

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

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§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 1

There is One God

Introduction

In this class we have just completed a long excursus on the subject of Natural Theology. We are doing a survey of Christian doctrine, and the initial segment of the course dealt with Doctrine of Revelation and Doctrine of Scripture. Then we moved to Doctrine of God, and we examined God's attributes and his nature. Then we took a side road to look at Natural Theology – that is to say, arguments for and against the existence of God. We have now completed those. Now we are returning back to our track on Doctrine of God, and we want to move specifically to a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity. That is the subject for this lesson.

If I were to ask for a show of hands (which I will not), I wonder how many persons here, today, if I asked you, “Is God a person?,” would say, “Yes” and how many would say “No?” Is God a person? Well, I don't want to embarrass anybody, so we won't have a show of hands. But technically it is not correct to say that God is a person. Rather, in Christian theology, God is three persons. This is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – God is tri-personal. So the correct answer to the question would be to say, “God is *personal*, but he is not *a person*.” It sounds paradoxical, but that is what the Trinity implies. God is personal, but he is not a person. He is tri-personal. God is three persons.

It is this doctrine – the doctrine of the Trinity – that distinguishes Christianity from other great monotheistic faiths like Judaism and Islam. Judaism and Islam are forms of Unitarianism with respect to their doctrine of God. They believe that God is a person – there is one person who is God. By contrast, Christianity is trinitarian, not unitarian. This same doctrine also serves to distinguish Christianity from all of the various cults that claim to be Christian. I am thinking here of cults like Mormonism (or the Church of Latter Day Saints) or Christian Science or Jehovah's Witnesses. When you look at the various cults, the doctrine of the Trinity is almost like a yardstick that will measure whether or not a group is a legitimate Christian denomination and whether or not it has veered into some sort of a cultic heresy. Virtually every one of these cults will deny the doctrine of the Trinity. So the doctrine of the Trinity is extremely important in distinguishing Christianity from other monotheisms and also from Christian cults.

Unfortunately, many Christians find themselves very ill-equipped to explain or defend the doctrine of the Trinity. If the average Christian gets into a discussion with a Jehovah's Witness who comes to his door, I fear that the average Christian will be wiped out by the Jehovah's Witness. The Jehovah's Witness will be so well trained that the poor Christian will be completely annihilated if he tries to defend the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, when you call upon Christians to explain what the doctrine of the Trinity is, a great many of them will actually turn out to be heretics! They will actually espouse a view which has been condemned by the Christian church at one or another council as being aberrant and

not correct Christian doctrine. So there is a real need here, I think, for us to carefully understand and explore this doctrine.

This doctrine of the Trinity is unfortunately often obscured by Christians in mystery.¹ Very often they will simply say that the doctrine of the Trinity is incomprehensible and no one can understand it; it is a mystery and thereby they excuse themselves from having to explain it or think about it. But I think that this is an unfortunate tendency because the doctrine of the Trinity is really not in any way logically incoherent or mysterious. The doctrine of the Trinity is not the doctrine that three Gods are somehow one God. That would be clearly self-contradictory – to say there are three Gods, and these are one God. Neither is it the claim that there are three persons who are somehow one person. That, again, would be self-contradictory – to assert that there are three persons who are all one person. But the doctrine of the Trinity does not assert that there are three Gods that are one God or three persons that are one person, but it asserts that there is one God who is tri-personal. It is one God who is three persons, or, to put it another way, there is one God who has three centers of self-consciousness: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I think it is unfortunate that very often Christians will appeal to inadequate analogies to try to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. There is really no reason to expect that there would be any analogy to the doctrine of the Trinity. There is no reason to think that there has to be some created thing that would so reflect the nature of God that it would be a good analogy. Most of the analogies that are suggested are inadequate. For example, here is one popular analogy for the Trinity: One man can be a father, a son, and a husband. That is like the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit being one God. I am one man, but I am a father, I am a son, and I am a husband. So I am three-in-one. Well, that is not an adequate analogy for the Trinity because that one man simply has these three different roles, but there is only one person involved there. That is not the doctrine of the Trinity – that there is one person who functions in these three different roles. That is a heresy; that is not what the doctrine asserts. Sometimes it is said that water (H₂O) can take the form of either liquid, steam, or ice. It can be either a liquid, a gas, or a solid. That is the way the Trinity is – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are all the same in essence, like H₂O, which can be in these three different forms – liquid, steam, or gas. Again, the problem is that the liquid, the steam, and the gas are simply different states of the same substance successively. You can have water being in these different states, but that is not the doctrine of the Trinity. This again is a form of what is called “modalism.” So I personally think that it is better just to eschew any of these analogies. I don’t think we need to have analogies to the Trinity. The doctrine is clear and logically coherent in what it states; namely, that there are three persons who constitute one God.

The way I like to think of it is in terms of self-consciousness. My being supports one center of self-consciousness which I call “I” – that is how I refer to myself. I am one being who is one person. I have this one center of self-consciousness. God is a being with three centers of self-consciousness – three “I”s. There is the Father, there is the Son, and there is the Holy Spirit. So just as I am one being with one center of self-consciousness, God is one being, but with three centers of self-consciousness. I think that is the easiest way to think about what the Trinity is. We will say more about this. This is just by way of

¹ 4:57

introduction. But I want us to get a handle on what the doctrine of the Trinity affirms rather than what it does not.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not something that is explicitly taught in the Bible. The doctrine of the Trinity is a systematic summary of the biblical material concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.² Theologians take the raw data of Scripture and reflect on it and systematize it. The doctrine of the Trinity is the result of that reflective systematization of the raw material of Scripture. Therefore, it really doesn't matter whether or not the word "Trinity" is found in the Bible. The name just isn't germane. The question is whether the doctrine is one that is biblically faithful. Is this a faithful systematic summary of the biblical doctrine (whatever you call it)? If you didn't call it "Trinity", maybe you could have called it "Uni-Triad" or something. You could have had some other name. The name isn't important, and therefore it is of little relevance whether or not the word "Trinity" is found in the Scripture. What is important is, does the doctrine faithfully represent and systematize the teaching of Scripture concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

DISCUSSION

Question: I remember reading from Wolfhart Pannenberg, your mentor, that the doctrine of the Trinity is not made explicit in the Scriptures, not even in Matthews's baptismal formula; yet it says baptizing in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.³ That is not explicit?

Answer: Well, the doctrine of the Trinity that gets formulated in the great creeds, as we will see, uses certain Greek philosophical concepts like *hypostasis*, which is a kind of individual bearer of properties. It uses the word "nature" to describe God. The idea of three persons in one nature, I think, is what he is saying you don't find Scriptural statements for. But I think that he would agree that that creedal formulation is a faithful expression of what is taught in Scripture. And the Matthean passage where Jesus says "baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" would be a good example of that kind of Scriptural data that needs to be summarized.

Followup: I thought so because you wouldn't baptize in the name of God, a prophet, and a force. You wouldn't call them one name [singular].

Answer: Yeah, "in the name of . . ." and then those three. Yeah, that's right. You wouldn't do it in the name of a force, a prophet, and God the Father, yes.

Question: I know we are trying to stay away from analogies, but there is an analogy I heard a long time ago, and I would like your opinion on whether or not it is a good enough one to use or if I should throw that out as well. It is the one with the sun itself. The plasma is like God the Father, and the Son is like the sun's rays coming down to Earth, and then the chemicals that have an effect on the plants and trees is kind of like the Holy Spirit. They are kind of like the three different facets all in one. I have heard that a lot, and a lot of people have used that as an analogy. Do you think that is fair?

² 10:04

³ cf. Matthew 28:19

Answer: Well, the church fathers would often use the analogy of the sun and its rays as an analogy of the relationship between the Father and the Son. But the Holy Spirit doesn't seem to fit in there very well. These chemicals aren't part of the sun, or they are not in any way, it seems to me, connected to the sun directly. So even if you think that works in explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit doesn't seem to be naturally pulled into that analogy very well, I don't think.

Followup: And were you the one who made the *Avatar* correlation? I heard that, but I couldn't remember if that was you.

Answer: Yeah, but that was the Incarnation, not the Trinity. I do think that the *Avatar* movie gives a very good illustration of one person with two natures, which is a sort of mirror image of the Trinity, which says there are three persons with one nature. In the Incarnation, you have one person with two natures.

Question: While we are on the subject of analogies, years ago I heard you use the analogy of Cerberus to explain three persons with one being that I found really helpful.

Answer: I will mention that later on, when we get to giving a model for the Trinity. So hang onto that, and I will come back to that. I am glad you found it helpful; I always feel a little uncomfortable comparing the Trinity to a dog. But anyway we will come back to that later.⁴

Question: So, as far as the stated doctrine, it is implied that you have the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit all being referred to as God. So that is by implication rather than a stated doctrine, but if all three are referred to as God, that means they are all God in some fashion.

Answer: Yeah, exactly. That is what we will look at here in this next section. We are going to look at the Scriptural data that affirms with respect to each person that he is divine and that he is a distinct person. So the doctrine of the Trinity, as I say, is simply a systematic way of formulating what the biblical data say.

Question: The most difficult thing that we've run into – we do a lot of work with English-as-a-second-language people – is the translations that refer, always, that Jesus is the Son of God. That always throws everybody for a loop. Why does it say he is the Son of God, if he is God? Is that just translation problems?

Answer: No, that is in the Greek. Jesus is the Son of God. That is the way he is presented in the Gospels. We will talk more about this when we get to the section on Doctrine of Christ. So I don't want to go on a detour on that now. But the "Son of God" language, in its Hebrew context, I think, was probably a way of asserting Jesus' Messianic status – that he was the promised Messiah. Theologically, the church has taken Jesus' being God's Son to mean that the Son is begotten from the Father, that even in his divine nature, Christ is begotten of the Father from eternity. That gets enshrined in the Nicene Creed that we will talk about when we do look at what the Creed has to say about the Trinity. So we will touch on that; but more than that I don't want to say at this point.

Question: Is it the Westminster Confession that says "one in essence and three in person?" Is there any difference between essence and nature?

⁴ 15:04

Answer: No, I think essence and nature would be synonymous.

Followup: Because when you said there is no creative thing that can be analogical, we first have to explain what God is – which is not us, and it is not person; it is spirit.

Answer: Well, God is personal, and I think we should think of God as a mental substance. He is like a soul. The biblical view of man – and we will talk about this when we look at the Doctrine of Man –, is that you are not just a chemical composition on a skeleton. You have a soul – you are a soul. You are a soul with a body, and when your body dies, your soul continues. So the soul is a kind of spiritual or mental substance or thing. That, I think, is what God is. Jesus said, “God is spirit.” So he is an immaterial, non-physical, spiritual (or mental) substance.

Followup: That is the one way that we are able, in our ESL (English as a Second Language) to explain to someone what God is. All nations and all people understand this kind of spirit thing.

Answer: Right! And I think that is a very appropriate analogy. We understand ourselves as persons – as selves – and not just as physical material entities. That, I think, is a reflection of the fact that we are made in the image of God.

Scriptural Data

Let’s begin to look at some of the Scriptural data on this subject.

There is One God

First and foremost, the Scripture teaches that there is one God. The biblical view is monotheism – there is only one God. Let’s look first at some Old Testament passages on the oneness of God.

First, from Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD and you shall serve the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” The hallmark of Jewish religious belief was monotheism.⁵ Yahweh, or God, is the only God there is. That is the first and foremost commandment.

Turn to 1 Kings 8:60 – this is Solomon’s benediction at the dedication of the temple. He prays “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other.” So there is no God apart from the God of Israel.

Isaiah 45:5a, 18:

I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God. . . . For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’

So, again, this is strong affirmation of monotheism. You might look at Isaiah 44 as well, which is Isaiah’s polemic against pagan polytheism, where he mocks idolaters and polytheists and asserts in very strong terms that there is only one God and that that God is

⁵ 20:04

the Lord.

This emphasis on Jewish monotheism carries right on through the New Testament. Look at the Gospel of Mark 12:29. Jesus is asked by one of the scribes what is the greatest commandment and “Jesus answered, ‘The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’”” So Jesus affirms characteristic Jewish monotheism. This is the greatest and first of the commandments – to honor God as the one God.

In Romans 3:29-30a, Paul says, “Or is God the God of Jews only?” That is to say, is he some sort of national deity that belongs just to the Hebrew nation? He continues, “Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one.” So there is one God who is the God of all humanity, even those that don’t acknowledge or worship him.

In 1 Corinthians 8:4, Paul says, “As to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that an idol has no real existence, and that there is no God but one.” So, again, Paul affirms that there is only one real God.

In 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Again, there is just one God.

Finally, James 2:19, James says, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!” So the belief that God is one is a belief that is shared not only by Christians and Jews but also apparently by demons.

So both the Old Testament and New Testament are very explicit in teaching that there is only one God. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a form of tri-theism – saying that there are three Gods. That would be completely contrary to Scriptural teaching. Scriptural teaching is very clear that there is only one God.

What we will see next time is that although the Scripture teaches that there is only one God, it teaches that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead. That will be the Scriptural data that we will begin to explore next time.⁶

⁶ Total Running Time: 25:01 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 2

Three Distinct Persons in the Godhead

Three Distinct Persons in the Godhead

We have been talking about the doctrine of the Trinity. Last time we began to look at Scriptural data pertinent to the doctrine. We saw that Christianity teaches that there is one God. Christianity is a monotheism. There is one and only one God. But we come now to the second point, which is distinctive to Christianity and differentiates it from unitarian forms of monotheism like Judaism and Islam, namely, there are three distinct persons who are God.

The Father

Let's begin first by looking at the person of the Father. What I want to show is that when you look at Scriptures, the Scriptures teach two things about the Father. First, the Father is a distinct person. He is distinct from the Son and the Spirit. Secondly, the Father is God.

First, the Father is a distinct person.

Look at Matthew 11:27. Jesus says, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Jesus clearly differentiates himself as the Son from the Father and says he is the one who reveals the Father to mankind.

Matthew 26:39. This is Jesus in prayer in Gethsemane: "And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'" Here Jesus clearly differentiates himself from the Father in that he prays to the Father and prays, not that his will (Jesus' will) be done but that the Father's will be done. Clearly, Jesus is not praying to himself, as Muslims will sometimes say about this verse. That is not the Christian understanding. There are distinct persons involved here – the Father and the Son – and the Son is praying to the Father that his own will would be aligned with the Father's will

Finally, John 14:16-17. Jesus is speaking and he says,

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

Here Jesus differentiates himself from both the Father, whom he will pray to, and the Spirit, the Counselor, the Comforter, who will come then as another advocate for the disciples in the absence of Jesus. So in John 14 you have a clear differentiation of these three distinct persons.

The Father is a distinct person from the Son and the Spirit, and it hardly needs to be prooftexted that the Father is God. But let's look at some verses anyway. The concept of God as Father is an Old Testament concept. It is part of Judaism. The idea of God as a heavenly Father wasn't new to Jesus of Nazareth. Rather Jesus was right in line with traditional Jewish thinking.

Look at Psalm 89:26: "He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'" Here God is referred to as Father.

Isaiah 63:16. Isaiah says, "For thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; thou, O LORD, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name."⁷ Here, Israel calls upon God as Israel's Father.

This concept of God, or metaphor of God, as a heavenly Father is one that lay at the center of Jesus' own worship and faith. Matthew 6:9, for example. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he told them this: "Pray then like this, 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.'" Jesus taught the disciples to think of and address God as their heavenly Father.

The Father is a distinct person from the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Father is clearly God. In fact, the word in Greek for "God," which is *ho theos* – the definite article "the" is aspirated in *ho theos* –, literally means "the God." *Ho theos* is the word for God and usually refers to the Father in the New Testament. When the New Testament writers talk about "God," they are typically talking about the Father. The Father is the one who is "*ho theos*."

Paul, in his letters, typically writes a greeting like this, "Grace to you and peace from God (*ho theos*), the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Look at Galatians 4:4-6 to see an interesting use of this terminology,

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'

It is God who is the one to whom we cry, "Abba, Father!," and he has sent the Spirit of his Son, Jesus Christ, into our hearts to respond to God the Father in that way. When the New Testament talks about "God" (*ho theos*), the reference is almost always to God the Father.

DISCUSSION

Question: About Matthew 11:27, I heard a Oneness Pentecostal say about how "No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son.' Oh, then what about the Holy Spirit, huh?!"

Answer: That wouldn't support Oneness Pentecostalism; that wouldn't show that the Father is the same person as the Son, obviously, because here they are differentiated. I

would just say that in this verse, Christ isn't thinking of the Spirit, it just doesn't come into play. Theologically, we would say that the Spirit knows the Father as well, though it is the Son who is the one who reveals the Father to man. Obviously, this wouldn't support the view that the Father and the Son are the same person, which is what Oneness Pentecostals believe.

Question: I have heard that the Our Father at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer that he is teaching the disciples is very distinctive. I have read Muslims even read about the audacity of calling him Father when they convert out of Islam. Is it still a common usage among Jews do you know of? I know you showed in the Old Testament it was a common usage, but is it in common usage today, or in post-first century?

Answer: I am not sure about contemporary Jewish piety. I think that probably what these folks are talking about is not using the word *pater*, in the Greek, "Father," but it is Jesus' using the word "Abba," which is this sort of familial diminutive term or term of affection for God. That seems to have been unique to Jesus to think of God as "Abba," as Father, and to call God his Father in that sense.⁸ But I do not know about contemporary Judaism, whether or not it would use this kind of terminology or not, frankly. [*inaudible...someone off-mike makes a comment...*] OK; so he says "Our Father" and "Our King" is still used in Jewish liturgy.

The Son

Let's turn to the second point, which is Jesus Christ. I want to show again that Jesus is a distinct person from the Father and the Spirit and that he also is regarded as God.

First, Jesus is a distinct person. Mark 1:9-11. This is the account of Jesus' baptism.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.'

Here we see all three persons involved in the baptism. The Son is baptized, the Father speaks from heaven praising the Son, and the Spirit descends upon Christ in the form of the dove. So you have all three of the persons involved here in distinct roles in the baptism of Jesus.

Look at John 17:1-5. This is Jesus' high priestly prayer,

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.'

Here Jesus speaks of his preincarnate state with the Father. He prays to the Father that he

⁸ 10:10

would be glorified, having glorified the Father here on earth. So there is a differentiation between the Father and the Son. The rest of this chapter, if you read it, goes on to clearly differentiate the Father and the Son in many such passages.

Look at John 7:39, which speaks of Spirit. Verse 38; Jesus says, “He who believes in me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water,” and then John comments in verse 39, “Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” So the Holy Spirit was not yet present with the disciples, but he was promised and would come later, as we’ve seen.

Jesus himself speaks of this in John 16:7: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” There is the Advocate, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, that Christ would send, and he says that “it is to your advantage that I go away because if I do, then he will come to you”; otherwise he will not, clearly differentiating himself from the Spirit.

So we have Christ as a distinct person from the Father and from the Holy Spirit as well.

Moreover, the New Testament affirms very clearly that Jesus Christ is also God. Here the writers of the New Testament faced a very difficult terminological problem.⁹ Namely, if *ho theos* refers to the Father, then how can you say that Jesus Christ is God without implying that he is the Father? If you say that Jesus is *ho theos*, you are saying that Jesus is the Father, which is false, as we’ve seen. Jesus is not the Father. They differentiated the Father and the Son. So how can you say that Jesus is God without saying that he is the Father?

What you find in the New Testament is that the authors of the New Testament did terminological acrobatics, back flips, to find every way they could to affirm the deity of Christ without saying that Jesus is *ho theos*, without saying that he is the Father. That is why, frankly, you don’t find very many bald statements in the New Testament, “Jesus Christ is God.” That would be to say that Jesus Christ is the Father, which they did not want to say. So what they tried to do is find every other way that they could express the deity of the Son without blurring the distinction between the Father and the Son.

Let’s look at some examples. Colossians 1:15-19 and 2:9. These are remarkable verses about the person of Christ. Speaking of Christ, Paul writes in Colossians 1:15,

“He is the image of the invisible God,”

(If you want to see what the invisible God is like, look at Jesus Christ – Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God.)

“the first-born of all creation;”

(That is to say, the heir of all creation – the first born is the heir of everything.)

“for in him all things were created,”

⁹ 15:01

(A role that is properly ascribed only to God in Judaism.)

“in heaven and on earth,”

(Not just earthly things, things in heaven, too!)

“visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

(He is the creator and the sustainer of everything else that exists.)

“He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”

(And now this incredible statement:)

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

Then turn over to chapter 2:9 for a comment on this same expression, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” This is just an incredible statement. He is not saying that Christ was a man who was filled with the full presence of God. No, no – he is saying that in Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. He is the bodily form of the fullness of deity. The word here for “fullness” was a word that was appropriated in non-Christian philosophy by Gnostics to express the divine fullness. The Gnostics believed that God was too pure to have any sort of relationship with matter. The material world was evil, and therefore God could not be sullied by contact with the material world. So in the Gnostic system, the fullness of God, called the *pleroma*, was utterly apart from the world, and there came out of God a sort of series of emanations, like descending stair steps that finally, eventually, resulted in the creation of the material, physical world. But they could not have the *pleroma* directly in contact with the bodily, physical world. Here, Paul says, no, in Christ the fullness of deity dwells bodily. It dwells in bodily form! So this is a remarkable statement of the deity of Christ.

Second indication: the title *kyrios*, or “Lord”, that is attributed to Christ.¹⁰ The title *kyrios* is the Old Testament name of God translated into Greek. In the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word *kyrios* is used for the name of the “LORD.” So the LORD is Yahweh in the Old Testament. What the New Testament writers do is pick up this word *kyrios*, and they apply that to Jesus of Nazareth instead of *ho theos*. So they are saying that Jesus is the Lord, and then they apply to Jesus Old Testament proof texts about Yahweh – they take Old Testament proof texts speaking of Yahweh, and they apply these to Jesus.

A beautiful example of this is found in Romans 10:9,13. Paul says, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” This is the confession that is required to be a Christian in the New Testament church: Jesus is Lord. Then in verse 13 comes the Old Testament proof text. Quoting now from Joel 2:32: “For ‘everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.’” They take this Old Testament passage about Yahweh from Joel and apply that to Jesus Christ and say if you confess that Jesus is Lord, then, just as the Scriptures promise,

¹⁰ 20:04

everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Another interesting example of this is fascinating. 1 Corinthians 12:3; he says, “I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” Here, again, you see the centrality of this confession in the New Testament church to Jesus being the Lord. This *is* the important confession that Christians make.

Prayer was even addressed to Jesus as Lord. Look at 1 Corinthians 16:22b. There Paul says in the English translation, “Our Lord, come!” This is, in Greek, the word *maranatha* – which I am sure all of us have heard of, at least those who lived through the Jesus Revolution back in the 70s. *Maranatha*. That is what this is in the Greek. This is a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic phrase “*marana tha*” which means, “Our Lord, come!” What you have here in 1 Corinthians 16 is the primitive church at prayer. It is the language of the primitive church in Jerusalem in Aramaic. And how did they pray? They prayed to Jesus as Lord and prayed “Our Lord, come!”

In using the word *kyrios*, they applied to Jesus the Old Testament name of God and then cited Old Testament passages about God in reference to Jesus.

This can result in some really strange circumlocutions. Look at 1 Corinthians 8:6, where you see these expressions come together: “for us, there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” The Father and the Son are described in almost identical terms. They are the ones from whom and through whom and for whom we exist, and they both have the names of deity. One is *ho theos*, the other is *kyrios*. So you have the deity of Christ affirmed and yet the differentiation of Christ from the person of the Father preserved.¹¹

Third point: Christ is given the role of God in the New Testament. We have already seen this in Colossians 1 where Christ is described in these cosmic terms as the creator of everything other than himself, things in heaven and things on earth. You have the same sort of description in Hebrews 1:1-3:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, (*just as in a ring, a signet ring, in wax – the wax seal bears the very stamp of that ring*) upholding the universe by his word of power.

Here Christ is described as the creator and sustainer of the universe who is a reflection, or bares the imprint, of the very nature of *ho theos*, of God, himself.

Finally, John 1:1-5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not

¹¹ 25:10

overcome it.

Then he goes on to describe the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ. Here again you have Christ described in terms of being God and the creator of all reality, of everything outside of himself.

So, in Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, John 1, each written by a different author, you have the same picture of the cosmic Christ who plays the role of God as the creator and sustainer of everything outside of himself. This shows that this was not some peculiar theological persuasion of a particular author. Rather, this is the conviction of the New Testament church that is throughout the New Testament. Christ stands in the place of God; he fulfills the role of God. In this way, they affirm the deity of Christ without saying that Christ is *ho theos*.

Finally, the last point: In addition to all of these other attempts to indirectly affirm the deity of Christ, while preserving his distinction from God the Father, there are several occasions on which the New Testament writers lose all restraint, and they come right out and say that Jesus Christ is *ho theos*. Those will be the passages we will look at next time.¹²

¹² Total Running Time: 28:47 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 3

The Deity of Christ

We have been talking about the doctrine of the Trinity, and I have been looking at the Scriptural data concerning the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We saw that, with respect to the Father, the Father is God, and he is also a distinct person. We have now seen the Son as a distinct person, and we are looking at the Scriptures that indicate that the Son is God.

I looked at several passages last time that showed how the New Testament authors affirmed the deity of Christ without referring to Christ as *ho theos*, that is, God, because *ho theos* in Scripture refers to the Father. *Ho theos* refers typically to the Father in Scripture, and the Christians didn't want to say that Jesus is the Father, so instead, they would refer to him as the Lord, which is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament name of God. Then they would apply to Christ verses from the Old Testament referring to Yahweh, to God. Therefore, you get these locutions in the New Testament "there is one God (*ho theos*), the Father, and one Lord (*kyrios*), Jesus Christ."

I indicated, however, that sometimes the New Testament writers will lose all sense of restraint, and they come right out and say that Jesus Christ is, in fact, *ho theos* – that he is God. Today we want to look at some of these passages. If you are interested in exploring this further, I want to recommend that you look at this book: *Jesus as God* by Murray Harris¹³. Harris is a fine New Testament scholar from New Zealand. He was actually my Greek exegesis teacher at Trinity. He spent years studying the passages in the New Testament referring to Jesus as *ho theos*. He came to the conclusion that there are nine clear passages in Scripture, in the New Testament, where Jesus is called God, *ho theos*. We want to look at some of these.

First, Hebrews 1:8-12. Here he is speaking of Christ, the Son of God, and in verse 8 he says,

But of the Son he says,

‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades.’

and,

‘Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end.’

¹³ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus As God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Bookhouse, 1992)

The translation “thy throne, O God,” rather than “God is thy throne,” I think is correct because of the parallelism with verse 10. In verses 8 and 10, Christ is referred to as God and as Lord. He is both God and Lord, the creator of heaven and earth.

Titus 2:13. Here Paul says that “we await our blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Again, I think the translation here is correct, rather than an alternative translation that would be “of the great God and our Savior,” which would separate them, because in the Greek the possessive pronoun does not come until the end of the phrase. In Greek, it is *tou megalou theou kai soterou hemon*. Here it is literally “the great God and Savior our.” The possessive pronoun comes at the end of the phrase. And then follows *Iesou Christou* – Jesus Christ.¹⁴ So the definite article at the beginning and the possessive pronoun at the end brackets the phrase “our great God and Savior,” Jesus Christ. So this would be one of the passages that Harris would say is properly translated as I read it and does refer to Christ as God: our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:5-7:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Here it says that Jesus Christ was in the form of God; and lest you try to interpret that in some way that isn't full deity, he says that he didn't count equality with God something to be grasped, something to be held onto. Rather, he relinquished his status and emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of man, which speaks of the incarnation. Here we have a very strong statement of Christ's equality with God himself.

In addition to these passages, we have a number of affirmations that Christ is God in the writings of John. Let's look first at the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” There he affirms of the Word, who was Jesus Christ, that the Word was God. Don't be misled here by the fact that *theos* in this passage does not have the definite article. The phrase is *theos en ho logos* – literally “God was the Word.” The order of the words in Greek doesn't indicate which is the subject and which is the predicate. In Greek, you can have the words almost in any order. You do not indicate the subject and the predicate simply by word order. Rather, it is the word that has the definite article that is the subject of the sentence, and the predicate is the noun that lacks the definite article. That is why the last part of verse 1 doesn't say “and God was the Word.” No, the subject of the sentence is “the Word” – “the Word was God.” So the absence of the article here does not mean, as it is translated in the Jehovah's Witness Bible, “a god” – small “g.” I do not know of any Greek scholar who would translate John 1:1 as saying, “The Word was a god.” The absence of the article simply is a device, a grammatical device, to show that the word *ho logos* is the subject of the sentence. In any case, the absence of the article would simply indicate that the Word is not the Father, but he is nevertheless divine. If you want to translate this as “the Word was divine” or “the Word was God” in that sense, it would still show equality with God, but there would be a differentiation from the Father, just as

¹⁴ 5:03

verse 1 says, “He was with God in the beginning.” He was with God and the Word was God.

This verse is not to be taken in isolation. It comes in the context of the whole Gospel of John, which elsewhere makes dramatic references to Christ as God. For example, look at verse 18 of chapter 1.¹⁵ If you have a contemporary translation it will say, “No one has ever seen God, the only God [or the only begotten God] who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” This was so unsettling to early copyists of John – to speak of the only begotten “God” – that they changed it to the only begotten “Son.” So some of your older translations will translate this as “the only begotten Son,” or “the only Son,” who is in the bosom of the Father. But that is not what the original said. The original Greek of John is jarring in what it says. “The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known.” So here the Son is differentiated from the Father, but he is called God. He is the only unique, only begotten, God who has made known the Father.

As if that weren’t enough, turn over to the second to the last chapter of John, John 20:28. This is the appearance of the risen Lord to Thomas. It is the Christological climax of the Gospel of John. Jesus is introduced in the prologue to the Gospel of John as the Word, who was God in the beginning, who created the world, who took on flesh and came into human history. Now in this appearance to Thomas, Jesus appears to the disciples and Thomas says in John 20:28, “My Lord and my God!” The Greek here again is very interesting. It is *ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou* – “the Lord of me and the God of me” literally. “My Lord and my God!” So here you have both of these names of Christ brought together in this confession that Christ is both “the Lord” and “the God,” the climax to the Gospel of John, Christologically speaking.

Finally, turn over to 1 John, his epistle; 1 John 5:20. Look at the last part of that verse: “we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” The antecedent of the word “this” is “his Son, Jesus Christ,” who is “the true God and eternal life” in essence.

In all of these ways, John has a strong affirmation that Christ is God himself.

DISCUSSION

Question: You said earlier that Christ was the image of the invisible God and also it says here that he was in the form of God in Philippians 2. One common Jewish objection to this is from Deuteronomy 4:15-16 saying,

Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female . . .

and it goes on to others like the sun, moon, stars. The argument is therefore God can’t enter into his creation and can have no form even though Philippians says he has a form.

¹⁵ 9:59

Answer: It seems to me there that people are trying to mix apples and oranges. You are taking an ancient Hebrew text that is clearly talking about a physical form – that God doesn't have a physical form like the other polytheistic deities of the ancient Near East. Then you are shifting a thousand or more years later to a letter in Greek using the idea of a form which isn't talking about a physical form.¹⁶ In Greek thought, the idea of the form of something could be its essence or its nature. So it is not affirming here that Christ was in the form of God in the sense of some sort of physical shape. Obviously, Christ did have a physical body, but here it is talking about the preincarnate Christ. He was in the form of God and then took on human flesh. So the form here is not talking about some kind of physical form, such as is prohibited in these passages against idolatry in the Old Testament. It is saying that he had the very nature of God, and that is why it goes on to say he didn't count equality with God something to be grasped, but he emptied himself.

Question: You could say in the Old Testament, there are forms when God went past Moses, he said you'll see my back and similar things with Elijah and so forth.

Answer: Certainly you have these theophanies in the Old Testament, where people have visions of God in some kind of an anthropomorphic manifestation. But God himself doesn't have a form. Remember, when we looked at the attributes of God, one of his attributes is his incorporeality – God is spirit. So he has no physical form. That is why it is forbidden to make any kind of image in the Old Testament. But I think the important point to say is that you cannot impose one piece of literature upon another and assume they are using the same vocabulary with the same meaning. Paul is talking about form in quite different sense.

Question: Is that the same Greek word for form that Plato used?

Answer: I think it is *morphe* in the Greek, which would be different from the Platonic form which is *eidos*. But there are a number of words that could be used for “form” – *schema*, *morphe*, *eidos*. Remember, Plato is using classical Greek, whereas the Greek of the New Testament is a more vulgar Greek called Koine Greek. This was Philippians 2:5-7 – it is *morphe* – being in form of God, *en morphe theou hyparchon* – that is the word that is used there. It is not the word from classical Greek that Plato has.

Question: You haven't brought up Philippians 2:11. Is that also a good verse that shows Christ is God?

Answer: Verse 11 of chapter 2 of Philippians, “Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” That would be *kyrios* again, and remember we saw that that is the central confession of the New Testament church. Paul says, “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” and “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.” So that is another reflection of the centrality of this conviction that Jesus Christ is *kyrios*, is Lord. He is God. But it is not *theos*. I was just looking at those passages where it actually uses the word *theos* as an identification of Jesus Christ.

Question: There are some who claim that Christ never literally claimed to be God. We looked at passages in epistles and other writers, but is there a good verse in the Gospels where Christ is speaking claiming to be God?

¹⁶ 15:00

Answer: I don't think you are going to find Jesus going around saying things like, "I am God." I think that is naive – and precisely for the reasons that I have been talking about. He is not the Father. So what you find in Christ are claims whereby he put himself in the place of God. He receives worship, like Thomas' confession "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus says, "You believe me because you have seen me; blessed are those who have not seen and believe." He receives worship. He calls himself the Son of Man in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 7, of this divine-human figure to whom God the Father will give all authority and rule upon earth, and all nations and peoples will serve him. Jesus claims, "I am that Son of Man."¹⁷ And at his trial scene, he says, "I am the Son of Man and you will see him seated at the right hand of the Power" – that is to say, of God – "coming on the clouds of heaven in judgment." And they condemn him for blasphemy. These are the clearest indications where Jesus arrogates to himself the prerogatives of divinity. We will look more at this when we get to the section of the class on Christology – the doctrine of Christ. Here I was not focusing on Jesus' own self-concept, but rather what does the New Testament say about Jesus because our concern here is not so much Christology as it is the Trinity. We are doing Doctrine of God, and so we want to see that the New Testament writers affirm that Christ is a person who is distinct from the Father and yet he is God. We are not interested, at this time, in Jesus' self-understanding. That will come later in the class. But if I were to defend his self-understanding as God, it would be by pointing to these passages where he puts himself in the place of God by what he says and does. If you are interested in seeing more about that, take a look at either the chapter in *Reasonable Faith*, my book, on the self-understanding of Jesus or in the book *On Guard*, where it talks about Christ's radical personal claims which were considered blasphemous and which led to his crucifixion.

In summary, we have very good grounds for affirming the deity of Christ in the New Testament, and I haven't even talked about these other passages to which I just alluded where Christ functions as God. Forgiving sins, for example. Or receiving worship. Or the titles that he claims for himself, like the unique Son of God, or the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel. All of those could be brought in as well. The point is that the authors of the New Testament believed that this Jesus – this man who had walked among them, lived and died, was raised, and ascended to the right hand of the Father – was (in some very difficult way to express) God himself. He was not the Father; but he was God, equal with the Father.

DISCUSSION

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: The question he asked is in John 8:58: "Before Abraham was, I am." Is that a good proof text for the divinity of Christ? It may well be. This is a passage where Christ seems to affirm his eternal existence – "before Abraham was, I am." And he does so in the language of Exodus 3:15 where God speaks out of the burning bush to Moses and

says, “tell them that I AM has sent you to them” – the name of God. Then the reaction of the Jewish people to him – wanting to stone him for blasphemy – suggests that they took this to be an arrogation of divinity to himself – equating himself with God. So John 8:58 would be a relevant passage.

Question: I was going to say that in John 10:30, Jesus says, “I and the Father are one,” so he must have meant one essence. I am not sure how he would have expressed that in the Greek.

Answer: Right, that is debated as to whether or not he means that we are one in the sense of same nature, one in essence, or is this a less metaphysical statement expressing his unity with the Father in harmony of will and purpose, in ministry, and so forth. I think that is a less clear passage, but certainly one that could be brought in as corroborating evidence.

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: OK, John 14:9. This is where Philip says to him, “Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Some demand! “Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied,” is all Philip says. And Jesus says, “I have been with you so long, and you still don’t know me? He who has seen me has seen the Father.” That fits right in with this high Christology of John’s Gospel, doesn’t it? – that you see God in seeing Christ.¹⁸

¹⁸ Total Running Time: 25:33 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 4

The Holy Spirit

We have been talking about the doctrine of the Trinity, looking at the Scriptural data concerning the distinct personhood and the deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We saw that the New Testament teaches that the Father is a distinct person from the Spirit and the Son, and that the Father is God. Indeed, the word God, *ho theos* in the Greek, typically refers to the Father, when that word is used in the New Testament.

Then we looked at the person of the Son, and we saw that the Son is a distinct person from the Father. He prays to the Father. He is sent by the Father. And we saw, furthermore, that the Son is also referred to as deity. The New Testament writers were reluctant to call Jesus *ho theos*, “God,” because that referred to the Father. So, instead, they adopted the word for the personal name of God in the Old Testament, “Yahweh” (in the Greek, that is *kyrios*), and they called him *ho kyrios* or “the Lord.” So by using the name of God from the Old Testament and Old Testament proof texts to apply to Jesus, they affirmed the deity of Christ, at the same time preserving his distinctness from God the Father.

Last time we saw that, in certain cases, the New Testament authors do go the full nine yards, and they do come right out and call Jesus *ho theos* explicitly. We looked at a number of those references.

The Holy Spirit

Today we come to the person of the Holy Spirit. Again, we want to show how, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is referred to as a distinct person and also that he is God.

First, the Holy Spirit is a distinct person from the Father and the Son. Luke 11:13: Jesus says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Here the Holy Spirit is given by the Father.

John 14:26: Jesus says, “But the Counselor, 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 have said to you.” In this verse, you have all three of the members of the Trinity referred to: the Holy Spirit sent by the Father in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ.

Also look over at the next chapter, chapter 15, verse 26. John 15:26: “When the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.” Here again you see all three of the persons of the Trinity: the Spirit (or the Counselor) sent by the Father and bearing witness to Jesus Christ, the Son. It is interesting that the distinctness of the person of the Spirit is emphasized in this verse in that John actually violates Greek grammar by using the

masculine pronoun to refer to the Spirit, even though in Greek the word “spirit” is neuter – it is *to pneuma*; it is a neuter noun, and yet when he says in verse 26, “the Spirit of truth *who* proceeds from the Father,” “*who*” is a masculine pronoun instead of a neuter pronoun. So John will not call the Holy Spirit “it” – the Holy Spirit is not an “it;” the Holy Spirit is a person. He is a person who is distinct from the Father and the Son and is divine.¹⁹

Romans 8:26-27:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Here again the Holy Spirit is clearly not some sort of an impersonal force. He is a person who intercedes for the saints before God the Father, bringing our prayers to God the Father. And God the Father knows the mind of the Spirit, who is interceding for the saints to the Father according to his will. Here again the Spirit is described as a distinct person.

Matthew 28:19: This is the Great Commission, where all three of the persons of the Trinity are mentioned: “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.” So when baptism is to be performed, it is in the name of all three of the persons of the Godhead – in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14 also mentions all three members of the Trinity: “The grace of the Lord [*kyrios*] Jesus Christ and the love of God [that is to say the Father, *ho theos*] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Here all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned – the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, 1 Peter 1:1-2 refers to all three persons of the Trinity,

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood . . .

You see the role of each of the persons in the plan of salvation. We are chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and cleansing by his blood. So all three of the persons of the Trinity are mentioned here and are distinct persons.

This can be a source of some confusion. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come in his place and in his name. The Counselor would come in the stead of Christ and continue Jesus’ ministry. Look at some passages in the Gospel of John. John 14:26 and then in John 16:13-14:

John 14:26: “The Counselor, 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 have said to you.”

¹⁹ 4:57

There the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father in the name of the Son Jesus Christ. Now look over at 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. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.²⁰

There you see the subordination of the Holy Spirit to the person of Christ. He is not going to speak on his own authority; rather he will declare to us the things of Christ, and he will glorify the Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is sent in the name of Christ to glorify Christ and to teach us the things of Christ. As a result, the Holy Spirit becomes so closely identified with Christ in the New Testament that he is often referred to as the Spirit of Christ or sometimes simply as Christ himself.

Look at Romans 8:9-11 for a very interesting example of this phenomenon,

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the *Spirit of God* dwells in you. Any one who does not have the *Spirit of Christ* does not belong to him. But if *Christ* is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.

Do you notice the progression in this paragraph? It goes from speaking of the Spirit of God to the Spirit of Christ to simply Christ. The Holy Spirit standing in the place of Christ in continuing his ministry becomes so closely aligned with Christ that the indwelling Holy Spirit is simply referred to as Christ – “Christ in you.”

When we talk about people’s receiving Christ, technically what we really mean is receiving the Holy Spirit. It is when you receive the Holy Spirit that you are regenerated and born again. When we talk about receiving Christ, we should not overlook that this is primarily the person of the Holy Spirit that is doing the act of regeneration and then indwelling, so that we are empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit. Often we will say, “Christ lives in me” or “We have received Christ,” but technically it is really the person of the Holy Spirit, who is so closely aligned with and continues the ministry of Christ that he is simply referred to as “Christ.”

So the Holy Spirit is a distinct person from the Father and the Son. It goes without saying that the Holy Spirit is God as well. Let’s just look at a couple of passages.

Matthew 12:28: Jesus says, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Here the Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of God.

Acts 5:3-4 is a very interesting passage in this regard. This is the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it

²⁰ 10:00

not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

In verse 3, Peter says to Ananias, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit,” and then in verse 4 he says, “You have lied to God,” so, again, showing that the Holy Spirit is God himself.

Romans 8:9. We have already read that one: “You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

Finally, 1 Corinthians 6:11.²¹ He says, “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

So the Holy Spirit is a distinct person from the Father and the Son, sent to continue the ministry of the Son and to glorify him, and he is God himself.

DISCUSSION

Question: Is the word “Spirit” used consistently throughout that, and what is the word?

Answer: Yes, it is consistently used throughout those passages. It is an interesting word because we have some English derivatives from it. It is neuter, as I say, *to pneuma*. What word do we get from *pneuma*? Well, “pneumatic,” – like something that is pumped up with air, a pneumatic pump, for example. It comes from the word “spirit” in Greek. That is the word that is used to refer to the Holy Spirit.

Question: What would you say to somebody that says the data is a bit sparse on the Holy Spirit’s deity? We did go over four scriptures. Does that matter to you? Have you ever heard that?

Answer: No, I think that, really, quite honestly, it is just indisputable that the Holy Spirit is God. The real question, I think, would not be the deity of the Spirit – it would be his distinct personhood – because the Scripture just over and over again speaks of the Spirit of God. One could multiply passages about the Spirit of God. The question would be, is this really a distinct person, or is the Spirit of God a sort of metaphor for the working of God or the power of God or God’s energy or something of that sort? I think that would really be the only question. Are we talking here about a self-conscious mind? Some of the passages that I read indicate that the Spirit is spoken of in those terms. But I cannot see any grounds at all for thinking that the Holy Spirit is not God himself.

Question: If the Spirit really was just an emanation of Christ or God the Father, would Christianity change if there were just two deities?

Answer: OK, let’s be very careful! Christianity doesn’t teach that there are three deities! That is polytheism. Christianity teaches that there is one God, one deity, who is three persons. You are saying, would it change Christianity if there were only two persons in the Godhead, a sort of “binitarianism” rather than trinitarianism. I think it would certainly radically alter the way in which we, as Christians, relate to God because, as we will see when we get into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is in one sense the

²¹ 15:02

person of the Trinity who is most intimately related to us in the church age. The Son has ascended to the Father – he is not here in space and time anymore. The Holy Spirit is here in his place. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates us and who brings us into relationship with God. It is the Holy Spirit who indwells us. It is the Holy Spirit who fills us daily. He gifts the church with gifts of the Holy Spirit. He produces the fruit of the Spirit in a sanctified life. It is through the Spirit that we are gradually transformed into the image of Christ, made to be more and more like Christ. It is the witness of the Holy Spirit that gives us assurance of the truth of the Christian faith. So if there weren't any Holy Spirit, all of those duties would have to be taken over by the Father or the Son in some way. I am not saying that that is impossible, but it would certainly really change in a very practical way the way in which we relate to God. The Holy Spirit, I think, has rightly been called the forgotten member of the Trinity. We just sort of overlook him in favor of the Son and the Father, but honestly, for those of us in the church age – post-Pentecost – the Holy Spirit is in some ways the most intimately related person of the Trinity to us today because he dwells within us and fills us and gifts us and gives us assurance and all the rest. So this is a person of the Trinity that is not to be overlooked or neglected or downplayed.²²

Question: I noticed all the Scripture you quoted was from the New Testament. Do you have any Old Testament passages?

Answer: One could certainly quote from the Old Testament about the Spirit of God without difficulty. What you find in the Old Testament is that the Spirit of God would come upon people to perform a special task, and then he would be withdrawn. So the judges, for example – people like Samson and Gideon and others – would be called to a special task by God, and the Spirit of God would come upon them and temporarily empower them to carry out these mighty acts. But he was not the permanent possession of people in the Old Testament times, which may explain why even great saints like David would lapse so horribly into sin so frequently. They didn't have the Holy Spirit as a permanent possession. That is why I said for those of us in the church age, in the post-Pentecost period, we have the person of the Holy Spirit as our permanent and abiding possession, as he indwells us and produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and sanctifies us to become like Christ. But there are certainly references in the Old Testament to the Spirit. As for Christ, this is going to depend on how you interpret some of these Old Testament theophanies, where people had these visions of the Lord, particularly the angel of the Lord, this divine figure that seems to be distinct from the Lord but is nevertheless God. Some, including I think most of the church fathers, interpreted these theophanies to be, in fact, visions of Christ – the preincarnate Christ appearing to people. John, in fact, does say that when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up in the temple – do you remember that? When Isaiah says “Woe is me! I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips! For mine eyes have seen the Lord” – do you remember that vision of Isaiah?²³ John says it was Jesus that Isaiah saw – it was the preincarnate Christ that Isaiah had this vision of.²⁴

But, again, that is the New Testament reflecting back on the Old Testament and reading it

²² 20:03

²³ cf. Isaiah 6:1-5

²⁴ cf. John 12:41

in light of Christ. I think that our fundamental grounds for believing in the doctrine of the Trinity is the New Testament. It is because of the impact of Jesus on these Jewish men that they came to believe that God was not simply the Father, which is the dominant view in Old Testament Judaism, where God is the Father. They came to believe that Jesus, in some difficult to understand and to articulate way, is also God, though he is not the Father. And then the Holy Spirit, whom they experienced at Pentecost and in the church, also was God and yet was distinct from the Father and the Son. So we must not minimize the impact of what one might call the event of Christ upon the thinking of these Jewish people. It is due to the impact of Jesus that this radical alteration in Jewish theology took place in the Christian church – they began to see God as a plurality of persons. While this may be foreshadowed in the Old Testament, I think it is part of God’s progressive revelation that doesn’t become clear until you get to Christ.

Question: Speaking of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament, I think there are two different names – one is *Elohim* and the other is when the Holy Spirit would come upon...

Answer: *ruah* is the Hebrew name for Spirit. *Elohim* is really just another name for God, or gods.

Followup: And *ruah* is actually like breath also.

Answer: Yes, that is right. It can mean breath, just as *pneuma* can mean just breath or air; as when Jesus died, he gave up the “spirit;” or “Someone had no more breath in him,” we might say. It is the same word. And we might sometimes use the word “spirit” like that in English, though I think probably as a result of Christianity we associate the word “spirit” more with the idea of an immaterial being rather than just the air that you breathe. But you are right, in Hebrew and Greek, this word also could be just breath.

Followup: That is the same breath for Adam right?²⁵

Answer: As far as I know, yes. He breathed into Adam the breath of life.

Question: *kyrios* – is that *adonai* or Yahweh?

Answer: That is *adonai* in the Septuagint. When the Septuagint translates that, it translates it as *kyrios*.

Question: What is the history of the term “Holy Ghost?” We don’t hear that much anymore.

Answer: No, we don’t! I could not say exactly when English translators began to translate *pneuma* as “ghost” rather than “spirit.” Often, we will use the words “ghost” and “spirit” as synonyms, don’t we? – such as “He saw a spirit” or “He saw a ghost.” But when you connect it with the Holy Spirit, the word “Holy Ghost,” though very quaint and, in a certain way, sort of charming, makes it sound as if this is the ghost of Jesus, that Jesus died on the cross, and now his ghost inhabits the world and indwells Christians and so forth. I think it is probably really good that we have gotten away from the expression “the Holy Ghost.” Although I do like that quaint sort of Elizabethan English, that can be very misleading. I do not know where it first originates in English literature that he is called “Holy Ghost.”

²⁵ 25:01

Question: In Isaiah, you have him saying, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”²⁶ That is certainly evidence that a child will be God and man and they call his name Emmanuel. This is certainly indicating you are going to have that plurality.

Answer: I think that as Jesus appropriates these prophecies from Isaiah that refer to this, that you definitely do have affirmations of deity. I think that the Messiah in certain passages like that did seem to have these connotations, that it would be God himself who would be the Messiah.

Followup: I also think about Psalms – “The LORD says to my Lord.”²⁷

Answer: Yes, that is another one that Jesus quotes with reference to the Father.²⁸ These are all, I think, foreshadowings. They are capable of multiple interpretations. I think it is when you see them in retrospect, in light of the Christ event, that their meaning and application to Christ becomes clearest.

Question: There is one verse, Romans 8:26, you went through. The last half of that verse I wanted to get your insight. I have heard a lot of different ideas about that. “The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” What is your insight or how do you apply that to your life?

Answer: I do not think this is talking about speaking in tongues, if that is what you mean. He says it is too deep for words. What the Spirit is doing is interceding for us in a way that cannot be expressed in any kind of verbal language. So I do not think he is talking about that. The way I apply it is this way. I am troubled sometimes when I pray because the Scripture says that if you ask anything according to his will, then we know that we have the requests made of him. It says that in 1 John 5:15. We want to pray in accordance with God’s will. But the difficulty is, we don’t know what God’s will is, except in a sort of general sense – our sanctification, for example, or that someone would come to Christ. But we do not know that it is God’s will that I should get this particular position or that I should marry this particular person or that I should undertake this particular speaking event. So how can you pray according to God’s will and have confidence that you are going to receive the request when you don’t know what his will is? This verse really helps me because he says the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Why? Because, he says, we do not know how to pray as we ought. That is exactly the problem that I so often face! I do not know what to pray for. But, he says, the Spirit intercedes for us, and he who searches the hearts of men knows what is in the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.²⁹ What a wonderful promise that is! We don’t know how to pray, we don’t know what God’s will is, but the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, and he translates our prayers, as it were, into requests according to the will of God. He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. So I think that is a tremendous encouragement and comfort to pray – that we are not going to be in the situation like the person who gets the magic lamp with the genie in it and you ask the

²⁶ cf. Isaiah 9:6

²⁷ cf. Psalms 110:1

²⁸ cf. Luke 20:41-44

²⁹ 30:01

genie for something and he gives you literally what you want, but it turns out to be something totally different than you expected, and it is counterproductive, and so forth. That is not the way prayer works. Rather we pray with our limited insight, and then we trust the Spirit of God to intercede before the Father, asking for us what we need according to his will. So I would say this verse counsels us to pray in confidence, to pray without fear, and to trust the Holy Spirit to intercede for us before God.

Followup: I have always only heard the speaking of tongues reference. I have never heard people who don't think that is what it is really expound on it. This is the Spirit of God that is already in us, and he is communicating with the Father on our behalf, correct? Where is the interceding taking place? Is it in our own selves or is it a spiritual realm thing?

Answer: The verse doesn't say. I do not think that you need to think of it as a spatial location because God isn't in space. Therefore, I do not think we need to conceive of it in any kind of a spatial way. It is simply that the Holy Spirit is so much more intimately related to the Father than we are. It says that the Father knows the mind of the Spirit, so it is kind of like mind reading. I think of it more like telepathy, frankly. It is as if there is a telepathic connection between the Father and the Spirit that I don't have. The Spirit takes my prayers and communicates them according to his will.

Let me wrap up our lesson by saying in summary: it was clear to the writers of the New Testament that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all distinct persons. Yet it was equally clear to them that they were all God. The difficulty that these authors faced was: how do you express this? The situation was complicated by the fact that they didn't even have the requisite vocabulary to express these ideas. The concept of a person did not even exist at that time. The modern concept of a person, what it means to be a person, actually sprang out of the trinitarian debates among the Church Fathers in the early centuries of the Christian church.

Tertullian, who lived from AD 150 – AD 225, a North African Church Father, coined the term *persona* to express the idea that there were three persons that were God, and he used the term *trinitas* for the first time to describe who God is. God is a trinity. A trinity of what? He is a trinity of persons. This came, then, to be expressed as the idea of three persons in one nature. That is an articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, that there are three persons who are the one God.

What we will do next time is begin to look at these debates that raged in the early church among the Church Fathers as they sought to hammer out the doctrine of the Trinity, to take this raw data of Scripture and formulate it into a clear creedal affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity.³⁰

³⁰ Total Running Time: 34:59 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 5

Historical Survey of the Doctrine

Systematic Summary

We have been looking at the biblical material for the doctrine of the Trinity. I am so glad that we took the time to survey the New Testament Scriptural data for the deity and the distinct personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Those of you who watched the debate with the two South African theologians Spangenberg and Wolmorans³¹ will remember how they attacked the doctrine of the Trinity as an imposition from the fourth century church upon primitive Christianity and having no basis in the original teachings of Jesus or the apostles. It is having this solid biblical background that enables you to see just the spuriousness of that sort of claim on the part of these theologians.

Historical Survey of the Doctrine

The Difficulty of Expression

The doctrine of the Trinity, as we know it today, as it was formulated by the ecumenical councils, is a result of a systematic reflection upon the data of Scripture and trying to formulate the data of Scripture into a coherent doctrine of God. The difficulty that the church faced was, how do you say that there is only one God and yet there are three persons, each of whom is God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? How can you avoid saying, on the one hand, there are three Gods, which you don't want to say (that denies monotheism) or saying, on the other hand, that there is only one God and that these three persons are just different facets of the same person, which would not be right either? How do you affirm both the deity of each of the persons and their distinctness? That is what we are going to look at this morning.

Logos Christology

The roots of the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity that was eventually promulgated at Nicaea comes out of the “Logos Christology” of the early Greek apologists. Who were these men? These were second century Christians. They lived in the century right after Christ, beginning about AD 100 and following. They included people like Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus, Athenagoras. These were early Christian writers who wrote in defense of the Christian faith in an overwhelmingly pagan Roman culture. These men helped to lay the ground work for the doctrine of the Trinity that was eventually promulgated at the Council of Nicaea.

This is called a Logos Christology because it takes its inspiration, on the one hand, from

³¹ For William Lane Craig's brief description of this debate, see his website article found at: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8203>

the prologue to the Gospel of John, where, you remember, John says “In the beginning was the Logos,” that is to say, the “Word” or “Reason.” *Logos* is the Greek word for “word” or “reason.” “In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God.” And then John describes how he became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ. So, on the one hand, there was this doctrine of Christ as the Logos of God coming out of the prologue of the Gospel of John.

But, significantly, this also connected with the work of a Jewish philosopher named Philo of Alexandria in Egypt. If you ever doubt the influence of philosophy upon the formulation of classic Christian doctrines, this is a case in point that you can look to. Philo, who lived from about 25 BC to AD 40, was a Jewish philosopher who was an advocate of what is called Middle Platonism. That is to say, he was a follower of Plato, as Plato’s thought had evolved by the time of the first century.

In Middle Platonism, and particularly in the writings of Philo, the Logos (same word) is described as the reason or the mind of God. For Philo, the Logos, or God’s mind, is the creative principle behind the world.³² It serves as a sort of model for the world on which God creates the world – this sort of rational blueprint for the created physical world. Philo talks about the “*kosmos noetos*” or the rational or intelligible world that exists in the mind of God and serves as a pattern for the physical world that God then makes. This realm of the intelligible world, the ideas of God, are lodged in God’s Logos, or mind or reason. Philo would sometimes refer to the Logos as the Son of God or as God himself.

These Greek apologists, schooled as they were in Greek philosophy, connected Philo’s doctrine of the Logos with the doctrine of the Logos found in the prologue of the Gospel of John. They held that the Logos, prior to the creation of the world, existed immanently in God’s mind, that is to say, internal to God’s mind. It wasn’t as though the Logos was exterior to God; the Logos was the mind of God. It was his immanent reason or word. Before the creation of the world, this mind or Logos of God proceeded out of God – it went forth from God, and by the Logos then God created the world.

Let me read to you a passage from Athenagoras in his essay *A Plea for the Christians*. This is chapter 10 of his treatise *A Plea for the Christians*. This is what Athenagoras says:

The Son of God is the Word of the Father (that is, the “Logos” of the Father) in Ideal Form and energizing power; for in his likeness and through him all things came into existence, which presupposes that the Father and the Son are one. Now since the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son by a powerful unity of Spirit, the Son of God is the mind and reason of the Father . . . He is the first begotten of the Father. The term is used not because he came into existence (for God, who is eternal mind, had in himself his word or reason from the beginning, since he was eternally rational) [*so he is called “begotten” not because he came into existence, God has always had his mind, his reason; rather Athenagoras says*] but because he came forth to serve as Ideal Form and Energizing Power for everything material. . . . The . . . Holy Spirit . . . we regard as an effluence of God which flows forth from him and returns like a ray of the sun.

So the Holy Spirit is like the sunshine, the rays of the sun, that proceed out of the sun.

³² 5:02

They are not the same as the sun, but they are something that proceeds out of the sun.

On this Logos Christology, the Logos is begotten by the Father in the sense that the mind of God proceeds forth as a distinct individual, and it is through the Logos then that the world is created.

This Logos doctrine of these early apologists then was taken up into Western theology by the Church Father Irenaeus and then became very influential.

DISCUSSION

Question: The resultant physical world that had defect – was there an explanation to that? Did they draw on Genesis? I know what the Gnostics said, but what did these guys say?

Answer: That is a good point. They would certainly be in opposition to the Gnostic idea that this procession of the Logos and the creation of the world represented a kind of falling away from perfection or a sort of downward stair step away from perfection to the evil material world. They would attribute evil to creaturely free will, whether on the part of angels or on the part of human persons and not in any way would this represent a departure from perfection.³³ The Logos is God himself and therefore fully perfect and the world that he has made is in itself good, though it becomes marred by sin.

Question: How familiar are you with the Aramaic targums?

Answer: Not all that familiar! I know of them, but I haven't read much in them.

Followup: They have the “memra,” which is also the “word,” and for a lot of God's actions, like God's raining sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah, it is the Word of God raining sulfur. And the Word of God did this and the Word of God did that. So it seems perhaps Philo might have drawn from these traditions?

Answer: That is absolutely right! When you look at Philo, he is primarily – I think Philo scholars agree – he is primarily an exegete of the Jewish Scriptures. What he wants to do is to put Jewish thought into Greek categories to make it intelligible to his contemporaries. So the idea of God's Word in the Old Testament is extremely important for Philo and would probably be a source of his Logos doctrine. But I think that when you get to John and his Logos doctrine, there is more going on there than just the Old Testament Word of the Lord. The very fact that he is using the word “Logos,” I think, connects this with Greek philosophy. You have a confluence here, I think – you are quite right –, of Jewish thinking about the Word of God, the Word of the Lord, and then this Platonic doctrine of the mind of God, the reason of God. These come together in Philo and then, I think, influenced the Greek apologists.

Question: When John uses “Logos” and connects with the Greek philosophy, you've well explained what he is connecting with. But what is he not saying? What is different in the Christian doctrine from Platonic?

Answer: Here is one thing that would be different: the idea of the Logos in Stoic philosophy in Greek thought. In Stoicism, the Logos was a kind of immanent principle in

³³ 9:58

the world. It is the rational structure of the world that exists in things. For John, the Logos is clearly not some sort of immanent principle in the world that gives it rational structure. Rather, the Logos is God himself – he transcends the world, and he creates the world, and the world therefore has its rational structure because it is a reflection of the Logos himself. So that would be one way in which it would be distinct. And I think we would say, too, that John’s notion of the incarnation is just utterly unparalleled in Greek thought. Even in Philo – the idea that the Logos could take on flesh and become a human being is just without parallel. So the historization, if you will, of the Logos – that he dwelt among us, as John says – that is extraordinary.

Question: John was a fisherman. Was he schooled in any of this? Or was this common knowledge? Or is it just divine inspiration?

Answer: I don’t think it is just divine inspiration because it does connect with the Middle Platonism of his day. Scholars think that it isn’t demonstrated that John himself knew Philo’s work. Some have suggested that maybe John read Philo. They were contemporaries. But I think, for the most part, scholars would say that while it cannot be proven that John knew Philo’s work, nevertheless John breathes the same atmosphere as Philo in what is written in the prologue, this atmosphere of Middle Platonism – of the Logos as the mind of God. Whether or not a Galilean fisherman could have written this is going to depend on a number of things. First, did a Galilean fisherman write the Gospel of John? I mean, one could say that maybe John is not written by John, the son of Zebedee. There are scholars who think it might have been somebody else. Or maybe John, the son of Zebedee, appropriated this prologue and attached it to his Gospel. Or maybe, as a young man, John grew up and became much more educated and sophisticated. He left fishing and went into theology and church work, and the doctrine that you have in the Gospel of John is a very, very high Christology of Christ as Lord and God. I think that that is the sort of thing where we are just too ignorant to be able to answer the “how” question.³⁴

Modalism

Let me go ahead then to the next school of thought that we want to talk about, which is Modalism. Modalism followed the Logos Christology of the second century. This represents a third century development, that is to say, during the AD 200s. Modalism was a heresy that was propagated by certain theologians such as Noetus, Sabellius, and Praxeus, and others. Sometimes, Modalism is called Monarchianism because it holds there is one God who is this sort of monarch over all. Or sometimes it is called Sabellianism, named after Sabellius, the heretic who held to it. This view was opposed by Church Fathers like Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, and Novatian. Those were some of the principal protagonists in this debate.

What is Modalism? Modalism is a unitarian view of God. It is a view that there is only one person who is God. The Father is the one who became incarnate. There is no distinct person from the Father. There just is one Father. It was really the Father who became incarnate as Jesus Christ.

³⁴ 14:56

Sometimes Modalism holds that the persons that we speak of as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are just different roles played by this one person who is God. For example, I am a father, I am a husband, and I am a son. But I am just one person. Those are just three different relationships that I stand in. Or I might play three different roles – I might be a philosopher, a theologian, and a debater. Those are different roles that I play as one person. But there aren't three persons. Similarly, there is just one person who is God and he portrays, or plays, these three roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So you can see that, on Modalism, the deity of Christ is affirmed. The idea that Christ's deity is in any way denied is quite false. Modalism had a very high view of Christ. But it just didn't distinguish the persons of the Trinity. It didn't deny the deity of the Son and the Spirit, but it just denied that they were distinct persons.

Tertullian, in his essay *Against Praxeas* (which is an excellent, excellent treatise – if you'd like to read one of these early writings, *Against Praxeas* by Tertullian is highly recommended!), he says the error of the Modalists is their “thinking that one cannot believe in one only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the very selfsame person.” He says, “while they are all of one, by unity,” that is of substance, he says, “the mystery of the economy... distributes the unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit . . . yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as he is one God.”

Tertullian gives us the vocabulary of the Trinity. He says that the economy of God distributes the unity of God into these three persons, and that is what you have distinct in God – three distinct persons in one substance, in one being.

It will often be said by contemporary theologians that when Tertullian affirmed that God is three persons he did not mean this in the modern psychological sense of “person,” that is to say, a self-conscious individual, a center of self-consciousness. Rather, Tertullian meant “person” just in the sense of three individuals; that is to say, three subjects of predication, three individual things which you could predicate properties of, but not self-conscious persons in the psychological sense. But if you read Tertullian's work, it seems that that is simply incorrect. When you read Tertullian, he did think of the persons as centers of self-consciousness and therefore persons in a modern psychological sense.³⁵ For example, when he proves the personal distinction between the Father and the Son, Tertullian appeals to Scripture passages that use first and second person pronouns like “I” and “you.” He quotes numerous passages in which the persons of the Trinity are distinguished by the personal pronouns that they use, so that you have the person standing in a sort of “I-thou” relationship. The Father stands to the Son in a relationship of an “I” and a “thou.” So he will quote, for example, Psalm 2:7, which says, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee,” and Tertullian says to the Modalist, “If you want me to believe him to be both the Father and the Son, show me some other passage where it is declared, ‘The Lord said unto himself, I am my own Son, today I have begotten myself.’” And, of course, no such passage exists. He will challenge the Modalist to explain how a being who is absolutely one and singular can use first person pronouns, especially plural pronouns like “Let us make man in our image.” Tertullian clearly thinks of the persons of

³⁵ 19:59

the Trinity as being able to employ first person and second person pronouns like “I” and “you” in relationship with each other, and therefore they are persons – self-conscious individuals. So he says “in these few quotations the distinction of persons in the Trinity is clearly set forth.”

So it seems to me that Tertullian is not just talking about individuals as subjects of predication, but he is talking about persons in the modern psychological sense of three centers of self-consciousness in God.³⁶

³⁶ Total Running Time: 22:25 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 6

Arianism and the Council of Nicaea

We have been talking about attempts on the part of the early Church Fathers to formulate a doctrine of the Trinity.

We saw the roots of this doctrine lay in the Logos Christology of the early Greek apologists of the second century, who thought of the Logos, described in John 1, as the mind of the Father – the mind of God – which then proceeded out of God as a distinct individual, through whom then the world was created.

During the third century, a heresy arose which is called “Modalism” or “Sabellianism” or “Monarchianism.” According to this heresy, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all divine, but they are not distinct persons. It is really a form of Unitarianism – there is one person who is God, but this one person plays three different roles or is expressed toward us with three different faces, as it were, and we call them the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But really there is only one person that God is.

We saw that early Church Fathers like Tertullian spoke strongly against this view and appealed to Scriptural passages where the persons of the Trinity use first person personal pronouns (“I”) and second person personal pronouns (“you”) in addressing each other. So they stand in an “I-thou” relationship, which necessitates there being distinct persons. As Tertullian says, nowhere does the Scripture say, “I am my only beloved Son; today I have begotten myself.” The Scripture says, “Thou art my beloved Son; today I have begotten you.”³⁷

DISCUSSION

Question: Sabellianism died out pretty quickly because it was so radically different than the Christianity of the day; but it is, or has in the early twentieth century, kind of reappeared with the Jesus Only Pentecostalism. But I would like to ask: when a teacher or a preacher uses the analogy of water, steam, and ice to explain the Trinity, is that not a form of Modalism?

Answer: It does seem to be Modalism because what the person is saying is that this one substance can take three different forms. It can be a solid as ice, or it can be a liquid as water, or it can be a gas as steam. It seems to me that that is Modalism on the face of it. I have been told by chemists, however, that there is something called “the triple point” where there is a temperature/pressure point at which the substance H₂O can be solid, gas and liquid. However, I haven’t looked into this – it sounds phony to me because I suspect that what that means is it can be *either* gas, liquid, or ice at that point; but it would seem to me to be a self-contradiction to say it is all three simultaneously; that it is both solid,

³⁷ cf. Hebrews 1:5, 5:5; Acts 13:33; Psalms 2:7

gas, and liquid at the triple point. But I have not looked into this further. That would be an attempt to avoid the charge that this analogy is Modalistic.

Comment: The triple point is when they exist in equal amounts in each one. When you have liquid water, there is still steam and water vapor in the air so both exist at the same time. There is just more liquid than there is gas. The triple point is when you have any amount of water in the system with equal amount as solid, equal amount as liquid, equal amount as gas. That is the difference.³⁸

Answer: In which case, I am not sure that is a good analogy, then, for the Trinity!

Question: It is not all three at the same time; that would be a contradiction. Are you later going to draw the distinction between Modalism and anti-social and non-social Trinitarianism?

Answer: I will get into Latin and Social Trinitarianism a little bit later on. So hang on to that!

Question: I am having trouble understanding. I understand three centers of consciousness and how that can delineate them as individuals. What I am not understanding is what makes them whole.³⁹

Answer: Right – that is the problem! That is a really, really good question. I will address that later on when we get to our own attempt to provide a model of the Trinity. Right now, our interest is purely historical at first, to see what the early Church Fathers said about this. Then we will try to address that.

But you see what this person is asking? If you've got three persons – if they are one – then one what? How can you not have three things – three different beings – if you have three persons? It is a really difficult question. What the Church Fathers wanted to say is that there is one substance which is expressed in three persons. But trying to understand that is difficult. We will address that later on when we get beyond the mere historical background.

Question: That is why I like the three phases of water, because the thing we are trying to say is – if I have a glass of ice water, I have a system. They are all three present at the same time in different forms – I have vapor over the top, I have ice and I have water. So I have one substance but I have three forms or expressions of that substance. That is my comment, but my question is – can you contrast Modalism and Adoptionism?

Answer: Adoptionism is a more Christological theory, or view, rather than a view about the Trinity. What it said was that – certain early church thinkers, like Paul of Samosata, said that Jesus was just a human being whom God adopted to be his Son and therefore he was not eternally God. You still have a unitarian view of God, but God adopts this man Jesus and makes him his Son. Some Adoptionists might even say that Jesus was deified and that he somehow became God in virtue of being adopted. That is a heresy that isn't so much a Trinitarian heresy (which is what we are looking at) but a Christological heresy about the Doctrine of Christ. We will talk about that when we talk about the

³⁸ This isn't exactly correct. The true definition of "triple point" is "the temperature and pressure at which three phases (gas, liquid, and solid) of a substance coexist in thermodynamic equilibrium"

³⁹ 5:08

Doctrine of Christ.

Question: Don't all analogies fail? I don't know if I ever heard one that doesn't.

Answer: I am not a big fan of analogies. I don't see any reason to think that there has to be an analogy for God – for the Trinity. Why should there be anything in the created world that should reflect the nature of God in this way? I think what we want to do is craft a doctrine that is comprehensible and that makes sense. But there is no reason to think there has to be an analogy for it. If we can find one, great! All the better! But I do not think that should be the focus of our attention. If God is unique – well, so much the better!

Followup: Define God, and give two examples – that sort of thing!

Answer: Yeah! “Define God, and give two examples!” he says. [*laughter*]

Arianism

Let's move on, then, to Arianism, which was a heresy that arose in the fourth century – that is to say, the early 300s. Arius was a presbyter of the Church in Alexandria in Egypt. He was opposed by his bishop who was Athanasius, one of the greatest of the Church Fathers in Alexandria who became a champion of orthodox Trinitarian theology.

In the year 319, Arius began to propagate the doctrine that the Son is not the same substance as the Father. Rather, the Son was created by the Father before the beginning of the world. So before God created the world, he created the Son, Christ. Therefore, Christ had a beginning and was not of the substance, or nature, of the Father. He was different – he was a created thing.

The reason that most theologians, like Athanasius, found Arius' doctrine to be abhorrent was not, as Arius himself fancied, because he affirmed that the Son had a beginning. After all, some of the Logos theologians (these early Greek apologists) also thought that the Logos had a beginning.⁴⁰ They thought that the Logos existed in God as the mind of God. He was immanent in the mind of God. Then he came forth and was begotten by the Father and then created the world. So even within orthodox circles, there was the idea that the Son might not be eternal as a distinct person but was begotten at a certain point of time. Arius thought, “Well, I am not saying anything different than these early apologists in saying that there was a time when the Son didn't exist.”

But he missed the point. As Athanasius said, what was really objectionable about Arius' doctrine was not that the Son had a beginning, whereas God is without a beginning. Rather, it was that Arius denied that the Logos existed even immanently in the mind of God prior to creation, so that the Logos was, in fact, a *work* of God. He was a *creature* that God *made*. He wasn't begotten from the Father; he wasn't of the substance of the Father; he was a work and therefore a creature – he was part of creation. That was what was objectionable. So Athanasius wrote that, on Arius' view, the Son is “a creature and a work, not proper to the Father's essence.” That's from his *Orations against the Arians* [1.3.9].

⁴⁰ 10:04

One of the key terms in this early debate was the Greek term *homoousios*, which expressed the sameness of substance of the Son with the Father. *Homo* means “same” as in “homogenized milk” (it is all the same, the cream isn’t separated from the milk). *Homo* means “same” as in “homosexual” – same sex. *Ousios* comes from the Greek word *ousia* which means “substance.” So, to say that the Son and the Father are *homoousios* is to say they are the same substance. That is to say, they are the same nature, the same essence, or the same thing, the same being.

The doctrine of Arius, by contrast, was *heteroousios*. *Hetero* means “different” as in “heterosexual” – different sexes. So, to say that the Son and the Father were *heteroousios* meant that they had a different substance. They were not the same substance or essence. The Son was, in fact, a creation or a work that the Father had made and was therefore distinct from his nature.

DISCUSSION

Question: I thought that the word the Arians used was *homoiousios* which meant “of a similar” substance – not necessarily different but similar. Is that correct?

Answer: Not exactly! The semi-Arians – those who were trying to find some sort of accommodation between these – proposed the word *homoiousios*, which I might as well talk about right now, since it has been brought up.

Homoiousios meant “similar in substance.” So the Father and the Son had a similar nature, similar substance, but it wasn’t the same. The whole difference in this controversy therefore lay in this single Greek letter “iota.” So when people say things like “I don’t give an iota about that!”, what that is referring to is this early Trinitarian controversy, where the whole difference between heresy and orthodoxy hung on this single iota – whether you thought that the Son was merely similar to the Father in substance or you thought he was the same substance. Because if he is the same, you affirmed the deity of Christ; if you say he is only similar, you have denied the deity of Christ.

Those are some of the key terms that were used in this debate.

DISCUSSION

Question: According to this heresy, was Jesus created before or after Genesis 1:1?

Answer: It would be before the beginning. Before the beginning of the world, he created Christ.

Followup: Wouldn’t that technically be before time began? So, wouldn’t Jesus have been created in some infinite, eternal time frame?

Answer: The Arian watchword was – “there was a time when he was not” or “there was once when he was not.”⁴¹ I doubt that they reflected very deeply upon whether or not that

⁴¹ 15:02

necessitated a beginning of time. But the idea was that Christ, the second person – well, excuse me, he would *not* be the second person – the Son is not co-eternal with the Father but had a beginning at some time.

Question: Did the Arians believe that the Son was worthy of the same worship as the Father?

Answer: I don't see how they could hold to that because he's not God. You can honor him, but you couldn't worship him, otherwise you would be worshipping a creature.

Council of Nicaea

In the year 325, the Emperor Constantine, who was the first Christian emperor and who proclaimed an edict of toleration for Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, convened an ecumenical council of the church at Nicaea in modern day Turkey. This was the first such council where representatives from the universal church all around the Roman Empire came to Nicaea to deal with this issue, which was threatening to tear the church apart.

At this council in Nicaea, there were basically four parties that were represented there. On the one hand, there were the Athanasians, the partisans of Athanasius, who had the strong view that God the Father and Christ were of the same substance. On the other hand, there were about six bishops who were Arians, six of them who sided with Arius. There were probably around 70 to 90 bishops who were semi-Arians, who held to the *homoiousios* view. Then there was this big center party of about 200 bishops who were basically just confused and didn't know what to think about this. In the debates at the council, the Athanasians prevailed and the Council of Nicaea promulgated the Nicene Creed, which affirms the full deity and distinctness of the Son.

Let me read to you from the statement that the Council issued:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ [*so you see there? "God the Father," "the Lord Jesus Christ" – right out of the New Testament, the titles that they give to the persons*], the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father [*homoousios*], through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

So you have the three persons of the Trinity: God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Then the Council appended these anathemas, or condemnations, against the Arians:

But for those who say 'there was when he was not' and 'before being born he was

not' and that 'he came into existence out of nothing' or who assert 'the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change' – these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

There are several features of this remarkable statement that I think are worthy of comment.⁴²

First of all, the Son (and, by implication as well, the Holy Spirit) are declared to be of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the Father. Not *homoiousios*, as the semi-Arians claimed, but he is the substance of the Father. Therefore, the Son is declared to be begotten, not made. This is very significant. When things are begotten, the offspring have the nature of their parents – kittens are born of cats, dogs are begotten by dogs, cows beget cows. But if something is made, it is of a quite different nature than the artisan who made it. Michelangelo can make a statue, or someone can make a wood cabinet or make an automobile. That is different than their nature. In saying that the Son is begotten, not made, it is expressing that he is of the same nature as the Father – begotten from the Father.

Notice also especially that this affirmation is made with respect to Christ's *divine* nature, not his *human* nature. I think we tend to think that Christ is begotten by God in his human nature and that he had a virginal conception in Mary's womb and was begotten miraculously by the Holy Spirit. But what the Council is affirming here is that Christ is begotten in his divine nature, not his human nature. This represents the vestige, or the influence of, the old Logos Christology, which saw the Logos as something proceeding out of the Father and becoming a distinct person. That is preserved in the Nicene Creed in this language of the begetting of the Son from the Father. But notice that, as the anathemas that are appended to the Creed made very clear, this is an eternal begetting. This is not a begetting that took place at a point in time just prior to creation. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father. There was never a time when he was not, the condemnations say. So the analogy here is like the rays of the sun that proceed from the sun. As long as the sun exists, the rays of the sun proceed from it. If the sun has existed from eternity past, the sunshine, the rays, will exist from eternity past. They do not begin to exist at some later time. The idea here is that the Son is eternally begotten from the Father and therefore never had a beginning.

Next time, I want to talk about the condemnation of those who say that Christ is a different *hypostasis* or *ousia* or substance from the Father because this became a matter of tremendous controversy and confusion in the early Church. Eventually, it led to the Creed being changed and revised so as to affirm that although there is one substance in the Trinity, there are actually three *hypostases*, or three individuals or persons. The word is being used here in a quite different way that occasioned a great deal of controversy and confusion.⁴³

⁴² 20:04

⁴³ Total Running Time: 23:47 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 7

Coherence of the Doctrine

We have been talking in our lesson about the doctrine of the Trinity, and we came last time to the Council of Nicaea, which was convened in the year AD 325 to settle the controversy that had arisen over the doctrine propagated by an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius, who held that Christ is not the same essence, or substance, as the Father. Christ was in fact the first of God's created works; God is a single person (the Father), and the Son is a product whom the Father has made. This view was condemned at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, and the Nicene Creed was promulgated.

Let's, for sake of review, read again the Nicene Creed. The Creed states:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

Then these anathemas, or condemnations, are appended to the Creed:

But for those who say 'there was when he was not' and 'before being born he was not' and that 'he came into existence out of nothing' or who assert 'the Son of God is from a different *hypostasis* or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change' – these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

We pointed out that this Creed has several notable features in it that deserve comment.

First of all, it says that the Son is of the same substance with the Father. That is to say, the Son is fully and unequivocally divine. This is evidenced also in the fact that the Father is said to be the Maker of all things and Jesus Christ is said, in the second article of the Creed, to be begotten, not made. So if God the Father is the Maker of all things, and Christ is not made, then he must be divine. He is not one of the things the Father has made; instead he is begotten from the Father. We saw that this is the vestige of the old Logos Christology of the early Greek apologists, who thought of the Son as somehow immanent, or in, the mind of the Father and who then proceeded out of the Father – came forth from the Father. Similarly, here in the Creed, it says that the Son of God is begotten from the Father and therefore of the same nature as the Father. Just as kittens are begotten by cats, dogs by dogs, cows by cows, so the Son, being begotten by the Father, shares the

same nature as the Father. He is not something that was made; he is someone who is begotten from eternity without beginning.

Then we closed last time by noting that the Creed says that anyone who says that the Son is a different *hypostasis*, or *ousia*, from the Father is anathematized. This caused a great deal of controversy in the early church and a great deal of confusion. Why? The Roman empire at that time was divided linguistically into the West and the East.⁴⁴ In the West, centered in Rome, the theologians spoke Latin. In the East, and in Alexandria, they spoke Greek. As a result, these words had different meanings for the Latin and the Greek church fathers.

Although the Nicene Creed is written in Greek – it is promulgated in Greek – the meaning of the word here is the Latin understanding, ironically. What does that mean? In Latin, the word for “substance” is *substantia*. It is simply the etymological equivalent of *hypostasis*. In Greek, *hypo* means “under” (as in a “hypodermic needle” or “hypothermia”) – it means when something goes low or goes under. *Stasis*, as you can imagine, is related to the word “to stand.” So *hypostasis* is something that stands under the properties that it has. It basically is a property bearer. A *hypostasis* is an individual thing that bears properties – it is the thing that stands under its properties. It bears the properties it has. In Latin, “sub” means “under” (like “submarine”). And *stantia* is the same root for “to stand.” So *substantia* means “to stand under something.” The substance is the thing that exists and bears the properties. It has the properties. So, in Latin, *hypostasis* and *substantia* are really the same thing – they are just the Greek word and the Latin word for the idea of an individual property bearer, an individual thing. That is why, in the Creed, it says anybody who says that the Son of God is a different *hypostasis*, or substance (and that word in the Greek is *ousia*), from the Father is condemned. He is a heretic.

The trouble is that, for Eastern theologians who spoke Greek, *hypostasis* and *ousia* were *not* synonyms. Their word for “substance” was *ousia*. That is what substance is in Greek – *ousia*. *Hypostasis*, for the Greek theologian, wasn’t the same thing as a substance. Therefore, it was very disquieting and confusing for them to read in the Creed that if you say that the Son of God is a different *hypostasis* or substance you are condemned. This was very confusing.

Gregory of Nyssa was one of the prominent Greek fathers who wrote on this subject. In his 38th epistle, he explains the Greek understanding of what a *hypostasis* is. He says “a *hypostasis* is what subsists and is especially and peculiarly indicated by a name.” For example, “Paul.” So a *hypostasis* would be an individual like Paul, or John, or Peter. Those would be individuals that could be named. That would be a *hypostasis*. But he says, “*ousia* refers to the universal nature common to things of a certain type.” For example, man. So, according to Gregory, *ousia* refers to the essence, or the nature, that is shared by all men, for example. Peter, John, and Paul would be different *hypostases*⁴⁵, different individual men, but they would all have the same *ousia*, they would all have the same essence, namely, humanity. So everyone in this room has the same essence, a human nature. You have humanity as your nature. But that doesn’t mean everybody in the

⁴⁴ 5:04

⁴⁵ “*hypostases*” is the plural form of “*hypostasis*”

room is the same *hypostasis*. Rather, there are individual men and women here who have this universal human nature.⁴⁶

For the Greek fathers, the Father and the Son are clearly distinct *hypostases* – they are different individuals. They are not the same. How do you know that? Because they have different properties. For example, only the Son has the property of being begotten. The Father is unbegotten. The Son is begotten. So they are clearly not the same individual. They have different properties. The Son has the property – bears the property – of being begotten; the Father bears the property of being unbegotten. Therefore, these are two *hypostases* even though they have the same essence, or the same substance.

Therefore, when the Nicene Creed denies that the Father and the Son are different *hypostases* – when it says the Father and the Son are the same *hypostasis* or *ousia* – that sounded like modalism to the Greek church fathers. That would be modalism – it would be to say that there is only one individual who is God and who bears all these properties, and it just *appears* to us as though they are distinct as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. But really there is only one individual there. So the Greek church fathers were greatly confused and disturbed by this condemnation appended to the Nicene Creed that says anyone who asserts that “the Son of God is from a different *hypostasis* or substance” is anathematized. The Greek fathers wanted to say, “Yes, they are the same substance, but they are not the same *hypostasis*; they are different.” I think you can see the confusion that arose because of the language differences between the Latin and the Greek speakers.

After decades of intense debate, this was finally cleared up at the Council of Alexandria in the year 362. What the Council of Alexandria did was adopt the Greek reading that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit have the same *ousia*, but there are three *hypostases* in the Trinity. *Hypostasis* became equated with the idea of a person or an individual. So the classic doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one substance, one essence, one nature, which is God, but there are three *hypostases*, three persons, three individuals who are the same being and have the same essence.

DISCUSSION

Question: In terms of talking about Christ being different from God – Christ came to Earth in a human body, but did Christ change from an initial state (as a spirit, like the Father or Holy Spirit) when he came to Earth? Or did Christ already have some sort of preincarnate body?

Answer: This will be a question that we will take up when we get to the Doctrine of Christ. Here we are still on the Doctrine of God. We will discuss this more in detail later on. But the classic Christian understanding of the incarnation is that the second person of the Trinity – the Logos or the Son – did not change in any way in becoming incarnate because the incarnation is not a matter of *subtracting* something from the divine nature; it is a matter of *adding* to it an additional nature which it did not have before, namely a human nature.

⁴⁶ 9:57

Followup: Because Christ's spirit essentially remains unchanged.

Answer: That is right. So what happens in the incarnation is not a matter of subtraction but of addition. That is the way to think about it from an orthodox perspective. So it is completely wrongheaded when people think about the Son, the second person of the Trinity, and wonder what attributes would he have to give up in order to turn himself into a human being.⁴⁷ That is really a very pagan idea, akin to Zeus turning himself into a bull or turning himself into a swan. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation is not that Christ turned himself into a man. It is rather that his person, which already had a divine nature, now takes on, in addition to that divine nature, another nature – a new nature, a human nature – which he did not possess prior to the virginal conception in the womb of Mary. We will talk about that in more detail later on.

Question: Last week you talked about the four parties represented at the Council of Nicaea. At the end of the Council, it resulted in the Athanasians prevailing, and out of that came the Nicene Creed. Did they leave the Council of Nicaea essentially united? In other words, regarding the groups who didn't initially agree with the Athanasians and were debating them – by the time they left did they change their views and all leave believing the same thing?

Answer: I am not absolutely certain about how every party who was at the Council eventually wound up. I think that some of the Arians remained unrepentant. Certainly, that vast majority of the bishops – that large center party that was so confused – went over and agreed with Athanasius. I think that the reason was that the church had always affirmed the deity of Christ, and, therefore, they saw that the error of Arius was turning Christ into a work, into a creature, and that simply couldn't be tolerated.

Followup: So there might have been a few factions, but for the most part they left united?

Answer: Yes, that is right, it was united in this. This was the verdict of the Council, and then the Creed came out of it.

Question: To clarify what you were discussing earlier, could you talk about *kenosis*?

Answer: You are talking here about a theory of the incarnation called *kenosis*. Again, we will talk about this more when we get to the Doctrine of Christ later on. This was a 19th century (so very, very recent in terms of church history) development of an attempt to understand the incarnation in non-orthodox terms. *Kenosis* takes its word, or its terminology, from Philippians 2 where Paul says that Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself.⁴⁸ *Kenosis* is the word for "emptying." These theologians began to wonder, "Wherein did this emptying consist? What did Christ empty himself of in order to take on human flesh?" They began to do exactly what I suggested was wrongheaded – they began to speculate, what attributes of divinity did Christ give up in order to turn himself into a human being? He gave up omnipotence; he

⁴⁷ 15:00

⁴⁸ This is referring to Philippians 2:5-8 (NASB) which says, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

gave up timelessness; he gave up omnipresence. All of these attributes were thought to not be really essential to God because Christ gave them up; and if these were essential attributes of God, then Christ isn't divine. It denies the deity of Christ. So what they had to say is that these are just contingent properties of God. God isn't essentially timeless, omnipotent, omnipresent, and so forth. What was really essential to God were the moral properties of God, like his being loving and holy, and Christ didn't empty himself of those, he kept those. So the whole impulse of Kenotic Christology was based on this question, how do we understand what Christ had to give up in order to become a man? As I said earlier, I think that this is just wrongheaded. He didn't give up anything on the orthodox view; rather what he did was he added additional attributes to his person that are constitutive of a human nature. Think again, to borrow that illustration from the movie *Avatar*, of Jake Sully who didn't give up any of his human properties in order to become a Navi. He took on an additional nature on the planet that was his Navi nature, but he remained a human being in the spaceship and didn't give up any of his human attributes. He became one person with two natures. That is closer to the orthodox doctrine than Kenotic Christology, which, though very popular especially in Christmas cards and popular piety around Christmas time, is quite unorthodox. We will talk about that much more later on.⁴⁹

Question: At Nicaea, there were both Greek and Latin speaking people and they agreed together when they left Nicaea. Is the "or" in the Greek to indicate not "and" – that it was supposed to be implying the same thing, and that's why they agreed when they left?

Answer: That is a good question, and I don't know what was in their minds about that. But they are intended to be synonyms – *hypostasis* or *ousia* – and I think they capitulated to this but with a great deal of discomfort. Then afterwards there came out all of this rumbling and grumbling about this that then finally got resolved in the Council of Alexandria.

I want to go back to the question that was raised earlier that I forgot to address. I think you can see, from our survey so far, what a gross misrepresentation of church history it is to say that three hundred years after Christ the church assembled and voted to make Jesus Christ divine. That is just completely wrong. Right from the beginning – the Logos Christology of the Greek apologists, the modalists like Praxeus and Sabellius – they all thought that Christ was God. It wasn't until Arius arose, at the beginning of the 300s, that this threat of a non-divine Christ began to trouble the church. Nicaea simply ratified what the church had always believed from the beginning, that Christ was fully divine, and, therefore, Arius and his followers were mistaken. But it is just a complete misunderstanding of church history to think that up until this point no one had believed Christ to be divine, and then somehow at the Council of Nicaea they magically turned Christ into God and voted to make him God. That isn't an accurate understanding of church history.

Question: At Nicaea, did the Arians or others appeal to the Gnostic gospels or challenge the canon to support their case?

Answer: Not that I know of! Even the heretics always appealed to the canonical books of

⁴⁹ 20:04

the New Testament. I am not aware of any Arian that attempted to appeal to these extra canonical writings.

Question: I had heard when Dan Brown's book was popular that the vote was 316-2 where in his book it says this was by a close margin when they voted at Nicaea.

Answer: It was overwhelming. As I say, there were only about six Arian bishops even in attendance of the thing. So Arianism was never going to win. The question was just this terminological problem of how do you say that the Father and the Son are both God but nevertheless they are not the same person? That was the difficulty. That finally got hammered out by making a distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia*. That was really the nub of the issue. It wasn't the divinity of Christ; it was, how do you affirm the divinity of Christ and yet also affirm his distinctness from the Father? That was the real theological nut to be cracked.

Question: Can you break apart the word *hypostasis* in Greek?

Answer: *hypo* means "under." The example I gave was "hypodermic" where a needle goes under the skin. *stasis* means "standing." It looks like the word "stand." So *hypostasis* is something that stands under its properties and bears its properties.

Followup: (inaudible)

Answer: It is equal in Latin, isn't it? *sub* is "under" and *stantia* is "stand." That was the confusion. The fathers who wrote the Creed were using these etymologically as synonyms, which they are etymologically. You break the word apart and they are perfectly synonymous. But the trouble is, for the Greeks, that is not the way they understood it.⁵⁰ They didn't understand these things to be synonymous. They could distinguish between a substance, which they translated not as *hypostasis* but as *ousia*, and therefore said "We want to affirm that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three *hypostases* just as John, Paul, and Peter are three *hypostases*, but they are all the same substance."

Coherence of the Doctrine

That completes the historical survey that I wanted to do with you. This brings us to the apologetic problem of the Trinity. Is this a logically comprehensible and defensible doctrine that there are three persons who are God?

The Problem

At one level, the problem seems to be that the doctrine of the Trinity seems to be logically incoherent. Because what the doctrine affirms is that the Father is God and the Son is God but the Father is not the Son:

Father = God
Son = God
Father ≠ Son

That violates the transitivity of identity, to put it in fancy terms. If the Father is God and

⁵⁰ 25:07

God is the Son, then the Father is the Son, and yet the doctrine of the Trinity says the Father is not the Son. Similarly, for the Holy Spirit. There seems to be a logical incoherence in the doctrine of the Trinity in saying that the Father is God, the Son is God, and yet the Father and the Son are not the same. How do you make sense of that?

A Proposed Solution

What I think we want to say as Christians, or at least what we can say as Christians, is that *the Trinity is God*. So if we want to make an identity statement, “who or what is God”, it is the Trinity. The Trinity is God. What that means is that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not divine in virtue of being instances, or examples, of the divine nature. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not divine because they are examples, or instances, of the divine nature. Just to make the terminology clear: Ben is an instance of the human nature, Jim is an instance, or an example, of the human nature, and Bob is an instance, or an example, of the human nature. The reason they are human is because they instantiate the human nature. What I want to suggest here is that if the Trinity is God, then the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not divine in virtue of instantiating the divine nature. This can be very clearly seen in the fact that, if the Trinity is God, then it is essential to the nature of God to be three persons. But the Father is not three persons. The Son is not three persons. So they are not instances of the divine nature. The Trinity is the instance of the divine nature. That is why the Trinity is not a fourth God in addition to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is only one God, and that God *is* the Trinity.

It is the Trinity which is an instance, or an example, of the divine nature. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not instances of the divine nature, and that is why they are not three Gods. If they were instances of the divine nature, then there would be three Gods, just as Jim, Ben, and Bob are three men, each being an instance of the nature of humanity. So the Trinity is the sole instance of the divine nature, and that is why there is only one God, God who is the Trinity.

While a statement like “The Trinity is God” is an identity statement, statements like “The Father is God” or “The Son is God” should not be construed as identity statements. This is an identity statement: “The Trinity is God” – God and the Trinity are the same thing. These are not identity statements: “The Father is God,” “The Son is God.” Rather, these are *predicates*.⁵¹ For example, they could ascribe an office or a title to a person. For example, when I say “Bryant Wright is pastor” I do not mean that he is identical to being a pastor, or “the” pastor, because there are other pastors as well. But I am saying that is an office or a title that he holds. Or it will be a way of ascribing a property to a person. It would be, for example, to say as much as “The Father is divine.” You are not making an identity statement, you are predicating a property of the Father, namely, the Father is divine. It would be as if I were to say of the king, “Belshazzar is regal.” By ascribing the property to him of *being regal*, I am saying that Belshazzar is the king. But I am not making an identity statement there. I am saying he holds the office of being a king or he is regal, but I am not making an identity statement.

Properly speaking, the true identity statement is “The Trinity is God,” and statements like

⁵¹ 30:04

“The Father is God” or “The Son is God” are not identity statements; they are predicative statements. They predicate properties of the Father and the Son, namely, the property of being divine.

DISCUSSION

Question: If you are arguing this with someone, what if they said, “Is God, taken alone, less capable, less powerful, less endowed than God as a member of the Trinity?” In other words, when you separate them out, to say they are less than?

Answer: All right, let’s think about this question. Is God (I think he said), taken alone, less than God as a member of the Trinity? God is not a member of the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are members of the Trinity. God *is* the Trinity. See, it is an identity statement – God is the Trinity, the Trinity is God; so God is not a member of the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not Gods with an “s,” they are not instances of the divine nature. There is only one God, and that is the Trinity. So there isn’t such a thing as God as a member of the Trinity.

Question: We hear a lot from pastors and other individuals, “We pray this in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” Is that improper?

Answer: No, I don’t think that is improper. Indeed, I don’t think it is improper to say things like “The Father is God.” I am just saying that philosophically we need to understand how these words are being used. I am not against the expressions. We can use these linguistic expressions, but we need to understand that when we make them, we are not making an identity statement that the Father is identical to God. So when we say “God the Son,” what we mean is the second person of the Trinity, the divine Logos, the divine, second person of the Trinity. When we say “God the Father,” we are talking about the first member of the Trinity, the divine Father.

Question: You never hear “God the Trinity.” This is the first time I ever heard, “in the name of God, the Trinity.” I hear “God the Son,” “God the Father,” and “God the Holy Spirit,” but I have never heard of “in the name of God the Trinity.”

Answer: Yeah, you know there was a hymn that we sang the other day in church. I can’t bring it exactly to mind, but it speaks in this way. It says in the last verse something about “God the Holy Trinity” and it refers to God as the Holy Trinity.⁵² So this is not unknown or unusual in Christian expression; but I grant you that it is true that we don’t often talk this way.

Question: Would it be appropriate to say that God is the essence of the Trinity and the

⁵² See further down in this Q&A session for a comment given by another person that reminds Dr. Craig of what the hymn name is (“Holy, Holy, Holy”) and its lyrics. To further illustrate the point that the term “God, the Trinity” has been used in prior centuries, see also the hymn titled, “All Men Living Are But Mortal” whose lyrics were composed in the 17th century by Johann G. Albinus. The lyrics say, in part:
“Yea, with joy I leave earth’s sadness
For the home of heav’nly gladness,
Where I shall forever see
God, the Holy Trinity.”

Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is the existence?⁵³

Answer: OK, let's be careful here--because we are trying to be careful. I don't think we want to say that God is the essence of the Trinity because an essence in this case would be a bunch of properties, and God isn't a bunch of properties. The essence of the Trinity would be things like omnipotence, omniscience, moral perfection, holiness, timelessness, and necessity. Those would be things that would make up the essence of God. I just want to say that these are the same being. If you want to ask "What being is God?," I am suggesting it is the Trinity. That is God.

Question: The way the explanation has come out, it sounds almost like, to give a different example, you have a council of three people. The council is the whole and it is not without the three people. But that the three people in that case are distinct and don't necessarily have the same nature, whereas we know that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while they have some different things that they do, have the same nature and are of the same nature.

Answer: I think that what you are on to here is you are pushing me to explain, "How are you going to distinguish your view from tri-theism?" Is God just a sort of council of three divine beings, sort of like the Greek pantheon of gods? Is that what God is? I am going to have to develop this some more in order to try to show why we are not talking here about tri-theism but one being.

Followup: That is what it sounds like.

Answer: Well, don't think that! *[laughter]* I think it is clear that we don't want to say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each instances of the divine nature because surely it is essential to the divine nature to be three – to be three in one, to be a trinity. Yet the Father isn't a trinity, and the Son isn't a trinity. Plus the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have different properties on at least the orthodox view. We have got to distinguish them as being three persons, and the challenge will be, how do we unite them as one being and not just some sort of council? I share that concern, and we will talk about that as I develop this model.

Comment: The hymn is "Holy, Holy, Holy," and the tune name is "Nicaea."

Answer: Really? How does the last verse go in "Holy, Holy, Holy"?

Followup: It goes:

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Answer: There you go, that is what I was thinking of! And the tune is "Nicaea" interestingly enough! Very nice!

What we will do next time is ask ourselves, why don't we have three gods in the sense of

three divine beings who just form a sort of council, as was said here? What makes them one? That will be the challenge that we will take up next time.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Total Running Time: 38:51 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

2. THE TRINITY

Lecture 8

A Possible Model of the Trinity

We have been looking at a model of the Trinity to make sense of the biblical doctrine that there are three persons who are God and yet there are not three gods but one God. What I suggested last time is that when we look at statements like “Jesus is God” or “The Father is God,” these are not to be understood as identity statements but as predications. It is like saying, “Bryant Wright is pastor.” You are saying he fills the role of pastor or he has a function of a pastor. But that is not to say he is the only pastor there is. There could be co-pastors even though Bryant Wright is pastor. So when we say “Jesus is God,” what we are saying is Jesus is divine. But we are not saying that Jesus is identical with that being which is God, which I would suggest is the whole Trinity – the whole Godhead. Jesus is not identical with the whole Godhead. He is one member of the Trinity. When we say, “The Father is God,” “The Son is God,” and “The Holy Spirit is God,” we are not postulating three Gods because we are not making identity statements. We are making predicate statements. We are predicating properties of the persons, namely, the property of being divine.

This still leaves us wondering, however, how could these three persons all be divine and yet there not be three separate beings? How can you have three divine persons and yet not have three beings, three entities? How can you have three divine persons who are together one being?

The Analogy of Cerberus

Perhaps we can get a start at this question by means of an analogy. I hope no one will find this analogy sacrilegious. I find it useful, but I do use it with some feeling of discomfort and uneasiness. In Greek mythology, there is a dog which is supposed to be guarding the gates of Hades named “Cerberus.” One of the tasks of Hercules is to subdue Cerberus at the gates of Hades. Now, Cerberus is no ordinary dog. He is a three-headed dog, and each of these heads is a fully functioning canine head. I think we can suppose, therefore, that Cerberus has three brains and that these brains are associated with three distinct states of consciousness, whatever it is like to be a dog. Whatever a dog-consciousness is like, Cerberus has three of them, not one of them. Therefore, even though Cerberus is a sentient being, he doesn’t have a unified consciousness; rather he has three consciousnesses – three centers of consciousness. Obviously, in order for Cerberus to be a biologically viable organism, as well as to be a good guard dog, there needs to be a considerable degree of cooperation and harmony among these three canine minds. Despite the diversity of his mental states, Cerberus is clearly one dog. He is one three-headed dog, a single biological organism which exemplifies a canine nature.

We can enhance the Cerberus story a little bit by investing Cerberus with rationality and self-consciousness. In that case, Cerberus now will become a tri-personal being. Each of these consciousnesses will not simply be a canine consciousness, it will be a personal

consciousness – a self-consciousness endowed with rationality and will. If we were to ask ourselves what makes Cerberus a single dog, or a single being, despite the fact that he has multiple minds, I think we doubtlessly would reply it is because he has a single, physical body. There is one physical organism in which these three minds are lodged. That answer seems all right for Cerberus so far, but suppose Cerberus were to be killed? Suppose Hercules slays Cerberus, and let's suppose that Cerberus' minds survive the death of his body.⁵⁵ Suppose that his souls are immortal. In what sense would they then be one being if there isn't any physical body any longer to unify them? How would the three self-conscious minds of Cerberus differ at all from three exactly similar minds which have always been unembodied, which have never been embodied in a dog body? That is the problem facing us with the Trinity. Since the divine persons are prior to the incarnation at least – three unembodied minds – we are faced with the question, “In virtue of what are they one being rather than three individual beings? Why aren't there three Gods?”

The Nature of the Soul

Maybe we can get some insight into this question by reflecting on the nature of the soul. Souls are immaterial substances. The soul, or the mind, is not a physical thing – it is an immaterial or spiritual thing, an immaterial substance. My colleagues J.P. Moreland at Talbot School of Theology believes that souls come with a variety of capacities and faculties. For example, he would say that higher animals like chimpanzees and porpoises have souls that are more richly endowed with powers than the souls of, say, iguanas and turtles. Whether you agree with that or not, certainly we can make sense of that idea – of souls which are endowed with a range, or a spectrum, of rational powers and abilities, and these souls therefore differ in their cognitive powers and properties. What makes the human soul a person as opposed to, say, the soul of an iguana or a tortoise or even a porpoise? What makes the human soul a person? It would seem that the human soul is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent who is capable of self-determination. I will repeat that – the human soul is a person, or is personal, because it is endowed with rational faculties of intellect and volition which enable it to be a self-reflective agent capable of self-determination or free will.

A Possible Model of the Trinity

When you think about it, God is very much like an unembodied soul. When you die and your soul is separated from the body, you go to be with the Lord until the resurrection at the end of history – and you are at that time a *disembodied* soul. God would seem to be very much like an *unembodied* soul. In fact, as a mental or spiritual substance, God just is, it seems to me, an unembodied soul. He is a soul. We naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls that we are familiar with in our intercourse with one another are all persons. But the reason that human souls are individual persons is because each soul is equipped with one set of rational faculties which are sufficient for personhood. Each one of us has a set of rational faculties and volitional faculties that are sufficient for being an individual person. But suppose that God is a soul who is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties, each of which is sufficient for

⁵⁵ 5:04

personhood. Then God – even though he is one soul – would not be one person, but he would be three persons. For God would have three centers of self-consciousness, three centers of intentionality (thinking about things), three centers of volition (freely willing to do things). So God, if he has three complete sets of rational faculties, will have three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality, and will, which seems to be exactly what the doctrine of the Trinity would maintain. God would clearly not be three distinct souls because the cognitive faculties that we are talking about are all properties of the same soul.⁵⁶ There is one immaterial substance which is so richly endowed with cognitive faculties that it is sufficient for three persons. So God would be a spiritual substance, or soul, which is tri-personal, in contrast to us, who are individual souls, or beings, each of which is one person.

I think this model of Trinity monotheism, as it is called, would give a clear sense to the classical trinitarian formula “three persons in one substance.” That seems to be exactly what this model captures – three persons in one substance. It would seem to me that this would be a model of the Trinity that would be biblically faithful and, so far as I can see, rationally coherent. Therefore, while we cannot dogmatize and say, “This is the correct understanding of the Trinity” – we have no reason to think we should know how God can be triune! – nevertheless, it provides a model for understanding the Trinity which enables us to turn back any allegations offered by cultists, Muslims, or Unitarians who would claim that the doctrine of the Trinity is somehow a logical incoherence.

DISCUSSION

Question: When you come to a Mormon understanding, which is far broader than a Trinitarian understanding of gods and goddesses, they try to unite these particular “gods” (Jesus and the Father) by way of the will. You are not just using “will” to unite them – you are using a spectrum?

Answer: More than that! I am postulating a single substance. I take Mormonism to be polytheism. Mormonism really is a very crass, materialistic form of polytheism because they think that God has a humanoid body, literally a physical body. And the gods and goddesses sire offspring. So I take Mormonism to be utterly unlike this – it is a form of polytheism. The fact that you can have a harmony of will among two of the gods doesn’t do anything to suggest that they are one being. This is a criticism that has often been given of certain models of the Trinity, like Richard Swinburne’s, where he attempts to unite the persons of the Trinity by virtue of the unity of will and purpose. I agree with you that that doesn’t get you any more than this sort of Mormon doctrine of polytheism. You have got to have some way to unite these persons in one being. I think that what I suggested here, namely, thinking of God as a single, unembodied soul, gets you the idea of the one substance, which is critical to monotheism.

Question: Did any of the historical early church fathers or thinkers adequately explain this, and if so, why have we gone so many years with this criticism still so rampant among the non-believers?

⁵⁶ 10:01

Answer: I have read a lot of the early church fathers on the subject of the Trinity, and I am not convinced that any of them did provide an adequate explanation of how you could have three persons in one substance. I think that their burden was to articulate the doctrine, not to explain it. Similarly, with regard to the incarnation, none of them really – well, I shouldn't say that, because I do think Apollinarius was on the right track, but – at least the creeds of Christendom don't explain how Jesus can be one person with two natures or how God can be one being with three persons. They simply articulate what the doctrine is. I think that is the better part of wisdom, in a way. When you are doing theology, systematic theology, you want to articulate the bounds of orthodoxy, and then within those bounds I think you allow reflection and speculation about how this could be so. That is why I am offering this as a model for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. But I don't read in the early church fathers any really convincing attempt to provide an explanation of how this could be so.⁵⁷ When you read Augustine's classic treatise on the Trinity, at the end he more or less just says, "All of my analogies are inadequate. None of them really explains how God is like this. I've just tried to show that in creation there may be reflections of the trinitarian nature of God." He more or less just throws up his hands at the end and says he can't explain it. I don't think you will find anything in the early church fathers that would offer a sort of metaphysical account.

Question: In support of your suggestion or solution is we have the psychological difficulty of multiple personalities, and you could take that as an example where you can have 27 personalities in the same person utilizing the same body.

Answer: In my book, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, I talk a little bit about multiple personality disorders and whether these might provide some sort of analogy for understanding the Trinity. In the end, I don't think they are helpful because in schizophrenia or the split-brain experiences, you still have one person who just has these multiple personalities; but it still is one person. It is not as though there are really different persons there. It is just that this one person can exhibit very different personalities, and these could be in conflict. I do think that those analogies are more helpful for understanding the incarnation with respect to how the divine second person of the Trinity could have a human consciousness as Jesus of Nazareth and yet a sort of overarching divine consciousness that encompasses the human consciousness in the same way that one of these split personalities can actually be aware of the other personalities and talk about "Sheila" or "Jane" and is aware of them and knows about them, even though it is one of the split personalities. So I think that is more helpful with the incarnation than here with the Trinity, where the difficulty is not to explain the psychological properties so much as to account for how you can have three distinct persons without having three different beings.

Question: The best scenario that I heard about the Trinity is that if we see the sun and the sunbeam, the sunlight, and the fruit that is ripened by the sun, this encompasses some kind of idea of the Trinity.

Answer: The idea of the sunbeam from the sun is one that the church fathers often used to try to illustrate how the Son is begotten from the Father – eternally begotten from the Father, just as the beam of light is always radiated by the sun. The sun never exists

⁵⁷ 15:16

without its radiance. But I don't think that it helps really with the Trinity – it might help you to catch an image of this idea of the Son's being eternally begotten – because very clearly the fruit on the tree that you mention isn't the sun. The fiery orb in the sky is not the fruit on the tree, so there is no unity there. It doesn't really help in understanding how the three can be one. You've got clearly three different things there – the sun, the radiation, and the fruit on the tree.

Question: I am not understanding exactly what unifies them into one substance. What is that substance, what unifies them?

Answer: The idea is that we should start by thinking of God as a soul, just as you are a soul; and when you die, you are a disembodied soul. You are at that time an unembodied consciousness, so you are one thing – you are one immaterial substance. That is what I am inviting us to think about God as. God is an immaterial substance, a mind, just like you are when you are an unembodied soul. Then I want to invite you to think that this is a soul that is much more richly endowed with cognitive faculties than you are. You just have one set of cognitive faculties, and therefore you are one person. But I want you to try to imagine a soul that is endowed with three sets of cognitive faculties, each of which is sufficient for personhood – rationality, self-consciousness, and freedom of the will.⁵⁸ I think that gets us this idea of one thing, one substance, namely, this soul, that is so richly endowed that it is tri-personal.

Followup: A lot of people don't even define the "soul," and I see here that you are equating mind and soul, which I definitely agree with. The French have a kind of linguistic comparison between the two, mind and spirit, but with our culture we tend to almost separate the two. So what constitutes the mind, if not volition and the other things?

Answer: This is a good question. I think what you are putting your finger on especially is that in our materialistic culture, people don't believe in souls anymore. They think that you are just a neuro-physical organism and that there isn't any immaterial, spiritual part to your nature. You are just a bag of chemicals on bones, and therefore this doesn't even make sense. My trinitarian model presupposes the truth of dualism with respect to human beings. We are not just bags of chemicals on bones, but there is this immaterial aspect to our being called the soul or the mind. "The soul" is the theological synonym for what philosophers call "the mind." When philosophers talk about the soul, they don't use the word "soul;" they use "mind." The nomenclature in philosophy is typically "the mind/body problem." Is the mind identical to the body? Is the mind a sort of property of the body? Or is the mind a distinct substance from the body? I am presupposing a sort of mind/body dualism here that says that the soul is something that is a substance. It is distinct from the body. If you don't agree with that, then this model just won't make any sense at all.

Question: I agree with your analysis in your model. Perhaps it is like the concept of God as infinite – the word "infinite" is not found in the Bible, but we believe the concept is taught in the Bible. Do you think it is a viable alternative for someone to say that they have doubts that the trinitarian nature of God is truly a primitive Christian idea because it

⁵⁸ 20:00

is not clearly affirmed? And to say we really don't understand the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and that to quibble about the exact nature of the relationship is wrangling about words, which Paul says in 2 Timothy 2 we should not do? Is that a viable alternative, or do you need to pin this down?

Answer: As I said when we looked at the biblical material at some length, I think that in order to be biblical a view has to affirm that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God – all equally divine – and yet each is a distinct person. If you affirm that, then I think you are affirming a biblical doctrine of the Trinity even if you don't have this sort of formulation that I have suggested in the model. I am not suggesting that the early Christians had this model in mind or anything like it in mind at all. I am doing the work of a systematic theologian, trying to reflect upon the data of Scripture and saying, "Can we make sense of it?" But as long as you make those affirmations that I suggested, I think that you can say, "It is a mystery, and I don't know how three are one; but I affirm that each is a distinct person and each is God equally, and I rest with that." That would be fine, I think.

Question: I derive a little comfort from what you talked about last week with the water metaphor. That makes me feel good – that water can exist in three different states depending on the ambient environment. I can imagine the Trinity being something like that. The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, depending on where it resides at the time could exist independently like water in three different states. It is the same thing except that it appears in three different forms, depending on the ambient environment.

Answer: Now that sounds like modalism to me, not like trinitarianism.⁵⁹ You've got the water, a quantity of water, and it can be either steam, gas, or liquid depending on the ambient environment. That is modalism. Now if you say, "Wait a minute! At the triple point part of it can be solid, part of it can be liquid, and part of it can be gas," then I am not sure that you haven't got tri-theism there because it is different quantities of water that exhibit these different properties. How is that different from having, for example, three men all having the same human nature, but they are different parcels of matter – different men? I feel uneasy about the water analogy, whatever comfort that might bring. I would encourage you to think about this model instead and see if that would bring any illumination to this doctrine.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ 25:03

⁶⁰ Total Running Time: 26:10 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)