

DTP – Second Year – Grace Bible Church

THEOLOGY PROPER III – THE TRIUNITY OF GOD

“And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, *and* coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’”
Matt 3:16-17

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and might!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber, 1826

1A. THE DOCTRINE STATED

1B. A definition:

“There is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.” B.B. Warfield, “Trinity,” The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, James Orr, ed. Vol. 5:3012

2B. Key points:

- 1C. God is three persons.
- 2C. Each person is fully God.
- 3C. There is one God.

3B. Admission of difficulty:

1C. Stated:

“The doctrine of the Trinity is perhaps the most mysterious and difficult doctrine that is presented to us in the entire range of Scripture. Consequently we do not presume to give a full explanation of it. In the nature of the case we can know only as much concerning the inner nature of the Godhead as has been revealed to us in the Scriptures. The tri-personality of God is exclusively a truth of revelation, and one which lies outside the realm of natural reason.” Boettner, Studies, pg. 78.

2C. The Meaning of Mystery:

1D. What it is: “We must distinguish between apprehension and comprehension. We can know what God is, without knowing all He is. We can touch the earth while not able to embrace it in our arms. The child can know God while the philosopher cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection.” Clark, Syl. Sys. Theo., p. 59

2D. What it is not: “But while the doctrine of the Trinity presents a mystery, it does not present a contradiction. It asserts that God is one in one respect—in substance or essence—and that He is three in an entirely different respect—in personal distinctions... The doctrine of the Trinity is above reason, and could never have been discovered by man apart from divine revelation; yet it cannot be proved contrary to reason, nor inconsistent with any other truth which we know concerning God.” Boettner, Study Theo., p. 125

3C. The Consequences: “Let it be remembered that we are under no obligation to explain all the mysteries connected with this doctrine. We are only under obligation to set forth what the Scriptures teach concerning it, and to vindicate the teaching as far as possible from the objections that are alleged against it. It is a doctrine which should never be presented to an unbeliever as a subject for argumentative proof, for it can be accepted only by faith, and that only after the person is convinced that God has spoken and that He has revealed this as a truth concerning Himself.” Boettner, Study. Theo., p. 126

2A. THE BIBLICAL SUPPORT

1B. Old Testament References to the Oneness of God:

1C. Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 15:11; 20:2-3

2C. Deut. 3:24; 4:35, 39; 6:4; 32:39

3C. Psalms 35:10; 71:19; 86:8; 89:6; 113:5

4C. Isaiah 43:10; 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21; 46:9

5C. Jeremiah 10:6-7

2B. Old Testament Allusions to the Plurality of God

1C. Genesis 1:1, 26; 3:22; 11:5-7

2C. Psalms 2:7; 45:6-7; 110:1

3C. Proverbs 30:4

4C. Isaiah 6:8; 11:1-2; 44:6

5C. Jeremiah 23:5-6

6C. Daniel 7:13-14

7C. Mal. 3:1

8C. Psalm 33:6, Isa. 61:1; 63:9-13; Hag. 2:5-6

3B. Summary of the Old Testament Witness:

1C. “Though we do not find the doctrine of the trinity as fully revealed in the Old testament as it is in the New, there is enough evidence for it that with its fuller revelation in the New Testament time, the disciples immediately became trinitarians.” Smith, Sys. Theo., pg. 149.

2C. “The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.” B. B. Warfield, The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity, pg. 5.

4B. New Testament Affirmations of Plurality

1C. Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19

1D. The impact of Grammar:

“Our Lord’s Great Commission (Matt. 28:19), however, presents a deliberately conceived Trinitarian formula: “...baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Unity of being is suggested by the one “name” (*to onoma*) into which converts were to be baptized, and plurality of

persons by the three distinct subjects—“the Father,” “the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit.” The deliberate repetition of the article in the phrase *tou patros kai tou huiou kai tou hagiou pneumatos* is a most concise and unambiguous representation of the coequality of the three distinct persons in being, authority, and honor. It is fitting that Jesus’ earthly ministry concludes with so concise a summary of the one God who subsists in three persons. Lewis & Demarest, Integrative Theology, p. 263

2C. Luke 1:30-35

3C. John 6:27; 10:30; 14:16-26; 15:26; 17:11, 21-23

4C. Acts 5:3-4

5C. Romans 1:1-4; 9:5

6C. 1 Cor. 2:10-11; 12:4-6

7C. 2 Cor. 13:14

8C. Eph. 1:3-14; 4:4-6

9C. 1 Peter 1:2-3

5B. Summary of the New Testament Witness to Plurality:

1C. The NT writers laid no less stress upon the unity of God than the OT. They do not place “two new gods by the side of Jehovah.”

1D. John 15:3

2D. 1 Cor. 7:4

3D. 1 Tim. 2:5

2C. The doctrine of the Trinity is presumed in the NT not developed.

1D. “Our New Testament is not a record of the development of the doctrine or of its assimilation. It everywhere presupposes the doctrine as the fixed possession of the Christian community; and the process by which it became the possession of the Christian community lies behind the New Testament.” B. B. Warfield, The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity, pg.6.

6B. Verses Demonstrating the Deity of the Father

1C. 1 Cor. 8:6

2C. Gal. 1:1

3C. Eph. 4:6

4C. John 6:27

5C. 1 Pet. 1:2

7B. Verses Demonstrating the Deity of the Son

1C. Rom. 9:5

2C. Col. 2:9

3C. John 1:1; 10:30; 20:28

4C. Titus 2:13

5C. Mark 2:5

6C. Matt. 16:16

7C. Verses attributing attributes of God to the Son

1D. Holiness - Jn. 6:69; 2 Cor. 5:21

2D. Eternity - Jn. 1:1; 8:58; Heb. 1:8

3D. Life - Jn. 1:4; 11:25; 14:6

4D. Immutability - Heb. 13:8

5D. Omnipotence - Matt. 28:18; Rev. 1:8

6D. Omniscience - Matt. 9:4; Jn. 16:30; Col. 2:3

7D. Omnipresence - Matt. 18:20

8D. Creation - Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16-17

9D. Raising the Dead - Jn. 5:27-29

10D. Object of prayer and worship - Jn. 5:23, 14:14; Luke 24:51-52

8B. Verses Demonstrating the Deity of the Holy Spirit

1C. Acts 5:3-4

2C. 1 Cor. 2:11, 6:19ff

3C. John 15:26

4C. Mark 3:29

3A. HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE TRIUNITY

1B. Tree

2B. Flower

3B. Water

4B. Sun

5B. Light

6B. Personality

7B. Shamrock

8B. Cf. An early Christian symbol, "The Shield of the Trinity", translated from Latin and reproduced in Robert Culver, The Living God, pg. 94

9B. Their Vulnerabilities

1C. May gravitate toward Tritheism

2C. May gravitate toward Modalism

4A. UNDERSTANDING THE DOCTRINE

1B. Language and terminology

1C. Trinity: “The word *trinity* is never found in the Bible, though the idea represented by the word is taught in many places. The word *trinity* means ‘tri-unity’ or ‘three-in-oneness.’ It is used to summarize the teaching of Scripture that God is three persons yet one God.” Grudem, Systematic Theo., pg. 226

1D. “...the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such unBiblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity lies in Scripture in solution; when it is crystallized from its solvent it does not cease to be Scriptural, but only comes into clearer view.” B. B. Warfield, The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity, pg. 1.

2C. Essence: “The full nature of what God is.” Erickson, Concise Dict., pg. 65. In modern theologies this is the equivalent of “substance.”

3C. Subsistence: “As applied to the doctrine of the Trinity, subsistence is that mode of existence which is peculiar to each of the divine persons, and which in each constitutes the one essence a distinct person.” A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology, pg. 165 In modern theologies this is equivalent to “person.”

Therefore:

1D. Trinitarian Person = the entire divine essence (nature) because the divine nature is undistributed (not portioned out).

2D. The Trinitarian Person subsists in a particular manner, such as

- 1E. Father
- 2E. Son
- 3E. Holy Spirit

2B. Classifications

1C. Ontological Trinity: “The word *ontological* as applied to the Trinity refers to the eternal and immanent distinctions within the God head.” Smith, Sys. Theo., pg. 147

In other words: It is an attempt to describe the inter-relation of the members of the Godhead. See chart below:

1D. Father	Generation	Neither Begotten Nor Proceeding
2D. Son	Filiation	Begotten
3D. Spirit	Procession	Proceeding

2C. Economical Trinity: “Economy means administration, management. The economical Trinity is simply the term used to display some of the works, administrative tasks, management actions, of the three Persons, as seen in the terms involved just above.” Sarles, Sys. Theo. Syllabus, pg. 2 Class 22.

In other words: It is an attempt to describe the inter-relation of the members of the Godhead in their actions toward creation. See chart below:

1D. The Father

- 1E. Electing (1 Pet. 1:2)
- 2E. Loving (John 3:16)
- 3E. Giving (James 1:17)

2D. The Son

- 1E. Suffering (Mark 8:31)
- 2E. Redeeming (1 Pet. 1:18)
- 3E. Upholding (Heb. 1:3)

3D. The Spirit

- 1E. Regenerating (Titus 3:5)
- 2E. Energizing (Eph. 1:12-14; Acts 1:8)
- 3E. Sanctifying (Gal. 5:22, 23).

3B. Interrelationships Within the Trinity

1C. The Eternal Generation of the Son:

1D. Stated: “...an eternal personal act of the Father, wherein, by necessity of nature, not by choice of will, He generates the person (not the essence) of the Son, by communicating to Him the whole indivisible substance of the Godhead, without division, alienation, or change, so that the Son is the express image of His Father’s person, and eternally continues, not from the Father, but in the Father, and the Father in the Son.” A. A. Hodge, *Outlines*, pg. 182.

2D. Analyzed:

1E. “Calvin was the first one to challenge these last two speculations [The Father as the fountain and the Son deriving His essence from the Father by eternal generation]. He taught that the Son ... did not derive his essence from the Father.” Smith, *Sys. Theo.*, pg. 153

2E. “But, studying the edification of the Church, I have thought it better not to touch upon many things, which would be unnecessarily burdensome to the reader, without yielding him any profit. For to what purpose is it to dispute, whether the Father is always begetting? For it is foolish to imagine a continual act of generation, since it is evident that three Persons have subsisted in God from all eternity.” Calvin, Institutes, Book I, chap. 13.

3E. Spurgeon offers his own commentary on the usefulness of such terminology when he says it is "a term that does not convey to us any great meaning; it simply covers up our ignorance."

2C. The Procession of the Spirit

1D. Stated: “the relation which the third person sustains to the first and second, wherein by an eternal and necessary, i.e. not voluntary act of the Father and the Son, their whole identical divine essence, without alienation, division, or change, is communicated to the Holy Spirit.” A. A. Hodge, Outlines, pg. 189

3B. Summary Regarding Classifications within the Ontological Trinity

1C. “We prefer to say, as previously stated, that within the essential life of the Trinity no one Person is prior to, nor generated by, nor proceeds from, another and that such priority and subordination as we find revealed in the works of creation, redemption and sanctification, relate not to the immanent but to the economic Trinity.” Boettner, Studies, pg. 123

5A. THE HISTORICAL CHALLENGES TO THE DOCTRINE

1B. It’s development:

“The development of the doctrine of the Trinity is best seen as organically related to the evolution of Christology. It became increasingly clear that there was a consensus to the effect

that Jesus was “of the same substance” (*homoousios*) as God, rather than just “of similar substance” (*homoiousios*). But if Jesus was God, in any meaningful sense of the word, what did this imply about God? If Jesus was God, were there now two Gods? Or was a radical reconsideration of the nature of God appropriate? Historically, it is possible to argue that the doctrine of the Trinity is closely linked with the development of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. The more empathic the church became that Christ was God, the more it came under pressure to clarify how Christ related to God. McGrath, Christian Theology, pp. 250-251

2B. Modalism: The claim that there is one Person who appears to us in three different forms or modes. Today this view is held by the United Pentecostal Church.

3B. Views that Deny the Full Deity of the Son or the Spirit.

1C. The Arian Controversy: Arius, a Bishop of Alexandria who died in A.D. 336 taught that the Son was created at a point in time and was not divine. Today this view is held by the Jehovahs’ Witnesses.

2C.. Subordinationism: The view that though the Son is eternal (not created) and divine, He is still subordinate in being to God the Father. (Not to be confused with the roles of the economic Trinity).

3C. Adoptionism: The view that Jesus lived as an ordinary man until his baptism, but then God “adopted” Jesus as his “Son” and conferred on him supernatural power.

4C. The “Filioque” Clause: A Latin term meaning “and from the Son.” Which was inserted into the Nicene Creed which led to a split between the western (Roman Catholic) and eastern (Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox) branches of Christianity in 1054.

3B. Tritheism: The view that there are three separate Gods. Held by some early pagan religions.

4B. Socinianism: “Faustus Socinus believed that Scripture should be interpreted rationally. This philosophical framework led him to deny the deity of Christ. In his view Christ had a human nature and did not become God until after his resurrection when the Father delegated some of his divine power to the risen Jesus. Socinus accepted the miracles and virgin birth of Christ, seeing them as signs given to mankind to show Jesus' unique role in becoming divine.” Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.

5B. Deism: “The term deism, as distinguished from theism, polytheism, and pantheism, does not designate a well-defined doctrine. In general, it refers to what can be called natural religion or the acceptance of a certain body of religious knowledge acquired solely by the use of reason

as opposed to knowledge gained either through revelation or the teaching of a church. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.

6B. Unitarians: Unitarians are the modern day Arians and Socinians. “Unitarianism came to New England as early as 1710, and by 1750 most of the Congregational ministers in and around Boston had ceased to regard the doctrine of the Trinity as an essential Christian belief. In 1788 King's Chapel, the first Anglican church in New England, became definitely Unitarian when its rector, with the consent of the congregation, deleted from the liturgy all mention of the Trinity. The triumph of Unitarianism in New England Congregationalism seemed complete with the election of Henry Ware, an avowed opponent of the Trinitarian position, to the Hollis chair of divinity at Harvard.

In the nineteenth century, under the impact of transcendentalism, Unitarianism became steadily more radical. Its later leaders such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker rejected those remaining supernatural elements which William Ellery Channing had seen fit to retain. Modern Unitarianism has become increasingly humanistic. Many members of the American Unitarian Association, founded in 1825, have come to the conclusion that their movement is not a part of the Christian church. In 1961 they merged with the Universalists.” Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.

6A. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE

1B. Justification:

2B. Worship:

3B. Prayer:

4B. Unity and Diversity in Creation:

1C. Marriage for example.

5B. Contemporary Apologetics:

“In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity can no longer be treated as a theoretical abstraction with little relevance to the Christian life, but must rather be seen as a fundamental underpinning of all pastoral practice. If this is true, it is especially significant in a secular age where the general tendency is to reduce all religions to a single category and regard them as basically interchangeable. A Trinitarian faith would not only exclude traditional Unitarians, but also Jews, Muslims and followers of other faiths that do not share this particular understanding of Deity. That in turn is bound to have

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the most serious consequences for interfaith dialogue, which can hardly get very far as long as Christians insists on the centrality of the Trinity for their practice (as well as for their belief, of course).”

—Gerald Bray “The Trinity: Where Do We Go From Here” in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*. Edited by A.T.B. McGowan (IVP, 2006), 24.