

# Firm Foundation

## *The Doctrine of God*

### Introduction:

At the conclusion of the Camp David Accord (1978) during President Carter's administration, three world leaders were present: Israel's leader, Begin; Egypt's leader, Anwar Sadat; and the President of the United States, Jimmy Carter. In the spirit of agreement and being moved by the significance of the occasion, President Carter suggested, in a seemingly spontaneous gesture, that the three join in prayer. His rationale was that "we all pray to the same God anyway."

While this may have been a politically prudent action it carries no theological truth at all. As a matter of fact it simply leads to confusion and supports an already popular notion that all religions basically have the same God.

This study is an effort toward clarifying this common misunderstanding. In this regard it must be remembered that the only source of man's knowledge of God is God's self-revelation, that is, the Holy Scriptures. There can be no absolute knowledge of God independent of God's self-revelation because God dwells in the light which no man can approach, (I Tim. 6:16).

In order to accomplish the task of knowing the God of the Holy Scriptures the following outline will be employed:

- I. The Natural Knowledge of God
- II. The Christian Knowledge of God
- III. The Trinitarian Controversies
- IV. Objections to the Unity of the Godhead
- V. The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament
- VI. The Trinity and Human Reason
- VII. Ecclesiastical Terminology and the Christian Knowledge of God
- VIII. God's Essence and Attributes
  - A. The relation of essence and attributes
  - B. Classification of Divine Attributes
    - 1. Negative
    - 2. Positive

## I

### The Natural Knowledge of God

Man knows by nature not only that there is a personal, eternal, and almighty God, the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe, but also that this God is holy and just, who demands and rewards the good and condemns and punishes the evil. This natural knowledge of God is derived in three ways.

A. *From the divine works of nature—they bear the stamp of the Creator*

Romans 1:20 *In this verse we learn that though God is invisible, He can never-the-less be seen by man. He need only observe the worlds of Creation. Ps. 8*

It is noteworthy that atheist philosophers, using their reason, employ almost identical language, as when, for example, Aristotle says of God: "Though God is invisible to every mortal creature, He is visible from His very works." Likewise Cicero: "You do not see God, and yet you learn to know God from His works."

This is called the cosmological argument for the existence of God.

B. From God's continuous work in the context of creation (realm of nature and History)

Acts 14:15-17 He gives the unbeliever abundant witness of Himself in the realm of Nature.

Acts 17:26-28 This is true also in history. God made the human race come from one set of genes, from one progenitor. The purpose of History is that men should seek the Lord. God's guiding hand is evident not only in nations but in individuals.

This is called the historic/theological argument for the existence of God.

C. Divine Law is written into the heart of all men. History is outside of man. This is internally on man's heart. It is from within.

Romans 1:32 This is God's judgment

Romans 2:14-15 This is the law apart from the specific decalog or ten commandment.

This text shows us that man's conscience is God's tribunal within man and is recognized as such by man. This explains the attempts of the heathen to propitiate God by idol worship, sacrifices, asceticism, etc., and thus to silence their accusing consciences.

This is called the Moral argument for the existence of God. This is proof from the fact of the Moral Law: proof from "practical reason."

What conclusion regarding logic can be drawn from all shades of atheism, that is crass atheism, pantheism, polytheism, or agnosticism?

It is neither rational nor scientific - is springs from the suppression and denial of the natural knowledge of God.

Romans 1:18

Only he who suppresses his reason can assert that there are no proofs for the existence of God. Scripture clearly says that God's invisible nature and His eternal power and deity are clearly perceived from the things that have been made (Rom 1:20).

What is the practical result of the natural knowledge of God?

What is it that Scripture teaches regarding this?

It teaches two things:

- a. In man's present condition the natural knowledge of God is entirely insufficient to attain salvation. It arouses the conscience of man, but it cannot quiet the awakened conscience; it shows man that there is a God and a divine Law, but it does not enable man to keep this Law.

Romans 1:19,21; 32; 2:14-15 \_\_\_\_\_  
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- b. It has two positive values.

1. Civil righteousness \_\_\_\_\_

2. for the church also \_\_\_\_\_

As Lutherans we are very careful when discussing the natural knowledge of God. On the one hand we set forth its value in great detail; on the other hand, we stress its inadequacy and utter insufficiency in bringing man to salvation.

## II

### The Christian Knowledge of God

The Christian knowledge of God, which is derived only from God's Word, the Holy Scripture, is characterized by one word. That is that word?

Trinitarian - in other words the Christian knows that the creative God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit \_\_\_\_\_

Luther's thesis is correct: "The Holy Scriptures teach that God is absolutely One \_\_\_\_\_

and that He is also three persons, absolutely distinct. "

First of all, the Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, teaches that God is one.

This is called monotheism.

Deut. 6:4 "The Lord our God is one Lord." The Hebrew word for "one" here is echad (אֶחָד) . It's used to declare the oneness of God, emphasizing that there is only one God. While "echad" can mean "one" in a numerical sense, in the context of Deuteronomy 6:4, it's understood to convey a sense of both unity and singularity, rather than simply the number one. \_\_\_\_\_

1 Cor. 8:4 "There is none other God but one." \_\_\_\_\_

How does the Bible regard polytheism? as entirely false. The gods of the non-believer are "non-gods" (Jer

2:11), non entities, vanities without existence. (Leviticus 19:4; 26:1) The New Testament calls them "as nothing" (1 Co 8:4) "vanities" (Acts 14:15) They can neither harm nor help man because there is no breath in them. (Jer 10:5; 14-15)

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So the Bible demands of man a monotheistic worship. (Ex. 20:3; Mk. 12:29-30)

Why do you think this is? A plurality of God would necessitate and division of adoration according to the number of gods.

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Outside of monotheistic worship, what is man doing? 1 Cor 10:20 the gentiles worship devils. Acts 14:15

In conclusion, polytheism is denounced in no uncertain terms in Scripture.

The Bible just as definitely teaches something else in this regard. What is that? One God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are three persons in one God. Matthew 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; again at Christ's baptism the triune God is revealed.

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"Go to the Jordan, and there learn the Trinity" (Matt. 3:16-17), where, as Luther says, "the Divine Majesty reveals itself as follows: The Father in the voice, the Son in His humanity, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove: three distinct Persons and yet only one God, one almighty, eternal, divine essence."

Can we know that without special revelation? absolutely not

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What is that special revelation? "Moses and the Prophets" The Holy Scriptures.

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It is only in the bible, which is God's Word, that He speaks to us and with us and there reveals His innermost being and His loving heart.

Which statement is the correct statement?

The Bible is the Word of God. (*Quia* - Because) All of it. This is true. It means that it is to be the norm and standard of the Christian life and faith.

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The Bible contains the Word of God. (*Quatenus* - in so far as) It means that you cannot trust the Bible. What do we mean by this? If the Bible only contains the Word of God then it is left up to man to determine what is true and what is false. Why is this a problem?

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Thank God that the often heard claim that the Bible is only a record of human concepts of God as developed un Jewish and Christian influence is FALSE! Christ and the Apostles "identify" Scripture with God's Word without any restrictions. If, therefore, we abide in the Scriptures, we hear what God declares about Himself. We learn that the one true God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as what kind of thoughts He has entertained from eternity toward fallen mankind. This leads us to a discussion of the practical value of the Christian knowledge of God.

What is it that the natural knowledge of God cannot do on a day in and day out basis?

It cannot deliver us from an evil and troubled conscience.

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What does the Christian knowledge of God accomplish? *It calms the troubled conscience. In fact, it is our salvation where we confess the Father as Creator and Sustainer; the Son as Redeemer; and the Holy Spirit as sanctifier.*

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When we confess: "I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," we are saying, "I believe in that God who is gracious to me, a sinner."

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, men have taken offense at the prolonged and sometimes acrimonious battle which the Church fought to preserve the doctrine of the Trinity. (Note the study of Creeds and Confessions.) But the stakes in this controversy were high: the preservation of the Christian knowledge of God and man's salvation. The Church of the Reformation, too, confesses in the first article of the Augustana the doctrine of the Trinity and renounces any and all fellowship with the deniers of the Trinity.

Book of Concord, p 100 [Article I. God] *The Trinity is a very serious matter of God.*

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### III The Trinitarian Controversies

It is a mistaken idea that the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ were developed by the church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries. On the basis of the oral and written Word of the Apostles the Apostolic Church knew and accepted these doctrines.

Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; 2 Thess. 2:15

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Luther was correct when he said that the Bible presents "far more abundantly and powerfully" this doctrine than the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon. Never-the-less, the Christian Church has been compelled to fight bitter wars not only against professed Anti-Trinitarians outside the church, but also against those in her own borders who disturbed and disrupted the Church by teaching a doctrine of God which was nothing but the result of their own speculation.

The principle arguments against this doctrine are three in nature:

- 1) *Discard the Trinity in favor of the Unity or Monoarchianism*
  - 2) *It promotes three different Gods*
  - 3) *The Koran ridicules this doctrine ("Triad - the Creator has no wife) saying that the doctrine of the trinity namely three persons one God represents "establishing a heavenly family."*
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Since Christian knowledge consists in this, "that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance," the Christian Church must necessarily take an uncompromising position (a) against all such as deny the three Persons and (b) against all who deny the one God, or the one divine essence.

## A. The Christian Church and Unitarianism

The Unitarians can also be know as Monarchians and Anti-Trinitarians.

The Monarchians can be divided into two classes:

- 1) Modal Monarchians
- 2) Dynamic Monarchians.

Modal Monarchianism: This came to be in the 3rd century and they held that god is a unity and therefore unipersonal. The unipersonal God has revealed Himself successively in these modes or forms. Father as creator; Son as redeemer; Holy Spirit as Sanctifier. These are not distinct but are parts played by one divine essence. Sabellius (excommunicated in 260AD) at first was very popular. 1) it held to a monotheism over and against a pagan polytheism. and 2) it did hold to a form of trinity. and 3) it emphasized the deity of Christ.

Dynamic Monarchianism: This, on the other hand, teaches that Jesus was simply a man who was pre eminently endowed with the power "logos" of the unipersonal God. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is only a divine power operative in Moses, the prophets, and especially Jesus. Jesus is called the Son of God only in that the Logos influenced Him to moral agreement with God's will. Because of this Jesus was adopted (adoptionism) ultimately to achieve permanent oneness with God. The modern Dynamic Monarchians are Mormons.

While these two types of Unitarianism differ in many important points, they agreed in their categorical denial of the three distinct Person in God. Most English, American, and German Unitarians are Dynamic Monarchians. The modern Dynamic Monarchians are Mormons.

Why do you think Dynamic Monarchianism would be attractive in today's culture? \_\_\_\_\_

The Christian Church has always successfully met and overcome Unitarianism by the following three Scripture proofs:

- a. The names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can denote only three self-subsisting persons. No one who hears these names of God will think of three modes of the same person.
- b. Personal actions such as knowing, willing, teaching, reproving, speaking, are ascribed to each of the three persons. Matt 11:27, Father, Son, know. John 1:18 Son "declares" John 14:26; Luke 22:42 - Son "willingly". John 14:26 the H.S. teaches. Acts 28:25 "speaks" all of these predicate personal acts.
- c. Scripture expressly describes the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as another. John 5:32, 37; (Father and Son) John 14:16.

## B. The Christian Church and Unitarianism and Subordinationism

The unity of God is denied by the Tritheists and the Subordinationists.

Tritheists: These assume that the three essences are of equal quality -three gods.

Subordinationists: These assume that the three essences are of unequal quality

Scripture teaches, in the first place, that there is no division of the divine essence.

1 Cor. 8:4 here we maintain the indivisibility of the Godhead

We must also maintain that each of the three Persons possesses this one undivided and indivisible divine essence in its entirety. A division of the Divine Being which would ascribe to the Father the first third of the Godhead, to the Son the second, and to the Holy Spirit the third, is contrary to the very essence of God.

Col. 2:9 In Him the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwells

Acts 5:4 τὸ Θεῶν. (tow Theow) denotes the entire Godhead, not just a third of it.

There are many, many more verses and Scriptural evidence to support the divine attributes, works, or worship among the three Persons, but that the three Person share in them without any distinction of rank.

1) the attributes are not divided among the three Persons. On the contrary, Scripture ascribes these attributes without division or limitation to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Son: John 10:28; (Omnipotence) John 21:17 (Omniscience) Matt 28:20 (Omnipresence)

The Spirit: Ps 33:6 (Omnipotence) 1 Cor 12:10 (Omniscience) Ps 139:7 (Omnipresence)

2) Works too are ascribed to all Father is Creator

The Son: Creation — John 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:10

The Spirit: Creation — Ps 33:6; Job 33:4

3) Since all three Persons possess the same divine essence, attributes, and works, therefore one and the same divine worship is due each Person.

The Son: John 5:23

While the Scriptures do not say in express words that men must worship the Holy Spirit, it is nevertheless taught very definitely in all those Scripture passages where divine majesty, attributes, and works are

ascribed to the Holy Spirit. That the Holy Spirit is entitled to the same worship as the Father and the Son is expressed also in the baptismal formula. By being baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Christian adores the Holy Spirit with the same divine worship which is accorded to the Father and the Son. The Christian Church therefore worships the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity.

## IV

### Objections to the Unity of the Godhead

The FIRST objection : In His High Priestly Prayer (John 17) Jesus addresses the Father as "the only true God" (John 17:3) and thereby disclaims essential quality with the Father (homousia)

Answer: Jesus claims nothing less than essential equality in John 10:30. - His words are unmistakable.

Objection: If Christ claims unity of essence with the Father why does He demand in John 17:3 that men must know both the Father and the Son in distinction?

Answer: in this context, John 17:2, He claims unity of essence by ascribing to Himself the divine work of giving eternal life. But the real purpose of John 17 is to answer how men come to a saving knowledge of the One True God. The answer? the only true God is revealed in the incarnate Son v.4. So it is not sufficient to know the Father but the Son also, for salvation.

The SECOND objection : Since the Son is of the Father and the Holy Spirit is of the Son the Son must be inferior to the Father and the Holy Spirit inferior to the Son

Answer: This objection is non-sense. Even in the natural realm a son is not necessarily inferior to his Father. According to the Father's own self revelation in His Word it is impossible for the son to be inferior to the Father and so on. As already shown, each person in the deity is the entire God. There are not three "sets" but only one "set." So 1,2,3 is called the "order of natural enumeration."

The THIRD objection : They will say that Scripture itself teaches subordination when it states that the divine activity or work in nature and the church are brought about by the Son and the Holy Spirit. (order of creation)

Answer: Some passages (John 1:3; Col 1:16) seem to say this but we have already shown that there is an order of Persons. so also in this case there is an order of operation. John 5:19 - the Son; John 16:13-15; there is not a division of divine activity. there is one operation.

The FOURTH objection : John 14:28-29 Jesus says that the Father is greater than the Son.

Answer: Jesus is speaking of an inferiority which will cease at His glorification and His return to the Father. State of humiliation before His Exaltation. John 17:5



## V

# The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament

This is a highly controverted matter and deserves special discussion. Many people say that the Old Testament does not teach the Trinity. Luther's position may be summarized as follows:

Although this doctrine of the Trinity is not revealed as clearly in the Old as in the New Testament, never-the-less this doctrine is unmistakably set forth in the Old Testament. "Thus at the very beginning of the world the doctrine of the three Persons in the Godhead was indicated, later clearly understood by the Prophets, and finally fully revealed in the Gospel."

In his exposition of Genesis 35:7 Luther says that the great part of the Jews did not believe this doctrine. Yet, even many in visible Christendom do not heed or believe this doctrine. Isaiah comments on their rejection in Chapter 6, verse 10.

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*They will not recognize the Scripture.*

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The Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are agreed that the doctrine of the Trinity is revealed to such an extent in the Old Testament that the believers were able to perceive and believe the doctrine of the Trinity.

Still people insist that "no theologians will turn to the Old Testament for proof texts in support of the doctrine of the Trinity."

The question whether the Old Testament teaches the doctrine of the Trinity is settled once and for all in the Christian Church by the fact that Christ and His Apostles prove the divine personality of the Son and of the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament.

Ps. 110:1 (Matt 22:41ff) *The Messiah is not only David's son but David's Lord. Everyone will admit that the term "David's Lord" doesn't denote a symbol on a germ of personality but a complete and full personality.*

In regards to the Holy Spirit the Savior thereby is confirming what David declares in 2 Samuel 23:2: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me."

In Hebrews 1, the deity of Christ, and that can only mean His divine personality, is proved from six Old Testament texts:

Ps. 2:7 *He is God*

2 Sam. 7:14 *God's Son - Who is wrong*

Ps. 97:7 *Controls creation*

Ps. 45:7 *love righteousness. hate wickedness*

Ps. 102:26-27 *eternally He will be worshipped*

Ps. 110:1 *He rules*

We see from these passages that the Messiah is not a Platonic idea, a mere concept, a symbol, a germinal personality, but that the Messiah is real, living, and complete personality.

In the same manner, the Old Testament clearly teaches the divine personality of the Holy Spirit in predicating the following activities:

Gen. 1:2 \_\_\_\_\_ *Creation* \_\_\_\_\_ Gen. 6:3 \_\_\_\_\_ *reproving man* \_\_\_\_\_

2 Sam. 23:1-3 \_\_\_\_\_ *speaking through David* \_\_\_\_\_

Is. 63:10 \_\_\_\_\_ *being frustrated and embittered by Israel* \_\_\_\_\_

Finally, the doctrine of the Trinity is taught also in those passages which, like the New Testament in Matt. 28:19 and 2 Cor. 13:14, enumerate the three Persons of the Trinity side by side and as three separate Persons.

Is. 63:8-10 \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the "Angel of the Lord" in Genesis 22:1-12? \_\_\_\_\_ *considered to be the second person of the Trinity - God. Genesis 32:25 Jacob would. not pray to an angel -- Christ showed himself to say that he would not always be invisible - but came to suffer and die.* \_\_\_\_\_

## VI Trinity and Human Reason

On the one hand, we cannot nor should we dare to differentiate between a divine Person and the Divine Being, because the Scripture ascribes the entire Godhead not only to the Father, but also to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, we must make a real distinction between the Persons, because the Holy Scriptures speak of three Persons as another: only the Son--not the Father nor the Holy Spirit--was incarnate. Luther puts it this way:

"Reason cannot comprehend that on thing contains no distinctions and at the same time is three distinct things."

further:

"Metaphysics and every speculation of the part of a creature must be excluded in the doctrine of God."

In other words, we cannot make the doctrine of the Trinity plausible to reason.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ *There are no proofs for Trinity. Certain natural phenomena may remind us of the fact that there are 3 persons in one divine essence but these are not proofs. Only God's Word brings this confidence.* \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ *It is not possible by a process of rationalization to derive the doctrine of the Trinity from divine essences or attributes.* \_\_\_\_\_

But modern theology, which in its rejection of Scripture has shifted from Scripture to the theological opinions of the individual, can present only human speculations concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. Naturally, there are as many different theories and personal opinions as there are individual speculative theologians. Never-the-less, the many theological opinions fall into two general categories:

1. Open denial
2. Religious Experience - Subjective

What is an appropriate response by the Christian to such theories or to people who find the Trinity to be a stumbling block to faith?

We do not need to defend its doctrines with rational arguments We should not attempt to investigate with our reason how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be one God. We join good company in that we are not able to understand everything.

## VII

### Ecclesiastical Terminology and the Christian Knowledge of God

Scripture does not reveal the doctrine of the Trinity as an academic problem, but as an exceedingly practical article of faith for our salvation.

Romans 16:25f \_\_\_\_\_

"... Nothing could redeem us from the dreadful all into sin and from eternal death except an eternal Person who has the power to destroy sin and death and to give eternal righteousness and life instead. For this no angel nor any other creature was sufficient. Only God Himself could accomplish this." --Luther

Self-righteous and conceited man rejects the doctrine of the Trinity; he has no use for the soteriological importance of this revealed doctrine. And man's rebellion is directed primarily against the essential deity of Christ, whom self-righteous and conceited man will not accept as the only Mediator between God and man. The words of 1 Timothy 2:6: "He gave Himself a ransom for all," are, as Luther says, "nothing but thunderclaps and fire from heaven against the righteousness of the Law and the doctrine of works. The wickedness, error, darkness, ignorance, of my will and intellect was so great that only an inexpressible great ransom could free me."

What problem would 80% of this country have with what Luther just said? \_\_\_\_\_

But the Christian realizes the seriousness of the attacks upon the essential deity of Christ. They know that a denial of Christ's deity destroys the god/man work of redemption and thus the object of saving faith. And the Lord has always raised stanch defenders of the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. He did so in the life-

and-death struggle of the Christian Church during the Trinitarian controversies of the third and fourth centuries. Today the controversy of the Church with Modernism is no less serious and difficult. In the interest of its self-righteousness modern theology has reduced Christianity to an ethical religion. This is an open disavowal of divine revelation, of Christ's vicarious atonement, and of the Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity. But God has guarded this doctrine with special care. As Francis Pieper observes:

"History introduces us to outspoken opponents as well as to men who attempt to explain and modify the doctrine of the Trinity. But it is a striking phenomenon that from the beginning of the Christian Church down to our day neither the outspoken opponents nor the compromising theologians have been able to suppress this doctrine, confident though they were of their anti-Trinitarian position. Nor has faith in the Trinitarian God ever proved to be an obnoxious error; on the contrary, both in theory and in practice it has proved to be a salutary doctrine."

At this point in our study we are about to conclude our discussion on Trinity. However, it is appropriate that time be taken here not only to review ;but to repeat, possibly covering some new ground, in an attempt to summarize and solidify as much as possible the **Doctrine of God among the Trinity**.

Trinity is a paradox. For the Christian, God is Triune. This is a distinctive characteristic which separates the Living God from all other "gods." But we are forced to admit that the term is extra-scriptural. We also cannot say that Trinity has been a central concern for Christians. The word Trinity is absent from the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. That leaves us with something of a problem. How is Trinity to be understood? We will answer this question in three parts:

- a) Revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture;
- b) Formulate a set of thesis' on what the teaching is; and
- c) View the three Persons separately in a Trinitarian context.

#### **a) Revelation of the doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture**

This doctrine is not presented in a systematic form. Still it is present. This is true of many other doctrines as well. Name some that you feel fit this category (accumulated data to form a teaching).

Infant Baptism

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But this does not mean that it is not Scriptural.

Of what, then, does much of the study of doctrine consist? The accumulation of Biblical data and then the application of Biblical data.

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It is clear that the Scriptures talk of One God and three Persons. But this is a doctrine of revelation.

What does that mean? This means it can only be concluded from the witness of Scripture.

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Let us construct an explanation. Biblical proofs do exist. We must be careful not to work out of context.

## Old Testament

There are not many such proofs in the Old Testament. Trinity is not completely revealed in the O.T.

Why do you think that is?\_\_\_\_\_

So full revelation does not exist in the O.T.. Yet indications do exist. Indication is the best of all terms to use in this case. The reason is that the Bible does not deal with trinity as an abstract truth. It is a living reality. So it is given as fact and a way of life. As a result we can say that the Trinity is indicated in the lifestyle. So Trinity is given as fact and not conjecture.

Is. 7:14 \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 1:26 \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 18:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Still, this is not a full revelation. All that is indicated is a distinction of persons. It does not point to a Trinity. In fact, if this was all that we had the indication could be of more than three persons. Further indications are as follows:

Angel of Yahweh: Gen. 16:7-13 \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 18:1-21 \_\_\_\_\_

Mal. 3:1 \_\_\_\_\_ Gen. 19:1-28 \_\_\_\_\_

These are simply indications of distinction.

Also, there are O.T. passages in which the Word is personified.

Ps. 33:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Prov. 8:12-31 \_\_\_\_\_

In the following verses we see God as speaker and the mentioning of the Messiah:

Is. 48:16 \_\_\_\_\_

Is. 61:1,9 \_\_\_\_\_

Aside from a few additional verses in chapter five of this study that is about it. Trinity is not revealed in completeness. All we have is "Hear O Israel..." and a certain distinction of persons. This equals an indication only.

## New Testament

This is much more clear. There are many passages including Matthew 28.

Mat. 1:21 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 9:31 \_\_\_\_\_

Other passages are Mat. 28:19; Mat. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 13; 1 Cor. 12. These all indicate One God and a distinction of Persons.

### b) Dogma: Statement of Doctrine of Trinity

This is the faith of the Church:

1) In the divine Being there is one indivisible essence . God is one in His constitutional nature (Deut 6:4)

Clearly, the terms of men to articulate this doctrine is rooted in Scripture.

2) There are three persons or individual substances: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Again, this is based on Scripture.

It is very difficult to express this in human terms. This is the best we can do.

The word Person is not full proof--in fact it is easily misunderstood. This is only a distinction.

3) The whole undivided essence belongs equally to the three persons and not divided amongst the three persons. This is a major point.

If this is not clearly understood what dangerous concept of God will emerge? Tri-theism This is a difficult point

This third point is the major understanding.

4) Operation of the three persons is marked by a certain order. Father first, Son second, H.S. third. What is the basis of this order? (is it time? is it dignity? is it a logical order of derivation?) it is the third of these. Generation + Procession take place within the divine Being = Economic Trinity - ontological Trinity (experience salvation)

5) Each has Personal Attributes. Father = creation; Son = redemption; H.S. = Sanctification. Still this is a joint effort and responsibility.

6) The Church confesses that this is a mystery beyond the comprehension of man. While parts of it can be understood its essence cannot be comprehended. All we can do is formulate the doctrine with the evidence have. However, the mystery cannot be removed.

## Analogs of the Trinity

There are weaknesses in all of them because all are human analogies.

1) imitative of nature. Water can be a solid, a liquid, and a gas. Plant life has a root, a trunk, and branches. And apple: skin; "meat"; Seeds.

What is missing from this type of analogy? There is no personality even though there are three parts. There is no essence.

2) The make up of man. Intellect, feelings, will. St Augustine used this and pointed out that man is the image bearer of God.

What might the danger be in this type of analogy? the intellect and the will and feelings are not always in agreement.

3) the nature of love: presupposes 1) a subject; 2) an object; 3) a union.

What doesn't this illustrate? It does not illustrate a tri-personality

Still, are analogies of the Trinity appropriate? yes How can they be defended?

the purpose is not so much to explain but rather to reduce the mystery. Still, the mystery remains.

## VIII

### God's Essence and Attributes

No classification of the divine attributes is fully adequate. It is therefore, of no theological consequence which classification is used, so long as the various attributes are defined according to Scripture alone.

We will follow the division into negative and positive attributes.

What do we mean by negative attributes? That of which the creature has no experience or knowledge

What do we mean by positive attributes? That which the creature has in part experienced.

Why do we use this method? This is a comparison between God and His creatures - to adore divine perfection which transcends human comprehension

Before discussing the divine attributes we must make one more observation. All divine attributes revealed in Scripture such as unity, infinity, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, could only fill our hearts with terror if Scripture had not also revealed God's grace toward all sinful mankind for the sake of Christ's vicarious atonement. This attribute of God's grace is the center of the entire Scriptures, for the scope of all

Scripture is Christ, the Savior of sinners, "who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:6). The attribute of God's grace, which is provided through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, is also the God-intended center of all human history, for the only purpose of the world's existence is the proclamation of God's grace through the redemption in Christ (Matt 24:14).

## NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES

### 1. The Unity of God

God is in a class by Himself. Every creature has at least something in common with other creatures and exists in duplicate, triplicate, or multiple form. There can be no other God besides God. He cannot be divided.

Is. 43:10 Understand that I am He; before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me.

Is. 45:5 I am the Lord and there is none else; there is no God besides Me

1 Cor. 8: There is none other God but one.

But are not creatures also called gods in Scripture? Yes, this is true of rulers and governors. Why?

Under God they exercise divine functions.

But God is the *ens summum*, that is, the Absolute Reality, and therefore He cannot share being, activity, authority, glory, with anyone or anything.

Is. 41:23 gods of the heathen are important

The "creature gods", such as civil rulers, on the other hand, have existence and administrative powers, but only in a derived sense. Without God they are nothing and can do nothing. How important, therefore, our private and public intercessions that the one true God preserve the being and authority of these "gods"!

This doctrine has great practical value:

1) The earnest admonition to cling to this one God with undivided allegiance

2) The comfort that no person or event in history can harm us in our relationship to God (Rom 8:31)

So God cannot be classified. Since we cannot compare Him with a creature the definition must be negative. As Luther says, "Who knows what God is? He is above body and spirit, yes, above everything we can say, hear, or think."

Strictly speaking, then, a definition of God is impossible. Still, the Scriptures are a description of God. So the closest we can come to knowing God is as He is revealed in the Word.

### 2. The Simplicity of God

We can describe God's simplicity only in negative terms. It is that attribute according to which God exists entirely uncompounded and without parts. The infinitude of God does not allow the ascribing of parts.



How should we understand the following passages? (Ps. 139:16 eyes,

Isaiah 55:11 mouth, Ps. 119:73 hands, Matt. 5:35 feet) figuratively; anthropomorphically (ascribing human characteristics to nonhuman things); anthropopathically (ascribing human feelings to something that is not human) - John 4:24

This is simply beyond all human comprehension. Therefore God Himself has condescended to us, divided Himself, as it were, into component parts, and because our finite intellect permits us to conceive of God's attributes, e.g., justice, omnipotence, grace, as following one after another or as existing alongside one another. This is a knowledge of God "in part," as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 13.

### 3. The Immutability of God

Ps. 102:26-27 \_\_\_\_\_

He is immutable also in all His attributes. Prov. 19:21 \_\_\_\_\_

We learn a twofold lesson from God's immutability.

1) to warn the wicked— God's wrath in unchangeable;

2) to comfort the faithful because God's grace can never depart

Why then does the Scripture ascribe to God a change of mind as in Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11; Jonah 3:10 or a change of place as in Gen. 11:5? to conform to our mode of thinking in terms of time and space, cause and effect.

The Scripture teaches very clearly this reality (immutability) in 1 Sam. 15:29 \_\_\_\_\_

God's essence is not changed when He enters into time and space. (Jer. 23:24)

The Scriptures speak of God in a twofold manner:

1) His majesty being above time and space (Look at Ps 90:4)

2) In accordance with our human views as being in time and space - this is the only God we can comprehend.

We must also think of God, who in His being is immutable, is angry or merciful according to the difference the object of His affection. We must so conceive of God that in spite of the immutability in His

essence He is a gracious God to the humble, poor, and contrite sinners, but a jealous God to the proud and self-righteous (1 Peter 5:5; Luke 18:9-14; Luke 1:52-53).

How might we say this in our own words? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### 4. The Infinity of God

*(Note: Dictionary eternity is defined according to time only. Infinity is defined both time and space)*

All creatures are finite, that, they are subject to the limits and boundaries of their being and activity. God is infinite. The term infinity expresses the idea that God in His being and activity is in no way bound by the limitations of time and space. Two passages point this out very clearly:

Ps. 145:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 147:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Possibly one way to capture the essence of infinity is to use the word immensity instead. By ascribing immensity to God, Scripture expressly reminds us that we dare not make our puny reason and intellect the yardstick to measure God's being and activity.

1 Tim 6:16 \_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 145:3 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Kings 8:27 \_\_\_\_\_

This is the absolute difference between God and man: we must be reminded that we are limited! Therefore it is correct to say that "God enters into time and space and still always remains above time and space."

#### 5. Omnipresence of God

God alone is Omnipresent. Man and all creatures are always limited to a specific locality. Not even the angels are omnipresent. The Scriptural teaching on God's omnipresence may be summarized in three points.

1) Wherever God works, He is present. God never works in absentia.

*God does not send out His angels to do His creating. He is present in the creatures inner most and outer most parts.*

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Jer. 23:24 *the point is that God sees everyone because He is present according to His essence, not only according to His power.*

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Ps. 139:8 *The psalmist is expressing the same point.*

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2) But God's omnipresence is of such a nature that while He is present in all creatures, He is at the same time outside the creature and never becomes the creature or even a part of the creature.

Acts 17:28 \_\_\_\_\_

Col. 1:17 \_\_\_\_\_

But at the same time He is far outside, and distinct from the creature as the Infinite is distinct from the finite.

What is the only means of comprehending God even though He is present in all creatures?

God pro-me. He is revealed to us and for us in Christ. As Luther said, "He is not in the leaf for me."

3) God is present everywhere without local extension, contraction, multiplication, or division. If God were subject to time and space these concepts would be applicable. Scripture teaches that God transcends all time and space.

I Kings 8:27 \_\_\_\_\_

Is. 66:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Again, this doctrine, as in others, is provided as practical.

1) Since there is no place where we can hide it is a warning Jer23:24; Ps139:7ff

2) No place will separate us from His love Psalm. 23:4; Matt 28:20; Is. 43:1-2.

## 6. The Eternality of God

The term eternity in the Scriptures is used in two ways.

1) Modified: denotes a long and indefinite period of time. Ex 12:24 (regarding circumcision) Also: it is existence which has no ending but it has a beginning such as man (Mt 25:46)

2) Absolute: unlimited duration without beginning or end.

In the strict and absolute sense the word eternity denotes infinite, unlimited duration without beginning, without end, without succession. In this sense, eternity can be predicated of God only.

Ps. 90:2 \_\_\_\_\_ Ps. 102:27 \_\_\_\_\_

This is our warning and our comfort. How? Our warning: 2 Thess 1:9; Our Comfort: eternal presence with the Lord.

Of these two, which is the God pleasing motivation? \_\_\_\_\_

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## THE POSITIVE ATTITUDES

### 1. Life

God alone has life in an absolute sense. Creatures also have life, but it is a derived life, a life in God.

Acts 17:28 \_\_\_\_\_ John 5:26 \_\_\_\_\_

This living God is set in contrast to the idols set up by man.

Joshua 3:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Jer. 10:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 14:15 \_\_\_\_\_

This is in contrast to all created life which has its origin in God.

Acts 17:25 \_\_\_\_\_

This fact has two realities.

Heb. 10:31 \_\_\_\_\_

Josh. 3:10 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Tim. 3:15 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Tim. 4:10 \_\_\_\_\_

In times of disaster and despair the Christian exclaims with Luther: "LIFE!"

### 2. The Knowledge of God

Knowledge is an attribute common to both God and man. The knowledge of creatures is relative, imperfect. God's knowledge is absolute, perfect. The knowledge of God differs from that of creatures in two points: in its extent and in its manner.

a. God's knowledge is omniscient John 21:17; 1 John 3:20; and it comprises all things. It includes all future events - even contingent events.

b. Man's knowledge is acquired. He progresses from the known to the unknown--from one fact to another. God's knowledge is not acquired--He knows all things in one. Man must perceive and deduce from available data.

What Scripture teaches concerning God's knowledge serves for our warning and our comfort.

Warning: It is the prerogative of the Divine Majesty alone to know the future

Comfort: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. The Wisdom of God

Scripture makes a distinction between God's wisdom and His knowledge, Rom. 11:33. In Scripture the term wisdom denotes a practical knowledge, the ability to discern correctly the best ends and choose the best means for attaining these ends. And in this sense, Scripture ascribes wisdom to God. The Gospel of Christ Crucified is expressly called the "wisdom of God," the "hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory." (1 Cor. 2:6ff).

Since God is the "only wise God" (1 Tim. 1:17; Rom. 16:27) dare we criticize God's wisdom? \_\_\_\_\_

How do we stand before His wisdom? We are prone to criticize in His works and elevate our puny wisdom--However, we are called to stand before His judgments in adoration and praise. this includes punishments, famine, wars, depressions etc., all things with which God allows mankind to be afflicted.

They must serve God's gracious purpose and will to bring men to repentance and faith, as Christ expressly teaches on the basis of concrete examples in Luke 13:1ff.

### 4. The Divine Will

The Scriptures ascribe to God not only mind (Rom. 11:34) but also will (1 Tim. 2:4; John 6:40; 1 Thess. 4:3). It is in this final category that we will conclude our study of the Doctrine of God. Within this section we will consider the following:

- |                  |               |    |                   |
|------------------|---------------|----|-------------------|
| a.               | His holiness; | c. | His truthfulness; |
| b.               | His justice;  | d. | His grace; and    |
| e. His patience. |               |    |                   |

We should take a few moments to discuss God's will in general.

a. first we must distinguish between God's first will and His consequent will.

1. John 3:17: we must think of God as not willing to condemn a single person.

2. Consequent v. 18—He wills the condemnation of all who reject Christ.

Why is this important? This distinction is important because Calvin-Reformed teach that God has two independent and contradictory wills, namely the saved and the lost.

b. Secondly, we distinguish between the irresistible and the resistible will of God.

irresistible: God, in His will that all be judged on Judgment Day—"Divine Must"

resistible: Christ's will that men live in faith through the Gospel can be resisted. Matt 23:37

Why is this important? Many have misused this by saying that "if a man can resist he can also accept, however, this spiritual attribute does not exist in natural man.

c. God wills immediately (abnormally) and mediately (ordinarily)

immediately: John 2:1-11- Christ made wine without stomping or even growing grapes. These are miracles outside of normal means

mediately: God's usual order is that He works faith, preserves faith and works sanctification etc., only through the means of grace which He appointed and bound us. (Rom 10:17; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 1:23ff; Mk 16:15; Matt 28:19-20)

Can you think of circumstances where God's means of order is misunderstood or ignored?

d. God's will is unconditioned by mans effort as well as conditioned by mans effort.

Realm of grace: God's will is not contingent on mans effort. Salvation is by grace alone. Without deeds of the Law. Rom 3:28; Rom 11:6

Realm of law: God's will is conditioned by mans work.

Can you think of examples where God's good will is contingent upon man's fulfillment of the Law?

The man, Jesus Christ, fulfilling the Law. He came, not to remove the law but to fulfill the law.

No one who hopes to be saved in this way should forget that the will of God is conditioned by nothing less than a perfect fulfillment of the entire Law, for "cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them" (Gal. 3:10).

e. Scripture distinguishes between God's revealed will and His hidden will. 1 Cor 2:12; 15-16 (we know in the mind of Christ); and Romans 11: 33-34 (Unknowable) All matters of salvation are revealed solely Christ and can be found only in Christ.

### a. The Holiness of God

Two things are pointed out: 1) God transcends everything. He is separate - removed - exalted. Is 43:3, 14; Is 6:3.

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2) Also denotes absolute ethical purity and authority. 1Pet 1:6,

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How then do we deal with the existence of evil? Deut 29:29 "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.:"

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### b. The Justice of God

The proper understanding of this point constitutes the essence of Christianity.

1) Legal Justice: moral standards and actions, rewards good, punishes evil. 2 Thess 1:4-10

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2) Evangelical Justice: declaring a sinner righteous for Christ's sake. Christ bore the adequate punishment of sin in our place and whoever rejects this full and complete payment must pay it himself either partially (as though one may contribute to their reconciliation) or in total.

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### c. The Truthfulness of God

Men put little faith in what God says. They believe neither God's threats in the Law (Ps. 90:11) nor His promises in the Gospel (Is. 53:1; John 12:38). But this distrust and disbelief frustrates God's gracious purpose to save man. Therefore God does not hesitate to assure us in His Word that He is not a liar like men, but the absolute truth.

Rom. 3:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Men are categorized otherwise: Titus 1:12 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 15:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 116:11 \_\_\_\_\_

But against this universal dishonesty of man, Scripture places the absolute truthfulness of God: Titus 1:2

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John 3:33 \_\_\_\_\_ Heb. 6:18 \_\_\_\_\_

John 10:35 \_\_\_\_\_

### d. The Goodness of God

There is a very important lesson in the truth that God alone is good in Himself, whereas all human goodness is only a derived goodness. This truth will guard against pride when we observe special gifts in ourselves not given to others, and against envy when the situation is reversed. Scripture and experience teach us that pride and envy have always been the great troublemakers in the Church and in the State.

1 Cor. 4:7 \_\_\_\_\_ 1 Pet. 2 \_\_\_\_\_

"All good gifts come down to us and our neighbors from God. Whoever therefore is envious of the neighbor has a quarrel with God, the Giver of the gifts, and is in reality one who picks a fight with God."

God's goodness is not only "remote," that is an attribute within the divine essence, but it is also "subjective," something that God shows toward His creatures.

Ps. 145:9 \_\_\_\_\_ Jonah 4:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 36:6 \_\_\_\_\_ Ps. 136 \_\_\_\_\_

As a result, all creatures are to praise God. (Ps. 148)

But Scripture focuses our attention in particular on God's goodness toward man, more specifically, toward man as a sinner.

Mercy: (Luke 1:78-79) sin has brought untold misery

Love: (John 3:16; Titus 3:4) God is deeply attached to sinful mankind and anxious to restore him

Grace: (Titus 3:5; Rom. 3:24) God is good to the sinner only for the sake of Christ's vicarious satisfaction.

Patience: (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:9; Ex. 34:6) This aspect prompts Him not to punish immediately but to wait for sinners repentance. Catastrophes are employed by God in the interest of His salvation. Luk 13:3,5, a call to repentance.

God's goodness must be reflected in His children:

Luke 6:36 \_\_\_\_\_ 1 Thess. 4:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 5:44-45 \_\_\_\_\_ Eph. 4:32 \_\_\_\_\_

Pro. 12:10 \_\_\_\_\_

The most important attribute of God's goodness lies in His grace in Christ. We must always keep in mind that the true scope of the Bible is none other than to reveal God's grace.

John 3:17 \_\_\_\_\_



Acts 10:43

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If Scripture had revealed all the divine attributes except God's grace, then Scripture would be of no value to us. Our knowledge of God would fill our hearts with terror if Scripture had not revealed that the one, indivisible, immutable, infinite, omnipresent, eternal, living, all-knowing, all-wise, omnipotent, holy, just, truthful God is also the gracious God--gracious in Christ and for Christ's sake.

"All sins Thou borest for us,  
Else had despair reigned o'er us."

This is the one and only, true God.

In concluding our discussion of the doctrine of God we must once more point out that all who deny the Holy Trinity know nothing of God's gracious being. If there is no Trinity, then there is no eternal Son of God, no incarnation of the Son of God in the fullness of time, no Vicarious Atonement, no justification by faith, no peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; then there is only Law, with its obligations, demands, threats, and curses. The Triune God is the gracious God--and the gracious God is the Triune God.