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Great Words of the Faith The Trinity Galatians 4:4-6 & Selected Scriptures

When it comes to the government of our nation and our state, there are some key words that are vital for us to understand. Some of these words are often misunderstood by many, such as “democracy” and “democratic republic”. Recent days have seen discussion about other important terms – such as the electoral college. Knowing and understanding the meaning of these words and ideas is vital to be involved in the discussion and for effective involvement in our democratic process.

When it comes to the Christian faith, there are key words that are vital for the follower of Christ. Some are essential to our very salvation. Others are crucial for us to grow in grace as we should. We are beginning a series of studies on some of these great words of the faith.

The first word we will consider is “Trinity”. This word describes and defines the very nature of God. It is often considered one of the most difficult subjects to understand. Let us attempt in our brief study to better grasp this important word that describes what one author called “the most important doctrine we never think about”.

***There is one God who exists in three persons:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.***

What Is the Trinity?

The teaching of the **Trinity** is foundational and essential to the Christian life. It is crucial in understanding what God is like, how he relates to us and works in our lives, and how we should worship and serve Him. Yet it is a topic difficult for us to understand so we often fail to examine it as we should.

The word “Trinity” itself is not actually found in the Bible. It is a term early believers coined to describe and define the clear teachings of the Bible regarding the nature and existence of God. It was used to describe these two clear Bible teachings:

There is only one God

There are three divine persons.

Let us briefly back up our statement that these three teachings are clearly taught in the Bible. Each of these statements could easily take up its own study

There is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6; 1 Timothy 1:17

There are three distinct, divine persons.

God the Father – John 6:27; Titus 1:4

God the Son – John 1; John 8:58; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3; Titus 2:13

God the Holy Spirit – 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Acts 5:3-4. The scriptures expressly call the Holy Spirit God. Divine qualities are attributed to the Spirit. Works peculiar to

God are credited to Him such as creation, miracles, and inspiration. Finally, divine worship is due the Holy Spirit. For many years a chart has been used to help describe the relationships of the persons of the Trinity – that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God; yet they are distinct Persons, the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son (See resource page).

The truth that there are more than one divine Person is hinted at in the earliest pages of Scripture. **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”** (Genesis 1:1). It does not show up in our English language, but in Hebrew **“God”** is a plural noun while **“created”** is a singular verb. Later, in verse 26 God says, **“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness”**, again using plural words to describe God. This plurality of divine persons is more clearly revealed as we go through scripture.

While there are no Bible verses or passages that use the word “Trinity”, there are many where all three members are present. At Jesus baptism we see the Father proclaiming, **“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”** and the Holy Spirit descending as a dove. Galatians 4:4-7 which we will look at shortly describes the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our lives.

At first glance the statement that there is one God who exists in three persons seems contradictory. But the early believers carefully thought through and crafted their words to describe the Trinity so there is no actual contradiction:

God as one in **essence** (being or existence)

God is three in **persons**.

If we said, “*God is one person, and three persons*”, that would certainly be contradictory. God is *one* in a different way than He is *three*. The early believers used these terms to try to find a way to express the relationship of three beings who are equally and uniquely God, but not three Gods.

In the early days of the church, these truths were hotly debated and discussed, and errors often arose in teachings and beliefs about the Trinity. This was particularly true regarding the deity (“*Godness*”) of Christ and His relationship to the Father. Faithful believers developed creeds (brief statements of Bible teaching) and confessions (longer documents or statements of faith), and catechisms (Bible teaching in the form of questions and answers) to lay out the Bible’s teachings regarding the Trinity and other important truths. (See resource page).

The Importance of the Trinity

Why is the teaching of the Trinity important? We quickly get bogged down in the definitions and descriptions of “*essence*” and “*persons*”, “*existence*” and “*subsistence*”, “*co-equal*” and “*co-eternal*”. We might think this is a topic best left to theologians and professors and with little practical value for our lives. However, it is a vitally important teaching both for our salvation and our Christian lives.

Knowing God Rightly

As followers of Christ we would say our highest goal is to know God. We can only know God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Bible. He has revealed Himself to us as one God in three Persons. As we see in the early creeds and confessions, the early believers thought the teaching of the Trinity was important. As a matter of fact, they would have said that if you rejected this teaching you could not in fact be truly saved. This does not mean we have to fully understand this teaching (who does?). But to be presented with this truth and reject it means we reject God as He has revealed Himself. This is most often seen in those who reject the deity of Christ (not believing He is God) or reject God existing in three persons.

The Trinity at Work in Salvation and in Our Lives

In our recent studies we have clearly seen the presence of the Trinity at work. In Romans 8 we saw how God the Father provided salvation through the Son, Jesus Christ and is now at work in the lives of believers through the Holy Spirit. In our study of the Christian’s warfare in Ephesians 6 (and in the rest of the letter) we saw all that God the Father provides for us through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps there is no other passage of scripture where the work of the Trinity for us is described than in Galatians 4:

⁴ ...When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ Because you

are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:4-6)

Here we see all three persons of the Trinity at work in our salvation and our Christian lives. It is the Father who ordained or planned our salvation. It is the Son who accomplishes or provides our salvation. And it is the Spirit who applies or communicates our salvation. In the plan of salvation, we see the Father’s mercy, the Son’s merit, and the Spirit’s power. This passage tells us that the Son was with the Father in eternity past and at the right time, the Father sent the Son. The Son redeemed sinful people by His suffering and death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. The Father and the Son have sent the Holy Spirit to convict us and enable us to understand the gospel. Upon our repentance and faith in Christ gives assurance of our relationship as God’s children. (See Romans 8).

The Foundation for Prayer

Knowing God as He has revealed Himself in the Trinity is the foundation for our prayer. We pray to the Father, through the Son (why we close “In Jesus’ name), in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18). It is only through Christ we, as sinful people can be forgiven and go to a Holy God in prayer. Both the Son and the Spirit intercede for us as we pray to our Father.

We Want to Know What Love Is

We are all familiar with that great description of God, “...God is love” (1 John 4:8). Yet as we think of God in eternity past, how could He have been the God of love if He were alone. Instead, we find that He existed in perfect love and fellowship with the Son and the Spirit. In John 17 Jesus talks about the Father’s love for Him (vs. 23, 24, 26).

That is why He is the very description and definition of love. Believers are exhorted to pursue unity and to have love for one another. We have the greatest expression and example of love and unity in the Trinity – in the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Putting the teaching of the Trinity into Practice

The teaching of the Trinity is very important for us to learn, study, and put into practice. This is a teaching on which we should study and meditate, not leave to pastors and theologians. It helps us know God as it gives us glimpse of His glory and nature. It reveals to us the depth of God’s grace in His plan of salvation and His work in our lives. It gives us the foundation for going to Him in prayer. And it demonstrates for us the very definition and description of love. Let us make sure that the doctrine of the Trinity is not “The most important teaching we never think about”!

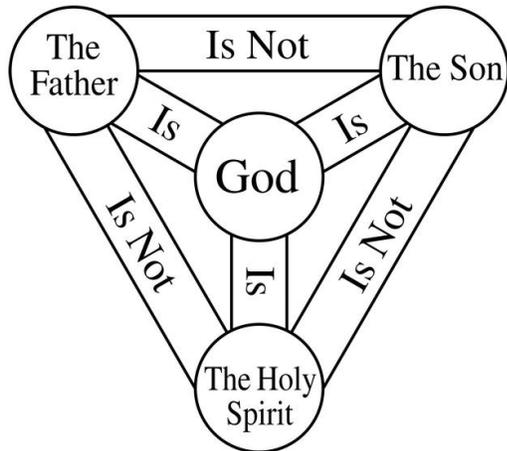
CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

Thursdays, 12:00 p.m.

McManus Conference Room (M252 by House Min Ofc)

Trinity Resources

Chart commonly used to help us understand the relationship of the divine persons in the Trinity.



Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; 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.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic (universal) and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Athanasian Creed

Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic (universal) faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally. Now this is the catholic (universal) faith:

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.

London Baptist Confession

This divine and infinite Being consists of three real persons, the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three have the same substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence without this essence being divided. The Father is not derived from anyone, neither begotten nor proceeding. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. All three are infinite and without beginning and are therefore only one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being. Yet these three are distinguished by several distinctive characteristics and personal relations. This truth of the Trinity is the foundation of all of our fellowship with God and of our comforting dependence on him.

Westminster Confession

In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Baptist Catechism

Question 10: How many persons are there in the Godhead?

Answer: 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.

Scriptures: [1 Corinthians 2:11; 8:6; John 1:1; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28; Acts 5:3,4; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3.](#)