the Father? _____

Exodus 3:14 and John 8: 57-59: What title of God does Jesus claim? _____

Not only do we see Jesus identified with the Father but we clearly see Him identified as the Holy Spirit as well.

John 14:16-18: Where was the Spirit? _____

Where would He be? _____

What did Jesus say He would do? _____

How encouraging this must have been for the apostles to hear. Jesus was *with* them but would be *in* them. When He returned it would be in another form. That form is the Holy Spirit. Christians today often fantasize about being with Jesus during His earthly ministry. I think these were eager to have what we have: Christ IN us.

Paul teaches the unity of the Trinity easily through the names he attributes to the Spirit.

Romans 8:9: First Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of _____.

Afterwards, he refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of _____.

So Paul identifies the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of God the Father and secondarily as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. There can be no denying that these three are one.

John 17:11: Jesus and the Father are _____

It has been said that the doctrine of the Trinity is implicit in the Old Testament and explicit in the New Testament. We could not come to a complete understanding of the Trinity through the Old Testament alone. However, we do find passages that seem to hint at the further revelation that was to come in the New Testament.

Genesis 1:1-2: Which two members of the Trinity are most evident? _____

Elohim is plural name for God in Hebrew and is used in Genesis 1:1. This is a hint at the Trinity.

Colossians 1:16: Who else was clearly present? _____

Genesis 1:26: Does God speak of Himself as singular or plural? _____

Led of the Spirit, Matthew felt the Trinity was so important that he conscientiously reports that the Trinity was apparent at both the beginning and conclusion of

earthly ministry of Jesus.

Matthew 3:16-17: At which event do we see the Trinity here? _____

Matthew 28:19: What is taking place as we see the Trinity here? _____

Which members of the Trinity are found in following passages in order?

1 Peter 1:2: _____

Jude 1:20: _____

John 15:26: _____

2 Corinthians 13:14: _____

Ephesians 2:18: _____

1 John 5:7: _____

It is comforting to know that God is more advanced than we. It would be difficult to serve a god who did not retain some mysteries for Himself. In His revelation of Himself as a Triune Being, He has given us what some might call a "teaser." He has given us a taste of a marvelous truth that we have to wait to comprehend fully. We know the truth but will not understand it in its entirety till we meet Him face to face.

1 Corinthians 13:12: How do we see Him presently? _____

How will we see Him? _____

As God has revealed Himself in the Trinity, He has demonstrated His great love for us. We see Him as a loving Father who provides and cares for His children. We see Him as an elder brother and Redeemer in the Son who has given Himself for us. In the Holy Spirit we see Him as a Comforter who lives with us and in us. He relates to us on every level and meets our every need.

DAY
5

APPLICATION

What is the greatest truth you you have learned from God's Word today and how can you apply it to your life?



TABLE TALK



PASTOR'S MESSAGE