

What Do You Believe? – “The Ologies”
Study Notes #4, February 7, 2016
Theology Proper – Part 2 – The Trinity

• **REVIEW:**

This is our fourth lesson in the new study of “*What Do You Believe?*” We have introduced the material by considering:

- **Why do you believe what you believe?**

So we looked at the objective and subjective means of determining our beliefs. ***What is your source, basis, or authority for your beliefs?***

Of course, the most authoritative, absolute and objective truth is that from the ultimate absolute and authoritative Being – God Himself. ***Ultimate Absolute Truth MUST come from GOD!*** And thankfully, He has chosen to reveal Himself to us, and designed us to “see” and “hear” that revelation.

So we looked at the “**SOURCES**” of God’s revelation of truth to us. The two sources of “General Revelation” available to all people – **Creation & Conscience**. But the most important truth is only revealed to some through the **Special Revelation** of Jesus **Christ!** By the power of the truth of His word in His Scriptures and the power of its illumination in our spirits by His Spirit, we can know God’s **GRACE** and be justified, sanctified and (one day) glorified!

- ***EVERYTHING else we believe must be grounded in, supported by and in agreement with the Holy Scriptures!***

The Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures:

- **Bibliology – The Study of the Bible**
- ***sola Scriptura* – Scripture Alone – the sole authority and source for truth**

With **that foundational groundwork** laid and secured – that the Word of God must be our source and standard for all truth and beliefs – we can move on to consider the different areas of study within “Theology.”

- **What is “Theology?”** *Theos* – God; *logos* – logic, word, idea

Theology Proper – The Study of God (Himself)

The first and most important is known as ***“Theology Proper.”*** That is the term used to refer to the purest and highest branch of “Theology” in total – namely **the study of God Himself!**

- **To Begin, “Who” is God?**

We looked at why it is important that we must think rightly about God. As A. W. Tozer so powerfully taught us in his book, ***The Knowledge of the Holy*** –

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

“I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”

“A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God.”

“The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its **high opinion of God.**”

- ***I believe that a (the) right set of beliefs is founded upon these essential elements:***
 1. **A faith in the Bible as the Word of God, and the sole authority for all truth.**
 2. **A high view of God!** (We cannot have too high a view of God!)
 3. **An accurate view of man!**

The Existence of God:

The first thing that most theologians would cover to begin any study of God is the *Existence of God*. Obviously, first we must be sure there is a God, before we go any further in our study of Him. We examined the “proofs” or sources of knowing God exists:

- A. General Revelation – Creation & Conscience**
- B. Specific Revelation – Christ – The Word of God**
- C. Traditional Philosophical “Proofs” for the Existence of God**

- ***Since we know that God exists – Who is God?***

The Knowledge of God – His Incomprehensibility

We saw the odd but dramatic truth that **God is not fully comprehensible or “knowable.” This at first seems contradictory or hopeless! What is the point of studying God if He cannot be fully known?**

John Calvin said that “**the finite cannot grasp the infinite.**” But, through various and whatever means are possible, we can *know God!* Thankfully, He condescends to us – giving us “baby talk” to help us attain to some level of knowledge of Him. These include:

1. **Anthropomorphism** – the use of human forms and analogies to describe or convey knowledge of god.
2. **Via negationis** - This is simply **the way of the negative!** God is described by what He is **not!**
3. **Via eminentiate** is the **way of eminence.** This takes human concepts or references to the ultimate degree.
4. **Via affirmationis** is the **way of affirmation.** This is simple making affirmative statements about God in a positive way.

But in spite of all the ways that God reveals Himself to us in knowable ways in His Scriptures, we are still left with the fact that He is ultimately unknowable completely – **He remains incomprehensible!**

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NASB) ⁸ "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

So if God is incomprehensible, and unknowable fully, what are we to do? We must know God! YET - This is an impossibility! What are we to do?

- **We must understand that before we even try, we will never fully understand or comprehend God!**

And yet – God chooses to reveal Himself and be “known” by and through His Son Jesus Christ! (Mat. 11:27; 1Cor. 2:14-16; John 1:14-18)

- **Then – How can we know God? How can we comprehend Him?**

Through Jesus Christ! He has explained Him! He is the only way we come to know God! (Truth in tension!)

We see and know God best in Jesus Christ!

(Transition) - So, we now move from looking at “Who” God is, to “What” God is.

- **“What” is God?**

*I mean this with reverence and respect, knowing He is NOT a “What” but a Who! But, we need to ponder what kind of Being He is. **What is His essence? What is His nature?***

- I. **The TRINITY:** from combination of words “tri – unity” or “three in oneness”

This brings us to the first and perhaps the most important doctrine of “theology proper” about God Himself, and that is **His Own Essence and Person**. That mysterious and glorious, scary and complex, concept is known as the **Trinity**. It is not only one of the greatest and deepest concepts in Theology, it may be the most profound and important concept in all of man’s thinking! *(It is also one of the “scariest” and hardest to grasp!)*

- ***What are some common analogies used to attempt to describe the Trinity? (3 leaves of a clover, 3 parts of an egg, 3 states of water, 3 roles of a man) BUT - All analogies fall short and are WRONG!***
- ***This is perhaps the most difficult concept in all the Bible or Theology!***
- ***Discuss why? Why we must move immediately from His Incomprehensibility to the Trinity – Incomprehensibility is most seen in Trinity, and Trinity is perhaps the most incomprehensible attribute.***
- ***Watch video on the Trinity*** (Absolute Basics of the Christian Faith #2)

The Triquetra – a Celtic symbol for the Trinity – endless, eternal, infinite, united

A. W. Tozer on the Holy Trinity:

“To meditate on the three Persons of the Godhead is to walk in thought through the Garden eastward in Eden and to tread on holy ground. Our sincerest effort to grasp the incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity must remain forever futile, and only by deepest reverence can it be saved from actual presumption.

He said that ***“the whole idea of trinity in unity is a contradiction in terms.”***

“The doctrine of the Trinity is truth for the heart.”

A. One in Essence:

The very definition of God demands that He be ONE, and One Alone! The concept of “monotheism” is central to the “One True God,” and was emphasized and declared repeatedly for the Jews and the nation of Israel.

- **God’s Unity and Uniqueness**

The *Shema* was and is the central prayer for Jews, even to this day. It is the most familiar and well known verse of Scripture for all Jews, and is the first one a child learns. It emphasizes **the unity of the God of Israel**.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NASB) ⁴ ***"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"*** ⁵ ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."***

And after declaring the great words of the *Shema*, it was so important that God had Moses to record these instructions about it:

⁶ *"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart."* ⁷ *"You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."* ⁸ *"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead."* ⁹ *"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

So clearly, this concept of **God's One Essence, His Unity** is important to Him and should be to us!

- **How important is this to us, as "new covenant Jews?"**
- **What did Jesus say about the Shema? When asked, He said it is the most important and greatest commandment of all!**

Matthew 22:37-38 (NASB) ³⁷ ***And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."*** ³⁸ ***"This is the great and foremost commandment."***

*Jesus quoted from the Shema to tell us the greatest commandment! Further, when God gave the Mosaic Law to His people Israel, what was the very **first commandment?***

Exodus 20:3 (NASB) ³ ***"You shall have no other gods before Me."***

In other words, "you shall worship only Me!" This was also clear in the verse following the Shema:

Deuteronomy 6:13 (NASB) ¹³ ***"You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name."***

- What is another word for "uniqueness" when speaking of God? **Holiness**

So clearly, this concept of **God's Uniqueness, His Holiness** is important to Him and should be to us!

- **How important is this to us, as "new covenant Jews?"**

- **What did Jesus say about this unique holiness of God? When He faced His third and final temptation by Satan in the wilderness, what did He quote to defeat him and send him away? (The same OT text!)**

Matthew 4:10 (NASB) ¹⁰ *Then Jesus *said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, '**YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.**'"*

And Peter was inspired to write later:

1 Peter 1:16 (NASB) ¹⁶ *because it is written (in Leviticus), "**YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.**"*

Many believe that the Trinity is the reason that the threefold praise to God for His holiness in Isaiah and Revelation, where He is declared by the angels to be "**Holy, Holy, Holy**" is for the **Father, Son and Holy Spirit!**

- **CONCLUSION about the Unity of God –
God is ONE in Unity & Essence
God is HOLY in Uniqueness**

B. Three in Persons:

In spite of the most high and holy significance of the above concept of one in essence and holiness, He clearly reveals Himself throughout both the Old and the New Covenants as being Three in Persons!

Even in His very first revelation of Himself, as Creator in the first chapter of Genesis, what did God reveal about Himself? *Notice the very first words of His Special revelation of Himself:*

Genesis 1:1-3 (NASB) ¹ *In the beginning God (the Father) **created** the heavens and the earth.* ² *The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.* ³ *Then God **said** (the Word – the Son), "Let there be light"; and there was light.*

And then He moves from implication to direct evidence of His Three Persons, saying:

Genesis 1:26 (NASB) ²⁶ *Then God said, "**Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;** and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

Even the root Hebrew word for "God" *Elohim*, is from the root *El* or *Elohei* for God and the suffix *him* meaning "three or more" in number!

You won't find the word "trinity" in your Bible, but the concept and doctrine is clearly there, everywhere! We all know this in **the New Covenant or Testament**, as these three Persons are clearly revealed. Notice in the

- **New Testament Trinity:**

God the Father

God the Son, Jesus Christ

God the Holy Spirit

In fact, there is often a clause that mentions all three members of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. Not one God in three phases. Not three different gods coexisting. One Divine Being, three Persons!

Here's a list of just some (9) NT Bible verses that explicitly reference all three members of the Trinity:

1. Matthew 28:19

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . ."

2. Luke 3:22

"And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him [Jesus] in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My [the Father's] beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

3. Matthew 3:16

"After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him."

4. John 14:26

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My [Jesus'] name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

5. John 15:26

"When the Helper comes, whom I [Jesus] will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me . . ."

6. 2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

7. Galatians 4:6

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

8. Ephesians 2:18

For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

9. 1 Peter 1:2

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: may grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

But, the Old Covenant or Testament has the concept of three Persons in the Godhead, or the Trinity, everywhere also! The Covenant that everyone would think would be so “mono-theistic” that such a concept would be a heresy!

- **Old Testament Trinity:**

YHWH Elohim – the Lord God

Malak YHWH – the Angel of the Lord

Ruach YHWH – the Spirit of the Lord

In addition to that identified in the opening words of Genesis, there are many OT passages that illustrate and prove this concept. Time and space do not permit our exploring all the passages of OT Scripture that prove these are all Divine and yet distinct Person of God Himself. But some of those include:

Genesis 3:22 (NASB) Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like **one of Us**, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—

Isaiah 6:8 (NASB) ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for **Us**?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Exodus 3:1-15, Genesis 22:1-14, Zechariah 3, Psalm 45, Isaiah 63, Ezekiel 11:5, etc.

In fact, there is **no passage in the Bible where it is stated that God is an absolute Unity**, singular in Person!

Even in what is the greatest “mono-theistic” statement in all of Holy Scripture (or even the writings of men), this concept and truth is there – at least not contradicted. The root word used for “One” in Deut. 6:4 is ***echad***. It means “one” but not necessarily “one in person.” The same words used for “one” in Genesis 2:4 for “one” flesh referring to man and wife, and in Genesis 11:6 referring to “one” people.

And, the word used for “God” in the Shema is ***Eleinu***. This is the word for God with a plural possessive pronoun suffix denoting things which belong to us. *So even the word*

for God is not necessarily singular, but could help refer to more than one person possessing the nature on “oneness.” Literally, the verse might be translated as:

“SHEMA Hear O Israel: YHWH the Lord our ELEINU God (plural) is YHWH ECHAD (one - united).”

- **Therefore, the Holy Trinity of the One God in the Old Covenant:**
YHWH Elohim – the Lord God
Malak YHWH – the Angel of the Lord
Ruach YHWH – the Spirit of the Lord

Is the same as the Holy Trinity of God in the New Covenant:
God the Father
God the Son
God the Holy Spirit

- **These three OT Divine Persons correspond exactly to those in the NT!**
- **CONCLUSION about the Trinity of God –**
God is Three in Persons
All Three Persons are fully God

Denials and Affirmations about the Trinity:

A. Denials:

1. **Modalism – God is NOT One Person Who appears in three different forms or “modes.”** Many use the analogy of God being like a man who is at once a father, a son and a husband – the same person acting out and fulfilling three modes or forms. That is NOT what the Trinity means!
2. **Arianism – the Second and Third Person of the Trinity are NOT in any way less than God (the Father).** This was the controversy at the Council of Nicea in 325AD, and came about from the false teaching of Arius, the Bishop of Alexandria, who taught that the Son and the Holy Spirit “came forth” from God the Father, and did not exist until a point in time. This meant they were “like” or “similar” in nature to God the Father, but not “of” the same nature as God the Father. This can be manifested in a variety of heresies, like Arianism, Subordinationism, Adoptionism, or the “Filioque Clause.” Some of these heresies are seen in the Mormon and the Jehovah Witnesses religions.
3. **Unitarianism – God is One in all ways, and there are not three Persons.** This states that God is one entity, and that the “Son” is a son in the same manner as we are, and likewise for the Spirit. This heresy is found in some

Pentecostal religions, and even some that see the Spirit as the only one true God. (e.g. T. D. Jakes)

4. Tritheism – There are Three Gods

B. Affirmations:

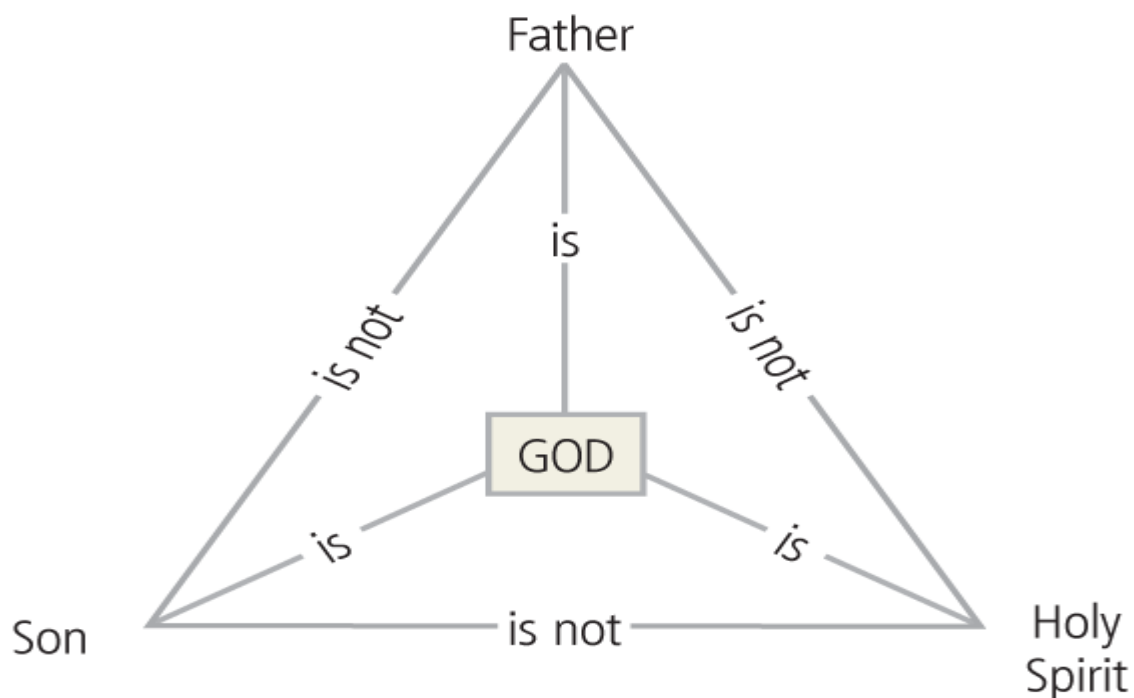
1. God is three Persons
2. Each Person is fully God
3. There is One God.

All major Trinitarian errors that have arisen have come from a denial of one or another of the above primary affirmations!

- **So how can we evaluate any teaching or idea about God that relates to His Triune Being? By these three statements! They test any errors! Try it for any of the heresies above.**
- *Discuss meaning of the ancient historical figure (triangle below) used to describe the Trinity:*

Shows –

**The Father IS God, the Son IS God, the Spirit IS God
The Father is NOT the Son, the Son is NOT the Father, etc.**



- **We cannot fully understand this, especially for what it means for God!**

- **But what does this doctrine of God (Theology) MEAN for US?**

- **Applications? Discussion**

1. Relationship between Love and Trinity: (see video)
 - a. We know that God is Love because God is Triune
 - b. We know that God is Triune because God is Love
 - c. We know that God did not “need” us to love
2. The Persons of God All work together to do everything, even for us:
 - a. The Father **Creates**
 - b. The Son **Redeems**
 - c. The Spirit **Regenerates**
And YET – they all Three do all three things!
3. The Persons of God Doing the Work of God: (see video)
 - a. The Father is the **Source** – e.g. “idea of light”
 - b. The Son is the **Way** – e.g. “switch of light”
 - d. The Spirit is the **Power** – e.g. “electricity of light”
4. The Person of God in our Salvation & Sanctification: (see video)
 - a. The Father is **Above** us
 - b. The Son is **Beside** us
 - c. The Spirit is **Inside** us
5. **The Seven Fold Practical Implications of the Trinity:** How we can learn and live in light of the Example and “likeness” of God in the Trinity.
 - a. **Trinitarian life is humble.** The doctrine of the Trinity is **so complex and wonderfully mysterious that it humbles us.** This is because while God can be known truly, he cannot be known fully. This forces us to be humble in our understanding of God and establishes a precedent in our thinking to allow room for mystery, as we indeed see and know in part, as Scripture states.
 - b. **Trinitarian life is loving.** When 1 John 4:7 says, “Love is from God,” it is revealing that **love emanates from the Trinitarian community of God.** Trinitarian love includes love for God, family, friend, neighbor, stranger, and even enemy. This is because even though we were enemies of God, estranged by sin, Jesus came to be our neighbor, loved us as a friend, died for our sins to make us family, and shared with us God’s love.
 - c. **Trinitarian life is worshipful.** This means that we worship, including singing, serving, and praying, to the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - d. **Trinitarian life is relational.** John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God (Father), and the Word was God.” In the original Greek, John is saying that God the Father and God the Son were proverbially **face-to-face** in eternity past. This is the

language of **friendship**, which compels us to live face-to-face with others in **companionship and community**. This is why Christians practice hospitality to strangers and why they participate in the life of their local church as they live face-to-face with their spouses and children. All of this is to practice for the day when, as Paul says, we too will see God “face-to-face.”

- e. **Trinitarian life is unified and diverse.** Greek Christian theologians are fond of describing the Trinity with the term *perichoresis*. As the three persons of the Trinity are mutually indwelling, or permeating one another, **we are deeply connected as part of the body**, yet we retain our own identity. We are always persons in community.
- f. **Trinitarian life is submissive.** As we hear **Jesus teaching us** to pray, “Your will be done,” and himself praying, “Not my will, but yours, be done,” we learn to submit ourselves to the will of the Father, by the Spirit like the Son.
- g. **Trinitarian life is joyful.** The Trinity is the place of **the greatest joy that has ever been or ever will be**; each member of the Trinity (Father, Son, Spirit), delights in the others and pours himself out continuously for the good of the others. Some religions teach that God made people to cure his loneliness; conversely, the fact is that God as a Trinitarian community was never without joyful and loving community. He is a relational God who welcomes us into a joyful and loving relationship with himself.

Trinitarian Praise:

Romans 11:33, 36 (NASB) ³³ **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!** How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
³⁶ **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.**

Trinitarian Benediction:

2 Corinthians 13:14 (NASB) ¹⁴ **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.**