

THE THREE-PERSON'D GOD

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

Trinity Sunday gives us the opportunity to think deeply about the nature of the One we worship. No single doctrine helps us in this more than the doctrine of the Trinity. Though the tri-unity of God will in one sense always remain a mystery, in another sense it is the logical expression of three essential truths clearly taught in the Bible.¹

God is three persons. The idea that God is a community of three persons is not the result of someone's creative imagination. Rather, it is the culmination of centuries of reflection on Scripture and the manner in which God has revealed himself through history. In the Bible we learn that the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Spirit. Each one is distinct from the other and yet intimately connected. Further, each one has traits and characteristics that only persons have (talking, feeling, thinking, etc.).

Each person is fully God. As we study the Scriptures, not only do we learn that three distinct persons make up God but we learn that each of these persons is fully God! The Son is not part God and part man. He is fully God and fully man. Likewise the Spirit and the Father are full and entire expressions of God.

The two points above fit easily and logically together. If we had no further knowledge than this, we would conclude that "God" is multiple beings. A Father, a Son and a Spirit. Such a belief system would be called polytheism – or to be more precise, tritheism. In fact, this is what many uninformed persons assume about Christianity. They believe we worship three "gods." Thus it is this final point that brings the doctrine of the Trinity into dramatic focus.

There is one God. Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God. The three persons, though distinct, intermingle and co-inhere from all eternity. Not only are they one in purpose and harmonious in will, they share the same essential being. In other words, there is one God eternally existent in three Persons.

Nearly all heresies in the history of the church have been the result of someone's inability (or refusal) to live with the tension created by these three biblical affirmations. They have sought to resolve the tension by eliminating one of the affirmations. The historic stream of orthodox truth, whether Protestant, Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, has been defined by understanding God in these Trinitarian terms.

Reason and logic can only take us so far. When we reach the point we can no longer understand the theology, then we are precisely at the point where we are invited to worship the mystery!

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed trinity!
(Reginald Heber, 1826).*

Pastor Stan

¹For a fuller discussion of these matters and for a plethora of Scriptural references, see Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1994) (pages 231-241).