

TRINITY

- I. Biblical references to “trinity”
 - A. There are no references to the word “trinity” in the Bible.
 - B. Development of the word “trinity” in reference to God.
 1. Greek word *trias*
 - a. Means “threefold” or “threesome”
 - b. Used by Theophilus of Antioch c. 175 A.D.
 2. Latin word *trinitas*
 - a. *tri* means three; *unitas* means unity
 - b. Used by Tertullian c. 210 A.D.
 - c. Root of English word “trinity”
 3. The word was employed in attempt to correlate and integrate the revelation of God as singular, yet functionally diverse in three distinct personages.
 - a. necessity of correlating oneness and threeness of God
 - b. concept of “trinity” inherent in Scripture “in solution”
 - C. References to the oneness or unity of God
 1. Old Testament

Deut. 6:4 - “The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”

Deut. 32:39 - “I am He, and there is no god besides Me”

Isa. 43:10 - “Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me”

Isa. 46:9 - “I am God and there is no other; there is no one like Me”
 2. New Testament

I Cor. 8:4-6 - “there is no God but one. ...there is but one God, the Father...; and one Lord, Jesus Christ...”

Gal. 3:20 - “God is only one”
 - D. References to the diversity of God
 1. Old Testament

Gen. 1:1 - “In the beginning God (*Elohim* - plural) created...”

Gen. 1:26 - “Let Us (plural) make man in Our (plural) image”

Isa. 6:8 - “Who will go for Us (plural)?”

Isa. 9:6 - (Messianic) “Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”
 2. New Testament

Matt. 3:16,17 - “being baptized, Jesus...saw the Spirit of God descending...and a voice, saying, “This is My beloved Son...””

Matt. 28:19 - “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”

II Cor. 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”

Gal. 4:6 - “God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts...”

Eph. 4:4-6 - “one Spirit...one Lord...one God and Father of all...”

I Pet. 1:2 - “foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ...”

I Jn. 5:7 (KJV) - (without adequate MSS evidence; interpolation)

 - a. Father as God

Jn. 6:27 - “the Father, God, has set His seal”

Eph. 4:6 - “one God and Father”

I Pet. 1:2 - “God the Father...”
 - b. Son as God - (cf. I Jn. 5:20; Phil. 2:6)

Jn. 1:1 - “the Word was God”

Jn. 20:28 - “My Lord and my God”

Titus 2:13 - "our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus"
 Heb. 1:8 - "of the Son, Thy throne, O God, is forever..."
 II Pet. 1:1 - "God and Savior, Jesus Christ"

c. Holy Spirit as God
 Acts 5:3,4 - "lie to Holy Spirit...you have lied to God"
 Rom. 8:9 - "the Spirit...Spirit of God...Spirit of Christ"
 I Cor. 6:11 - "the Spirit of our God"
 II Cor. 3:17,18 - "the Lord is the Spirit"

- II. A brief history of Christian discussion concerning the "trinity"
- A. Justin Martyr (100-165) - while arguing for monotheism, refers to Jesus as "a second God in number"
 - B. Theophilus of Antioch (c. 175) - first to use Greek *trias* for "threesomeness" of God.
 - C. Tertullian (160-220) - first to use Latin terms: *trinitas* explained as 3 *personae* in one *substantia*.
 - D. Origen (c. 182-251) - subordinated Jesus and Spirit to the Father; Father is God in Himself, Son is image of Father, Spirit is image of Son.
 - E. Arius (c. 250-336) - Son brought into being by God, and thus made God.
 - F. Athanasius (296-373) - first to employ Greek *homoousion* as explanation of trinity.
 - G. Council of Nicea (325) - accepted Athanasius' *homoousion* explanation as orthodox Christian teaching. Some wanted *homoiousion*.
 - H. Cappadocian theologians (4th century), Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus - Settled on 3 *hypostaseis* in 1 *ousia*.
 - I. Augustine (354-430) - Three persons in 1 nature or essence. Many psychological analogies (ex. mind, knowledge, love)
 - J. Eastern Orthodox Church (1054) - rejected *filioque* concept of Spirit generated from Father "and the Son"; division from Western Latin Church
 - K. Richard of St. Victor (c. 1120-1173) - God as love demands a plurality of persons.
 - L. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) - three subsistences in one God.
 - M. John Calvin (1509-1564) - made more distinction between Son and Spirit.
 - N. Karl Barth (1886-1968) - three modes of being in one God, who is both I and Thou.
- III. Issues of consideration concerning the "trinity"
- A. Identifying the Oneness
 - 1. Being
 - 2. Essence
 - 3. Substance
 - 4. Nature
 - 5. Reality
 - 6. Person
 - 7. Godhead
 - B. Identifying the Threeness
 - 1. Persons
 - a. psychologically - personalities, self-conscious beings
 - b. sociologically - interrelational, interpersonal
 - c. distinct agents
 - 2. Individualities
 - 3. Identities
 - 4. Roles of activity
 - 5. Modes of expression

6. Entities
7. Emanations
- C. Interrelational factors of threeness
 1. Father, Son, Holy Spirit
 - a. paternity, filiation, procession
 - b. unbegotten, begotten, procession
 2. Priority and subordination
 - a. in relational function, but not essential being
 - b. eternality of such
 3. Eternal interpersonal relations
 - a. God is Person
 - b. God is Love
 - c. God is Faithful
 - d. Dynamic Being
 - e. Fellowship
- D. The tension or dialectic between
 1. Oneness and threeness
 2. Unity and diversity
 3. Indivisibility and distinctness
 4. Coinherence and community
- E. Avoidance of extremes
 1. Unitarianism, monad
 2. Tritheism, polytheism
 3. Modalism, Monarchianism
 4. Subordinationism
- F. Inadequacy of all human analogies
 1. father, son, husband
 2. water: liquid, gas, solid
 3. music: 3 notes, 1 chord
 4. light: 3 bulbs, 1 lumination
 5. atom: neutron, electron, proton
 6. space, matter, time
 - a. space: length, width, height
 - b. matter: energy, motion, phenomenon
 - c. time: past, present, future
 7. source, manifestation, meaning
 8. cause, event, consequence
 9. spirit, soul, body
- G. Necessary balance
 1. Ontological trinitarianism
 2. Operational trinitarianism
 - a. relational trinitarianism
 - b. administrative trinitarianism
 - c. economic trinitarianism
 - d. sociological trinitarianism
 - e. ergonomic trinitarianism
 - f. synergistic trinitarianism
 - g. functional trinitarianism

- IV. Implications of attempting to understand the “trinity” of God
 - A. Correlates with age old philosophical question of one and many
 1. Emphasis on one
 - a. monism
 - b. unity

- c. singularity
 - d. simplicity
 - 2. Emphasis on many
 - a. complexity
 - b. diversity
 - c. relativity
 - d. random
 - 3. Einstein's "theory of relativity" and "unified field theory" were attempts to explain that the diversities relate to a constant and a singularity.
- B. Three alternatives of response to Scriptural teaching of oneness/threeness
 - 1. Reject as incompatible with human reason - absurdity
 - 2. Reduce to human reason - emphasize oneness or threeness
 - 3. Accept the revelation of God - hold in balance/tension of dialectic or antinomy.
 - a. Natural reason will never arrive at trinitarian understanding of God.
 - b. Must accept God in the manner He has revealed Himself
 - c. Failure to do so is deification of human reason
- C. Centrality of trinitarian understanding to all Christian teaching
 - 1. Pervades every doctrinal category
 - a. Christology
 - (1) Incarnation - Jesus as God-man
 - (2) Redemptive efficacy
 - b. Pneumatology
 - c. Soteriology
 - d. Sanctification
 - e. Ecclesiology
 - 2. Necessity of trinitarian assent for Christian belief
 - a. God has revealed Himself in His Son, by the Spirit
 - (1) He cannot be known in any other way, except through the Son, by the Spirit - Jn 14:6,7
 - (2) The gospel of salvation/sanctification requires the persons and work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - b. Must allow for latitude of differentiation in human struggle to understand and express the tension between oneness and threeness
 - (1) Can never adequately express in human thought or words
 - (2) Point out dangers and fallacies of overemphases
 - 3. Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 329-389 A.D.) - "I cannot think of the One, but I am immediately surrounded with the glory of the Three; nor can I clearly discover the Three, but I am suddenly carried back to the One."