

## **ORIGIN of the TRINITY – LESSON 4**

### **– Statements Re: “Theologically Correct” Trinitarian Belief; An Anti-Trinity Ministry**

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***Goals** – Gather information as to whether the concept of the Trinity is biblically based and a reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the Bible – both Old and New Testaments.*

*Gather information about the necessity of the theological debate, evaluation, “in-fighting”, and even church power politics. Why did it occur?*

*Present and ask critical questions about the resulting theology. Might we have reached a different conclusion or presented it with a different twist?*

***Recap of First Three Weeks** – Reviewed and discussed Old Testament references; reviewed and discussed New Testament References; discussed what we are trying to accomplish; Discussed the development of the Trinitarian “battles” and compromises in the early church; Discussed the creeds and their developments; discussed Martin Luther’s explanation of the Apostles’ creed and other of his comments; reviewed excerpts from Pastor Holm’s sermon on Trinity Sunday.*

#### ***Remaining Outline and Other Information***

**Discuss assignments** – i.e. Is the Trinitarian theology represented in any way in the Unitarian, Mormon, and other anti-Trinity ministries? Discuss the Baptist church’s presentation of the Trinity and identify any differences with the ELCA’s teaching. (These should be assigned to participants in advance and they will lead this discussion.)

**Discuss** the comments and questions which follow:

**Refer to** the example of “someone’s” Statement of Faith – discuss questions on that page – Is it right on? Does it miss the point entirely? Or is it good enough even though not quite “right on”. The material previously presented essentially states the following: The Athanasion Creed declares that whoever rejects the doctrine of the Trinity (presumably the precisely correct theological doctrine) and the doctrine of Christ is without the saving faith. How might this affect this discussion? Can you achieve eternal life if you believe in God, that Jesus died for your sins, and that the Holy Spirit is real? But when describing the trinity, you see it as follows: There is one God the Father who created heaven and earth. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the manifestations of God for purposes of revealing Himself to us and communicating with us.

#### **Statements Re: “Theologically Correct” Trinitarian Belief**

*..... We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another. But the deity of the father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty. What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit. Uncreated is the Father;*

*uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit. The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite. Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit: and yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal; and there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited.....(from the Athanasian Creed)*

*The Athanasian Creed continues to serve the Christian Church as a standard of the truth. It declares that whoever rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of Christ is without the saving faith.*

*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 Short Catechism)*

*(The following is paraphrased.) The Holy Spirit is fully a person, not a concept, or a force – like gravity or electricity.*

*God has given us His Son and His Holy Spirit in order to bring us to Himself through them. This is Grace through faith which we couldn't accomplish on our own.....The Father gives us all created things (the Creator); the Son gives us redemption through his death and resurrection; and the Holy Spirit gives all His sanctifying gifts. (from Martin Luther's Large Catechism) (Martin Luther does not seem to dwell on the Trinity – he almost takes it for granted – or perhaps he is declaring “it goes without saying”. He very clearly refers to one Godhead, with three persons comprising that Godhead.)*

*Trinity is the Christian name for God. (Theologian Karl Barth)*

*(Re: whether it is not God the Father who appears in human form to the Patriarchs or the Prophets – taking a concept from Augustine) .....the question of visibility is irrelevant. God the Father could have appeared in visible guise just as easily as the Son or the Holy Spirit. (from catholic.net, a Catholic web site)*

*There is one God who eternally exists as three different Persons.....three persons who are one God.....distinct from one another.....the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son. They are each different persons.....Each person is fully God.....(but just) one God.....the Father is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and Jesus is God. The only way to reconcile these two teachings is to conclude that (they) are all the same God – even though they are distinct Persons. (Matt Perman on the geocities.com web site – three “whos”, though only one “what”.)*

*(Example of a non-compliant view of Trinity) .....Jesus was created by God the Father before the creation – (therefore, perhaps) a minor god (compellingly important – but not the same as God the Father).....the Holy Spirit is distinct from God the Father.....(he is) merely God's active force which he uses to accomplish his purposes in the world. (Not unlike some of our ideas of the Trinity – actually this is the Jehovah's Witnesses' concept of the Trinity and their relationship.) (from Christianity Explained website)*

**Questions** – revised and updated from the original introduction:

Most sources would say the Trinity is a general Christian concept. But is this true? Are there any churches proclaiming to be Christian but have some serious theological differences with the concept of the Trinity? What are their arguments against the Trinity? (Anti-trinity example may be distributed in advance)

Who created the world / universe we live in? (*the Father? See Isaiah 64:8; the Son? See Colossians 1:15-17; the Holy Spirit? See Job 33:4; or some combination thereof?*)

Jesus says “I am God among you”. Could the Holy Spirit proclaim the same thing? Or would that, somehow, have to be a different claim.

Does the Old Testament “tee us up” for the later New Testament proclamations, and the subsequent long and bitter debates among the factions of the early church?

Define what you have been taught as to: What does it mean to be a Christian?

Can you be a Christian while denying the Trinity as technically defined by our Christian/Lutheran theology? This does NOT mean denying the entire existence of the Holy Spirit – rather just disagreeing with the concept somehow.

### **Examining what could be a lay person’s statement of faith**

*Example 1 – Q: What do you believe that makes you a Christian? A: I believe in God.* This is a very simplistic and sincere answer. Is this enough, and do you think many people would answer the question in this manner?

*Example 2 – Another statement of faith – I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Man. I believe Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father Creator to die for my sins to provide me redemption and eternal life. I believe the Holy Spirit has been sent by God the Father Creator to people on earth to make present His essence. I believe Jesus is the human manifestation of God. I believe the Holy Spirit is the essence and presence of God.* Is the person proclaiming this a Christian? Is this a “saving faith”? Is it right on? Does it miss the point entirely? Or is it good enough even though not quite “right on”.

*Example 3 – Another twist – There is one God the Father who created heaven and earth. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the manifestations of God for purposes of revealing Himself to us, communicating with us and remaining in our hearts. As part of God’s plan, Jesus died for our sins and the Holy Spirit of God is the very real, consistent Godly force and presence in our lives. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the means by which we experience God.* Comments?

*One More – I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Man. I believe Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father Creator to die for my sins to provide me redemption and eternal life. I believe the Holy Spirit has been sent by God the Father Creator to people on earth to make present His*

*essence. I believe Jesus is the human manifestation of God. I believe the Holy Spirit is the essence and presence of God. Is the person proclaiming this a Christian? Is this person saved?*

Can you achieve eternal life if you believe in God, that Jesus died for your sins, and that the Holy Spirit exists, but understanding the trinity as described above?

**Or –**

Are we left only with the Catholic's convenient concept: This is the Trinitarian Mystery – just accept the theology?

### **An Anti-Trinity Ministry**

I found a group called Thunder Ministries which adamantly proclaims itself as Christian, and is absolutely and aggressively opposed to the concept of a Triune God. Some of their strongly held beliefs follow:

- The term Trinity is not found anywhere in the Bible, and is merely a theory, a philosophy. It was made up by very superstitious men who lived in the Dark Ages. Some of the myths that developed include concepts of purgatory, hades, and the practice of praying to stone, metal, and golden images.
- Emperor Constantine, in 325 AD brought Bishops together at Nicea. This was a fraud since all were essentially on the Emperors payroll and feared for their lives if they were to disagree. This unholy alliance formed a new imperial state religion, the Roman Catholic Church. The Trinity-Theory was made the official doctrine of the Catholic Church. Soon after, the Council of Constantinople, the Trinity doctrine was confirmed by the Catholic Church.
- The Imperial Religion was forced on the Empire at the point of a sword. Killing was done in the name of God. Essentially, this was an early form of ethnic cleansing. The Bible was even outlawed and forbidden to all common people. The worship of Mary began to be taught, along with penitence rather than repentance. Other incorrect concepts arose including Transubstantiation, Indulgences, Infant Baptism and Sprinkling.
- The true original church was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, but the Catholic Church changed the mode of Baptism from “Jesus’ Name” to the titles “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”.
- Many churches broke off from the Catholic Church but kept the false doctrine of the Trinity. It is sad that so many people believe in this non-biblical theory.
- Study and trust in the bible and do not trust creeds and words of men only.

- The true belief is in the Oneness of God and that he was, is, and always will be, the One True God “Jesus Christ”. Jesus is the truth, the way, and the Life. He is the one true Lord.

Thunder Ministries has a web site which provides extensive teachings.