Basic Christian Theology

First Baptist Church Dandridge
Dr. Justin Terrell
justin@fbcdandridge.org

Theology: The Doctrine of God (3)

"*The mind of man cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. He who has tried to understand the mystery fully will lose his mind; but he who would deny the Trinity will lose his soul.*" – Harold Lindsell

1. The Basics of the Trinity

    a. **Misunderstandings and Heresies**: The Trinity is "one God, three persons," not one God, one person (unitarianism) or three gods (tri-theism, polytheism). Rolland McCune states, "God is triune, not triple; He is three-in-one, not three-and-one." Such heresies create some of the main incompatibilities between biblical Christianity and other world religions (e.g., Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.).

    b. **Attributes and Roles**: Each person of the Trinity shares the attributes of God (e.g., holiness, omniscience, eternality, sovereignty, etc.), yet each person functions in different roles (e.g., Gift-giver, Savior, Paraclete, etc.).

    c. Old Testament References and Allusions

        - **Genesis 1:26** – "*Then God said, 'Let <u>us</u> make man in our image, after <u>our</u> likeness.'*"

        - **Genesis 3:22** – "*Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of <u>us</u> in knowing good and evil…'*"

        - **Genesis 11:7** – "*Come, let <u>us</u> go down there and confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.*"

        - **Psalm 110:1** – "*The <u>Lord</u> says to <u>my Lord</u>: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'*"

        - **Isaiah 6:8** – "*And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall <u>I</u> send, and who will go for <u>us</u>?'*"

        - **Isaiah 48:16** – "*And now the <u>Lord God</u> has <u>sent me</u>, and <u>his Spirit</u>.*" (It appears that the pronoun "me" refers to God the Son).

        - **Isaiah 61:1-2** – "*The <u>Spirit</u> of the <u>Lord God</u> is upon <u>me</u>, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty*

to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God…" (In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus quoted these words while preaching in the Synagogue on the Sabbath. He indicates that these words refer to himself by saying, "*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*").

- Old Testament Allusions: While those living during the Old Testament period would not have understood these details without the revelation given in the New Testament, we can look back and see allusions of the Trinity through various symbols and instances. For example, the three men who came to Abraham in Genesis 18; the Trisagion ("holy, holy, holy") of Isaiah 6; the mentioning of God, the Spirit of God, and the Angel of the Lord.

d. New Testament References and Allusions

- Matthew 3:16-17 – "*And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*"

- Matthew 28:19 – "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*"

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 – "*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.*"

- 2 Corinthians 13:14 – "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*"

- Ephesians 4:4-6 – "*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*"

- 1 Peter 1:2 – "*According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*"

- Jude 20-21 – "*But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*"

2. The Specifics of the Trinity

a. God is Three Persons: Scripture indicates that God is one, yet God is three distinct persons. This truth implies that the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit, but the Father, Son, and Spirit are God. A major trinitarian heresy is "Modalism," where the Father, Son, and Spirit are

merely different representations of God at different times. In essence, God changes "modes" at different points in history ("superman theology").

- John 1:1-2 – "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*"

- John 17:24 – "*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*"

- 1 John 2:1 – "*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*"

- Hebrews 7:25 – "*Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*"

- 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 have said to you.*"

b. Each Person is Fully God: While there are three distinct persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully God.

- Matthew 6:9 – *"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."*

- John 1:1-3 – *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."* (cf. Matt. 1:23; John 20:28-29; Heb. 1:3; Col. 2:9). [Rules out the heresy of "Adoptionism"]

- Acts 5:3-4 – "*But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? … You have not lied to man but to God.*" (cf. Ps. 139:7).

c. There is One God: While the Trinity is three distinct persons, Scripture affirms that God is one.

- Deuteronomy 6:4 – "*Hear, O Israel; the LORD our God, the LORD is one.*"

- 1 Timothy 2:5 – "*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*" (cf. Romans 3:30; James 2:19).

3. The Economy of the Trinity

a. Principle: Scripture indicates all three persons are equally God, but it also reveals that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit differ in function and order. It is important to note that these differences are in priority and subordination, not essence. Theologians refer to the differences as the Economic Trinity

(the ordering of activities and administration), as opposed to the Ontological Trinity (essence, attributes, rank, or being of God). In the administration and activity of God, the Father is first, the Son is second, and the Holy Spirit is third.

- Father: "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" (Rom. 8:3; cf. John 3:16; 1 Cor. 8:6; 11:3)

- Son: "And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (Matt. 26:39; cf. John 6:38; 14:28; 1 Cor. 15:24).

- Holy Spirit: "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:14; cf. John 16:7; Rom. 8:9).

b. Examples

- Creation: Scripture indicates that each person of the Trinity had a specific role in creation.

  - Genesis 1:1 – "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*"

  - John 1:1–3 – "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" (cf. Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2)

  - Genesis 1:2 – "*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*"

- Redemption: Scripture declares that each person of the Trinity has a specific role in the redemption of sinners.

  - God the Father planned redemption and sent his Son into the world (cf. John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:9-10).

  - God the Son accomplished redemption by obeying the Father and sacrificing his life for sinners (cf. John 6:38; Heb. 10:5-7).

  - God the Holy Spirit applies redemption by opening the hearts of sinners, making them aware of their sins, drawing them to Christ for salvation, and persevering them until the end (cf. John 14:26; 15:26; John 3:5-8; 1 Peter 1:2; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11).