

## Biblical Theology by Dr. Chuck Baynard

### Lesson 6 (HCLD 8 )<sup>1</sup>

**Preparation:** Begin and end each study time with prayer. Pay particular attention to the background reading and pray over each passage asking God to reveal Himself to you.

**Background Reading:** Read all the Scripture verses in footnote # 2

**Vocabulary:** Trinity, Essence, Subsistence, Godhead, Person, Glory, and Properties.

**Question:** How many God's exist?

**Answer:** There is but one only, the living and true God.(a) <sup>2</sup>

**Question:** What is the difference between the Trinity and the Godhead and who is involved?

**Answer:** There are persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties. Trinity is the term chosen by Christians to use when speaking of all three persons of the Godhead.(b)

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<sup>1</sup> Q24: How are these articles divided?

A24: Into three parts: the first is of God the Father and our creation; the second, of God the Son and our redemption; the third, of God the Holy Ghost and our sanctification.(a)

(a) I Peter 1:2; I John 5:7

Q25: Since there is but one Divine Being,(a) why do you speak of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost?

A25: Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word,(b) that these three distinct Persons are the one, true, eternal God.

(a) Deut. 6:4

(b) Isa. 61:1; Psa. 110:1; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; I John 5:7; II Cor. 13:14

<sup>2</sup>(a) Deut. 6:4; I Cor. 8:4, 6; Jer. 10:10

(b) I John 5:7; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; John 10:30

(c) Heb. 1:5-6, 8

(d) John 1:14, 18

(e) John 15:26; Gal. 4:6

(f) Isa. 6:3, 5, 8; John 12:41; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25; I John 5:20; John 1:1; 2:24-25; Isa. 9:6; I Cor. 2:10-11; Col. 1:16; Gen. 1:2; Matt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14

**Question:** What are the personal properties of these three and how is it they are three yet equal?

**Answer:** It is proper to the Father to beget the Son (c) and for the Son to be begotten of the Father (d) and for the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity.(e) The Bible says that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, giving to them names, attributes, works, and worship, that are properly expressed toward God only. (f)

I have chosen to deal the Trinity, which appears in the Westminster Larger Catechism and other works as several questions, as a unit because the answers are so interwoven I think it is impossible to do justice to either question by itself without using terminology that could be the seed of gross error. While we can deal with knowledge of God, both general (as in nature) and special (that revealed in Scripture) without tampering with the doctrine of the Trinity, I do not think we can begin to understand God is one God and three persons by attempting to understand each person alone. While the proof texts are abundantly clear as to how the theologians from our heritage could make these statements, they are not that clear to most of how all of this is actually one doctrine. Every heresy to come along attacks the Scripture and the Godhead, so it is a necessity that all, to include new converts understand these questions. The Westminster Divines use some strange twists in structure of their answers to make sure they do not step outside Scripture in answering these questions one by one. Their choice of words was to make sure of the preciseness of the statement, and not always the best grammatically. At places they seem to present two things at once that can lead to confusion to those who have not studied the Bible extensively. For example answer ten of the Larger Catechism appears to create an order or subjection within the Godhead, while question eleven a few words later declares all to be one God, and equal in all things. One could want to throw up their hands and scream, aw come on fellows be consistent, are they or are they not equal?

Of all the statements presented in the Larger Catechism and systematic theologies these are perhaps the most crucial for us to understand; for it is from lack of the proper understanding of these questions that almost every heresy to ever exist came into being. All ancient heresies attack the Trinity or the deity of

Jesus Christ. This is one of the first issues that the Jehovah's Witness will spring on an unwary Christian, daring them to explain why they can believe in a three-headed God, and asking for the verse in the Bible where they can find the word Trinity. Of course no such verse exists, and most cannot explain the Trinity where an unbeliever can understand it. The average Christian becomes frustrated at this point and becomes angry and belligerent, or opens the gate of doubt about God in their hearts.

First off this is an issue of faith and has nothing to do with salvation. This is not the starting place for a Gospel presentation. A presentation of the five classic tenets of the Christian faith does a much better job of presenting the Gospel. This doctrine will only be received by faith and understood with the Holy Spirit providing the proper light to do so. I believe that allowing non-believers to draw us into such arguments is what Christ had in mind when he spoke of casting your pearls before swine. Arguments with non-regenerate man prove nothing and win no souls for the kingdom. This is the human side of us demanding a perfect apologetic for every verse in the Bible, when in truth not one verse can be properly understood nor applied apart from the indwelling Spirit.

In dealing with subordination within the Godhead the Westminster Divines choose to speak about properties that are personal to each person. This is about as clear as mud to the average person. And they leave the deity of both the Son and Spirit relying on Scripture proofs, without comment. Not a bad place to leave anything standing, and more than sufficient for this cause. However, for the believer, understanding is of the essence. I note that even Christ stopped to explain what seems most clear to His apostles that the truth was well established in their minds..

Let us see if we can bring some order and clarity to the doctrine of the Trinity. I have found that Calvin's treatment of the subject is superior as a whole to any before or after him. First and foremost the Trinity cannot be divided in any way. God Himself declared *Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one.* Yet in the first verses of Genesis we find God spoken of in the plural and existing in community as we are introduced to the Word and Spirit, so we can conclude that there exists in the Godhead three persons. Over the years I have heard this spoken of as persons and personalities, and presented in a dozen different analogies, that would supposedly make sense of it all. God declares Himself to be incomprehensible, and this is one such area where our finite minds cannot come to a place of peace by using human terminology, for we have nothing that even resembles the concept. I remember vividly the triangle diagram the professor used in seminary that demonstrated that only by being inside that triangle could you see all three persons of the Trinity and from the outside, no matter where you stood, you could see no more than two of the persons. He thought he had the secret. In my mind I sat there and said, yes I can see all three, but I knew this already, and your three-sided diagram only separates them, not explain the unity

thereof. I have not found any attempt that completely satisfies me. This is a metaphysical phenomenon that defies human understanding. God is one yet three because God said so. End of debate; now to gain peace within our own minds with this issue.

The first requirement then is faith. God has said this is the way it is, and that I can accept. However I think we need to understand it a bit better than this. That which we do not understand we are indifferent toward or ignore altogether. The doctrine of the Trinity is too central to Scripture and the Christian faith to afford either of these. Calvin chose to call the whole (unity) essence, and the three persons subsistence. This word can mean existence or maintenance of existence. He therefore says that the divine essence has existed from all eternity and within this essence we will find the three subsistences existing from all eternity. The word eternity is crucial here, for just as we can understand why it is important that God have neither beginning nor end, when we make the Son and Spirit co-equal with God, they too must have this attribute. What attribute of God the Father would we not find in either of the other two persons in the Trinity? That one person is more directly involved in areas that make a particular attribute appear to be His alone, it is one God we are speaking of. God existed before history or time in eternity and from this eternity the three were one in essence, while maintaining their personal subsistence. In this sense then we can have subordination within the Godhead; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exercising different personalities and making themselves manifest to their creation through the exercise of different attributes, but ever one in unity of essence or substance and co-equal in all things. Here we rise above the Arians and the error of Sabellians, not denying the existence of the three, giving all three their distinct existence from eternity without beginning, yet not so co-mingling the three that they are one and the same in reality.

Confusing? Join the party then and know you are not alone. It was for this cause that Calvin tried to be so precise, and the Westminster Divines were so careful in the selection of their words. Grab the essential truth that God is one, and the Son and Spirit are co-equal to God in essence or substance, two words the early fathers used somewhat interchangeably. Where you have one of the Godhead, God exists in His glorious fullness. You cannot separate them, nor assign each a mode of operation apart from the other two. For we do not have a law giving God, a loving Son, and gift giving Spirit. The three exist in perfect unity (oneness) and while there is subordination, it is so in perfection that where the Son is, so is God and the Spirit. Thus Christ could say, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Being equal to God, He could accept sacrifice and worship, yet say "only the Father knows." Christ could say "I lay my life down and I take it up again." Yet we read elsewhere that the Holy Spirit raised him in power and glory. So while the fullness of the Godhead is present wherever one subsistence is, this does not deny the distinct personality of either person of the Trinity, nor like some co-mingle the three for the cause of unity.

From this foundation I think we can perhaps grasp the simple eloquence then of the Westminster Divines, and like the leper find that the muddy waters have washed us clean. We dare to declare with the church fathers from the beginning God is one, existing in three persons, and understand what we have said. Calvin did not like the analogies used to demonstrate this principle, and I agree. Those outside my professor's triangle will not understand, and those inside by faith, can accept the more technical descriptions such as those presented here. The catechism proclaims, "*God is spirit and has not a body like mine.*" This spiritual attribute of God coupled with His *incomprehensibility* makes it far too deep and dark for the finite mind of man to dare take it further.

Though one of the longer chapters in John Calvin's, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I recommend all read Book one, Chapter thirteen of the *Institutes*. It runs twenty pages in length, but well worth the time and effort. This is a crucial doctrine for understanding the rest of our Reformed faith. In holding each section here to two pages or less, I cannot, were I ever capable, to completely articulate this doctrine. Here we find the foundation needed to understand "covenant theology."<sup>3</sup>

We cannot spend too much time studying the doctrine of the *Trinity*. These first questions are *essentials* in the Christian faith. The whole concept of how God deals with mankind through covenant is found here in the Trinity. God has always existed in community with a perfect "*covenant*" whereby all being equal, yet in a perfect subordination of person and work. The Moral Law reflects this same concept with the first table being that of relationship inside the family toward its head and the second table dealing with all other matters concerning living at peace with all. Destroy the Trinity and you have destroyed Christianity. I do not believe that to be an over statement. Thus the admonition to prayer at the beginning of this lesson and all lessons in this series, because it is only by faith and the revelation of God Biblical concepts can be grasped and owned by the individual.

Never in any way try to divide the Trinity, it is ever three persons and one God. All three are fully and equally God. Where there is one person you will find by necessity the whole of the Godhead in this sense. In this sense it would not be wrong to say God died on the cross, though that will make no sense to anyone. We need this distinction of person for our mortal minds to even begin to grasp what happened on Calvary. It is not wrong to say God indwells our hearts, though that too seems strange. However without the indwelling Holy Spirit none could receive the gift of faith and life in Christ. Man again needs the distinction of

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<sup>3</sup> An electronic version of Calvin in Windows Help File format may be obtained from [www.fprc.org](http://www.fprc.org) as a free download. This permits reading on the computer or printing out selected text for deeper study. Go to [www.onlinebible.com](http://www.onlinebible.com) to get a free electronic Bible free.

person to understand anything about God's plan of salvation. So the persons are of a necessity for our understanding. God in grace chose to reveal Himself to man as the One God, yet three distinct persons for man's understanding. God having revealed the Trinity and having assigned specific work to each person it would be most arrogant of the created to then deny God's wisdom and attribute the work of one person of the Godhead to the other.

It is not then a mere assignment of work that gives us the Trinity, but an actual distinction of person. When God said in the first table there are were to be no other gods before Him, God did not say there were other gods and that man had to leave them behind to serve Him. God said there are no other gods. The very concept then of another god is a lie and can only have its roots in hell with the father of lies. Therefore God must be one or God is at war with Himself. God then chose to give distinction to the three subsistences within the one substance, not to violate His own Word and thus create another god, but that God is such a perfection of unity that God is indeed one God though existing in three distinct persons. We see this also with God the Son taking to Himself a human nature that will never be mingled with the person of the Son, yet it is a truth Christ has two natures. We will cover this to some depth in a future lesson concerning Christ. These are simply things beyond the comprehension of man and which God has chosen to keep within His mystery that which is beyond what the Bible reveals. In prayer and faith then, we bow before the Triune God of creation. Man was created to know this perfection of unity and did for a moment in the Garden of Eden. Sin broke the communion and bought about the necessity of man being in darkness because of sin and struggling to understand the loving and graceful God, who sent His own Son to reclaim, that which is lost.

## **SUGGESTED SERMON OUTLINE**

### **The Trinity**

Isaiah 42:1-25; Matthew 28:1-20 / Psalm 22:1-31

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (1 John 5:7)

How are these articles divided?

Into three parts: The first concerns God the Father and our creation; the second, God the Son and our redemption; and the third, God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

Since there is only one Divine Being, why do you speak of three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Because God has thus revealed Himself in His Word, that these three distinct Persons are the one true, eternal God.

## **I. The Bible Teaches Trinity – Unity and Diversity**

**A. There is only one God.** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: (Deuteronomy 6:4)

**B. The one God of the Bible is complex -** all the human social relationships have their origin within God's unity. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

**C. Even the language of the Trinity appears across the Old Testament.** I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. (Isaiah 63:7-10)

**D. If Jesus is what he claims, then all Scripture and ultimately all of life must be understood in the Trinitarian context.** Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6 AV)

## **II. God Displays Himself as Triune**

**A. The baptism of Jesus displays all three persons of the Trinity.** And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:16-17)

**B. Unity and diversity appear together again in the formula for baptism.** And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (Matthew 28:18-19)

**C. The same mystery recurs in the Apostolic Blessing.** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

**D. All three are distinguished from each other.** Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; (Hebrews 1:2) And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (John 14:16-17)

### **III. Salvation Depends on the Trinity**

**A. Access to God is necessary for salvation.** That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: (Ephesians 2:12)

**B. Without Christ there is no access to God.** Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. (1 John 2:23)

**C. Without the Holy Spirit there is no access to Christ.** But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (Romans 8:9)

**D. The Holy Spirit only works in those who know Him.** Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (John 14:17)

**E. The true faith, right worship, and proper obedience which illustrate eternal life collapse when people peel away the Trinity.** And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

**F. The precious truths of the Trinity outweigh all the complexity of the mystery.** That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; (Colossians 2:2)