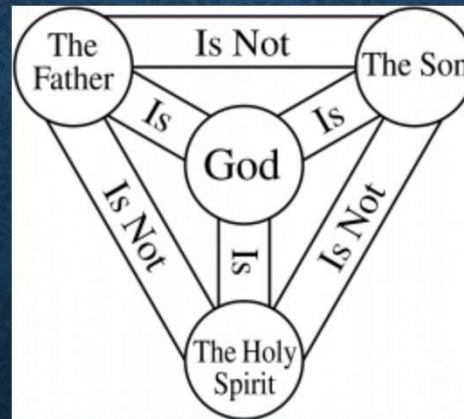


THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY



Its Development:

- There are two truths that are taught in the Scripture – the Oneness of God and the works of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Theological explanation must be developed in order to hold these two together in tension.
- Several errors are developing at this time.
- Careful study of Scriptures and sophisticated thinking about the Godhead are necessary to provide defense to the faith.
- Explaining the different roles or activities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in relationship to the world becomes necessary. (Later called the “Economic Trinity”)

- The early Church did not pretend to have the answers to this unfathomable doctrine of God and the incarnation. What they formulated are boundaries to guard biblical truths against the theorizers and unscriptural constructions of the truth.

Rigorous Monotheism

- Israel was taught that there is one God only—Yahweh.
- The whole law is saturated by this teaching against the polytheism of the pagan world.
- Deuteronomy 6:4–5 ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God *is* one Lord: ⁵ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.
- The Old Testament is read and heard through the lens of One God – and there is no other.
- The creation account in Genesis
- The appearances of the Angel of the Lord

The Incarnation

- The discussion of the doctrine of God began with Christ and his relation to the Father.

John 10:30 ³⁰ I and *my* Father are one.

- Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?
- He is one with his Father – “One” what???
- He is the “I am”
- His pre-existence

- He is from above or from another world
 - John 8:23 ²³ And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.
- He is the image of the Father
 - John 14:7 ⁷ If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.
 - John 14:9 ⁹ Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father?
 - (John 15:24; 10:30; 12:45; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; John 1:18)

The incarnation of Christ and his claims of pre-existence brought further investigation and discussions back to the OT.

- The language of plurality – “Let us make man in our own image”
- The appearances of the Angel of the Lord

The Angel of the Lord appears and is identified with God himself:

- Genesis 16:7-13
 - Appeared to Hagar.
- Genesis 18
 - The Lord appeared to Abraham in Mamre.
- Genesis 21:17-18
 - Appeared again to Hagar.
- Genesis 22:11-18
 - Called on Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his only son Isaac.

The Angel of the Lord appears and is identified with God himself:

- Judges 2:1-5
 - Appeared to the people of Israel.
- Judges 6:12, 20-22
 - Appeared to Gideon.
- Judges 13:3-23
 - Appeared to Samson's parents – Manoah and his wife.

- **God who anointed God**

- Psalm 45:6–7 ⁶ Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: The sceptre of thy kingdom *is* a right sceptre. ⁷ Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee With the oil of gladness above thy fellows.
- Hebrews 1:8–9 ⁸ But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of thy kingdom. ⁹ Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even* thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

- **The Lord speaks to the Lord (Mark 12:35)**

- Psalm 110:1 ¹ The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Tertullian (c.155 – c.220)

Tertullian's wording became the foundation for the church's definition of the Trinity: God is one in essence or substance yet three in persons.

- This formula meant that the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God, and the three are distinct from each other; yet God is only one, inseparable in essence.
- Weakness: He viewed the Son as subordinate to the Father.

Origen (c.185 – 254)

Two major ideas of Origen that had a lasting influence on the Eastern Church:

- His view that the Son was “eternally begotten” or “generated” from the Father (not created) and is of one being/essence substance (Greek, *homoousios*) with the Father.
- Second, his “subordinationism,” or that the Son and Spirit are by nature significantly subordinate to and “lesser” in glory than the Father.
- Weakness: He took Tertullian’s concept of subordination of the Son to the Father further – that the Son is subordinate to the Father in respect to “essence.” This became the stepping-stone for Arius.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA AND THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

The main issue:

- **Was Christ fully God, or was he a created and subordinate being?**

THE STRUGGLE TO FIND WORDS AND AGREE TO WHAT THEY MEAN

1. Parties with opposing views were using the same words but they applied different meanings to these same words.
2. The significant words that the parties were using to contend for their positions were:
 - *Ousia* (substance / essence / being)
 - *Hypostasis* (person)

1. But these words were *synonymous at that time* which added to much confusion.

- When the western Latins use *one substantia*, the Greeks thought they meant “one individual”.
- When the eastern Greeks use *hypostases*, the Latins thought they meant “three substances”.
- Clarifications were needed for the parties to reach mutual understanding.

2. So, is the Godhead ***one ousia/hypostasis*** or ***three ousia/hypostases***?

Arius, bishop of Alexandria (c.250 – 336)

Arian doctrine had roots with Tertullian and Origen who view Christ as subordinate to the Father.

- 1. Arians** are those who held the same or similar view as Arius who taught that the Son was a creature who came into being at some point, and was the agent through whom the world was made, but was **neither coeternal with the Father nor of the same being.**
2. This was the mistake of the Arians, who concluded that since a human son came into existence at a certain point in time, so the Son of God began to be and so is not coeternal with the Father but is of another being than he.

1. Arians had to interpret Jesus' claim "**I and the Father are one**" (John 10:30) as claim of moral oneness only and not one in essence/substance (*ousia*).
2. The party that holds the Father and the Son are of the same essence/substance (*homoousia*) had to find the right words to explain John 10:30 clearly – "**I and the Father are one**" ... *what?*

Various positions in understanding the nature of the Father and the Son

- 1. Homoousians** – the Son is of the *same substance* with the Father.
 - Defended by Athanasius in the East and Hilary of Poitiers in the West.
 - This became the *catholic* position (orthodox).
- 2. Homoiousians** – the Son is of *similar substance* to the Father.
 - This group were concerned that the “same substance” position would lead to Sabellianism (Modalism) that denies the distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- 3. Homoeans** – the Son is *like* the Father.
- 4. Anomoeans** – the Son is *unlike* the Father.

Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one*”

1. According to the *Homoiousians (Similar Substance)*

- To say that the Son is of the “same substance” as the Father is to affirm Modalism or Sabellianism.
- For them, this must be rejected because there is *no distinction* between the Father and the Son.

2. According to the *Homoousians (Same Substance)*

- To say that the Son is of “similar substance” as the Father is to affirm the inferiority of the Son or Subordinationism.
- For them, this is heresy because the Son is *eternal and of the same nature* as the Father.

There is only “*one iota*” of difference between them!

Athanasius (c.293 – 373)

Defended the Son as one in being with the Father.

- Christ is co-eternal with the Father.
- Christ has no beginning.
- The Son and Father are of the same essence.
- Christ is not subordinate to the Father.

Athanasius (c.293 – 373)

1. He stressed the *oneness* of God while maintaining *three distinct persons* within the Godhead.
2. To Athanasius, what is being affirmed is more important than the precise language with which it is affirmed.
3. Athanasius' contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity is most significant.

THE RESULTS FROM THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA (325)

1. The council affirmed the full deity of the Son.
2. They officially condemned specific Arian beliefs as heretical.
3. Arius and two other bishops out of more than three hundred refused to sign the creed.
4. Using series of biblical text to show the errors of Arianism was first considered but they found that to be very difficult.
5. It was decided to use a creed to express the faith of the church and to clearly declare Arianism was an anti-Christian doctrine.

THE RESULTS FROM THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA (325)

6. Arius was banished and forbidden to teach his heretical views.
7. The *homoousia* (same substance) statement continued to generate controversy.
 - But those who say, “there was a time when he did not exist,” and “Before being begotten he did not exist,” and that he came into being from non-existence, or who allege that the Son of God is of another *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or who is alterable or changeable, these the catholic (universal) and Apostolic Church condemns.
8. The statement on the Holy Spirit was not developed and will become the next topic of discussions.

The Aftermath of Nicaea

1. Arianism did not go away but appeared to continue to spread.
2. Many in the churches at that time felt the “one *hypostasis* in God” view as outrageously Sabellian and Modalist.
3. The majority had no clear views on the Trinity and did not understand what was at stake in the issues.
4. This majority supported the *Semi-Arian homoiousia* compromise hoping to settle the doctrinal controversy and end the division within Christianity.

The Aftermath of Nicaea

5. However, as long as Constantine lived, the authority of the Nicene Creed was not challenged.
6. However, as long as Constantine lived, the authority of the Nicene Creed was not challenged.
7. Both Arius and Athanasius were banished at different times as power shifted back and forth.
8. Athanasius championed the Nicene faith and found himself exiled five times for defending it.
9. Even after the political power shifted in favor of the Arians and Semi-Arians, they could not bring themselves together to unite and come to an acceptable doctrinal position.

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END