

Essentials of Christianity (pt 15)
5/30/2010

Introduction _____

For many weeks now we have been engaged in our study of the essentials of Christianity. We have spent much time focusing on the details of the many categories that make up the field of study known as **systematic theology**.

In the process of looking at these details it's a fitting comparison to say that our attention to detail has been much like examining the individual leaves on trees in the forest.

When doing this for an extended period of time, one may forget what the forest looked like after being so focused on the leaves.

So, to begin our time today I'd like to take a few moments to step back from looking at the leaves, to reconnect us to the big picture--**the forest**.

Review of the Essentials

Our study began with **Ephesians 4:11-16** (slide), which tells us that the goal of Gods ministers is to lead the body of Christ into a unity of the essentials which will build us up and keep us from being bounced around by the winds of bad doctrine.

This equipping will also enable us to earnestly contend for the faith as Jude admonished.

Systematic theology plays a vital role by helping us to understand biblical themes that are **essential** to our Christian faith, and to defend those beliefs. And so we are using the most common categories of S.T. to help us understand what the Bible teaches about what is **essential for every Christian** to believe.

We have covered the following.

Bibliology- The Doctrine of the Bible

The essential points of this category is:

Bible is the Word of God

Sola Scriptura- Latin for *scripture alone*; which means that the scriptures are the final authority.

And then the essential *the Christian Response*: that the Bible be taught, learned and obeyed.

Without bibliology we would have no foundation for the rest.

Next:

Theology- The Doctrine of God

The first component of this was establishing that *God does exist*: evidenced by **Humanity's Inner Sense of God** (conscience) and **the Evidence in Nature and Scripture**

The Person of God: the nature of God as a person. Under this heading we established the following.

There Is Only One God (Monotheism)

The Names of God (Elohim, Yahweh, Adonai, etc.,)

God is Spirit

God is Invisible

God is Living

God is Transcendent (distinct from creation)

Then we covered **The Attributes of God.**

Incommunicable attributes of God: those attributes that God does not share or "communicate" to others) and **communicable attributes** of God (those God shares or "communicates" with us).

Incommunicable Attributes:

God is Eternal (Infinite)

God is Immutable (Unchanging)

God is Self Existent (Independent, Self-Sufficient)

God is Omnipotent (all powerful)

God is Omnipresent (everywhere)

God is Omniscient (all knowing)

Communicable Attributes:

God is Holy

God is Truth

God is Just and Righteous

God is Love

God of Wrath

God is Jealous

The God of Peace

The Acts of God: what is essential to believe about the acts of God--the things He does.

The single act we focused on was creation.

God as Creator

And this brings us to where we are today: looking at what the Bible has to say about **God as Trinity**

In our lesson on the doctrine of the Trinity, we have established the three foundations:

Foundation One: Monotheism: There Is Only One God

Foundation Two: There Are Three Divine Persons

Foundation Three: The Persons Are Coequal and Coeternal.

Last week we ended by looking at some verses that establish the fact that the Holy Spirit is God: being co-equal and coeternal with the Father and the Son. This is in connection with **foundation three**, and is an essential part of our Christian faith.

The Holy Spirit is said to be omnipresent:

^{NAU} Psalm 139:7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

Omniscient:

^{NAU} 1 Corinthians 2:10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

And active in the very creation itself:

^{NAU} Genesis 1:2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

^{NAU} Psalm 104:30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the ground.

All of this helps us to conclude that the Holy Spirit is a person: not a force; and *is not* a part of creation: but involved in creation.

And Hebrews 9:14 indicates that He is co-eternal:

NAU Hebrews 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Misconceptions of the Trinity

Because of the numerous times in the Bible, where both the Son and the Spirit seem to have subordinate roles compared to the Father, some have thought that this is proof that the Son/Spirit are not full deity.

What happens if that JW comes to our door and tells us to look up this reference: **turn to Revelation 3:14**

NAU Revelation 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

Or maybe this one

NAU Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

In order to properly assess these types of passages, we need to understand some things about the roles of the Persons within the Trinity.

Let's ask for wisdom right now as we read through some quotes together.

This is some very important apologetics material.

The existence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order. To get a firm grasp on this concept, we need to define two terms that are often used in this discussion. The first is ontological. Ontology is the study of being. When we speak of the "ontological Trinity," we speak of the Trinity as it exists in and of itself. In contrast with this is the term economical. In this case, when we speak of the economical Trinity, we speak of the operations and workings of the Trinity, what the three persons do in creation and salvation (In this sense, people used to speak of the "economy of a household" or "home economics," meaning not just the financial affairs of a household, but all of the "ordering of activities" within the household).

Obviously, the Father, Son, and Spirit have taken different roles in creation and in redemption. Hence, we find different relationships between them in the economical Trinity as we see them working out redemption and bringing about salvation. We must be very careful to distinguish between relationships as we observe them outwardly and the eternal relationship that exists between the persons inside the triune nature of God, that is, the ontological Trinity.

The "order" that is observed biblically is the Father first, the Son second, and the Spirit third. But immediately our time-bound minds hit a pothole and often jump the track. When we think of someone being "first" and someone else being "second," especially in relationships, we immediately begin to import time elements. "If the Father is first, then He must be before the Son." We need to dismiss this concept immediately. When we speak of the "order" of the Persons, we are not talking about an order of being. It is not an order in time. It does not refer to dignity or participation in the divine Being. The first is not "bigger" than the second or the third. The order is one of relationship.

Put another way:

Thus, while the persons of the Trinity are equal in all their attributes, they nonetheless differ in their relationships to the creation and redemption. The Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father, but they are subordinate in their roles.

Moreover, these differences in role are not temporary but will last forever: Paul tells us that even after the final judgment,

NAU 1 Corinthians 15:28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

Here's another quote:

The subordination of the person of the Son to the person of the Father, or in other words an order of personality, office, and operation which permits the Father to be officially first, the Son second, and the Spirit third, is perfectly consistent with equality. Priority is not necessarily superiority....We frankly recognize an eternal subordination of Christ to the Father but we maintain at the same time that this subordination is a subordination of order, office, and operation, not a subordination of essence.^{1 2}

Related to this: let's look at some important things concerning The Son of God specifically: first turn to **John 10:24-38-- read.**

NAU John 10:24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵ *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.*

²⁶ *"But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.*

²⁷ *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;*

²⁸ *and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1994).

² White-Trinity

²⁹ *"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*

³⁰ *"I and the Father are one."*

³¹ *The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.*

³² *Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?"*

³³ *The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."*

³⁴ *Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS '?*

³⁵ *"If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),*

³⁶ *do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God '?*

³⁷ *"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;*

³⁸ *but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father."*

References to Christ as being the Son of God did not go unnoticed by the Jewish leaders. Let's consider the following.

Meaning of first-born

Those who deny the deity of Christ frequently do so by referring to the term first-born, suggesting that if the term relates to Christ it must imply He had a beginning in time. However, both a lexical study of the word as well as a contextual study of the usages provides a different solution to the meaning for first-born. In its Old Testament culture the predominant emphasis was on the status of the oldest son. He enjoyed

the double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17), privileges over other family members (Gen. 27:1-4, 35-37), preferential treatment (Gen. 43:33), and the respect of others (Gen. 37:22). Figuratively, the word denotes priority or supremacy (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9) 19-43 and is so used of Christ. In Colossians 1:18 where Christ is referred to as first-born the meaning is clear: as firstborn, Christ is Head of the church and preeminent in everything.

In Hebrews 1:6 the supremacy of Christ as the first-born is seen in that angels worship Him. Only God is worshiped. Psalm 89:27 is perhaps one of the clearest explanations of the term first-born. This is an example of synthetic poetry in Hebrew in which the second line explains the first. In this Messianic Psalm God affirms that Messiah will be the first-born, that is, the highest of the kings of the earth. First-born is explained as ruling over the kings of the entire earth. From both a linguistic and exegetical study it is clear that first-born draws attention to the preeminent status of Jesus as Messiah.

Meaning of begotten

The term begotten is used in several senses with respect to Christ. First, it is evident from Matthew 1:20 that Christ was begotten in His humanity but not in His deity. Christ was God from all eternity (Mic. 5:2), but at Bethlehem He took to Himself an additional nature, namely, a human nature. The Holy Spirit superintended Mary's conception to assure the sinlessness of the humanity of Christ. It is with reference to the humanity of Christ that the term begotten is used; it could never be used with reference to His deity. Begotten does not relate to Jesus' being the Son of God. In time and space Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 1:4). These verses all emphasize that Jesus' Sonship is vindicated or verified as a result of the resurrection, but the resurrection did not make Him the Son of God. Jesus has been the son of God from eternity. Thus, Psalm 2:7 and Acts 13:33 emphasize that begotten refers to the public declaration of the Sonship of Christ (but not the origination of the Son-ship).

Meaning of only-begotten

The term only-begotten (Gk. monogenes) (John 1:14, 18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9) does not suggest a beginning point in time but rather means that Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God is "unique," "the only one of its

kind,” “the only example of its category.” Only-begotten “is used to mark out Jesus uniquely above all earthly and heavenly beings.” In Genesis 22:2, 12, 16 it reflects the concept of “only, precious” as Isaac was viewed by his father, Abraham. John the apostle describes the glory radiated by the unique Son of God—no one else radiated the glory of the Father (John 1:14); moreover, the Son “explained” the Father—no one but the unique Son could explain the Father. It was the unique Son whom God sent into the world; eternal life was provided only through the unique Son of God (John 3:16). In examining the passages it is evident that only-begotten does not suggest a coming into existence, but rather it expresses the uniqueness of the person. Christ was unique as the Son of God, sent by the Father from heaven.³

In closing, turn to Matthew 16:13-20: read

^{NAU} Matthew 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (like Muslims do)."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

¹⁸ "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

¹⁹ "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

²⁰ Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

³ Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

Next week-- we'll go deeper into Christology so that we can know more fully WHO JESUS IS.