

Mystery of The Trinity, part 1

A kindergarten teacher asked her students to take out their drawing materials, and to draw a picture of something that was important to them. So the students took their drawing materials out and they started drawing. As the students finished, the teacher would go around and examine the artwork of the students. The teacher came up eventually to a boy by the name of Johnny and asked, "What are you drawing?" He did not look up; he just kept working feverishly on his picture, and he said, "God." "But Johnny," said the teacher, "no one knows what God looks like." He answered, "They sure will when I get done!"¹

I thought that was a pretty good response on his part. The boy responded that way because he knows what we know, and that is that we do not know what God looks like.

In fact, in our times, we do not know what God looks like. It was reported after the Russian cosmonauts went into space and came back, one of them made the following statement:

We have been in the air. We have been around the earth, and we did not see God.

The following Sunday, W. A. Criswell, the pastor of the First

Baptist Church in Dallas, made a classic statement. He said, "Ah, if those cosmonauts had just stepped out of their spacesuits, they would have found God."²

That is absolutely right. What both examples illustrate is a very simple truth: we do not know God very well. Billy Graham, when he was in college, asked the following question,

What kind of a guy is God?³

A. W. Tozer had the answer, and he said,

God is not like anything.⁴

He is not like anything that you or I know. He is not like you or me. He is not like anything with which we are familiar.

James Denney was a Scottish preacher and teacher. He had some students in his semester-long class. He told his students that they could not expect to understand an infinite God during the few months that they



2. Charles R Swindoll. The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart. Word Publishing. 1998. p. 232.

3. Robert J Morgan. Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations. Thomas Nelson. 2007. p. 350.

4. Ibid.

1. Em Griffin, "The Mind Changers." quoted by Charles R Swindoll. The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart. Word Publishing. 1998. p. 231.

were in class with him—it would take them years, even a lifetime.⁵

In reality, it is more than a lifetime. It would take an infinity! It would take time in heaven, time with God, to actually figure out what God is really like. Scripture tells us a lot about God. Scripture tells us that God is infinite, and it will take us an eternity to know and understand exactly who God is. Scripture has revealed a lot to us about God; but I will tell you that even with the Holy Spirit, who helps us come into all truth, there is one thing about God that we will never understand in this life. That truth is simply this: We do not know how an eternal God came into being. When you say, “an eternal God,” it implies that He had no beginning, and we do not understand what that means. That does not make sense to us, that someone has no beginning. Yet God says that is true of Himself. That is just really incredible to try to comprehend!

Everything that we know of in this earth has a beginning. Cars are made, homes are built, food grows. Everything has a beginning or something that starts it—but not God. I will tell you this: we do not understand God. We cannot see God. God just is. That is all we can say about God. We understand a few things about Him, but we cannot understand all of God.

THE TRINITY IS A MYSTERY. So the concept of a Trinity is a mystery to us. The concept that there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, is a mystery to us. We get glimpses of this reality in Scripture, but we cannot completely understand what that means.

There is a story told that Michelangelo was working on a statue one afternoon when some friends visited him. A month later they returned and found him still working on the same statue.

“What have you done since our last visit?” the visitors asked.

“Oh, I have smoothed a line here, I have polished an arm here, I have taken a few flakes of marble from the forehead, and so on,” replied the great one. “Oh! But those are only trifles. Is that all that you have done?” “True, they are but trifles,” replied Michelangelo, “but trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle.”

In this study we are going to look at some trifles, because

it is the only way for us to understand a little better someone whom we barely know. So our goal is to take some trifles or details and try to understand God whom we barely know, even though Scripture has given us what we might think is a lot of information. God is one. That is a true statement from Scripture. God is one, but He is God the Father. He is God the Son, and He is God the Holy Spirit. That perplexing truth is what we call the Trinity.

It is interesting that the word “Trinity” does not occur in the Bible. Some people say that because the word “Trinity” does not occur in the Bible, the Trinity is not taught in the Bible. It is interesting that I find the word “theology” is not in the Bible. Does that mean that theology is not a reality? The word “theology” is really two words; theos and ology, or “the study of God.” Just because the word “theology” does not occur in the Bible, does that mean we do not study God? That is not true at all! We are to study God. The word “soteriology,” the study of salvation, does not occur in the Bible. Does that mean the Bible does not teach salvation? We are not told how people long ago lived for 900 years. Does that mean those aforementioned topics do not exist or are not true? Just because the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible does not mean the truth is not there. In fact, the concept is taught throughout the Bible.

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD. We are on a treasure hunt. We are going to be searching Scripture to determine whether or not the concept of the Trinity is real. Is God really a triune being? Our goal is to understand God better. It is interesting if you look at Christendom and at the cults; there is one truth about God on which everyone seems to be in agreement. That truth is that God is one. I would like to begin there as we look at the issue of the Trinity. We want to look at the fact that God is one, and we want to see that Scripture does teach that as a truth. Turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 4, verse 35. That will be our first passage here tonight. Moses is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. Deuteronomy 4:35 (NASB)

This verse teaches that there is a God, and that there is nobody

5. Ibid.

besides Him. There is one God, and there is no other one. He is the only one - a very simple truth! We are going to come back to Deuteronomy, but go to Isaiah 44:6. It says,

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

"I am the first and I am the last,
And there is no God besides Me."
Isaiah 44:6 (NASB)

A really simple statement again. "I am the first, I am the last, and there is no God besides me." His point is, "there is no God besides me. I am it; there is no one else." Or how about Isaiah 45:5-6?

I am the LORD, and there is no other;
Besides Me there is no God.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me;
That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun
That there is no one besides Me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other,
Isaiah 45:5-6 (NASB)

The message is really simple. He is God, He is the only one, and there is no other. He is it, period! Then in Deuteronomy 6:4, the Great Shammah says,

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!
Deuteronomy 6:4 (NASB)

The word for "Lord" here is really Jehovah or Yahweh. That is the Hebrew. It is translated for us as "Lord" in our Bible. So we could read it this way:

Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one.

It says that Yahweh, He is one. There is one God, there is no one else besides Him. The message of the Old Testament is that there is only one God.

The New Testament has the same message. In fact, if we look at Mark 12:29, we will see what Jesus said. He quotes the

Great Shammah.

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD.'" Mark 12:29 (NASB)

Here Jesus authenticated, endorsed, and quoted the Great Shammah as authority. Jesus stated there is one God, period. There is no one else!

James 2:19 is a very familiar verse to many of us. It says,

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. James 2:19 (NASB)

So what is the testimony of the Old Testament? It tells us that God is one. The testimony of the New Testament in agreement states that God is one. The testimony of Scripture, Old and New Testaments is that God is one and there is nobody else.

TRINITY IS IMPLIED. Why then do we believe in a Trinity? Some of us might go to Matthew 3:16. But if we look at it closely, it does not prove the Trinity at all. Matthew 3:16 reads as follows:

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him. Matthew 3:16 (NASB)

Jesus is being baptized here. God the Father is above and the Holy Spirit comes down as a dove and lights on the Son, Jesus Christ. Some might say that proves the Trinity! God is in heaven. The Holy Spirit is present, and Jesus is in the water. But does that really prove the Trinity, or does it just tell us that there are three Gods? It does not tell us that they are one God. It just says once again that there is God the Father. There is God the Holy Spirit, and there is God the Son. Some people have looked at this passage and concluded that there are three Gods.

Matthew 28:19 says,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19

(NASB)

Again, the passage does not tell us that they are the same God. The verse just says that there is a Father, there is a Son, and there is the Holy Spirit. Some people claim this means there are three gods.

2 Corinthians 13:14 is a wonderful benediction which says,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14 (NASB)

This passage does not prove the Trinity either. This passage just says that there is God the Father, there is Jesus, and there is the Holy Spirit. It does not prove the Trinity; it just recognizes the three members of the Trinity. If we were to go way back in early church history, we would find that a man named Arius claimed that there was one God. He was a church leader in Alexandria, and he said that there was one God, but He said that Jesus was a created being, but that He was the highest created being. Then there are the Jehovah's Witnesses who believe there is one God. They say God is Jehovah and that Jesus is a created being, Michael the archangel! The Mormons believe there is one God, and that is Jehovah, and that Jesus was a created spirit child of Jehovah. The Unitarians tell us that there is one God, but they say that Jesus is not God. Others tell us that there are really three Gods. In fact, most everyone says there is one God, but there are some who say that Jesus is a man. Some say that Jesus is a God, but He is one of three Gods.

If all these passages do not really prove the Trinity, then why do we believe in the Trinity? To begin, these passages do not prove the Trinity. All they do is recognize that God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Why do we believe that there is a Trinity?

THE BIBLE TEACHES THE TRINITY. I want to answer this question by examining four different passages. Some might call them troublesome passages. They address the question of who Jesus is. Since within Christendom, everyone agrees that there is one God, Jehovah or God the Father, the real issue then is who is Jesus? The way you understand the Trinity is to answer the question: who is Jesus? So we want to

deal with four passages that answer who Jesus truly is.

The first one is Colossians 1:15. The verse reads:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Colossians 1:15 (NASB)

This verse says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is the stamp, He is the icon, He is exactly God. Then we are told that He is the firstborn of all creation. Some believe this means that Jesus was born before all the creation, that he was the first one ever created. But this verse is not talking at all about someone being created.

In order to show this, look at verse 18. In verse 18 we read,

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. Colossians 1:18 (NASB)

When it says in verse 18 that "He is the firstborn from the dead," what does that mean? Maybe you might say, "It means that He was the first one who was resurrected." If that is true, then how do we understand the fact that there were six people in the Bible who were resurrected before Jesus was resurrected? There was the son of the widow in Zarephath. Then there was the son of the Shunamite woman. There was a man who came back to life because Elijah's bones touched him. There is the son of the widow of Nain, and finally the daughter of Jarius. They were all resurrected before Jesus was resurrected. Oh, and we almost forgot Lazarus! Lazarus was resurrected before Jesus. So the word "firstborn" here does not mean that He is the first one to come out of the grave, the first one to be resurrected. It does not mean that He is the first one ever created. The word "firstborn" is *prototokos* in the Greek, and the word means "priority one" or "most important one." It can also mean "existed before." There is another Greek word that means firstborn. That word actually refers to somebody who is born first. It is not the word that is used here in Colossians 1:15 and 18. The word that is used here has the idea of "priority one." He is the most important one. So verse 15 means, "He is the image of the invisible God, the most important one over all of creation." He is also the most important one that

was ever resurrected. Now that one we can identify with really quickly, because of all the people that have ever been resurrected, Jesus is the most important one. He is the priority one. We can understand that very plainly.

If you are still a little confused, verse 16 will help make it even clearer. Verse 16 says,

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. Colossians 1:16 (NASB)

This verse is talking about Jesus. It tells us that He created everything, be it in heaven or on earth, whether it is visible or invisible. That is really inclusive. He created everything, whether you can see it or not, whether it is in heaven, here on the earth, or under the earth. It does not matter where it is or what it is. If something has ever been in existence, He created it. Now I have a question for you. If the word “firstborn” is supposed to mean that He was the first one who was ever created, how could He have created himself before He even existed? That is just not possible.

Verse 17 is even more interesting. It says,

He is before all things. Colossians 1:17 (NASB)

That means He existed before anything else existed or was created. No matter how you want to dice and slice and cut up verses 15, 16, 17, and 18, there is one truth. Jesus was not created. Jesus is not the firstborn in the sense that the cults want us to believe. He was not the first one born before the creation. That is not what the word means. The word is simply telling us that He is the priority one above all of the creation. He is more important than anything in the creation - including you and me.

Let me take you to the next verse, John 3:16, one of our favorite verses. It is a verse that we often see at baseball games, on the TV, and advertised everywhere. The verse says,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal

life. John 3:16 (NASB)

The wording in this verse in which I am interested is the word “begotten,” because that implies to some people that Jesus was created. Some people say that just like Colossians 1:15, this verse says that He was created. Well, there is a problem with that. Let us assume that the word “firstborn” in Colossians 1:15 does not mean what we have already learned that it means.

Let us for the moment assume that it means that He was the first one who was ever born. Then John 3:16 would tell us that He is the only one who was ever born. All of a sudden we have a problem. If Colossians really is telling us that He was the first one ever to be born, then how do we understand this passage that says He was the only one ever to be born? Colossians would imply that He is the first of many that were born. But John 3:16 would say that He is the only one. You have a logic problem: You cannot be the first of a series and then be the only one—it is just not possible. The phrase “only begotten” is translated from the Greek word *monogenes*. The word means “one and only” or “unique one.” It is close to the meaning of Colossians 1:15. How do we know the phrase ‘only begotten’ means ‘one and only’ or ‘unique one’?

Hebrews 11:17 will answer the question. It reads as follows:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son. Hebrews 11:17 (NASB)

So what does this verse tell us? It tells us that Abraham had a son, Isaac. In obedience to God, he offered him up. At the end of the verse, we learn that he was Abraham’s only begotten son. Now, if we want to assume for argument’s sake that “only begotten” means that he was the only one who was born, which is what some people want us to believe, then I have a question: Was Isaac the only one who was born to Abraham? The answer is no. Ishmael was born to Abraham before Isaac. That tells us that the phrase “only begotten” does not mean the only one who was born. That is not what the phrase means.

So when John 3:16 does not mean that Christ was the only one who was born, it means that He was the one and only. He was the unique one. The NIV Bible translates it correctly as

“one and only.”

Our third passage is John 10:30. We are looking at the phrase “Son of God.” We want to learn what the phrase “Son of God” means. John, chapter 10:31-32, is where we will start.

The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” John 10:31-32 (NASB)

Jesus has been talking about himself. Jesus has been explaining that He is God, that He is just like the Father. Verse 33:

The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.” John 10:33 (NASB)

The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day knew what Jesus was claiming. They said that Jesus committed blasphemy. They said that Jesus was claiming to be God. Critics want to tell us that Jesus never claimed to be God. That is not true. The Jewish leaders understood that Jesus claimed to be God, and they were upset about that. They said, “We want to stone you not because you did something good, but because you said that you were God, because you committed blasphemy.” Then Jesus responded in verse 34,

Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I SAID, YOU ARE GODS?’” John 10:34 (NASB)

Jesus is quoting Psalm 82. The Psalm is about the Jewish religious leaders who were abusing and mistreating the Jews. In Psalm 82:1-5, God said,

*God takes His stand in His own congregation;
He judges in the midst of the rulers.
How long will you judge unjustly
And show partiality to the wicked?
Vindicate the weak and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.
Rescue the weak and needy;
Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.*

*They do not know nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are shaken.
Psalm 82:1-5 (NASB)*

What has this all been about so far? The Jewish leaders are being rebuked for their partiality in their ruling. They have been unjust to the fatherless and have favored the wicked. It is like today. The just are treated unjustly, and the wicked are treated better than they deserve. This is a rebuke to the rulers of that day and of those today who do not rule justly.

Now verses 6 and 7:

*I said, “You are gods,
And all of you are sons of the Most High.
Nevertheless you will die like men
And fall like any bone of the princes.”
Psalm 82:6-7 (NASB)*

This is an open rebuke to the rulers. In effect He was saying “You may think you are gods, you may think you have authority, you may act unjustly, you may disregard what I have said, you may disregard what I have commanded, you are acting like gods. But you are going to die just like men.” This is a rebuke. This was an open rebuke of the religious leaders. When Jesus said in John 10:34 that “the law said you are gods,” it is not gods in the normal sense we think of. He is rebuking them for acting like gods and not mere men.

John 10:35-36 says,

If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? John 10:35-36 (NASB)

Now Jesus just said that if Yahweh can use that word god in an inferior way to refer to rulers, “then why do you accuse me of blasphemy when in fact I am God?” That is the whole point of Jesus’ statement. How can they accuse Jesus of being God when the Scripture even uses the word in an inferior way to refer to their own religious leaders?

CONCLUSION. I would like to close tonight with a statement by G. Campbell Morgan.

He was the God man. Not God indwelling a man. As such there have been many. Not a man deified. As such there have been none save in the midst of the pagan systems of thought. But God and man, combining in one personality the two natures, a perpetual enigma and mystery, baffling the possibility of explanation.⁶

G. Campbell Morgan is right. Jesus really is a mystery. We will discover in our next study that He is both man and God. Once we nail that piece down, the rest of the definition of the Trinity will follow. Let us pray.

6. Swindoll. Ibid. p. 314.