

Session 3: Doctrine Proper or the Theology of God, Part 2

Theology Proper Defined

Theology Proper is the study of the Triune God Himself. Theology Proper focuses specifically on the being, attributes and works of God, especially in the purposes of creation.

God in Three Persons: The Trinity

I. Trinity Defined

“God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.” (Grudem)

“One in essence, three in person” is the most concise definition of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Christian faith is not polytheistic, confessing many individual gods, each with its own peculiar divine nature. The Christian faith is not unitarian, confessing that the one divine nature is possessed only by a single person or a single acting subject. Instead, the Christian faith says that three distinct persons are the one divine nature in its entirety. The Father possesses all that makes God who He is; the Son possesses all that makes God who He is; and the Spirit possesses all that makes God who He is. We do not worship three gods, each of whom has his own power, his own intelligence, and so on. Instead, we worship three person who hold in common the same power, the same intelligence, and so on.” (www.ligonier.org)

“All of God’s attributes are true of all three persons, for each is fully God. Thus, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are also eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely loving, omniscient...” (Grudem)

II. The Doctrine of the Trinity, a Brief History

A. The first three hundred years of the church

B. Arius and Arianism

“There was a then when he did not exist.” (Arius and his supporters with reference to the Son of God)

C. The Council at Nicaea

“It is very clear from Athanasius that the council was increasingly concerned to find a formula to which Arius’ supporters could never agree.” (Rowan Williams)

When the word “homoousios with the Father...was read at the council, the bishops decided to include the word in the creed, seeing how strongly the Arians disliked it.” (Rowan Williams)

D. The Nicene Creed (see attached)

E. The next six church councils

F. The Filioque clause and the Great Schism

III. The Doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture

A. The Oneness of God and Oneness in Scripture

1. Deuteronomy 6:4
2. Genesis 2:24
3. Genesis 11:6
4. I Timothy 2:5
5. James 2:19

B. Old Testament Scriptures that Affirm the Trinity

1. Genesis 1:1-3
2. Genesis 1:26-27
3. Genesis 3:22
4. Genesis 11:7
5. Genesis 19:24
6. Psalm 2
7. Isaiah 6:8
8. Isaiah 9:6
9. Daniel 7:9-14

C. New Testament Scriptures that Affirm the Trinity

1. Matthew 2:11
2. Matthew 3:16-17
3. Matthew 14:33
4. Matthew 21:15-16
5. Matthew 28:9 and 17
6. Matthew 28:19-20
7. John 1:1-3
8. John 1:18
9. John 8:58
10. John 10:30
11. John 12:41-43
12. John 14:7-10
13. John 14:16-17
14. John 17:5
15. John 20:27-29
16. Acts 5:3-9
17. I Corinthians 2:10-11
18. Ephesians 1:3-14
19. Ephesians 4:4-6
20. Titus 2:13
21. Hebrews 1:1-3

- IV. Three Statements Summarizing the Biblical Teaching
 - A. God is three persons
 - B. Each person is fully God
 - C. There is one God
- V. The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity
 - A. If God is not Triune, then the existence of a personal universe is incomprehensible
 - B. If Jesus is not God, then His atoning sacrifice is insufficient
 - C. If Jesus is not God, then salvation belongs to a created being and not God Himself
 - D. If Jesus is not God, then Christian worship and prayers directed to Him are idolatrous
 - E. If Jesus is not God, then unity in diversity found in the universe and in relationships such as marriage and the church are incomprehensible
- V. The Problem with Analogies
 - A. Water, Ice and Vapor
 - B. The egg
 - C. Augustine's brain
 - D. Sun and light and heat
 - E. Marriage
- VI. Guarding Against Errors
 - A. Arianism ("there was a time when He was not." Held that the doctrine of the trinity was false.)
 - B. Modalism ("One in essence, one in person, expressed in different modes as Father, Son and Spirit")
 - C. Adoptionism ("God the Father adopted Jesus, who was just a man, because of his superior character")
 - D. Tri-theism ("God is three in essence, three in person")
 - E. Gnosticism (A mess of ideas involving a disconnected monad who creates one other like himself and then that second "dirge" creates other "dirges" until one makes a mistake and creates a physical universe.
 - F. Ebionism (early Christian, heretical sect that rejected the deity of Christ, emphasized the Old Testament Law, revered James and Matthew, rejected Paul)
 - G. Docetism ("Jesus only seemed to have a real body")
- VII. Application
 - A. Our understanding of creation and salvation are directly related to our understanding of the Trinity
 - B. Our worship and prayer is enhanced by a clearer understanding of the Trinity

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.