

# Introduction to the Trinity

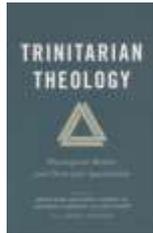
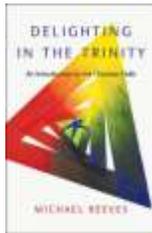
Sovereign Way Christian Church

## Introduction

- This is an extremely important subject.
  - Belief in the Trinity is a salvation issue.
- People will come to your door denying the Trinity.
  - JW's outright deny it.
  - Mormons hold to a "Trinity in purpose," but deny God is a real Trinity.
- My own run-ins and the results.
  - JW's when I was 17; Guy at the Airport; Woman at GCC.

My Approach When We Started	My Approach Now
OT Raw Material	Biblical Exegesis
NT Synthesis	Canonical Interpretation
Biblical/Historical Definition	Leveraging the Great Tradition

## What We've Studied



## Biblical Exegesis

## Direct NT Teaching

- John 1:1-3
  - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>1</sup> He was with God in the beginning.<sup>2</sup> All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.
- Philippians 2:5-11
  - Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.<sup>7</sup> Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man,<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.<sup>9</sup> For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—<sup>11</sup> and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

## OT Raw Material

- The very first verse of the Bible contains the raw material for the Trinity.
- בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ  
 • **Elohim** and **bara**. Here you have a plural noun and a singular verb. This suggests one God doing the one action of creating, but the one God himself is a plurality.
- The plurality of God is accentuated again near the end of Genesis 1.
  - Gen 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
- Genesis 19:24 is interesting too.
  - Then out of the sky the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah burning sulfur from the Lord.

## OT Raw Material

- So it seems that there is a plurality among God. Even the Shema allows for this. →
- Furthermore, the OT introduces three figures that are divine.
  - God, in general, refers to the Father.
  - The Messiah is said to be divine—Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, and Micah 5:2.
  - The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—Gen 1:2
- Though more can be said, this paints the over all picture of what the OT reveals. God is one, but the one God seems to include God, the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit.



In the Second Temple Era, some writers included the Word of God and the Wisdom of God within identity of the One God (P.T. Gen I; Ps. Jon. Gen III, XV).

## NT Synthesis

- The New Testament also presents three persons as the One God. So in articulating the Trinity, we should have a clear methodology.
- Ask Two Questions for each person of the Trinity.
  - Is each a person?
  - Is each God?
- If a person, then He is not an impersonal force.
  - This needs a little nuance, however. Person does not refer to psycho-volitional will like it does today. Person as it relates to the Trinity deals with relations of origin. More will be said later.
  - For now it is correct to say God is a personal God, so the three distinct hypostases will be personal as well.
- There is only One God.
  - Therefore, if three persons are defined and described as God, then God is a Trinity.
- So we will apply these questions to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## The Father

- No one questions the Father's divinity.
- Just in case, here is a verse.
  - John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
- The very title "Father" makes Him personal—for He relates to the Son.
- So yes, the Father is God and the Father is a person



## The Son

- Before dealing specifically with the Son as Jesus (Son Incarnate), we should address the Son as the Eternal Son.
- Is the Son a distinct person?
  - Philippians 2:5-6 – Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, "who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.
  - He is God, but is distinct from God (the Father).
- He is clearly called the Son.
  - John 1:14 – The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- The very title "Son" makes Him personal since He relates the Father.



## The Son

- More on His divinity.
- He existed from the beginning.
  - John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- He is the Creator of the Universe.
  - John 1:3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
  - Col 1:16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.
- Explicit Statements.
  - Col 2:9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,



## The Son

- Is Jesus Christ a man?
- He was a man.
  - 1Tim 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the **man** Christ Jesus,
- He was a teacher.
  - Matt 7:28 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,
- He had feelings.
  - Matt 14:14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he **had compassion** on them and healed their sick.
- So yes, clearly He is a person!



## The Son

- As the God-Man is Jesus Christ still Divine?
- There are many implicit pieces of evidence from Scripture.
- Only God is to be worshipped.
  - Matt 2:2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."
  - John 20:28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
- Only God can forgive sins.
  - Matt 9:2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

## The Son

- There are linguistic evidences.
- In Exodus 3:14, God identifies Himself to Moses as I AM, or **ehyeh-asher-ehyeh**.
  - This is related to the tetragrammaton YHWH, the name of God.
  - When the LXX was made, they translated **ehyeh-asher-ehyeh** to εγω εμιμ, or **egō eimi**.
- In John 8:58 Jesus answered the same of Himself with Before Abraham was, I AM.
  - Jesus would have said the Hebrew, and John translated to Greek. Note the Jew's reaction in vv. 59.



## The Son

- Eventually, the Jews stopped pronouncing יהוה (YHWH).
  - They substituted YHWH with the generic term, Lord, or אֲדֹנָי (**Adonai**). All of the Hebrew manuscripts used this substitute.
  - When the LXX was made, the translators translated **adonai** as κυριος or **kurios**.
- In the New Testament, Jesus was called κυριος many times.
  - Romans 10:9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.



## Jesus = YHWH

- שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אֶחָד:
- 1 Cor 8:6 – yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from him, and we exist for him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through him, and we exist through him.

## The Holy Spirit

- Some people have a hard time accepting the Holy Spirit as God.
  - Yet, the hang up here is they usually deny his personhood. Thus, we will spend more time on that.
- So these same two questions will be applied to the Holy Spirit.
- Is the Holy Spirit a person?
- Jesus described Him as **another paraclete**.
  - John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Helper**, to be with you forever,

## The Holy Spirit

- Holy Spirit is never referred to as an "it." Also, masculine personal pronouns are attached to the Holy Spirit, even though the word is neuter.
  - John 16:8 And when **he** comes, **he** will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:
  - John 16:13-14 When the Spirit of truth comes, **he** will guide you into all the truth, for **he** will not speak on his own authority, but whatever **he** hears **he** will speak, and **he** will declare to you the things that are to come. 14) **He** will glorify me, for **he** will take what is mine and declare it to you.
  - Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit **himself** intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

## Holy Spirit

- Is the Holy Spirit God?
- Showing His divinity is not difficult.
- The Holy Spirit is the Creator.
  - Gen 1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters.
- The Holy Spirit is eternal (a divine attribute).
  - Heb 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the **eternal Spirit** offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.
- Explicit Statement
  - Acts 5:3-4 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to **lie to the Holy Spirit** and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 4) While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**"

## Simultaneity of the Three

- Some accept the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but deny the Trinity.
  - Modalism = three manifestations.
- We only need one instance where all three are present at the same time. Here are two.
  - Matt 3:16-17 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17) and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."
  - Act 7:55-56 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56) And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

## The Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit has a will.
  - Acts 16:6-7 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7) And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.
- The Holy Spirit possesses "ego." He is aware of His own existence, as expressed by "I".
  - Acts 13:2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
- The Holy Spirit has feelings.
  - Eph 4:30 And do not **grieve** the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- So it is clear the Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force.

## Summary of the Three

- We have all three persons of the Trinity to be demonstrated as personal and divine.
- This achieves a number of things for us.
  - First, the Eastern religions are deemed to be false because their concept of God is impersonal.
  - Second, the heretics are wrong for either denying the divinity of Christ, or the personhood of the Holy Spirit.
  - Finally, the unbelieving world is in error as well since they deny the divinity of Christ.
- Furthermore, to refute the Jewish argument that Christians worship three gods (tritheism), remember that Jesus affirmed the shema.
  - He taught that even though the Father was God, the Son was God, and the Holy Spirit was God, all three are One, and there is only One God



## Trinitarian Formula

- Often opponents of the Trinitarian truth claim the doctrine did not exist until the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.
  - A light study of Church History can prove that wrong.
- Yet, there are Biblical Trinitarian Confessions.
  - 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**,
  - 2Cor 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.
- They are not as detailed as the later creeds, but they certainly provide the foundation.



## Canonical Considerations

### Analoga Scriptura

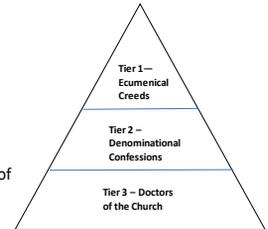
- The clear NT expression of One God and Three Persons helps us properly interpret that raw material from the OT.
- The complete teaching of the canon as a whole also helps with passages like Proverbs 8:22-30.
  - The Lord acquired me at the beginning of his creation, before his works of long ago. <sup>23</sup>I was formed before ancient times, from the beginning, before the earth began. <sup>24</sup>I was born when there were no watery depths and no springs filled with water. <sup>25</sup>Before the mountains were established, prior to the hills, I was given birth— <sup>26</sup>before he made the land, the fields, or the first soil on earth. <sup>27</sup>I was there when he established the heavens, when he laid out the horizon on the surface of the ocean, <sup>28</sup>when he placed the skies above, when the fountains of the ocean gushed out, <sup>29</sup>when he set a limit for the sea so that the waters would not violate his command, when he laid out the foundations of the earth. <sup>30</sup>I was a skilled craftsman beside him. I was his delight every day, always rejoicing before him.



## The Great Tradition

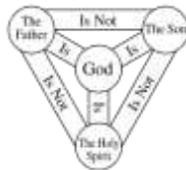
### Justification for Authority in Tradition

- Church tradition has ministerial, not magisterial authority.
- Pneumatology and Ecclesiology
  - The Spirit and the Word create the church.
  - The Spirit then continues to illumine the church.
  - Theology and the Christian life was always supposed to be done in community.
- Think of authority given to the church in the NT, as well as the Holy Spirit's gifting of the church.
  - Now extend that into church history



### Considerations from the Great Tradition

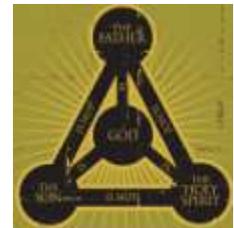
- How do we relate each person to each other?
- Eternal Generation of the Son from the Father.
- Eternal Procession (or spiration) of the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son.
- The missions reveal the processions.
- Or God *ad extra* reveals some truths about God *ad intra*.
- Or the economic Trinity reveals some truth about the immanent Trinity.



### Considerations from the Great Tradition

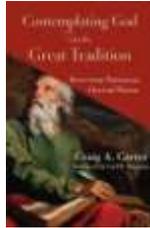
- One Divine Nature/Three Hypostases
 

One "ousia" Or "substantia"	Three "hypostases" Or "personas"
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- One Divine Will/Three Modes of Subsistence
- Inseparable Operations/Appropriations



## Considerations from the Great Tradition

- Remember the importance of Partitive Exegesis.
- Remember that the Incarnation leads to Jesus having two wills.
- Remember that "Persons" simply refers to eternal relations of origins, not to actual personalities.



## Excerpt from the Athanasian Creed

- The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.