

Associated Gospel Churches - Articles of Faith and Doctrine

The Trinity of the Godhead

Part 1

November 20, 2005

The Trinity of the Godhead

II. The Trinity of the Godhead

We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfection, and are worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence and obedience.

Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 11:6-8; John 1:1-4; Isaiah 63:8-10;

Matthew 29:19-20; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Mark 12:29;

Revelation 1:4-6; Hebrews 1:1-3

The Trinity of the Godhead

- **Definition**

“Trinity” = “tri-unity” or “three-in-oneness”

- the word “Trinity” not used explicitly in Scripture, but embodies Scriptural view of the nature of God
- term probably first used by Tertullian (c.160-230 AD)
 - first to assert clearly the tri-personality of God while maintaining substantial unity of the three persons
 - but did not reach understanding of the Trinity that would be more fully developed later (e.g. believed that the Son did not always exist)
 - in later life, he joined a heretical movement with some similarities to modern charismatic movement (Montanism)

The Trinity of the Godhead

- 3 statements summarize Biblical teaching on the Trinity:

1. God is three persons

“We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”

2. Each person is fully God

“...and that these three... [have] precisely the same nature, attributes and perfection, and are worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence and obedience.”

3. There is one God

“and that these three are one God...”

The Trinity of the Godhead

- Errors arise from denying any of 3 statements:

1. Denying that God is three persons

- **Modalism (aka Sabellianism, modalistic monarchianism)**

2. Denying that each person is fully God

- **Dynamic monarchianism**
- **Arianism**
- **Subordinationism**
- **Adoptionism**
- **Socinianism**

3. Denying that there is one God

- **Tritheism**

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

– suggestion of ‘plurality’ within God from the beginning

“Let us make man in our image...” (Gen. 1:26)

“...The man has now become like one of us...” (Gen. 3:22)

**“...let us go down and confuse their language...”
(Gen. 11:6-8)**

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

– Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the Trinity

“...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matt. 28:19)

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Cor. 13:14)

“Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits [or the seven-fold spirit], and from Jesus Christ...” (Rev. 1:4-5)

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

– God eternally exists as three Persons

e.g. John 1:1-2

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. He was with God in the beginning.”

– the Word (i.e. the Son) eternally existed as God

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

– God eternally exists as three Persons

e.g. Ephesians 1:3-4

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He [God the Father] chose us in Him [Jesus Christ] *before the creation of the world* to be holy and blameless in His sight.”

– **the Son was the Son before the creation of the world**

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

– God eternally exists as three Persons

e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:27-28

“Now when it says that “everything” has been put under Him, it is clear that this does not include God Himself, who put everything under Christ. When He has done this, then the Son Himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under Him, so that God may be all in all.”

– the Son will be the Son forever

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

– the three Persons of the Trinity are distinct

- the Father is not the Son
- the Father is not the Holy Spirit
- the Son is not the Holy Spirit

e.g. John 1:1-2

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. He was with God in the beginning.”

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

- the three Persons of the Trinity are distinct

e.g. John 14:26

“But the Counselor, the *Holy Spirit*, whom the *Father* will send *in my name*, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

- the Father will send the Holy Spirit in the Son’s name

John 16:7

“Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.”

- the Son will send the Holy Spirit

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

- the three Persons of the Trinity differ from each other in role and relationship

e.g. Roles in redemption

- the Father planned the work of redemption and sent His Son
- the Son obeyed and accomplished redemption
- the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to apply redemption to us, to regenerate us, to sanctify us, and to empower us

The Trinity of the Godhead

1. God is three persons

- the three Persons of the Trinity differ from each other in role and relationship

e.g. Relationships within the Trinity

- God (the Father) is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3)
- the Son submits to the Father (Heb 5:7-8), and does so eternally (i.e. not just temporarily while living on earth) (1 Cor. 15:28)
- the Holy Spirit submits to the Father and to the Son, and brings glory to them (John 16:13-14)

The Trinity of the Godhead

2. Each Person is fully God

- each Person possesses the whole nature, attributes, and perfection of God
 - each person is *FULLY* God, not just part of God
 - matter of major controversy in the Church in the 3rd-4th centuries
- each Person is “worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence and obedience.”

The Trinity of the Godhead

2. Each Person is fully God

- distinctions in role and relationship **DO NOT** mean superiority/inferiority of nature, attributes or perfection
 - e.g. submission of the Son to the Father or of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son does not equate to subordination/inferiority of essence or nature
- “ontologic equality with economic subordination”
 - the historic understanding of the Church, i.e. that the three persons of the Trinity are equal in nature, but differ in role

The Trinity of the Godhead

2. Each Person is fully God

– God the Father is fully God

- no real controversy within Christianity over this point

The Trinity of the Godhead

2. Each Person is fully God

– Jesus Christ, the Son, is fully (and eternally) God

- point of major controversy in 3rd-4th century
- submission in role & relationship with the Father led some to argue that the Son was inferior or subordinate in essence/nature to the Father

– this position ultimately rejected as heretical, e.g. Arian controversy (4th c.)

The Trinity of the Godhead

2. Each Person is fully God

– Jesus Christ, the Son, is fully (and eternally) God

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.” (Hebrews 1:3)

“...while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13)

The Trinity of the Godhead

2. Each Person is fully God

– the Holy Spirit is fully God

“...how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have *lied to the Holy Spirit... you have not lied to men, but to God.*” (Acts 5:3-4)

– the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal ‘force’, but a Person of the Trinity (“He,” not “It”)

“Yet they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.” (Isaiah 63:10)

The Trinity of the Godhead

2. Each Person is fully God

– the Holy Spirit is fully God

- placed on same level as other Persons of the Trinity in Matt 28:19-20, 2 Cor. 13:14, Rev. 1:4-6, etc.

e.g. Matt. 28:19: “...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”

– would make no sense if the Holy Spirit were not equal to the Father and the Son

e.g. ...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and [of the archangel Gabriel] - would not make sense

The Trinity of the Godhead

3. There is one God

**“The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this:
Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one...”**
(Mark 12:29)

**“You believe that there is one God. Good!...” (James
2:19)**

The Trinity of the Godhead

- **3 statements summarize Biblical teaching on the Trinity:**
 - 1. God is three persons**
 - 2. Each person is fully God**
 - 3. There is one God**

A mystery!

The Trinity of the Godhead

Applications of the Doctrine of the Trinity

- **Unity in Diversity**
 - **in the Church - one Body, with**
 - many members (1 Cor. 12:12-26)
 - many races (Eph. 2:11-16, Rev. 7:9)
 - many gifts (Eph. 4:4-16)

The Trinity of the Godhead

Applications of the Doctrine of the Trinity

- **Unity in Diversity**

- **in marriage**

- **Man's creation in the image of God reflected in part in being created as male and female (Gen. 1:27)**
 - **relationship of headship and submission between husband and wife occurs in the context of profound oneness (Eph. 5:31) and reflects the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity (1 Cor. 11:3)**
 - **thus, headship cannot imply superiority; submission cannot imply inferiority**

Next class

Church History: Trinitarian controversies

November 27, 2005

References

- **Berkhof, Louis.** *The History of Christian Doctrines.* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), p. 62-98.
- **Grudem, Wayne.** *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.226-261.