

The Mystery of the Big Picture
The Doctrine of the Trinity
(Milne 59-69, Grudem 227-259, Kendall 28-37)

1. What makes this difficult?

A. The limits of our language

- i) No parallel in our experience
- ii) Mystery
- iii) Three 'what'? 'three persons not that it might be spoken but that it might not be left unspoken' (Augustine)

B. The way we use the word God

- When we say God, do we mean *father*, or do we mean the entire Godhead? (Godhead = Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
- If we do, subordination of the Son and Spirit is inevitable.
- In the Old Testament, God the LORD (Yahweh) = the Triune God.

C. The word Trinity does not appear in the Bible

- 'Trinitas' and 'persona' first used by Tertullian (c.200AD).
- However, it is the clear teaching of the Bible.

2. What is the clear teaching of the Bible?

- A. God is three distinct persons**
- B. Each person is fully God**
- C. There is one God**

A. God is three distinct persons

- i) The Father is not the Son or the Spirit.
The Son is not the Spirit or the Father.
The Spirit is not the Father or the Son.
(John 1:1-2, 17:24)

Hebrews 7:25 teaches that we have an advocate interceding for us before the Father.
(see also John 14:26, Romans 8:27)

ii) The relatedness of Father, Son, Holy Spirit at key points in the Gospel story:

- The birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35, John 1:13)
- The baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:22)
- Ministry of Jesus (Matthew 12:28)
- Teaching of Jesus
- The Cross of Jesus (John 19:30, Hebrews 9:14)
- The Resurrection of Jesus (Romans 1:4)
- The Ascension of Jesus (Acts 2:33)
- Always distinct, always relating together, never independent

B. Each person is fully God

- i) Father - The one to whom Jesus prays.
- ii) Son - John 1:1-2, 20:28, Romans 9:6, Isaiah 9:6. Hebrews 1:3 'exact representation' as God and one who made the earth, to be worshipped by angels (cf Psalm 102:25)
- iii) Holy Spirit - Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Psalms 139
The Spirit knows the mind of God - 1 Corinthians 2:10-11
The Spirit brings new birth 'born of the spirit of God' - John 3:5-7, cf John 3:9

C. There is one God

There are not three Gods but one God

This is clear in the Old Testament: Exodus 15:11, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Isaiah 45:5-6

This is clear in the New Testament: 1 Timothy 2:5, Romans 3:30, 1 Corinthians 8:6

3. Simplistic solutions probably deny one of these truths:

- A. God is three distinct persons**
- B. Each person is fully God**
- C. There is one God**

The analogies:

- i) **The clover** ...three parts to each leaf...BUT utterly impersonal and each person is not a separate part of God.
- ii) **The tree**...Root, trunk and branches...BUT only parts - no one part is the whole tree and each person of the Trinity possesses all of the attributes of God.
- iii) **Three forms of water** ... water, ice, steam...BUT never the same at one time i.e. the ice is not water and the water not steam and does not share the same attributes.

4. The Errors

- i) Modalism
- ii) Arianism
- iii) Subordinationism
- iv) Adoptionism

5. The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity

- i) **Atonement** - if not fully God, could Jesus carry the full wrath of God?
- ii) **Justification by faith** - if Jesus not fully God, could he have carried all our sin?
- iii) **Worship** - we are commanded to worship Jesus. (Philippians 2:9, Revelation 5:12-14)
- iv) **Salvation** - comes through a creature, not God.
- v) **Independence** of God is at stake, he would need creation to relate to.
- vi) **Unity of the universe** is at stake.

"In the confession of the Trinity throbs the heart of the Christian faith: every error results from, or upon deeper reflection may be traced to, a wrong view of this doctrine." (Augustine)

6. Four models of the Trinity

