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B0514 – March 3, 2005 – Major Bible Themes
Chapter 05 – God the Trinity–Part 1

Because of the large amount of information in this chapter and the importance of it we're going to split this chapter into two weeks. This week we'll look at the Trinity and next we'll look at the Attributes of God and the Decree of God.

Additionally, I'm not going to spend any time on the arguments for the existence of God. If you are interested in the basic logical steps of those arguments then there is a hand-out on the back table with 6 of the arguments. There are actually many more arguments for the existence of God but I've only listed the most common arguments. I don't lay much credence to these arguments because to my knowledge all but one of them has logical problems and, as Dr. Chafer said, they operate independently of Scripture. Only one of them starts with Scripture. So, I just head out and start with the word of God and its insistence that all men already know God exists (Rom 1:20) and show that men's inconsistencies reveal the existence of the God of Scripture and makes them accountable and without excuse, justly condemned by God.

I. **Belief in the Existence of God**

- A. God created all things (Gen 1:1)
- B. All things bear the marks of God's handiwork (Ps 19:1)
- C. All men live within God's handiwork (Acts 17:24-28)
- D. All men inevitably see God through His handiwork (Rom 1:19-20)
- E. This makes all men inexcusable (Rom 1:20-21)
- E. Thus, God is just in condemning those who reject creation (Rom 1:24, 26, 28)

II. **The Trinity**

The word Trinity is not found in the Bible but the concept is taught in both the Old and New Testaments.¹ Although no explicit teaching is found on the Trinity the concept is drawn from all the passages regarding the essence and roles of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. It is a The most complete formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity came at the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451AD. Any departure from this formulation is considered a departure from scriptural truth. Let's start with the Old Testament evidence of the Trinity.

A. Evidence of the Trinity in the Old Testament

1. The Oneness of God

Deuteronomy 4:35 To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD [YHWH], He is God [elohim]; there is no other besides Him.

2. The Plurality of God

A. Plural Name and Pronouns Used of God

From the very beginning of the Bible (Gen. 1:1) the Bible speaks of God as a plurality. The term used for "God" in Genesis 1:1 is *Elohim*, the plural form of God. In Genesis 1:26 God said,

Genesis 1:26 "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;"

The Bible also contains the plural personal pronouns "Us" and "Our" indicating that God is a plurality of persons and not strictly a unity. However, these pronouns do not indicate the specific number three, but merely prove that in some sense God is multiple in person. The Trinity could not be understood from these passages alone. We had to wait for later revelation to know that there were three persons.

B. Angel of YHWH Passages

(Gen. 16:7-14; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; 31:11-13; Exod. 3:2; Judg. 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-22; 13:3-22; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12; 3:1; 12:8)

The mysterious, Angel of YHWH, is another evidence of a plurality in the Godhead. This Angel of YHWH is more than just a created angel in that He is identified with God, yet He is distinguished from God (Gen. 24:7; Zech. 1:12-13). For a clear example turn to...

Judges 13:21-22 ²¹ Now the angel of the LORD [*YHWH*] did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD [*YHWH*].
²² So Manoah said to his wife, "We will surely die, for we have seen God [*elohim*]."

Here the *angel of YHWH* is identified as God. In some texts *angel of YHWH* refers to any of God's angels but in this text and many others that *Angel* is identified as God. This points to a personal distinction within the Godhead.

D. Explicit OT Trinitarian Passages

(Isaiah 48:12, 16; Isaiah 60:22; 61:1)

There are two OT passages that mention all three persons of the Trinity. Let's look at one of them in Isaiah 48:16.

Come near to Me, listen to this:

From the first I have not spoken in secret,

From the time it took place, I was there.

And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.

The pronoun "Me" is obviously the "Son", while the "Lord God" is clearly the "Father" and "His Spirit" is the "Holy Spirit". There is no other way to understand this passage. It is the "Son" who is addressing Jacob and Israel (v. 12).

This and other OT passages show a seminal form of the Trinity and are revelatory enough for us to conclude that it was possible for a diligent Israelite student to understand the Godhead as a Trinity. Ryrie says, "the doctrine exists only in seminal form in the Old Testament."ⁱⁱ

B. Evidence of the Trinity in the New Testament

1. The Oneness of God

Like the OT there are many passages that insist there is only one true God.

1 Corinthians 8:4 ⁴ Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

John 10:30 ³⁰ "I and the Father are one."

2. The Threeness of God

A. Deity of Son and Spirit

All that is needed to show the evidence of the Triune God in the NT is to show the deity of the Son and the deity of the Holy Spirit. Passages which teach the deity of Christ include John 1:1; 1 John 5:20; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; Heb 1:8.

Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, (TSKS Construction)

Passages that teach the deity of the Holy Spirit include Gen 1:2; Matt 12:31-32; Acts 5:3-4, et. al.

Acts 5:3-4 ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land? ⁴ "While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

B. Explicit Passages

Two passages are worth mentioning here, Matthew 28:19 and 2 Cor 13:14. Both NT texts mention all three members of the Trinity. No one would argue the deity of God the Father (e.g. John 6:27; 1 Peter 1:2). The coupling of the three in these two passages is evidence of the deity, honor and glory of all three. Matthew 28:19-20 is the best because it unites the three persons in one name.

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name [singular] of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching

them to observe all that **I** (singular) commanded you; and lo, **I** (singular) am with you always, even to the end of the age."

These evidences are strong evidences of the Trinity in the NT, a continuation of the OT theme.

C. Doctrine of the Trinityⁱⁱⁱ

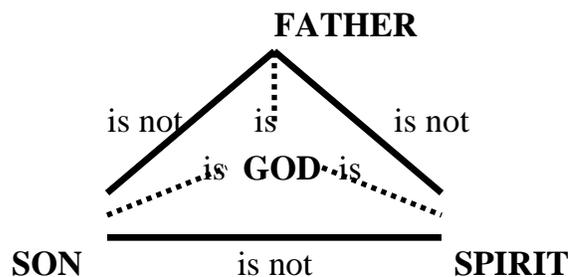
When we put all this data together we get a basic formulation of the Doctrine of the Trinity. We say that "God is one in essence and three in person." What does it mean that God is one in essence?

1. God is One in Essence/Substance

This means that the Father, Son, and Spirit all have the same attributes. "Essence is the being or nature of a person, what that person is like."^{iv} The attributes are "those qualities which compose the essence of a person."^v So, essence is the whole person of God and attributes are the parts that make up the whole. However, we can never say that God is part sovereign, part righteous, part just, part love, part omnipresent, etc..., but rather He is each of these attributes entirely. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) in reference to essence. If God was not one in essence then Christianity would teach tritheism but as it is we teach monotheism. However, distinct from His essence...

2. God is Three in Person

He is absolutely three in person. The Father is distinguishable from the Son, the Son from the Spirit, and the Spirit from the Father. They are always distinguishable persons, yet inseparable.

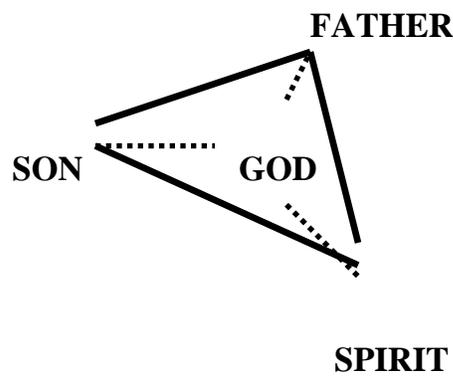


While no analogy can explain fully the Trinity of God, the simple concept of light may clarify the concept. Light is a single entity that has three properties. 1) The actinic or radiating property is invisible. It can be neither seen nor felt. 2) The luminiferous or

illuminating property can be seen but not felt. 3) The calorific or heat-producing property can be felt but not seen. Each property is distinct but all unite as light. “The actinic property is like God the Father, neither seen nor felt. The luminiferous property is like God the Son, both seen and felt. The calorific property is like God the Holy Spirit, felt but not seen.”^{vi} Each person of the Trinity is distinct but all unite as God. However, the scriptural revelation also teaches that within this Tri-unity of God there is subordination of role.

3. Subordination in the Trinity Does Not Refer to Essence

To show this we just tilt the prior diagram.



Subordination of role does not mean subordination of essence. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God but the Son and the Spirit take on subordinate roles. This does not change the essence of God in any shape or means. God’s essence is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

All Three Persons Equal (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 4:4-6; 1 Pt 1:2; John 13:16; 17:21)

Matthew 28:19 ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name [not names] of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

This shows that God is one in three. But notice the subordinate role Jesus Christ takes in John 13:16 and following...

Son Subordinate to Father (Matt 10:40; 26:39, 42; John 8:29, 42; 12:49-50)

***John 13:16** ¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.

Jesus Christ was identical to the Father in essence but His role of being sent was a subordinate one. In fact, Jesus did not come on His own initiative but on the initiative of the Father.

John 8:42 ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

And Christ did nothing and said nothing on His own accord but only did and said what the Father told Him to do and say.

Matthew 26:39 ³⁹ And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." **Matthew 26:42** ⁴² He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."

John 12:49-50 ⁴⁹ "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ "I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

In addition to this the Spirit was subordinate to both the Father and the Son. This is in accordance with the doctrine of sending (procession). The one sent is not greater than the sender and both the Father and the Son sent the Spirit (*filioque* clause).

Spirit Subordinate to Father and Son (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; 16:13-15)

John 14:26 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 said to you.

John 16:7 ⁷ "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

The Son and the Spirit are not in any sense inferior in essence to the Father. Christ was sent by the Father and subordinated His will to the will of the Father, but this does not imply inferiority. The Spirit was sent from the Father by way of the Son but this does not imply inferiority. Subordination within the Trinity is subordination of role, never a subordination of essence. For example, the Father is the planner, the Son is the executer of the Father's plan, and the Spirit is the revealer and interpreter of the executed plan. The marriage relationship between male and female should mirror this subordination. Females are subordinate to male headship, but that subordination does not make females inferior, it merely points to a subordination of role within the marriage.

ⁱ The debated passage of 1 John 5:7-8 in the KJV would contain an explicit teaching of the Trinity but it is not original. See lesson from 1 John 5:7-12 "God's Testimony" online.

ⁱⁱ Ryrie, Charles, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 59.

ⁱⁱⁱ The doctrine of the Trinity is a difficult doctrine to comprehend. Many Christians have tossed it out because of its supposed difficulty or have thought it not really necessary to the Christian faith. This error couldn't be farther from the importance and truth of the doctrine. The question philosophy, until modern times, has always struggled with is the problem of "The One and the Many". Is it the One, the unity, the universals which are most important or is it the Many, the individuals, the particulars that are more important. Aristotle, Plato and other philosophers struggled with this problem and ultimately concluded that it was the 'One' in the Greek city-state or polis. It is the ultimate philosophical question and though it is not discussed much today every nation, culture and individual faces this problem. Rushdoony reduces the problem of the One and the Many to the problem of authority. He says that man

Cannot resolve, with the philosophical tools at hand to them, the problem of authority...The problem of authority is not answerable by reason alone, and basic to reason itself are pre-theoretical suppositions or axioms which represent essentially religious commitments. And one such basic commitment is with respect to the question of *the one and the many*. The fact that students can graduate from our universities as philosophy majors without any awareness of the importance or centrality of this question does not make the one and the many any less basic to our thinking...Whether recognized or not, every argument and every theological, philosophical, and political, or any other exposition is based on a presupposition about man, God, and society—about reality. This presupposition rules and determines the conclusion; the effect is the result of a cause. And one such basic presupposition is with reference to the one and the many.

The importance of the problem cannot be overstated. One philosophy would stress the One, the Universal, maybe the city-state, the gods, the concept of Being, or the idea of Rome, but this One was always emphasized at the expense of the individual. Thus, all distinctions were erased at the expense of individuality resulting in Totalitarianism. Other philosophies stressed the 'Many', the particulars of life, the individual citizens, but always at the expense of their relationships and unity. This always results in Anarchy. No humanist philosophy has ever been able to create a unified field of knowledge, that is, an answer to the problem of the One and the Many. Modern philosophy has given up hope of answering this problem. However, all along Christianity has had the answer, rather than stressing the 'One' or the 'Many', there is a balance and this balance is created by the doctrine of the Trinity. God is both 'One' and 'Many' (namely three). Thus, Christianity is the only system of thought that answers the most fundamental and ultimate question of philosophy. It gives equal and interdependent emphasis on the individual as well as society creating a balance. Should we sacrifice this doctrine for the fruit of unbelief? I pray nay!

^{iv} Thieme, R. B., Jr., *The Trinity* (Houston, TX: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1993), 5.

^v Thieme, R. B., Jr., *The Trinity* (Houston, TX: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1993), 5.

^{vi} Thieme, R. B., Jr., *The Trinity* (Houston, TX: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1993), 17.

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