

Essentials of Christianity (pt 13)
5/16/2010

Introduction _____

Currently in our survey of the essentials of Christianity, we are working our way through the subject of theology. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most important components of this subject.

Last week we embarked on a journey to gain a greater understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Here is the description of the Trinity that we are working with.

Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹

As I said last week, the wording is chosen very carefully. Each word is important, each word has a specific function.

What is also important is not just the words that were included, but also the one's that were not.

I want to encourage anyone who was not here last week to please obtain a copy of the teaching. We covered some foundational stuff related to the subject of the Trinity that is essential to know, and that will help you benefit more fully from what we're covering today.

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Based upon our definition (which is rooted in what the scriptures teach), the three foundations of the Trinity are clearly visible.

Here they are:

Foundation One: Monotheism: There Is Only One God

Foundation Two: There Are Three Divine Persons

Foundation Three: The Persons Are Coequal and Coeternal.

Foundation One: we covered thoroughly at the beginning of our session on theology. So we won't need to cover any more on that.

Foundation Two: this is what we spent a good deal of time going over last week. The Bible teaches that there is ONE God, one Being: co-existing in three persons.

We covered most of what we needed to of this last week, but there are a few more details we need to look at before moving on.

What I want to do first is provide a few more scriptures as evidence for the distinction between the persons. And then we'll wrap up foundation 2 with a brief elaboration on the note we ended on last week about the heresy of Sabellianism.

These other scriptural examples do more than just show the members of the Trinity listed together; they also show how they relate to one another.

For example, we see in scripture that the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father--actions that would be impossible outside of recognizing that the Father is a separate divine person *from* the Son.

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand" (John 3:35).

"For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, so that you will marvel" (John 5:20).

Just as the Father loves the Son, so the Son loves His disciples. The disciples are separate persons from the Son; hence, the Father is a separate person from the Son as well:

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love" (John 15:9).

Please to turn to John 17:24-26: read

^{NAU} John 17:24 *"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

²⁵ *"O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me;*

²⁶ *and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

Again, this shows a loving relationship between the Father and the Son *before* the world was created.

Also,

We are told that Jesus continues as our High Priest and Advocate before God the Father: "If any one does sin, we have an advocate with

the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Yet in order to do this before God the Father, it is necessary that Christ be a person distinct from the Father.

Moreover, the Father is not the Holy Spirit, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. They are distinguished in several verses.

Turn to John 14:15-17, 26: read

^{NAU} John 14:15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

¹⁶ "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

¹⁷ that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

^{NAU} John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Thus, distinction of persons *is* essential to our understanding of who God is.

As I mentioned last week, attempts have been made to come up with alternative solutions to explain the Trinity which would deny **foundations 2 & 3**.

Some people, even some Christians, accept the truth that there is only one true God, and that the Father, Son, and Spirit are fully God, but deny that the Bible differentiates between them coexisting as persons.

Advocates of this position may believe that these are just different names for one person who acts differently at different times. Sometimes this person calls himself Father, sometimes he calls himself Son, and sometimes he calls himself Spirit (a form of modalism).

This position is unacceptable and cannot be considered orthodox.²

I'm not sure why some born again believers don't have the same conviction about Oneness Christians (modalists) as they do about other groups that deny the Trinity.

Most other groups who deny the Trinity do so thinking that orthodox Christian believers actually embrace some form of modalism. That is, many times Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses will attack the Trinity on grounds that are really only relevant to the Oneness or modalistic position. They will point to the baptism of Jesus and say, "Well, was Jesus a ventriloquist or something?" The Oneness position is, in fact, liable to all sorts of refutation on the basis of Scripture, so it is easy to see why many who wish to deny the Trinity prefer to attack this perversion of it rather than the real thing. Christians who love the Trinity must be very quick to correct those who think that orthodox believers embrace a form of modalism - one **what**, three **who's**. That is the issue.

Scripture leaves no room for confusing the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁴

Let's move on to the third foundation.

Foundation Three: The Persons Are Coequal and Coeternal.

What this essentially means is that all three persons must be God (coequal); consequently they eternally exist.

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³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

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This is the foundation that has probably come under more attack than any other attribute or quality of God other than His outright existence.

Let's put this in more technical language for the purpose of refining the definition of this third foundation.

The whole undivided essence (the what/being) of God belongs equally to each of the three persons (foundation three).

The statement asserts that the Father is in full possession of the entirety of the divine essence; the Son is in full possession of the entirety of the divine essence; and the Spirit is in full possession of the entirety of the divine essence. There are not three different essences, nor is the one essence divided equally into thirds. Each divine person is in full possession of the entirety of the divine nature.

What is the difference between "being" and "person"? Everything that exists has being. A rock has the being of a rock, a tree the being of a tree, a dog the being of a dog, and man is a human being. That which exists has being, but not everything that has being is personal. A rock is not personal.

Biblically speaking, there are three kinds of beings who are personal: God, men, and angels. I have being: I exist. Yet I am personal. My being is limited and finite. It is limited to one place geographically speaking, and one time temporally speaking. Such is the essence of being a creature. My being is shared by only one person: me. My being, since it is limited, cannot be distributed among two, three, or any more persons. One being, one person: that's what it is to be a human.

What we are saying about God is that His being is not limited and finite like a creature's. His Being is infinite and unlimited, and hence can, in a way completely beyond our comprehension, be shared fully by three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The divine Being is one; the divine persons are three. While the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Spirit, each is fully and completely God by full and complete participation in the divine Being. Unless we recognize the difference

between the terms being and person, we will never have an accurate or workable understanding of the Trinity.

It is the full and equal participation in the divine Being that is most often denied by heretical and unorthodox religious groups. The truth of this claim is found in the scriptural witness to the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. ⁵

This is what we're going to cover next: the Deity of the Son and the Spirit: the fact that they both are God. Most wouldn't deny the Father is.

First-- the Deity of the Son. Let's begin our journey on this by taking a trip back in time to the 4th century A.D.

To prepare us for this let's turn to **Hebrews 1:1-8: read**

NAU Hebrews 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

⁴ having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

⁵ For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

⁶ And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM."

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⁷ *And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE."*

⁸ *But of the Son He says, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM."*

This is truly one of the great texts demonstrating who Jesus is.

Follow along with me.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, the maker of all things visible and invisible.

And we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, the unique Son, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made, whether things in heaven and things in earth, Who for us men and for our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

But for those who say "There was a time when He was not," and "Before He was begotten He was not," and "He was made of things that were not," or who assert that He is of a different substance or essence [from the Father], or that He is created or subject to change or alterable - the Church anathematizes them. (edited excerpt from the Nicene Creed)

These words were the result of the greatest church council ever convened - not in size, but in importance. Beginning on June 19, 325, around 300 bishops, almost all from the Eastern portion of the Roman empire, met and considered the issue of the deity of Christ. Many bore the scars of years of persecution that had only recently ended (a.d. 313). They had been willing to lay down their lives for the gospel of

Christ, and now they were called upon to deal with a division in the church brought on by the teachings of a man named Arius.

A presbyter in a suburb of Alexandria, Egypt, Arius is said by historians to have been a good communicator - a slick speaker who could convince by his speech and personality. About seven years prior to Nicaea, Arius began to publicly disagree with his bishop, Alexander, because Alexander was teaching that the Son of God had eternally existed. Instead, Arius insisted, "There was a time when the Son was not." Christ, to Arius, was a highly exalted, yet created, being. Alexander attempted to deal with the issue locally, and Arius was condemned by a local synod in 321. But he simply moved elsewhere and continued to teach and preach.

Arianism, as it came to be known, disturbed the newly found peace of the Christian church. Rather than persecution from outside, now strife from within occupied the energies of believers. The Roman Emperor Constantine learned of the battle. Seeking a unified empire, and fearing the results a split of the Christian church could bring, Constantine moved to encourage reconciliation and resolution. Failing this, he called a council to meet at Nicaea in the summer of 325.⁶

How wide the divide? What kind of digging into the Bible did it take to refute this ancient heresy?

In further repudiation of the teaching of Arius, the Nicene Creed insisted that Christ was "of the same substance as the Father." The dispute with Arius concerned two words that have become famous in the history of Christian doctrine, homoousios ("of the same nature/substance") and homoiousios ("of a similar nature/substance"). The difference depends on the different meaning of two Greek prefixes, homo- meaning "same," and homoi- meaning "similar."

Arius was happy to say that Christ was a supernatural heavenly being and that he was created by God before the creation of the rest of the

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universe, and even that he was "similar" to God in his nature. Thus, Arius would agree to the word homoiousios. But the Council of Nicea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople in 381 realized that this did not go far enough, for if Christ is not of exactly the same nature as the Father, then he is not fully God. So both councils insisted that orthodox Christians confess Jesus to be homoousios of the same nature as God the Father.

The difference between the two words was only one letter, the Greek letter iota (i), and some have criticized the church for allowing a doctrinal dispute over a single letter to consume so much attention for most of the fourth century A.D. Some have wondered, "Could anything be more foolish than arguing over a single letter in a word?" But the difference between the two words was profound, and the presence or absence of the iota really did mark the difference between biblical Christianity, with a true doctrine of the Trinity, and a heresy that did not accept the full deity of Christ and therefore was nontrinitarian and ultimately destructive to the whole Christian faith.⁷

Communion/Band

quote from Brown. page 119-highlights.

Consider these strange words from the apostle Paul from the same chapter that we normally turn to when we're celebrating communion

1Cor 11:17-19

⁷Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

