

Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

Topic 2 - The Doctrine of God

Lesson 44 - The Trinity

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture taken from the New King James Version.

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One Simple God

- We worship One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. - Athanasian Creed
- God eternally exists as three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each Person is fully God, and there is One God. - Grudem, pg. 226
- The doctrine of the Trinity is very decidedly a doctrine of revelation. It is true that human reason may suggest some thoughts to substantiate the doctrine, and that men have sometimes on purely philosophical grounds abandoned the idea of a bare unity in God, and introduced the idea of living movement and self-distinction. And it is also true that Christian experience would seem to demand some such construction of the doctrine of God. At the same time it is a doctrine which we would not have known, nor have been able to maintain with any degree of confidence, on the basis of experience alone, and which is brought to our knowledge only by God's special self-revelation. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that we gather Scriptural proofs for it. - Berkhof, pg. 85

One Simple God

- There is only one God, and He consists of one simple (uncompounded, indivisible) essence. - MacArthur, pg. 190
- Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!
- Mark 12:29 Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.
- John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
- James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

Three Persons

- The One God exists eternally as three distinct Persons (also known as subsistences or hypostases).
- Each Person of the Trinity (known as the Godhead) possesses the entire simple (undivided) essence of God.
- Each of the three Persons though distinct from one another are co-equal in every perfection of the divine essence. - MacArthur, pg. 190

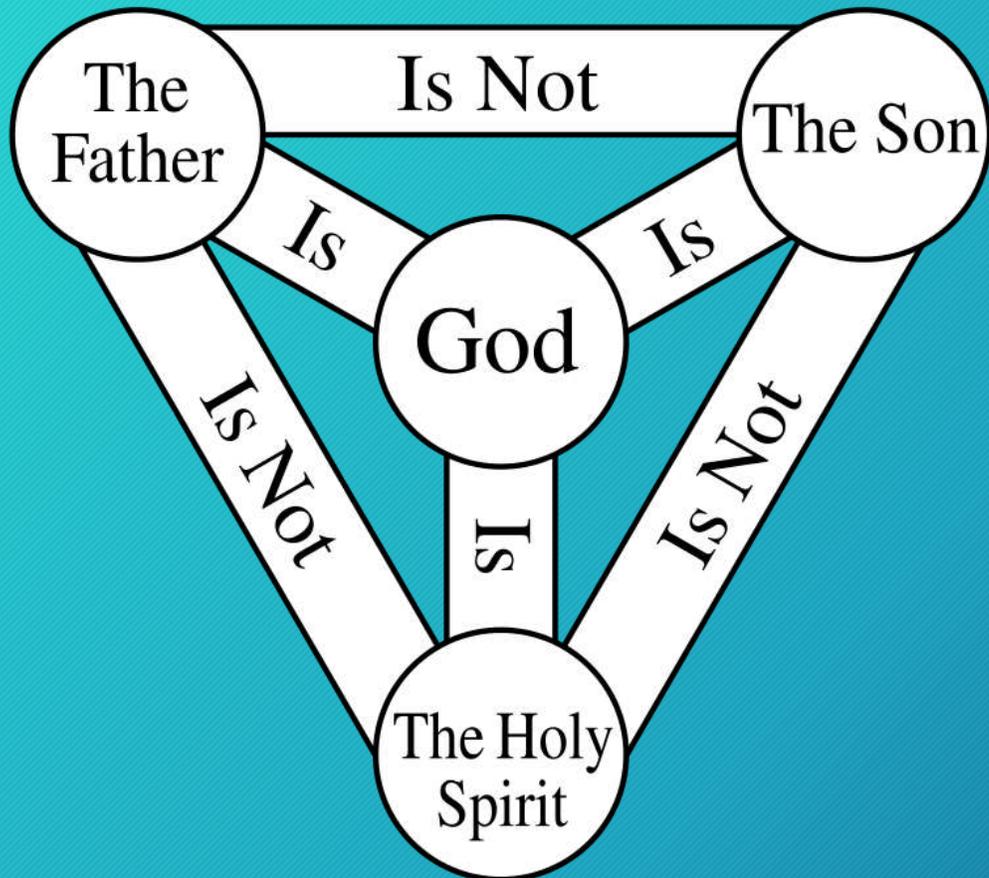
Three Persons

- Matthew 3:16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
- Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
- John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.
- 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 things that I said to you.

Three Persons

- John 15:26 But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.
- John 16:13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

The Shield of the Trinity



1. The Father is God.
2. The Son is God.
3. The Holy Spirit is God.
4. The Father is not the Son.
5. The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
6. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.

Created, Begotten, Proceeding?

- The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone. The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone. The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son. - Athanasian Creed
- Begotten - eternally generated by the Father
- Proceeds - eternally proceeding from both the Father and Son
- These are the eternal internal works of the Trinity which establish their modes of personal existence.
- This is beyond human comprehension and accepted by faith in response to the progressive revelation of God in His Word.

Illustrations

- The Trinity has no perfect analogy in human experience. Most attempts either divide the essence, compromise the distinction, or lose sight of God's personal essence.
- Three states of water - liquid (water), solid (ice), gas (vapor) = modalism
- Three leaves of a single clover = partialism
- Sun, light, heat = Arianism

Modalism

- Modalism states that God is a single person who, throughout biblical history, has revealed Himself in three modes or forms. Thus, God is a single person who first manifested himself in the mode of the Father in Old Testament times. At the incarnation, the mode was the Son; and after Jesus' ascension, the mode is the Holy Spirit. These modes are consecutive and never simultaneous. In other words, this view states that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit never all exist at the same time--only one after another. Modalism denies the distinctiveness of the three persons in the Trinity even though it retains the divinity of Christ.
- -<https://carm.org/modalism>

Partialism

- Teaching that Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are components of the one God. This led them to believe that each of the persons of the Trinity is only part God, only becoming fully God when they come together.
- -<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Trinitarian%20Heresies.html>

Arianism

- Arius taught that only God the Father was eternal and too pure and infinite to appear on the earth. Therefore, God produced Christ the Son out of nothing as the first and greatest creation. The Son is then the one who created the universe. Because the Son relationship of the Son to the Father is not one of nature, it is, therefore, adoptive. God adopted Christ as the Son. Though Christ was a creation and because of his great position and authority, he was to be worshiped and even looked upon as God. Some Arians even held that the Holy Spirit was the first and greatest creation of the Son.
- <https://carm.org/arianism>

Athanasian Creed

Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith:

That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.

What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated.

Athanasian Creed

The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being. So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty. Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord. Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.

Athanasian Creed

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone. The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone. The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers; there is one Son, not three sons; there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

Nothing in this trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So in everything, as was said earlier, we must worship their trinity in their unity and their unity in their trinity.

Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the trinity. But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Athanasian Creed

Now this is the true faith:

That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and human, equally.

He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself. He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human.

He suffered for our salvation; he descended to hell; he arose from the dead; he ascended to heaven; he is seated at the Father's right hand; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people will arise bodily and give an accounting of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith: one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.