

# DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

October 22 – 26, 2007



October 22, 2007

## The Tri-Une God

*“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”<sup>1</sup>*

From a human perspective, the math on the Trinity doesn't add up. How can something be 'one' and 'three' at the same time? Theologians have done their best to explain it using the metaphysics of their day. Preachers have tried to find things in nature to illustrate it (e.g. St. Patrick with the shamrock) but, once again, our human understanding falls short when it comes to comprehending the reality of God.

The word 'trinity' is found nowhere in scripture and, in fact, the doctrine took about two hundred years to really take shape in the form we now call the Nicæan Creed. But we affirm it to be true because it is an attempt to grapple with the teaching of Scripture.

On the one hand, the Bible clearly affirms that God is 'one': *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”<sup>2</sup>*

On the other hand, as we shall see, the Bible also teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct personalities and that each of them is truly God!

God is One. God is Three.

So, while it seems to defy logic and its meaning has been the subject of much debate, we affirm the Trinity because this is what the Bible teaches.

And the Bible has the first and last word on what we believe.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4 (NIV)

October 23, 2007

## The Trinity is a Unity

*“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>*

Scripture clearly teaches us that there is only one living and true God:

*“For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”<sup>2</sup>*

In the Early Church, those opposed to Christianity asserted that it taught ‘tri-theism’ or a religious system with three gods. Later on, Muslims, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others would add their voices to that accusation.

The confusion is understandable. But Christians do believe that God is in essence, one, while at the same time being three persons. Note that in the Great Commission, Jesus tells us to baptize in the “name” – singular – of the Father, Son and Spirit. We do not love and serve three gods, but one. However that one God is ‘tri-personal’.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to stress the unity of God because in our prayers and thinking it can be tempting to slip into ‘tri-theism’ – seeing one Person of the Trinity as more approachable or more important<sup>4</sup>. There is no such division between the Father, Son and Spirit. They are truly, mysteriously, One.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 (TNIV)

<sup>3</sup> See Daily Dose on this subject next week

<sup>4</sup> “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 6)

October 24, 2007

## God the Father

*“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only [Son], who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”<sup>1</sup>*

No one disputes that ‘the Father’ is divine. However in our time many question whether a gender-specific word is appropriate.

In the Biblical context, ‘Father’ conveys a number of things. For example, relationship: He is the one who is responsible for our coming into existence. In calling us his ‘children’, God acknowledges the bond of family with human beings. *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him”.*<sup>2</sup> It also encourages us to believe that we can trust God to supply our needs.<sup>3</sup>

But, (some may reasonably ask) couldn’t we substitute ‘Mother’ or ‘Parent’ for ‘Father’ to avoid offending those who find this sexist?

The principle obstacle is that ‘Father’ is not merely a title, but a ‘name’<sup>4</sup> – and one does not change the name of another without their consent. Our respect for God’s self-revelation in Scripture checks our willingness to substitute gender neutral language for God in terms of address. However, feminine metaphors and imagery are permissible and should even be encouraged to underscore the reality that God really is ‘beyond’ gender.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:18 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 103:13

<sup>3</sup> See James 1:17; Matt. 6:31-32

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:19 (The same holds true for ‘Son’ rather than ‘Child’ in respect to Jesus Christ.)

<sup>5</sup> Reflect on Genesis 1:27

October 25, 2007

## God the Son

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Bible also teaches the divinity of God the Son.

In the Old Testament, looking forward to the Messiah: “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever”<sup>2</sup> and “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”<sup>3</sup>

In the New Testament, when announcing Jesus’ birth, the angel declared, “they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God with us’”.<sup>4</sup> John 1 gives an extended description of the Word who is God. In Philippians 2:6ff, Paul teaches the pre-existence of Christ “who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage”, but laid aside that status to become one of us and die on the cross for us.

Biblical teaching declares that God alone is to be worshipped. Angels and men quickly put a stop to it when people mistakenly attempt to worship them<sup>5</sup>. But the risen Christ accepts worship as his due and accepts from Thomas the declaration “My Lord and my God!”<sup>6</sup> To the outrage of his hearers, he declared himself equal to Yahweh<sup>7</sup> - blasphemous, unless true!

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:1 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 45:6 (TNIV)

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 9:6 (TNIV)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 1:23 (TNIV)

<sup>5</sup> Eg. Acts 14:13-15; Rev. 22:8-9

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28:17; John 20:28

<sup>7</sup> John 8:58

The testimony is clear: Jesus Christ – God the Son.

October 29

## God the Holy Spirit

*“Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?... You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”<sup>1</sup>*

As with the Father, all agree that the Holy Spirit is divine. However, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others contest that the Spirit is a ‘person’. They argue that the Spirit is like electricity: a spiritual force, power or influence that goes out from God to do certain things. Divine – but impersonal.

By contrast, the Bible speaks of the Spirit in personal terms. He can be lied to, blasphemed<sup>2</sup>, and ‘grieved’<sup>3</sup>. The Holy Spirit searches, speaks, testifies, commands reveals, strives, creates, makes intercession, raises the dead, etc.<sup>4</sup> His title of ‘Paraclete’<sup>5</sup> (Comforter/Counselor) is a personal one, also applied to Christ.

In short, while “the Holy Spirit’ sounds less personal than ‘Father’ or ‘Son’, he is nevertheless a ‘person’ – not a thing or ‘force’. He is to be included in our worship of the Tri-une God and treated with suitable affection, respect and devotion, not just for his works and gifts, but for Who He is.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 5:3,5

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 12:31

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 4:30

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 1:2; 6:3; Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8; Acts 8:29; 13:2; Romans 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:10-11

<sup>5</sup> John 14:27; 16:7-11; Romans 8:26