

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW
LESSON 4
THE TRINITY

[TEACHER: Open the class by reading the following definitions]

“The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being.” [from *The Baptist Faith and Message*(the booklet), page 7]

“Trinity – God’s revelation of Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, unified in the Godhead yet distinct in person and function.” [from *The Baptist Faith & Message* (the book), page 26]

Triune – “Being three in one. Used esp. of the Christian Trinity.” [The American Heritage College Dictionary, Boston, New York, 1993]

INTRODUCTION

It is fascinating that a key, cardinal doctrine of Christianity uses a word that is not in the Bible. That’s right – you will not find the word “trinity” in the Bible. However, the concept, the truth of the Trinity is all through the Bible. The doctrine of the Trinity is a difficult one to grasp – that we have one God who exists in three Persons. However, it is a crucial doctrine of the Christian faith because it focuses on who God is and on the deity of Jesus Christ as well as the deity of the Holy Spirit. So, let’s look at the concepts and some of the scriptures where those truths are found.

TRUTH # 1 – GOD IS ONE

[TEACHER: Have everyone look up these verses and you read them aloud to the class.]

Exodus 20:1-3 – This is the first of the Ten Commandments. Israel was expected to understand that there is only one true God. The theological word for this concept is “monotheism”; mono – one; theos – God.

Deuteronomy 6:4 – This verse has been called the *shema* which is the Hebrew word for “hear”, the first word in the verse. The statement is the basic confession of faith of Judaism. It means that the Lord is totally unique; He alone is God.

1 Timothy 1:17; 2:5 – This reads like a doxology which is filled with reverence and awe for the Lord. “King eternal” emphasizes His sovereignty over all creation. “Immortal” and “invisible” refer to 2 of His attributes. “the only God” emphasizes His uniqueness. 1 Timothy 2:5 makes the clear statement that there is, in fact, one God. This verse also mentions Christ Jesus which will be covered later in this and future lessons.

NOTE: There are many other verses which teach the truth that God is one; this is just a sampling.

Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears write, "Together, the unending thunderous chorus of Scripture from beginning to end is that there is only one God." [from the book *Doctrine – What Christians Should Believe*, page 13]

TRUTH # 2 – THE GODHEAD CONSISTS OF THREE PERSONS

Wayne House, in his book *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine* states, "The oneness of God and the threeness of God are not contradictory". This is the toughest concept to understand. How can one God exist in 3 Persons?

Dr. Charles Ryrie, in his book *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* says, "...the doctrine of the Trinity must not imply in any way that there might be three Gods."

Let's look at some of the verses that teach the concept of the Godhead consisting of 3 Persons...

Genesis 1:1-2 (read)– At the very beginning, God is there and the Spirit of God is present.

John 1:1,2 & 14(read) – "In the beginning was the Word...". The Word is very clearly a reference to Jesus Christ because it says in verse 2, "He was in the beginning with God". And, in verse 14 it says that "...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

So, at creation God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all present. All 3 Persons of the Godhead are eternal; they have always existed; there was never a time when they did not exist.

God, the Father...

John 6:27(read) – The second half of the verse mentions both God the Son and God the Father. The point is that the Father is called "God".

God, the Son...

John 20:26-29 (read) – Jesus Christ is God. Thomas saw the risen Lord and identified Him as God. He said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus did not correct him.

Colossians 2:9 (read) – this states that in Him (Jesus Christ) that all of the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. Paul affirmed here that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man.

God, the Holy Spirit...

Acts 5:3-4 (read) – The Holy Spirit is God. Peter stated that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God.

1 Corinthians 2:10-11(read) – the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God. He is all-knowing.

The mission statement of Second Baptist Church is based on Matthew 28:19-20. In this passage Jesus commands us to "...make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." All three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned with equal importance in one verse. When one of our Pastors baptizes someone he says, "I baptize you (my brother/sister in

Christ) in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” in obedience to Matthew 28:19. So, every time we Baptize someone we are affirming our belief in the Trinity!

TRUTH #3 – THE TRINITY IS A MYSTERY WHICH WE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND FULLY

As we have seen, the Trinity is clearly taught in the Bible. However, it is something we just can't fully grasp – it is a mystery. We have to take it by faith.

ILLUSTRATION: When it comes to fully understanding the Trinity I sort of feel like Duffy Daugherty, the old Michigan State football coach who said, “I could have been a Rhodes Scholar...except for my grades.” I don't understand the first thing about electricity (I know some of you do!). But, that does not prevent me from walking over, flipping that switch and fully believing that the light will come on. I don't have to understand it to enjoy it and to benefit from it.

The same is true for the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible clearly teaches it; I can understand it in a limited way; I believe it; I don't over-analyze it nor do I worry about it.

In the book which explains *The Baptist Faith & Message*, the writers state, “When we affirm the Trinity, we stand with Christians throughout all the ages who, like the Apostle Paul, understood the assurance this doctrine brings.” (page 27) I love that statement – we stand with Christians throughout all the ages - we are in good company!

What about some of the illustrations of the Trinity to help us understand?

Here are three...

1. At the same time I am a husband, father and grandfather; three in one; one person, 3 roles.
2. H₂O is the chemical makeup of water. It comes in 3 distinct forms: liquid, solid (ice) and gas (steam/vapor). In all 3 it is still H₂O.
3. The egg has 3 components: shell, yolk and white. Each part is fully egg yet each has its own identity that distinguishes it from the other parts.[based on *Dr. Constable's Notes on John*, page 13]

These kinds of illustrations can help but they still come short for this reason: we are trying to explain the infinite using analogies from our world and with our finite minds. We just cannot totally bridge that gap. So, remember that when studying and pondering the Trinity.

APPLICATION QUESTION: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE IF I BELIEVE THE TRINITY OR NOT?

FYI – the 3 main non-Christian cults all reject the doctrine of the Trinity: Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Christian Science followers. When someone stumbles over the Trinity it almost always has to do with the Person of Jesus Christ. I suppose this is because a Person of the Godhead became a flesh & blood man and walked this earth. Jehovah's Witnesses have their own translation of the Bible in which they translate John 1:1 as saying “the Word was a God” instead of “the Word was God”. They believe that Jesus was not fully God but the highest created being.

So, again, we ask the question: what difference does this make? It makes a huge difference.

- A. God's word teaches it. John 1:1 teaches that Jesus Christ, the Word, is God NOT a God. C.K. Barrett in his excellent commentary, *The Gospel According to St. John*, makes this statement about John 1:1:

"John intends that the whole of his Gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous." [page 156]

So, John 1:1-2 clearly teach that Jesus is God. We are not to change it or explain it away as meaning something else. We believe it because it is taught in God's word.

The Bible clearly teaches that not only was/is Jesus God but that He became a man. The theological word for this is "Incarnation" – God took on human flesh. He did not just look like a man but He actually became a man. As an old backwoods preacher said, "God's got skin on".

- B. If it is not true then our sins have not been covered. Here is a great statement by Wayne Grudem on the Trinity:

"Yet it is extremely important that this mystery [the Trinity] be true. For example, if Jesus is not both fully God and a separate person from God, then he could not have borne the complete wrath of God, died, and risen from the dead. And if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, any belief in him is foolish and those who claim to be Christians are, in the words of Paul, 'of all people most to be pitied' (1 Corinthians 15:19). [from *Christian Beliefs* by Wayne Grudem, page 39]

Future lessons will look more fully at God the Son, Jesus Christ.

WHAT ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Most people stumble over the question of the deity of Jesus Christ. Since there is so much discussion and controversy over Jesus, the Holy Spirit sometimes gets lost in the shuffle. When theological liberals attack, they usually attack the Jesus of the Bible, not the Holy Spirit. Or, we tend to shy away from the Holy Spirit because of the excesses and emotion expressed in some churches.

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is God and equally a member of the Godhead with the Father and the Son. Later, in the coming weeks in this class, we will have 3 lessons on the Holy Spirit but for now, let us consider these points...

His Name – in 1 Corinthians 6:11 He is called "the Spirit of God". In Acts 16:7 He is called "the Spirit of Jesus".

He is a Person, not a “force”, “energy” or a ghost. He is a Person in the same way that God the Father and God the Son are Persons. He possesses intellect, emotion and will. He can be grieved – Ephesians 4:30. He can be quenched – 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

His relationship to the believer - When a person trusts in Jesus Christ as his Savior, it is the Holy Spirit who enters that person, Romans 8:9. By the way, this verse refers to Him as the “Spirit of God” and the “Spirit of Christ” in one verse so, those terms are interchangeable. You do not receive Jesus as Savior and then at some point in the future receive the Holy Spirit. A believer has the Holy Spirit the moment he trusts Christ; if someone does not have the Holy Spirit, then he is not a believer according to Romans 8:9.

His relationship to Jesus Christ – John 16:13-15(read). This passage teaches us the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to Jesus and to believers. He will guide us into the truth; He will teach us what the Bible means. Also, He will glorify Jesus Christ; He will point people to Christ. The Holy Spirit does not glorify Himself. Therefore, we are not to worship and glorify the Holy Spirit over & above Jesus and the Father as some churches do.

Summary – So, we have seen that God is One who exists in 3 Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All 3 are part of the Godhead but distinct from each other. They have 3 different roles but work together in perfect harmony. The Trinity is a mystery that we cannot fully understand but is clearly taught in the Bible.

CONCLUSION

In Matthew 3:16-17 a very significant event happened (read). Jesus was Baptized and all three members of the Trinity were present.

“For the first time the Trinity, foreshadowed in many ways in the Old Testament, is clearly manifested. The Spirit descends upon the Son and, at the same moment, the Father’s voice is heard from heaven.”[*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, Oxford Press, New York, 1967, page 995]

Future lessons in our class will explore the Persons of the Trinity.

“Holy, Holy, Holy”, that great old hymn, was written by two men. Reginald Heber wrote the lyrics in 1826 and it was used for Trinity Sunday in the Church of England. John Dykes wrote the tune in 1861 as a tribute to the Council of Nicea which formalized the Doctrine of the Trinity in A.D. 325. The hymn ends with the line...“God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.”

As Paul concluded his second letter to the Corinthian church he referred to the Trinity: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”(2 Corinthians 13:14). With that, we are dismissed.

TEACHERS: Hand out the diagram of the Trinity (attached).

22. Ancient Diagram of the Holy Trinity

