

# The Development of Christian Doctrine

# Outline

- I. The *Trinity* controversies
- II. The Bible and the Trinity
  - a. Jesus
  - b. Holy Spirit
- III. History of the doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the trinity is one of if not the most debated and difficult teaching within contemporary and historical Christianity

# Challenges of the doctrine of the Trinity

- ✓ Monotheism inherited from Judaism and characteristic of Abrahamic faiths

*Shema* – Deut. 6:4

4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our  
God, the LORD *is* one!

# Challenges of the doctrine of the Trinity

- ✓ What is the exact nature of the relationship between the three persons in terms of their divinity and function?

# The Bible and the Trinity

The New Testament does  
provide an actual doctrine of the  
Trinity – the focus of the NT is  
not doctrine but proclamation of  
the Kingdom of God

# Variety of Views of Jesus

➤ Messiah

➤ Indissoluble union with God  
(John)

➤ “Likeness” of God  
(II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15)

2 Corinthians 4:4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

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

# Variety of Views of Jesus

➤ Pre-existent Christ

(Phil. 2:5-11)

➤ Incarnate *logos*

(John 1:1-14)

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 1:1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:1-14 There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

John 1:1-14 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

# Pauline Controversy

Could Paul's strict Jewish upbringing allow him to call Jesus God?

Paul prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ – II Cor. 12:8

2 Corinthians 12:8 Concerning this thing I  
pleaded with the Lord three times  
that it might depart from me.

# The Holy Spirit

- Spoken through the prophets
- Descended at the baptism of Jesus – Matthew 3:16,17
  - John 14:16
  - I Cor. 12:1-11

Matthew 3:16, 17 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He[[c](#)] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

John 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

# Triadic Formulas

✓ II Cor. 13:13

✓ Eph. 4:4-6

✓ Matt. 28:19

2 Corinthians 13:13

All the saints greet you.

Ephesians 4:4-6 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

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

## About the early church

- ✓ Practice preceded doctrinal clarity
- ✓ Believed that there was only one God
- ✓ God revealed Himself in 3 ways

# Historical Overview

- “Church” = all of Christianity that had spread from Jerusalem to the Greek world without tools, structure, communication to ensure unity

There was no united thought on the Trinity until the 4<sup>th</sup> c.

# Historical Overview

- The debates were as much philosophical as biblical
- What may seem like minor semantic issues actually have major implications and caused factions within the church

# Historical Overview

- What was deemed heretical then may still be existent and believed in the church today
- Our challenge is to see their issues and debates without the bias of knowing what the orthodox doctrine became

“It is not surprising in the least to find that the church fumbled for some time in its attempt to formulate intellectually and conceptually its faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit and their relation to one another...

Nor is it surprising that occasionally it took the wrong road, and then found it necessary to retrace its steps and begin looking for the right road again. At times it even seemed as if the task it had set for itself could not be mastered.”

# Monarchianism

# Monarchianism

The primary intent of Monarchianism was to preserve the monotheism of Christianity

It took two forms *Dynamistic* (early) & *Modalistic* (later)

# Dynamistic Monarchianism

A divine power was active in the man Jesus who was adopted by God as His son (at Baptism or Resurrection)

# Dynamistic Monarchianism

- ✓ Jesus is half-God
- ✓ Neither eternal nor pre-existent
  - ✓ If after resurrection, was His death atoning?

# Modalistic Monarchianism

God is one person, therefore Jesus  
and the Holy Spirit were simply  
forms or modes of His appearance

# Modalistic Monarchianism

- ✓ Ignores the distinctions of persons in the trinity
- ✓ Disregards the Gospel accounts of Jesus praying to God the father

# Gnostic Influences

Gnosticism was a religious and philosophical movement that espoused salvation through knowledge

It designated God the father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit among its many aeons – spiritual beings

# Gnostic Influences

Christ had a phantom body on earth which He abandoned before His death. Therefore Christ didn't die on the cross, only the man Jesus did because God cannot be killed

This form of Christianity was  
known as *docetism*

# Irenaeus

Irenaeus' doctrine of God focused on God's inner being and God's self-disclosure in the history of salvation: Abraham, Exodus, Prophets, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit

# Irenaeus

God brought forth, from Himself,  
His Word and His Wisdom before  
creation

✓ Word & Wisdom are not co-  
eternal

# Tertullian

God is of one substance in three  
related persons

~water: liquid, solid, steam

“They are differentiated not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect”

Tertullian

# Tertullian

Tertullian subordinated the Son and the Holy Spirit to God the father and did not consider them all equal in form/function but they were of the same substance