

DEFENDING THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE

The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity

The Bible teaches that, while God is one, He exists in three Persons, called Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. These are three persons distinct but not separated in the Godhead. The real mystery of the Trinity consists in this, that each one of the Persons possesses the whole of the divine essence and that this has no existence outside of and apart from the Persons in the Godhead. The three are not subordinate in being the one to the other, though it may be said the Father is first, the Son second and the Holy Spirit third, an order which is also reflected in their work of redemption (1 Pet 1:2).

"Louis Berhof in his *Summary of Christian Doctrine* says, The Old Testament gives clear indications of more than one Person in the Triune Godhead. God speaks of Himself in the plural, Gen 1:26; 11:7; the Angel of Jehovah is represented as a divine Person, Gen 16:7-13; 18:1-21; 19:1-22 and the Spirit is spoken of as a distinct Person of the Godhead in Isa 48:16; 63:10. Moreover, there are some passages in which the Messiah is speaking and mentions two other Persons (Isa 48:16; 61:1; 63:9,10). Hence, the Bible teaches and authenticates the doctrine of the Trinity."

The name "Father" is frequently applied in Scripture to the Triune God, as the Creator of all things, 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 12:9; Jas 1:17; as the Father of Israel, Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16 and as the Father of believers, Matt 5:45; 6:6, 9, 14; Rom 8:15. In another sense, however, it can be applied to the First Person of the Trinity, to express His relation to the Second Person, John 1:14, 18; 8:54; 14:12, 13. The works particularly ascribed to Him are those of planning the work of redemption, creation and providence. The Westminster Confession of Faith in the Shorter Catechism Q6 says: How many persons are there in the Godhead? A: *There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.*

Due to the progress of revelation, the New Testament gives us clearer proofs. The strongest proof is found in the fact of redemption. The Father sends the Son into the world to save sinners like us (Rom 3:23-25) and Christ is fully God (Phil 2:6-10). Moreover, there are several passages in which the three Persons are expressly mentioned, such as the Great Commission, Matt 28:19 and the apostolic blessing, 2 Cor 13:14, 1 John 5:7 (Cf also Luke 3:21, 22; 1:35; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 1 Pet 1:2).

This important biblical doctrine was denied by the Socinians in the days of the Reformation and was rejected also by the Unitarians and the Modernists of our times.

The second person in the Trinity is called the 'Son of God' a title authenticating His deity (Matt 26:63-65). He bears this name, however, not only as the only begotten of the Father, John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; Gal 4:4 but also as the Messiah chosen of God, Matt 8:29; 26:63; John 1:49; 11:27 and in virtue of His special birth through the operation of the Holy Spirit, Luke 1:32,35. His special characteristic as the Second Person of the Trinity is that He is eternally begotten of the Father, Ps 2:7; Act 13:33; Heb 1:5. It is important to note that the Son is co-equal with the Father or substance, power and glory (Phil 2:6,9). The works more particularly ascribed to Him are divine works of divine mediation and reconciliation with men at the Cross of Calvary (1 Tim 2:5; John 14:6; Act 8:12; 1 John 5:11-13). The Holy Spirit is also ascribed as deity as in Act 5:1-4, lying to the Holy Spirit is synonymous to lying to God.

An Anti-Trinitarian Heretic during the Reformation

During the Protestant Reformation, there is Michael Servetus (1509 or 1511-1553), a Spaniard heretic who lived during in the 16th century and was notorious for his criticism of the doctrine of the trinity and his opposition to infant baptism. He has often been considered an early Unitarian. Sharply critical of the orthodox formulation of the Trinity, Servetus was an unrepentant heretic. Some aspects of his theology included his rejection of the doctrine of original sin and he influenced those who later founded Unitarian churches in Poland and Transylvania. Unitarians and other groups on the radical left-wing heretics stand against the Reformation to develop and institutionalize their own heretical views and practices.

Servetus rejected the doctrine of original sin and the entire theory of salvation based upon it, including the doctrines of Christ's dual nature and the vicarious atonement effected by his death. He believed that other human beings, touched by Christian grace, could overcome sin and themselves become progressively divine. He thought of the Trinity as manifesting an "economy" of the forms of activity which God could bring into play. He shared that Christ did not always exist (ie denying the eternality of Christ). He believed that Christ had been brought to substantial existence when God needed to exercise that form of activity. In some future time he would no longer be a distinct mode (modalism is condemned as a heresy in the ancient church) of divine expression. Servetus called the biblical popular conception of the Trinity, "a three headed Cerberus" making a mockery of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity (ie Greek mythology, Cerberus is a three-headed dog-like creature of the underworld).

The 16th century French Reformer, John Calvin took Geneva as a centre for his movement and built up a strong and vibrant Reformed Church and Christian community and was a training ground for the reformed faith. His knowledge, courage and strong stand for the truth of John Calvin and his prudent rule through the Presbyterian system of church government led him to deal with opponents of God firmly without compromise. The heresy of Servetus was a case

in particular. In 1553, the church in Geneva condemned Servetus to the stakes after finding him guilty of the heresy of Anti-Trinitarianism which is a serious doctrinal aberration that undermined the very true nature of the God of the Bible whom we worshipped. It was a difficult time for the reformed church but for the sake of protecting the Church's purity, they had to do what is right in the sight of heaven and not men.

Servetus was outspoken in his revolt against Christianity, attempting to win converts to his heretical views. In 1531, he wrote the book *De Trinitatis Erroribus* (the so-called "error of Trinity") and in it he blamphuously compared the Christian God with the mythological idol "Cerberus" which was believed to have three heads. The timely biblical discipline by John Calvin and the reformed church was necessary and it was a clear warning for the followers of this new heretical sect that they are not welcomed until there is genuine recantation of their false doctrines and beliefs. Many of them flee the countries not under the hold of reformers. They moved to Poland and Romania where they propagated their heretical views under the protection of more liberal kings and started new heretical sects and groups in the regime. Calvin in defending and explaining the uncompromising stand of the church against heresy put together and published, in 1554, a justification, *Defense of Orthodox Faith against the Prodigious Errors of the Spaniard Michael Servetus*. He argued that to spare Servetus would have been to endanger the souls of many and corrupt the doctrine of grace in the reformed churches. The church today ought to remember Act 20:28-32 where the injunction of the Apostle Paul to the elders at Ephesus, who stated the same warning without compromise (see Jack Sin: *Reformation: Retrospect, Introspect & Prospect*, Maranatha BP Church, Singapore, 1999, 52-54).

Christian Science, the Cult

Another aberrant group that is anti-Trinitarian is the Christian Science cult, which is another that clearly repudiates the Trinitarian Godhead: Mary Eddy Baker, the cult founder says "The theory of three persons in one God (that is, a personal Trinity or Tri-unity) suggests polytheism, rather than the one ever-present I Am" (*Science and Health*, 256). Instead, "Life, Truth, and Love constitute the Triune Person called God ... God the Father-Mother; Christ the spiritual idea of sonship; divine Science or the Holy Comforter" (*Science and Health*, 331-332). Christian Science teaches that the Biblical concept of the Trinity suggests "heathen gods" (*Science and Health*, 152). God is thus viewed as an impersonal "Divine Principle," a conception of one's mind (*Science and Health*, 361, 469). On page 465 in another of Mrs. Eddy's "authoritative" books, entitled *Miscellaneous Writings*, she wrote: "God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite, mind, spirit, soul, principle, life, truth, love," but devoid of any personality. This is the blatant heresy of the Christian Science Cult. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that God is a Triune, personal, transcendent Being who created "the world and all things in it" (Act 17:24). He is not a pantheistic all-in-all. He is holy and just, both righteous and true Triune God of the Bible. The Triune God created and still governs the

universe sovereignly, including man and overrules all things today (Acts 17:24-27).

Unitarianism Examined & Exposed

The word "Unitarian" historically is opposed to the Trinity of God (ie God existing in three distinct Persons, who are One in the Godhead). The Unitarians alleged that the Word is "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist philosopher was, the first American Unitarian to influence European thought, since transcendentalism, Unitarianism has been strongly influenced by humanism and in more recent years, by the concepts of Eastern religions and earth centred ideals. Unitarianism is anti-Christian and anti-biblical, as Christianity is synonymous with true nature of God (ie Trinity) and Christ the Son of God (ie a term authenticating his deity, see Matt 26:63-65) and his atonement and God the Holy Spirit who indwells in the believers (1 Cor 6:19,20) and is not an impersonal force or energy to be manipulated (as in the movie Star Wars). Unitarianism is the first denomination to ordain women and gays to ministry and to perform gay weddings. A gay wedding was performed 11 February 1974, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, by Rev Norm Naylor, a Unitarian minister. Unitarians are a do-it-yourself religion as Unitarian, one has to work at it for their salvation and one needs to be wary of their unbiblical teachings and practices.

Unitarians are never certain of having the final answers to eternal life. They are supportive of human kind's ability to solve the complexities of the world and arrive at individual answers. They are a lesser known cult in the west and a very confused group of people today.

The Three Persons are One God

The biblical arguments for the Trinity are soundly and solidly founded in the Word of God. First, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Second, we found that the Bible tells us that there are three persons who are called God. Hence, the inescapable conclusion: the three persons are One God called the Trinity (1 John 5:7, 2 Cor 13:14).

There are several places in the Bible in which the doctrine of the Trinity is clearly implied. Consider 1 Pet 1.1,2 where the Trinity is mentioned in the verse in the salvation of a soul. For example, concerning *Christ's Resurrection* we are told that the Father raised Jesus from the dead (I Thess 1:10), the Son raised Himself from the dead (John 2:19-22) and the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 8:11). Yet, we are told in Acts 17:30,31 that *God raised Jesus from the dead*. Therefore, either the Bible contradicts itself or the three persons are truly one God as the Bible teaches us. The latter is absolutely true and perfectly consistent with the inerrant and infallible Word of God "and there are no contradictions nor errors in the Bible at all".

In **Christ's Great Commission** to preach the Gospel, He instructs his disciples to *go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...* (Matt 28:19). It is instructive to note that the Greek word "name," used in this verse, is singular (homonos). It does **not** say, "in the **names** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," but rather, it says, "in the **name**...." In other words, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct **persons**, have only one name. This clearly implies the Triune nature of God. Furthermore, the Trinity is revealed at **Christ's incarnation** (Luke 1:35) and **baptism** (Matt 3:16,17), in the **Apostolic benediction** (II Cor 13:13), and in **Christ's own teachings** (John 14:26; 15:26).

Understanding and Accepting the Trinity

The Trinity is a concept that is almost impossible for any human being to fully understand, let alone explain but that does not mean it is not true. We have to accept the teachings of the Bible by faith. God is infinitely greater than we are, therefore we should not expect to be able to fully understand Him. The Bible teaches that the Father is God, that Jesus is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God. Though we can understand some facts about the relationship of the different persons of the Godhead to one another, ultimately, it may be incomprehensible to the human mind. However, this does not mean it is not true when it is clearly and authoritatively taught in the Bible.

While the word "Trinity" is not used directly in Scripture, this is an acceptable term that is used to describe the Triune God, the fact that there are three coexistent, co-eternal persons that make up the Godhead. Understand that this is NOT in anyway suggesting three Gods which is a false allegation by the Anti-Trinitarians. The Trinity is 1 God made up of 3 persons. There is nothing wrong with using the term "Trinity". It is shorter to say the word "Trinity" than to say "3 coexistent, co-eternal persons making up 1 God." What should be of real importance is that the concept that is REPRESENTED by the word "Trinity" is clearly taught in Scripture. Note also that the Bible teaches that there is one God (Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4; Gal 3:20; 1 Tim 2:5). The Godhead consists of three Persons: Gen 1:1; 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8; 48:16; 61:1; Matt 3:16-17; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14. In the passages in the Old Testament, a knowledge of Hebrew is helpful. In Gen 1:1, the plural noun "Elohim" is used. In Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7 and Isa 6:8, the plural pronoun for "us" is used. That "Elohim" and "us" refer to more than one is WITHOUT question. The word "Elohim" and the pronoun "us" are plural forms - definitely more than one and must be referring to three or more (ie Father, Son, Holy Spirit).

In further support of this, consider Isa 48:16 and 61:1 where the Son is speaking while making reference to the Father and the Holy Spirit (see Isa 61:1 and Luke 4:14-19 to see that it is the Son speaking). Matt 3:16-17 describes the event of Jesus' baptism. Seen in this account is God the Holy Spirit descending on God the Son while God the Father proclaims His pleasure in the eternal Son of God.

The members of the Godhead are distinguished one from another in various passages: In the Old Testament, "LORD" is distinguished from "Lord" (Gen 19:24; Hos 1:4). The "Lord" has a "Son" (Ps 2:7, 12; Prov 30:2-4). The Holy Spirit is distinguished from the "LORD" (Num 27:18) and from "God" (Ps 51:10-12). God the Son is distinguished from God the Father (Ps 45:6-7; Heb 1:8-9). In the New Testament, John 14:16-17 is where Jesus speaks to the Father about sending a Helper, the Holy Spirit. This shows that Jesus did not consider Himself to be the Father or the Holy Spirit. Consider also all of the other times in the Gospel where Jesus speaks to the Father. Was He speaking to Himself? No. He spoke to another person in the Godhead - the Father. Each member of the Godhead is God: The Father is God: John 6:27; Rom 1:7; 1 Pet 1:2. The Son is God: John 1:1, 14; Rom 9:5; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8; 1 John 5:20. The Holy Spirit is God: Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 3:16 (and He who indwells in us is God, the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:9; John 14:16-17; Acts 5:1-11).

Defective Analogies of the Trinity

Men have tried to use analogies and metaphors to describe the Trinity. None of the popular illustrations are accurate descriptions of the Trinity. Some have used the egg in the shell, white, and yoke are parts of the egg, not the egg in themselves. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not parts of God, each of them is God. Liquid, vapour and ice are forms of water in different modes have also been used. It is to be noted that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not forms (or modes) of God, for each of them is God. The use of primary, secondary or tertiary colours is even more confusing than the first two. Neither is the use of sunlight, rays or heat from the sun acceptable. All these, well meaning as they are intended to be, are at best deficient if not defective, worldly illustrations of the glorious and infinite biblical doctrine of the blessed Trinity of the Godhead. So, while these illustrations may attempt to give us a picture of the Trinity, the picture is not accurate at all. An infinite God cannot be fully described by a finite illustration. Instead of focusing on human illustrations of the Trinity, focus on the fact of God's greatness and infinitely higher nature than our own finite worldview. We can only exclaim with reverence and joy like the Apostle Paul *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?* (Rom 11:33-34).

Conclusion

In these last perilous days, we are to be wary and vigilant of aberrant teachings and heretical views from even within the church and be able to explain and expose them from Scripture. This orthodox teaching of the blessed Trinity is well established in the holy Word of God and as in the 16th century Reformation, it is to be strongly contended for and defended if it is undermined or denied by any today (Jude 3,4).

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(for a deeper study of the subject, read Robert Raymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Grand Rapids: Thomas Nelson Publishing House, 1998, 205-316 and Louis Berhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrines*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, 38-41).
