

What We Believe – 2. God

We believe in: *“The unity of the Godhead and the divine co-equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the sovereignty of God in creation, providence and redemption.”*

A) Introduction

Our view of God is paramount, since it will filter down into all areas of life. God desires that His people worship Him *“in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24). Acceptable worship of God is based upon true knowledge of Him: we cannot worship what we do not know. It is therefore the responsibility of every Christian to cultivate and develop an ever deepening knowledge of God.

God has revealed what He’s like in various different ways:

- Through the created universe (Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:19-20).
- Through human conscience (Romans 2:14-16).
- Through salvation (Galatians 1:16).

Most supremely, God has revealed Himself through His Son (John 1:18) and through the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16): that is, through both the incarnate and the inspired Word (John 1:1). Without the regular and consistent study of God’s Word, our view of Him will be driven by our own desires and experiences. In short we will start to create a god “according to our image”.

B) The Tri-unity of God

The doctrine of the Trinity is both one of the most fundamental and one of the most mysterious of the teachings of the Christian faith. It is an essential teaching – to deny it is to deny the Gospel – and yet it is hard to grasp. It isn’t taught explicitly in any one Bible passage, but it is the clear teaching of the Bible when taken as a whole.

The doctrine of the Trinity is this: there is one God who exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This position is reached from the following observations.

According to Scripture, the Father is God (**Matthew 6:9**, **Titus 1:4**), the Son is God (**John 1:1-2**, **Colossians 2:9**) and the Holy Spirit is God (**Acts 5:3-4**, **28:25**). In addition, the Father is a person (**Matthew 3:17**), the Son is a person (ref. the 4 Gospels!) and the Holy Spirit is a person (**John 14:26**). However, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the Father – they are distinct (**Matthew 28:19**). And yet, there is one God (**Deuteronomy 6:4**).

No illustration or analogy does justice to the Trinity, without misrepresenting the biblical data. Therefore we're best to stick with what we've got, and live with the mystery!

Why does it matter?

The doctrine of the Trinity may seem difficult to comprehend, but it has very significant practical application.

Because God is “three-in-one” it means that He is inherently relational. That is, from eternity God has existed in a community of love and fellowship. Since God is inherently relational, those made in His image are likewise to be the same. In an age of individualism, it is good to be reminded of our inescapable need for each other. There are no “lone ranger” Christians.

Additionally, the doctrine of the Trinity shows us that there is both unity and diversity within the being of God. Such should also be expressed in churches – unity without uniformity, diversity without denial of the truth.

C) The Sovereignty of God

God has attributes. An attribute is a way of describing what God is like. It is not a part or piece of God – He is indivisible. God does not consist

of the sum of all His attributes, but all of His attributes are true descriptions of Him.

Theologians speak of two categories of God's attributes:

- Communicable attributes are those which humans can also express. For example, God is merciful, kind and wise, and humans can be too. In the new creation we will demonstrate these attributes without any corruption of sin.
- Incommunicable attributes are those which belong to God alone and are not shared with humans. Amongst these are omniscience (all-knowing), omnipresence (everywhere-existing) and omnipotent (all-powerful).

Sovereignty is an incommunicable attribute. Sovereignty is about God's reign and rule. By definition, if God reigns over everything then nothing else can. Thus nothing but God can have true and absolute sovereignty.

The Bible teaches this explicitly: God declares "*the end from the beginning*" (Isaiah 46:9); He says "*I will accomplish all my purpose... I have purposed, and I will do it*" (Isaiah 46:10-11). God works "*all things according to the counsel of his will*" (Ephesians 1:11). As difficult as it may be for us to understand, nothing ever happens that is outside of the overall and ultimate control of God.

The Bible also teaches this with specific reference to various activities. God is sovereign in creation. The opening chapter of the Bible presents a God who alone forms the entire material universe purely through the spoken act of His will (Genesis 1). Additionally, God not only forms the world but continuously cares for it (Psalm 104). Indeed the entire universe is upheld "*by the word of his power*" (Hebrews 1:3).

God is also sovereign in providence. Providence is God's wise and mysterious ordaining of all that happens. It is His "silent" work in everyday life. It is what God is "up to" when we can't hear or see Him. The books of Ruth and Esther provide wonderful illustrations of God's

providence in action – guiding the seemingly mundane and insignificant aspects of life so as to achieve His own perfect purposes.

And God is sovereign in salvation. No one is saved apart from God's design and decree. Jesus said "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*" (John 6:44). The natural condition in which we enter this world is to be "*dead in the trespasses and sins*" (Ephesians 2:1). Since humanity cannot raise the dead, neither can we save ourselves. God must breathe life into us first before we will ever respond to Him. Thus Jesus taught "*unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:4).

Why does it matter?

God's sovereignty gives enormous comfort and encouragement to the believer in times of difficulty. Only a sovereign God can be trusted with our sorrow and pain, because it means that they are not without purpose. There is no meaningless suffering, however bleak or confusing things may seem.

God's sovereignty gives power to personal evangelism. Since it is God who saves – and not us – then we can rely fully on His means, instead of trusting in the latest gimmick or fad. We will also be driven to our knees in prayer, knowing that unless God brings life to a dead sinner, nothing we say or do will make any difference.

God's sovereignty gives endurance for the Christian walk. Obedience to a sovereign God is never in vain.

D) Helpful Reading

Olyott, Stuart, *What the Bible teaches about the Trinity*

Packer, J. I., *Knowing God*

Tozer, A. W., *The Knowledge of the holy*

Wilson, Andrew, *Incomparable*