

# Lesson 2: The Holy Trinity

THEME: God is Trinity in Unity God is three in one. While we know not the Godhead perfectly, we can safegaurd our explanations of Him by binding our words to those of Scripture.

Proverbs 9:10 — The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

- Lesson 1: Thinking Right and God Incomprehensible
- **Lesson 2: The Holy Trinity**
- Lesson 3: The Self-Existence of God
- Lesson 4: The Self-Sufficiency of God, The Eternity of God
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- Lesson 8: The Sovereignty and Holiness of God

## The Godhead is a Mystery

1 Timothy 3:16 — And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

"Love and faith are at home in the mystery of the Godhead. Let reason kneel reverantly outside.

## How Jesus Spoke Sheds Light on the Godhead

Plurality

John 14:23 — Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

"Christ did not hesitate to use the plural form when speaking of Himself along with the Father and the Spirit. “We will come unto him and make our abode with him.”

- Unity, Equality

John 10:30 — I and my Father are one.

Yet again He said, "I and my Father are one." It is most important that we think of God as Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. Only so may we think rightly of God and in a manner worthy of Him and of our own souls.

It was our Lord's claim to equality with the Father that led to His crucifixion.

# The Early Church's Statements on God

Credo's are statements of faith. Many early believers would sum up their beliefs as they had an opportunity to stand for their faith. These Christians would study to develop their own credo based on what they had learned about their faith.

## The Apostles' Creed, from birth of the Church to the 800's

The Apostles' Creed, though not written by the apostles, is the oldest credo of the Christian church and is the basis for others that followed. It has many forms with some believing to be originally written by apostles, but seeing editions through to the 9th century.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,  
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,  
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
Born of the Virgin Mary,  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell;  
The third day He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost;  
The Holy catholic Church,  
the Communion of Saints;  
The Forgiveness of sins;  
The Resurrection of the body,  
And the Life everlasting.  
Amen. — The Apostles' Creed

A heresy called Arianism erupted in the fourth century (300s). Arianism denied the divinity of Christ.

## The Nicæan Creed, 325 AD

The Arian controversy necessitated theological focus which culminated in the writing of the Nicene Creed in 325 AD. 318 Church fathers met at Nicæa and adopted a statement of faith.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
The only-begotten Son of God,  
Begotten of Him before all ages,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made,  
Being of one substance with the Father,  
By whom all things were made. — Nicæan Creed on the Son

I believe in the Holy Spirit  
The Lord and giver of life,

Which proceedeth from the Father and the Son,  
Who with the Father and Son together  
Is worshipped and glorified.— Nicaean Creed on the Holy Spirit

## The Athanasian Creed, Sometime after 350 AD.

Athanasius was the chief champion against the heretics who followed after Arius, who argued that Christ was an exalted creature but that He was less than God. Athanasius died in 373 AD, and the epithet that appeared on his tombstone reads "Athanasius against the world." This great Christian leader suffered several exiles during the embittered Arian controversy because of the steadfast profession of faith he maintained in Trinitarian orthodoxy. Though the name "Athanasius" was given to the creed over the centuries, the Athanasian Creed was probably written after the death of Athanasius as a result of Athanasius' influence is embedded in the creed.

The content of the Athanasian Creed stresses the affirmation of the Trinity in which all members of the Godhead are considered uncreated and co-eternal and of the same substance. In the affirmation of the Trinity the dual nature of Christ is given central importance.

...For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal....There is, then, one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits. In this Trinity, there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less. The entire three Persons are coeternal and coequal with one another.... That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal. -- from the Athanasian Creed

## The Council of Chalcedon

Along with Arianism (denied the Divinity of Christ) arose other heresies:

- In the fifth century (400s) another heresy (monophysitism) stated that Jesus was theanthropic (God-man): that he was neither purely divine or purely human
- Nestorianism claimed Jesus had two natures and was therefore two persons, one human and one divine.

Both the Monophysite heresy and the Nestorian heresy were clearly condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

## My Father is Greater than I

John 14:28 — Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

How do these creeds stating equality of the father and son harmonize with the saying of Jesus, “My Father is greater than I”?

“Equal to His Father, as touching His Godhead; less than the Father, as touching His manhood,”

To redeem mankind the Eternal Son did not leave the bosom of the Father; while walking among men He referred to Himself as “the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father,” and spoke of Himself again as “the Son of man which is in heaven.”

# Co-Active

The Persons of the Godhead, being one, have one will. They work always together, and never one smallest act is done by one without the instant acquiescence of the other two. Every act of God is accomplished by the Trinity in Unity.

It is a real if understandable error to conceive of the Persons of the Godhead as conferring with one another and reaching agreement by interchange of thought as humans do.

That instant, immediate communion between the Persons of the Godhead which has been from all eternity knows not sound nor effort nor motion.

A popular belief among Christians divide the work of God between the three Persons, giving a specific part to each, as, for instance, creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and regeneration to the Holy Spirit. This is partly true but not wholly so, for God cannot so divide Himself that one Person works while another is inactive. In the Scriptures the three Persons are shown to act in harmonious unity in all the mighty works that are wrought throughout the universe.

In the Holy Scriptures the work of creation is attributed

- to the Father (Gen. 1:1),
- to the Son (Col. 1:16), and
- to the Holy Spirit (Job. 26:13 and Ps. 104:30).

The incarnation is shown to have been accomplished by:

- the three Persons in full accord (Luke 1: 35),

At Christ's baptism

- the Son came up out of the water,
- the Spirit descended upon Him and
- the Father's voice spoke from heaven (Matt. 3:16, 17).

In Hebrews 9:14, we behold the three persons operating together:

Hebrews 9:14 — How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The resurrection of Christ is likewise attributed variously:

- to the Father (Acts 2:32),
- to the Son (John 10:17-18), and
- to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:4).

The salvation of the individual man is shown by the apostle Peter to be the work of all three Persons of the Godhead (1 Pet. 1:2), and the indwelling of the Christian man's soul is said to be by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-23).

## Conclusion

The doctrine of the Trinity is truth for the heart. The fact that it cannot be satisfactorily explained, instead of being against it, is in its favor. Such a truth had to be revealed; no one could have imagined it.