

## § 5. Doctrine of God: Trinity

### The Biblical Data

We've just introduced the subject of the Trinity. Last time I indicated that although the word “Trinity” is not found in the Scriptures, that is really incidental. The point is that the doctrine of the Trinity is a systematic summary of the biblical data that indicate two things: that there is one God and that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead. If those facts are true then the doctrine of the Trinity is true. Let's look at the scriptural data that support these two truths.

#### B. Scriptural Data

##### 1. There is one God

First, that there is one God. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament we find that this doctrine – monotheism--is taught; there is but one God.

##### a. Old Testament:

Turn to Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” This is the fundamental confession of Judaism – the so-called *shema*. The first clause of that confession is the uniqueness of God – there is one LORD.

Look at 1 Kings 8:60 – this is Solomon’s benediction on the occasion of 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 other God than the LORD – the God of Israel.

Also 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 the God of Israel is the only God that there is. There is no other God.

In Isaiah 44, you find a lengthy satirical critique of the pagan deities of Israel's neighbors: how the idolater carves a piece of wood, paints it, decorates it, clothes it, and then falls down in front of his own creation and says, *Thou art my God*, and worships the products of his own hands. Isaiah just laughs at this – makes fun of it, at its folly. Israel did not consider itself to have simply a special God – one of the many gods, Israel's God. No, Israel's God was the only God that there is. There is no other God besides Yahweh, the LORD.

b. New Testament:

In the New Testament, the Christian followers of Jesus taught and believed the same thing – there is only one God. Look, for example, at Mark 12:29. Jesus is asked what is the greatest commandment and “Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”’” He here quotes the *shema* as the fundamental commandment and confession of Israel and affirms Jewish monotheism.

Similarly, in Romans 3:29-30a, Paul also affirms monotheism. Paul says, “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one.” So, again,

Paul did not conceive the Jewish God to be just one of many. He says the God of Israel is, in fact, also the God of Gentiles because there is only one God, and therefore Jew and Gentile alike can be united in the worship of the one true God.

In 1 Corinthians 8:4, addressing the subject of pagan idolatry, 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 these idol gods are not real gods. They are figments of the imagination. In fact, he says, there is no God but one – the God of Israel.

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

Finally, in James 2:19, James says, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!” So even the demonic forces are monotheists – even the demons believe that there is one true God, and they tremble because they stand under God's wrath and condemnation.

So, to state the obvious, it is clear that the Bible teaches there is but one God, and the Old and New Testaments concur that this is the God of Israel.

## 2. There are three distinct persons in the Godhead

In addition to that, the next point is that the Scriptures teach that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead. Let's look at each of the three persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## a. The Father

First, God the Father. Two points are to be made here.

### (1) Is a distinct person

First, the Scriptures teach that God the Father is a distinct person. Let's look at several passages that indicate that.

First, 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." Clearly in this passage Jesus differentiates himself as the Son from the Father. The Father and the Son stand in relationship to each other – they know each other and the Son reveals the Father. So clearly the Father is a distinct person from the Son, who knows the Son, is known by the Son, and is revealed by the Son.

Also, Matthew 26:39. This is the account of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to his arrest and trial. It says, "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 prays to the Father and asks that he might be spared this terrible suffering. But then he submits his will to the will of the Father and says, *Not as I will, but as thou wilt*. Again, showing the distinction of the Father and the Son and the submission of the Son to the Father's will.

Next, John 14:16-17. We've seen that the Father and the Son are distinct persons. Now in John 14:16-17 we see the Father's distinction from the Spirit. Jesus 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 we have all three persons of the Godhead. The Son is praying to the Father to send another Advocate – another Counselor – and that will be the Spirit. We have three distinct persons here. The Father is distinct from both the Son and from the Spirit.

## (2) Is God

The second point is that not only is the Father a distinct person, but the Father is God. Again, this is to state the obvious. Look at Psalm 89:26: “He shall cry to me, ‘Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’” So one of the metaphors under which Israel conceived of the Lord (Israel's God) is as a heavenly Father. God is the Father of the children of Israel.

One finds this conception of God as Father elsewhere in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 63:16: “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.” Here Isaiah says even if Abraham doesn't acknowledge us (and Abraham was regarded as the father of the Jewish nation), even if Israel or Jacob doesn't acknowledge us as his progeny, nevertheless the LORD is our Father. God is the Father of Israel.

In the New Testament, of course, this is the way in which Jesus presents the God of the Old Testament to his disciples and to the

people whom he taught. Matthew 6:9. This is the Lord's prayer. He says, "Pray then like this, 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.'" Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God as their heavenly Father and to regard God as their Father.

So the Scriptures teach that God the Father is distinct from the Son and from the Spirit, and that the Father is God. He is the God of the Old Testament. In fact, this word "God" in the Greek, *ho theos* (literally meaning "the God" – the article *ho* is the masculine definite article) in the New Testament usually refers to God the Father. When the authors of the New Testament say something about God (*ho theos*) they are usually talking about the Father.

For example, Paul's customary greeting in his letters was to say something like this: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ." So the Father is spoken of as God – God the Father.

Compare what Paul says in Galatians 4:4-6:

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!'

Here, again, all three persons of the Godhead are mentioned. When it says "God" sent forth his Son, "God" sent the Spirit, it means God the Father. This is clear because the Spirit teaches us to cry out to God, "Abba! Father!" So "God" in the New Testament typically refers to the person of the Father. It says the Father sends the Son (who is Jesus), and then he also sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts whereby we cry "Abba! Father!"

It is very interesting to read the New Testament in this light. When you read something about God, it is typically talking about God the Father.

So the first point is the Father is a distinct person, and the Father is God.

b. The Son

Let's go to the second point concerning the Son (or Jesus Christ). Again, the Scriptures indicate both that the Son is a distinct person and also that the Son is God.

(1) Is a distinct person

First, let's look at some verses that indicate that the Son is a distinct person from the Father. Mark 1:9-11. This is the baptism scene of Jesus. Mark says,

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 have all three persons of the Godhead mentioned. The Son undergoes baptism by John the Baptist, the Spirit descends upon him, and then the Father from heaven says, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." So the Son is clearly distinct from both the Spirit and the Father in this passage.

John 17:1-5. This is Jesus' great intercessory prayer for the church:

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.’

Clearly here Jesus is praying to another person. He is not talking to himself. He is praying to the Father and asking that the Father would glorify himself in the Son and speaking of how the Son has glorified the Father while on this planet. We have here a clear distinction between the Father and the Son. The sixteenth and seventeenth chapters in John clearly speak of the three persons of the Godhead. If you want to read these passages on your own, you will find over and over again the distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Let’s look at John 7:39 for the distinction from the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus quotes the Scripture, “He who believes in me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water,” and then John says, “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 distinction between the Spirit and the Son is clearly drawn here because the Son was with them but the Spirit was not. The Spirit was someone they would receive in the future after Jesus had departed from them and been glorified. So



although the Son was present with them, the Spirit was not yet present with them in the way that he would be in his fullness. The Spirit and the Son are distinguished from each other personally.

Finally, John 16:7, Jesus says, “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.” Here Jesus is speaking of that other Counselor or Advocate that the Father would send. Again, he distinguishes this person from himself: *So long as I am here with you, the Counselor will not come; but when I go, then the Counselor (the Spirit of truth) will be sent to be with you and be in you.* So Jesus distinguishes himself from the Spirit of God who would come after him.

So in the New Testament we have the Son as a distinct person from the Father and from the Holy Spirit.

## (2) Is God

Secondly, this person is also God. The Son is God. Immediately this raises a problem. If *ho theos* refers to the Father, then how can you say that Jesus is God without implying that he is the Father, which the New Testament writers did not want to do? They did not believe that the Father had become incarnate and died on the cross! Or that somehow the Father is no longer in heaven. So how could the New Testament writers affirm the deity of Christ without saying or implying that he is the Father? What you find is that the New Testament authors wrangled every way that they could to assert the deity of Christ without saying flatly that he is God.

A very good popular level book on this is by Michael Green, *The Truth of God Incarnate*. Green does an excellent job of showing

the extent to which New Testament writers went to affirm in some very creative ways the deity of Christ without saying that Jesus is *ho theos*, which would imply that he is the Father. That is precisely why you do not find these sort of flat statements in the New Testament, “Jesus is God,” because to say “Jesus is *ho theos*” would be understood to say that Jesus is the Father, and this is not what the New Testament writers wanted to say. So they find every other way conceivable to express the deity of Christ without coming right out and saying flatly that Jesus is *ho theos*. Let’s look at some of these ways in which the deity of Christ is affirmed by New Testament authors.

(a)Kyrios

The early Christians’ solution to this problem was startling and ingenious. They adopted the term *kyrios* (“Lord”) as their principal means of referring to Christ (368 times in the NT). The significance of this term lies in the fact that while it, like the English word “lord,” has a wide range of meaning, *kyrios* is the term Greek-speaking Jews substituted for God’s proper name “Yahweh” in the OT! Jews would not pronounce aloud the divine name Yahweh but substituted *kyrios* for it. So Lord or *kyrios* translates the name of God in the Old Testament – Yahweh. The New Testament writers call Jesus “Lord” (*kyrios*) and then they apply to him Old Testament passages about Yahweh! So while not referring to Jesus as *ho theos* (which would suggest that he is the Father), they do refer to Jesus as *kyrios* (Lord) and apply to him Old Testament passages about Yahweh.

Look, for example, at Romans 10:9, 13. Paul says, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord [*kyrios*] and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Here is the fundamental confession of the New Testament church – Jesus is Lord. Jesus is *kyrios*. Then in verse 13 the prooftext is given from the Old Testament. Quoting from Joel 2:32: “For ‘everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD [Yahweh] will be saved.’” Christians took this Old Testament passage about Yahweh – the God of the Old Testament – and applied it to Jesus and said everyone who confesses that Jesus is Lord will be saved.

This was the most important confession in the New Testament church. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:3 – “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 [*kyrios*],’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

Also look at 1 Corinthians 16:22 where Paul says, “Our Lord, come!” The Greek term there is *maranatha* – it is a transliteration into Greek of the Aramaic phrase “marana tha” which means, “Our Lord, come!” This is the language of the New Testament church at prayer. It goes right back to the Aramaic that the early followers of Jesus spoke in Jerusalem. And they prayed to Jesus as Lord, praying “Our Lord, come!” So you have here the original language of the Jerusalem fellowship praying to Jesus as Lord – the name of God in the Old Testament.

I think you can see how naïve it is when somebody says the New Testament doesn’t say that Jesus is *ho theos* or is God. What it does say is Jesus is *kyrios*, which is the Lord – Yahweh – in the Old Testament.

One last passage that I want to share with you, and this is 1 Corinthians 8:6. This differentiation between *ho theos* and *kyrios* leads to some really strange circumlocutions in the New Testament. Look at 1 Corinthians 8:6. “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.” Here Paul adapts the Shema “the Lord our God is one,” but the Lord and God are differentiated. There is one God, the Father, but one Lord, Jesus Christ, and then they are both described in virtually identical terms. They are the ones through whom everything exists, the ground of all being. They are the Lord God, but they are different persons. One is called the Father, the other is *kyrios*.

As equally startling as the application of OT proof texts about Yahweh to Jesus Christ is the NT authors’ unsettling practice of retrojecting Jesus into OT narratives about Yahweh. We have a prime example in Jn 12:41. Speaking of Isaiah’s vision of the Lord high and lifted up in the temple, John applies this passage to Jesus: “Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him.” According to John, the vision of the LORD of hosts described in Is 6:1 was in actuality a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ! We have here not merely the application of an OT proof text about Yahweh to Jesus, but rather the actual retrojection of Christ into a prior historical circumstance. He is here clearly equated with God.

A second stunning example of this is in Jude 5. Referring to the Lord’s judgment upon the people of Egypt in leading Israel out of bondage, Jude says, “Now I desire to remind you, though you are fully informed, once and for all, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not

believe.” Older translations of Jude have the word, “Lord” instead of “Jesus.” But the best Greek manuscripts, which are the basis for contemporary translations, read that *Jesus* saved a people out of the land of Egypt! This is absolutely astounding. Jude says the Lord who led the people out of Egypt and judged the Egyptians was actually Jesus. This has to be one of the most powerful proof texts for the deity of Christ in the New Testament.

So chew on that during the week until we meet next time and talk about other creative ways in which the New Testament authors affirm Christ’s deity.<sup>1</sup>