

COMMON QUESTION NO. 17

IS THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY REALLY IMPORTANT?

The orthodox doctrine that has been held by the church since the early centuries, as in the Nicene Creed, is being openly opposed. Some are modalists, believing that the Father, Son and Spirit are only three manifestations of one Person. Others are Arians, believing only the Father is fully divine. Many more Christians are aware of what the Church teaches but it is not something important to them and certainly not practical.

In this booklet we pray the Lord will help us to show you that it is so important that to deny it is to deny the Christian faith. Is it important? I will give five reasons.

1. YES, because the Bible clearly teaches that the one God exists in three separate Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Everything revealed in the Bible is true and is therefore of practical value. First, by worshipping God as three Persons we worship Him as He really is and not as a god of our imagination. The Bible teaches that the Father is God (1 Corinthians 8:6), the Son is God (John 1:1,18, 5:18, 10:33, 20:28), and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3,5). What is the relationship between these three? They are separate but equal Persons. The Catechism says: 'There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power and glory.' They are Persons because they do things only persons do, and they relate as persons to each other. For example, the Father sent the Son; the risen Lord sends the Spirit. All three are present at the same time when Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:16-17), so they must be separate. It is into the one divine name that disciples are to be baptized (Matthew 28:19); they are three, yet one God. Then the benediction is pronounced in the name of the three as equals (2 Corinthians 13:14).

When we give up the Trinity as a truth, we embrace error. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, have a low view of Christ as a created being, and the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force. Oneness Pentecostals view the Father, Son and Spirit as the same Person manifested in various ways (like a man who is a husband, father and employee). There can be no meaningful relationship between them if God is only one person.

2. YES, because unless the three Persons are each fully God then our salvation is impossible. Each of the Persons has a vital role in our salvation, and that role can only be fulfilled by One who is fully God. The Father elects and predestines. The Son becomes man and redeems. The Spirit regenerates and indwells. Neither the Father nor the Spirit redeem, only the Son. The Son does not elect, but is given the chosen ones by the Father. The Spirit does not become a man. If the Son is not fully God how can He be the mediator between God and man? If He is not God He cannot represent God; and if He is not man He cannot represent man. For His death to have infinite value He must be God. For Him to be a substitute for sinners He must be man. This is why we refer to Him as the God-man. If the Spirit is not God how can He give us spiritual life, indwell us, and raise us from the dead? Read Ephesians 1:3-14 for a summary of these trinitarian blessings. The Father blesses us in the Son (3). The Father chooses us in Christ and predestines us through Him (4-5). The Son redeems (7). The Spirit is the seal, the guarantee of our inheritance (13-14).

3. YES, because if God is only one Person then we cannot believe that "God is love". If God is only one person and not three then He existed alone from the beginning until He made the first persons, Adam and Eve. How can He possess those attributes of relationship such as love

if He is alone? Love necessitates another person to be loved. Yet in His prayer in the Garden, our Lord refers to the love the Father had for Him before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). Jesus often refers to this pre-creation relationship – He came to do the will of the Father who sent him, to save all the Father had given Him (e.g. John 6:38-39). It is suggested that in Islam, because God is viewed as a ‘monad’ (one person), there is a great emphasis on power and submission, rather than love. It is the perfect relationship within the Trinity that ultimately structures our relationships. As the Father and the Son are one in a perfectly loving relationship, so we are to be one (John 17:21-22). The love the Father has for the Son is to be in us (verse 26).

4. YES, because our worship must be Trinitarian. We come to the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). We must worship each Person of the Godhead according to how the Bible reveals their relationship with each other. We must not worship One at the expense of the other. In our hymns, many only refer to God. Relatively few have something about the Spirit. In Grace Hymns, the section on the Work of God the Father in Redemption is so short compared with the section on God the Son. There must be a Biblical balance in our worship. We do this by enjoying communion with each person of the Trinity in their respective roles in our salvation. Read John Owen on Communion with God at <https://www.monergism.com>.

5. YES, because it is the only way we explain a world that is full of diversity in unity. The Trinity is mysterious to us. We can hardly begin to understand how there can be one God, and three Persons who are God. We could understand if there were three gods or just one person. In the same way the world is full of diversity and yet it is also united in harmony.

- All colours are made up of the seven primary colours.
- Many musical instruments play different notes at the same time in an orchestra, blending together into one glorious sound.

A husband and wife are two separate persons yet they become ‘one’ in the marriage relationship.

Questions.

(1) Jesus said, “The Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), so how can He be equal with God? He was speaking as the God-man who had submitted Himself to His Father for our salvation (see Philippians 2:6-7).

(2) Jesus said He does not know the time of His return (Mark 13:32). He is truly and fully a man. As man He felt tiredness and died, neither of which can be true of God. As man He was dependent upon revelation and so did not know all things.

(3) Is the Holy Spirit really a person? In some older Bibles the pronoun used for the Spirit is ‘it’ and not ‘He’ as if He is not a Person. This is because in Greek the gender of the word translated Spirit is neuter. But the Spirit is always presented as One who does things only a person can do, e.g. teach, be grieved.