

Essentials of Christianity (pt 14)
5/23/2010

Introduction _____

In the spirit of the Apostle Peter, I come to you today...

^{NAU} 2 Peter 1:12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.

¹³ I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder,

Some of what we'll be covering will be familiar territory for many of us. But it is nevertheless very necessary for us to re-familiarize ourselves with these truths--**frequently**.

We're talking about those essentials of Christianity that distinguish it from all other religions.

Today we'll continue looking at the subject of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is the cornerstone in understanding **who** God is.

We are right in the middle of the third foundation. The persons are **co-equal and co-eternal**. (maybe some other comments)

As I said last week, what this means is that all three persons **are God**.

Substantiating that the Father is God is very easy, as many OT & NT references make this very clear. Even many world religions and cults would have no problem accepting that.

It is when we invoke the scriptures teaching that the Son and the Spirit are God that conflict arises. And this should not surprise us. Since the fall, mankind has always sought to make God into the image he wants.

But it is the scriptures that are to inform and conform us to its image of who God is.

God as Trinity

Last week we started out establishing the fact that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is God.

We covered a lot of ground and eventually wrapped up our time together looking at some history about a fourth century heresy called **Arianism** which **strongly** denied the deity of Christ; relegating Him to a mere creature.

We went through that brief history lesson last week to simply point out the extent to which the champions of the faith were willing to go to earnestly contend for the faith.

But I want to repeat something I said a couple of weeks ago: the doctrine of the Trinity *was not* established at the Council of Nicea.

Do Christians today believe in the Trinity and the deity of Christ just because the Council of Nicaea said so? Some might. But we should not.

The Trinity and the deity of Christ are the explicit teaching of the Scriptures.

We can accept the use of the term *homoousion* because it accurately reflects the teaching that there is one God, and that both the Father and the Son are described as being fully God, fully deity.

Nicaea's authority, then, if we wish to use that term, is derived from its faithfulness to the scriptural testimony. It has validity today because what was true about Christ in a.d. 325 is true today, too. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).¹

Church councils have historically been used by God to help ward off attacks on the church by bringing the scriptures to bear upon whatever weapon the enemy throws at us.

Today we're going to finish up our time of focusing on the deity of Christ, by looking at a few passages that are very specific in addressing Jesus as God.

There are so many NT references to Christ's deity that it's overwhelming. We will be focusing on three. But some of the other ones will be in the footnotes of the sermon notes.

The Λόγος John 1: 1-3

I suppose the most obvious place to begin is where one of the most powerful descriptions in the entire Bible of who Jesus is.

Turn to John 1.

This is the prologue to John's gospel. It is a literary masterpiece and considered to be the cornerstone of Christology.

¹ White-Trinity

^{NAU} John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

² *He was in the beginning with God.*

³ *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

Three essential truths are delineated in verse 1. It's truly amazing how much is contained in just three verses.

First of all: the Greek word for “word” is the word **logos** (λογος). In this context λογος takes on the form of a title. Much like the word “lord” does.

The **first essential truth** that is expressed here is that the λογος *was and is* the Eternal One who always has existed before time and matter (pre-existence).

It is not by accident that John's gospel begins with the same phrase as the Bible begins with: “In the beginning...”

However, in Genesis 1:1, “in the beginning...” introduces the story of the old creation; whereas here, John introduces the story of the **new creation**.

So John elevates the phrase from its reference to a point of time (the beginning of creation); to the time of absolute pre-existence before any creation.

This verse fully proves that Jesus Christ was not a created being.

The Greek word used for “was” refers to a continuous existence; i.e. no point of origin in time.

Vs 3-- verse 3 then establishes that, contrary to the λογος being a part of creation, He himself was the agent of creation; the Creator Himself.

The second essential truth we see in these verses is one we've already addressed in detail as one of the important distinctives of the Trinity, but it's here too.

That the λογος *was* and *is* a person distinct from the Father ("the Word was with God").

The third essential truth we see is that: even though the λογος is distinct from the Father, the λογος shares the very same essence/nature of the Father (i.e. the Word was God). This corresponds to what we read last week.

NAU Hebrews 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...

It is later in John 1 that the identity of the λογος is clarified.

NAU John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is how we know *who* the λογος is.

The whole focus of John's prologue is the λογος who is eternal, and with God, and *is* God.

There are numerous other details in these verses; some related to grammar.

In verses 2 and 3, John continues his work of introducing us to the Logos, the Word. He reemphasizes the startling statement of verse 1 by insisting that "He was in the beginning with God."

Verse 3 then introduces another evidence of the deity of the Logos: His role in creation. Here is a phrase that can only be used of the one true God. Creation is always God's work. If the Logos created all things, then the Logos is fully divine.

This is clearly an exhaustive assertion. Just as Paul in Col 1:16-17 uses the entirety of the Greek language to express the unlimited extent of Christ's creative activity, so, too, John makes sure that we do not leave room for anything that is not made by the Logos.

If it exists, it does so because it was created by the Logos.

In the footnotes of my notes there's a link to an article that goes into great detail on these passages.

The JW's take great issue with the way Christians understand John 1:1-3, and the article I've linked to deals with their arguments.²

θεοτητα--Colossians 2:9

The next verse we're going to look at on Christ's deity is in **Colossians 2--turn to**. This reference to Christ's deity is especially interesting in light of the historical background for the book Colossians.

One of the things that the book to the Colossians was combatting was an insidious doctrinal heresy known as **gnosticism**.

² http://vintage.aomin.org/JOHN1_1.html

Gnosticism had a powerful influence on the culture in the early centuries of the church. Many parts of the NT were specific in addressing certain unbiblical teachings that were circulating during this time, with gnosticism being at the forefront. Colossians hits this false teaching head on.

It would be very time consuming to try and unpack the many details of the gnostic heresy. But in order to paint a backdrop for what we're about to read in Colossians 2, let's at least look at a snap shot of the strange belief system of the gnostics.

Gnosticism, in all its forms, was characterized by belief in the evil of matter, in mediating beings, and in salvation through knowledge. Beginning with the assumption that all creation is evil, the Gnostics argued that God didn't create this world and that he has absolutely no contact with it. However, intellectual necessity did not permit them to break completely the bond between divinity and the material world. They therefore taught that God put forth from himself a series of emanations, called "aeons, (Note: Eons were considered to be emanations sent forth by God from himself to fulfill various functions in the material and spiritual universe.)" each aeon a little more distant from him and each having a little less of deity.

At the end of this chain of intermediate beings there is an aeon possessing enough of deity to make a world, but, removed far enough from God that his creative activities could not compromise the perfect purity of God. The world, they argued, was the creation of this lesser power. These aeons were thought to inhabit the stars and rule human destiny. They therefore were to be appeased and worshiped.

Belief in the inherent evil of matter made it impossible for the Gnostics to accept who Jesus really was.³

³ Kenneth L Barker and John R Kohlenberger III, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary: Vol. 2: New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1994).

So we get a flavor for what Paul is contending with.

Now we may look at this belief system and laugh it off because it sounds so far fetched. But is what they believed any worse than what JW's or Mormons believe about Jesus.

Mormons believe that Jesus Christ was among the spirit children of Elohim (the father) and one of his spirit brothers was Lucifer.

JW's say that He was simply a created being, and, that he was at one time Michael the arch angel.

At the heart of every other world religion and cult is a denial of the Deity of Jesus Christ.

And so, it is with this in mind that we understand this first part of chapter 2.

^{NAU} Colossians 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,

² that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,

³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴ I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.

⁵ For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

⁶ *Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,*

⁷ *having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.*

⁸ *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.*

⁹ *For in Him all the **fullness of Deity** dwells in bodily form,*

¹⁰ *and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;*

The word for Deity (θηεοτης) can also be translated as “Godhead (KJV).” This is the only time in the NT this word is used.

It is said...

Divine glory did not merely gild (*decorate*) him, lighting up his person for a season with a splendor not his own; He was and is absolute and perfect God.⁴

J.B. Lightfoot said... In Christ dwells the entire fulness of the Godhead, whereas they (*the heretics*) represent it (*the Godhead, the deity*) to you as dispersed among several spiritual agencies. (*the aeons*) Christ is the one fountain-head of all spiritual life, whereas they (*the heretics*) teach you to seek it in communion with inferior creatures.⁵

Finally, let's turn to John 12.

Who Isaiah Saw-- John 12:38-41

⁴ Cleon L.Jr. Rogers and Cleon L. Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1998).

⁵ J. B Lightfoot, *J. B. Lightfoot's Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

Toward the end of Jesus' public ministry as recorded by John we find an incident where a group of people seek out the Lord Jesus. The significance of the passage often goes right past us because we are looking more at the encounter than a little comment John tacks on to the end of his citation from Isaiah.

Let's take a look.

^{NAU} *John 12:37 But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.*

³⁸ *This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?"*

³⁹ *For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again,*

⁴⁰ *"HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM."*

⁴¹ *These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.*

Did you follow the pronouns: the Him's, the He's..?

We have to go back a little to see that John cites two passages from the book of Isaiah. In verse 38 he quotes from Isa 53:1, the great "Suffering Servant" passage that so plainly describes the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John says the unbelief of the Jews, despite their seeing signs, was a fulfillment of the word of Isaiah in Isa 53. He then goes beyond this to assert their inability to believe and quotes from Isaiah 6 and the "Temple Vision" Isaiah received when he was commissioned as a prophet.

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah says he saw Jehovah; here it says he saw Jesus.

There are many more, but that will suffice.

The Holy Spirit is God

As important as embracing the deity of Christ, is embracing the Deity of the Holy Spirit--the third person of the Trinity.

Let's read through a quote together.

There is a reason why the Holy Spirit does not receive the same level and kind of attention that is focused upon the Father and the Son: it is not His purpose to attract that kind of attention to himself. Just as the Son voluntarily chose to take the role of Suffering Servant so as to redeem God's people, so, too, the Spirit has chosen to take the role as Sanctifier and Advocate of the people of God. But since it is the Spirit's role to direct the hearts of men to Christ, and to conform them to His image, He does not seek to push himself into the forefront and gain attention for himself. One result of this voluntary role of the Spirit in the work of salvation is that the evidences of His personality and deity are not as numerous or obvious as those for the Father or the Son. He is not "up front" and is not spoken of as often as the other persons. Some take this as evidence of inferiority, but difference in function does not indicate inferiority of nature.

There are two issues to address when looking at the biblical witness to the Holy Spirit. Due to the fact that some deny His personality, we must establish the clear truth that the Holy Spirit is not merely a "force" or "power," but is, in fact, a person. Having established this, we can then demonstrate that He is an eternal person, in full Deity, along with the Father and the Son.

One of the ways the New World Translation of Jehovah's Witnesses attempts to undermine the Trinity is by consistently rendering the

phrase "Holy Spirit" as "holy spirit." When possible, they omit the article, resulting in strange renderings like "That one will baptize YOU people with holy spirit" (Matt 3:11), "and he will be filled with holy spirit right from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15), and "she was found to be pregnant by holy spirit before they were united" (Matt 1:18). Their intention is clear: the Watchtower Society denies that the Holy Spirit is a person, hence, they desire their "translation" of the Bible to communicate the idea that the Holy Spirit is an "it," a force or power.

Of course, the argument that is often heard is that the phrase "Holy Spirit" in Greek is in the neuter gender, and it is. But Greek genders do not necessarily indicate personality. Inanimate things can have masculine and feminine genders, and personal things can have the neuter gender. We cannot automatically insert the pronoun "it" when referring to every neuter noun any more than we should always insert the pronoun "she" for "love," since love in Greek is feminine. Instead, we determine whether the Holy Spirit is personal the same way we would demonstrate that the Father or the Son is a person. Does the Spirit exhibit personality by speaking, using personal pronouns, and doing other things that only persons can do? Does the Spirit have a will? Can we insult or resist the Holy Spirit? ⁶

Personal activities *are* ascribed to the Holy Spirit, such as teaching (John 14:26), bearing witness (John 15:26; Rom 8:16), interceding or praying on behalf of others (Rom 8:26-27), searching the depths of God (1 Cor 2:10), knowing the thoughts of God (1 Cor 2:11), willing to distribute some gifts to some and other gifts to others (1 Cor 12:11), forbidding or not allowing certain activities (Acts 16:6-7), speaking (Acts 8:29; 13:2; and many times in both Old and New Testaments), evaluating and approving a wise course of action (Acts 15:28), and being grieved by sin in the lives of Christians (Eph 4:30). ⁷

Before we close today, we will look at two portions of scripture that demonstrate the deity of the Holy Spirit.

⁶ White-Trinity

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

Turn to Acts 5:1-6; 28:23-31;

^{NAU} Acts 5:1 *But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,*

² *and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.*

³ *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"*

⁴ *"While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*

⁵ *And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.*

⁶ *The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.*

^{NAU} Acts 28:23 *When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.*

²⁴ *Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.*

²⁵ *And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,*

²⁶ *saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;*

²⁷ *FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM."*

²⁸ *"Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."*

²⁹ *When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.*

³⁰ *And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him,*

³¹ *preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.*

Making a connection with all three members of the Trinity in the Isaiah reference.

