

The Trinity – The Reality

November 10, 2013

Athanasius

In the year 296 a young boy was born to a Christian family in the city of Alexandria which is in northern Egypt on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea

It has been told that that the young boy came to the attention of Bishop Alexander. Apparently, the boy and his friends were playing in the sea and were imitating the ritual of Christian baptism. Bishop Alexander was moved and had the boys enter into training to prepare them for the priesthood.

In the year A.D. 328, at the age of 30, this make-believe baptizer had become the Bishop of Alexandria. He would remain the Bishop of Alexandria, more or less, for 45 years.

I say more or less because of the 45 years in which he was the Bishop of Alexandria, he spent the better part of 17 years in exile. These 17 years of exile do not include the 6 times he had to flee Alexandria from people seeking to take his life.

- First exile: under Emperor Constantine, for 2.5 years [11 Jul 335 – 22 Nov 337]; Germany.
- Second exile: under Emperor Constantius, for 7.5 years [16 Apr 339 – 21 Oct 346]; lived at Rome.
- Third exile: under Emperor Constantius, for 6 years [9 Feb 356 – 21 Feb 362]; Egyptian desert.
- Fourth exile: under Apostate Emperor Julian, 10 months [24 Oct 362 – 5 Sep 363]; Egyptian desert.
- Fifth exile: under Emperor Valens, 4 months [5 Oct 365 – 31 Jan 366]; in his father's tomb.

Gregory of Nazianzus (The archbishop of Constantinople) remembered him like this:

“Let one praise him in his fastings and prayers . . . another his unweariedness and zeal for vigils and psalmody, another his patronage of the needy, another his dauntlessness towards the powerful, or his condescension to the lowly. . . . [He was to] the unfortunate their consolation, the hoary-headed their staff, youths their instructor, the poor their resource, the wealthy their steward. Even the widows will . . . praise their protector, even the orphans their father, even the poor their benefactor, strangers their entertainer, brethren the man of brotherly love, the sick their physician.”

“This single-minded love for Jesus Christ expressed itself in a lifelong battle to explain and defend Christ’s deity and to worship Christ as Lord and God. This is what this cleric from Alexandria, Athanasius, is best known for. There were times when it seemed the whole world had abandoned orthodoxy. That is why the phrase Athanasius contra mundum (against the world) arose. He stood steadfast against overwhelming defection from orthodoxy, and only at the end of his life could he see the dawn of triumph. His other great name was given because of his legacy of fighting for proper belief, is “Father of Orthodoxy.”

This great hero of the faith understood the gravity and necessity of understanding, believing, and protecting the doctrine of the Trinity.

Big Idea: Understanding the doctrine of the Trinity is essential because God is triune.

Deuteronomy 6:4 - "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

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,

5 Reasons The Doctrine of the Trinity Matters

1. IT PROTECTS AGAINST IDOLATRY

Tozer - what we think about God:

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God."

—A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Deuteronomy 5:7 – You shall have no other gods before me.

We want the Bible—God's self-revelation—to determine what the God we are to worship is like...the Biblical God is a triune God!

2. IT IS A CORE DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Athanasian Creed:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;

Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;

WLA Statement of Faith – Statement #1: There is one God, who is infinitely perfect, existing eternally in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

3. IT DEFINES ORTHODOXY (RIGHT BELIEF) IN CONTRAST TO HERESY (WRONG BELIEF)

The early church Fathers were not adding to Scripture as in the word Trinity. Rather, they were defending what was clearly evident in Scripture against those who would distort it.

- Apollinarianism - Jesus divine will overshadowed and replaced the human.
- Arianism - Jesus was a lesser, created being.
- Docetism - Jesus was divine, but only seemed to be human.
- Modalism - God is one person in three modes.
- Monarchianism - God is one person.
- Nestorianism - Jesus was two persons.
- Socinianism - Denial of the Trinity. Jesus is a deified man.
- Subordinationism - The Son is lesser than the Father in essence and or attributes.
- Tritheism - the Trinity is really three separate gods.

9 of the top 13 heresies pertain to an incorrect perspective on the Trinity!

4. IT DIFFERENTIATES CHRISTIANITY FROM ALL OTHER RELIGIONS

This doctrine is what sets Christianity apart from any and all other religions and cults

- Islam
- Buddhism
- Judaism
- Mormonism
- Jehovah's Witness

5. IT AFFECTS HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES

Not an intellectual game: "...the triune nature of this God affects everything from how we listen to music to how we pray: it makes for happier marriages, warmer dealings with others, better church life; it gives Christian assurance, shapes holiness and transforms the very way we look at the world around us" (10).

Plug Delighting in the Trinity

This is not just a mathematical difference – what God is really like shapes all of Christianity – we'll look at this some more over the next couple of weeks.

Pursue an understanding of the Trinity

There are mysteries in the Christian faith

These mysteries are not like alien abductions, the Bermuda triangle, or some bizarre, National Enquirer-inspired conspiracy theory

They are mysteries like secrets – as in Ephesians 3 where the Gentiles are included in the family of God

"Some of the most crucial and precious truths of the Scripture are counterintuitive to the fallen human mind. They don't fit easily into our sin-soaked heads. The orthodox understanding of the Trinity is one of those." CFOA (68)

2 Timothy 2:7 - Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

The Reality of the Trinity

A Summary of Scripture's Teaching on the Trinity

From Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*:

- I. God is three persons.
- II. Each person is fully God.
- III. There is one God.

1. God Is Three Persons

- Jesus' baptism:
 - **John 14:16** - "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."
- Great Commission
 - **Matt 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,
- Benediction to 2 Corinthians
 - **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.
- Introduction to 1 Peter
 - **1 Peter 1:1-3** - Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 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:

2. Each Person is Fully God

Attributes, offices, worship, actions

Plug *The Trinity* by Michael Reeves

- Attributes
 - Eternal
 - Father
 - **Psalm 90:1-2** Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
 - Son
 - **Revelation 1:17-18** (seeing Jesus who speaks to him) When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore
 - Spirit
 - **Hebrews 9:14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our[g] conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

- Omniscient or All-knowing
 - Father
 - **1 John 3:19-20** By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; 20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.
 - Son
 - **Colossians 2:1-3** For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge
 - Grudem – If God fully knows Himself, he knows everything He is able to do, which includes all possible thing
 - **John 7:28-29** So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me
 - Spirit
 - **1 Corinthians 2:9-11** But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” — these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

- Omnipotent or All-powerful
 - Father
 - **Genesis 17:1** When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty
 - Son
 - **Revelation 1:8** (Jesus speaking) “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”
 - **John 5:19** So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.
 - Spirit
 - **Isaiah 40:12-14** Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

- Omnipresent or All-over-the-place
 - Father
 - **Jeremiah 23:24** Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.
 - Son
 - Ephesians 4:10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.
 - Spirit
 - Psalm 139:7-8 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

Jesus - Not just a man

The Holy Spirit - Not power, effusion, influence, emanation

3. There is One God

- **Deuteronomy 6:4** - "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."
- Jesus recognizes Deuteronomy:
 - **Mark 12:28-29** - And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."
- Not an absolute singularity:
 - **Gen 2:21-24** - So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh

The Glory of the Trinity

Luther Moment

Driscoll Moment