

# KNOW THE TRUTH

## Lecture 3: The Trinity

Christians are already Trinitarians.

As Fred Sanders helpfully points out, “Christians should recognize that when we start thinking about the Trinity, we do so because we find ourselves already deeply involved in the reality of God’s true life as he has opened it up to us for our salvation and revealed it in the Bible. IN order to start doing good Trinitarian theology, we need only to reflect on that present reality and unpack it. The more we realize that we are already compassed about by the reality of the gospel Trinity, the more our Trinitarianism will matter to us.” (Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 33-34)

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 2:3: “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.”

### I. The unity of God

Deuteronomy 6:4 declares that “the Lord your God is one.”

Isaiah 45:5. “I am the LORD, and there is no other. Besides me there is no God.”

The Shorter Catechism questions and answers 5 and 6 say: “Are there more Gods than one? There is but one only, the living and true God. How many persons are there in the Godhead? 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.”

### II. Trinitarian Vocabulary

A. Substance

B. Persons

C. Existence:

D. Subsistence:

## II. Scriptural Testimony to the Trinity

### A. The Bible describes all three persons as equally divine.

The Father is God:

Jesus is God:

The Spirit is God:

### B. The Bible affirms the plurality of the divine persons.

#### 1. The Plural Names of God

The Angel of the LORD

Psalm 110:1

Isaiah 9:6 “wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.”

Christ’s baptism (Matt. 3:16-17):

Christ’s transfiguration:

Matthew 28:19ff.

Ephesians 1:3-14; 1:17; 2:13-18; 3:14-17; 4:6.

1 Cor. 12:4-6, Galatians 4:4-6, Titus 3:4-6, 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2, and 1 John 4:13-14.

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The sheer weight and comprehensive character of the Trinitarian paradigm as basic to the life and piety of the New Testament is the most compelling scriptural evidence for the unity of the Godhead and the trinity of persons.

C. A number of propositions can be deduced from the scriptural evidence:

1. There are not three God's, but only one.
2. Each person- Father, Son, Holy Spirit- is this God
3. Each person is distinct from the others
4. Each person is inseparable from the others

### III. Trinitarian Heresies:

The question with which the church wrestled- in its first four centuries especially- was how to account for all these details of the scriptural presentation. As with so much else, the church was driven to ever greater precision on the anvil of false teaching.

A. Arianism:

Arius (250-336): "there was when he was not."

Athanasius (296-378). and the First Council of Nicea, in 325AD:

Homoiousios or Homoousios:

Ousia- means substance or essence

Homo- means the same

Homoi- means like or similar.

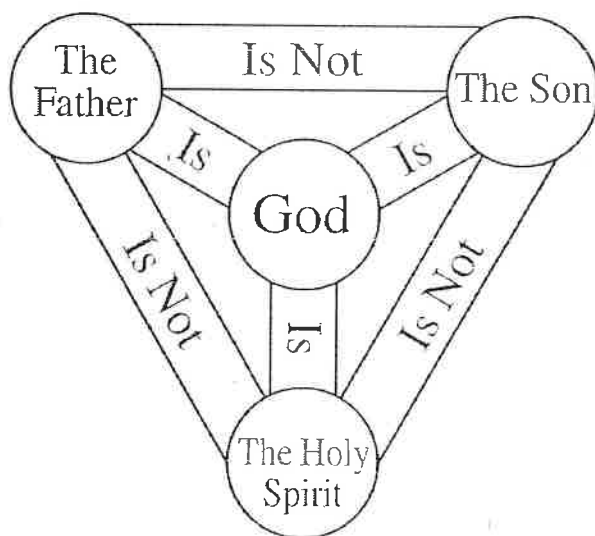
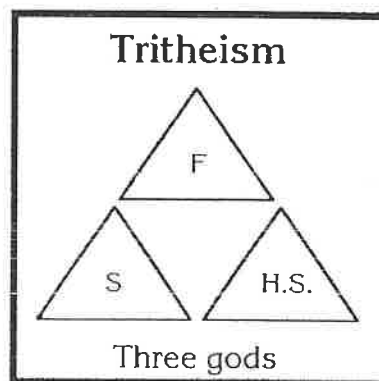
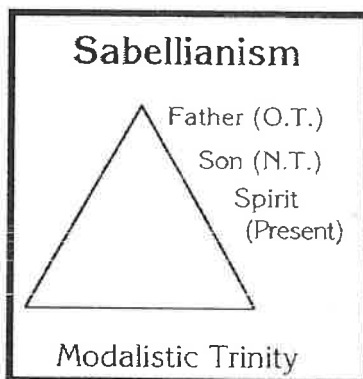
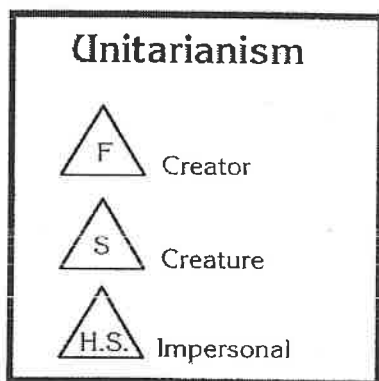
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B. Modalism: (or more properly Modalistic Monarchianism).

Perichoresis (Gk)/Circumincessio (Latin):

John 10:38; 14:10, 20: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

The Son, the "only begotten God is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18).



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### IV. Processions and Missions:

A. The Son proceeds from the Father: eternally begotten of the Father.

John 1:14, 18,

B. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

John 15:26: “the Helper whom I will send to you, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father...”,

Acts 2:33 “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

The Spirit is said to be both the Spirit of the God (Matt. 3:16; 12:28; Acts 2:28; Romans 8:9, 15:19), and the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9; Phil. 1:19; 1 Peter 1:11).

In Romans 8:9 the Spirit is said to be both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.

C. Eternal processions map onto temporal missions:

Gregory Nazianzen (329-390):

*“How has the Son been begotten?... God’s begetting ought to have the tribute of our reverent silence. The important point is for you to learn that he has been begotten. As to the way it happens, we shall not concede that even angels, much less you, know that. Shall I tell you the way? It is a way known only to the begetting Father and the begotten Son. Anything beyond this fact is hidden by a cloud and escapes your dull vision.”* (Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 29.8* in St Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham, (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002, 76)

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### D. The Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son Debate

Bruce Ware:

“An authority-submission structure marks the very nature of the eternal being of the one who is three. In this authority-submission structure, the three Persons understand the rightful place each has. The Father possesses the place of supreme authority, and the Son is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. As such, the Son submits to the Father, just as the Father, as eternal Father of the eternal Son, exercises authority over the Son. And the Spirit submits to both the Father and the Son. This hierarchical structure of authority exists in the eternal Godhead even though it is also eternally true that each Person is fully equal to each other in their commonly possessed essence.” (Bruce Ware, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles and Relevance*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005) 21)

Gender Complementarity:

### E. The Problems of the Divine Will (s?)

### F. Social Trinitarianism



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### Nicene Creed 325AD

Revised to present form at Constantinople and is technically now the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381; the filioque clause “and from the Son” was added around 581)

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made;  
of the same essence as the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven;  
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried.  
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.  
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.  
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.  
He spoke through the prophets

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church  
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

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## Athanasian Creed

mid 5<sup>th</sup> century, named after, but not composed by Athanasius

Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith.

Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic 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.

What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.

The Father is uncreated,

the Son is uncreated,

the Holy Spirit is uncreated.

The Father is immeasurable,

the Son is immeasurable,

the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal,

the Son is eternal,

the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eternal beings;

there is but one eternal being.

So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;

there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty,

the Son is almighty,

the Holy Spirit is almighty.

Yet there are not three almighty beings,

there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God,

the Son is God,

the Holy Spirit is God.

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Yet there are not three gods;  
there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord,  
the Son is Lord,  
the Holy Spirit is Lord.

Yet there are not three lords;  
there is but one Lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us  
to confess each person individually  
as both God and Lord,  
so catholic religion forbids us  
to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.  
The Son was neither made nor created;  
he was begotten from the Father alone.  
The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten;  
he proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers;  
there is one Son, not three sons;  
there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

Nothing in this trinity is before or after,  
nothing is greater or smaller;  
in their entirety the three persons  
are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So in everything, as was said earlier,  
we must worship their trinity in their unity  
and their unity in their trinity.

Anyone then who desires to be saved  
should think thus about the trinity.

But it is necessary for eternal salvation  
that one also believe in the incarnation  
of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Now this is the true faith:

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That we believe and confess  
that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son,  
is both God and human, equally.

He is God from the essence of the Father,  
begotten before time;  
and he is human from the essence of his mother,  
born in time;  
completely God, completely human,  
with a rational soul and human flesh;  
equal to the Father as regards divinity,  
less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and human,  
yet Christ is not two, but one.  
He is one, however,  
not by his divinity being turned into flesh,  
but by God's taking humanity to himself.  
He is one,  
certainly not by the blending of his essence,  
but by the unity of his person.  
For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh,  
so too the one Christ is both God and human.

He suffered for our salvation;  
he descended to hell;  
he arose from the dead;  
he ascended to heaven;  
he is seated at the Father's right hand;  
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
At his coming all people will arise bodily  
and give an accounting of their own deeds.  
Those who have done good will enter eternal life,  
and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith:  
one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.

