

I Believe in the Trinity

Part 2

We continue our thoughts on the Trinity. Last time we saw that the Trinity is a biblical teaching. Now we will look at how this teaching of the Bible came into expression.

The Trinity is a progressively revealed teaching. The teaching of the Trinity is the result of a careful study of the Bible, particularly the New Testament. What really led to the Trinity was the worship of Jesus Christ. The early followers of Jesus were all monotheists (that is, they worshiped only one God), yet they spoke of Jesus as divine and even worshiped him. John 1.1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word (Jesus Christ) was God. Paul states the following about Christ’s deity, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2.9). Notice here that both Christ’s deity and humanity are affirmed. Jesus was the God-man.

So Jesus’ early followers recognized him as God, yet they also believed that there was only one God. The teaching that God is one is found in both the Old and New Testaments (see Deuteronomy 6.4; 1 Timothy 2.5). So how do you reconcile Jesus as God with the fact that there is only one God? Add to this the fact that the Holy Spirit was called the Spirit of God and thus viewed as divine as well (see Ephesians 4.30; Acts 5.3-4). The result was the belief in a triune God—belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Now some have wrongly taught that this one God revealed himself as Father at one time, the Son at another time, and the Holy Spirit at yet another time. This heresy known as modalism claimed that God was not simultaneously Father, Son, and Spirit, but that he took on different modes at different times. Yet, the Bible denies this. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit came down on him in the form of a dove and the Father spoke from heaven, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (see Matthew 3.13-17). Thus, all three persons of the Trinity were acting at the same time. There is oneness in the Trinity, yet there is also distinction. Each person of the Trinity has a different role to fulfill. The Father sent the Son to die for our sins, and then the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to live within us. Thus, the whole triune God is involved in our salvation.

Many people describe the Trinity as water, steam, and ice. Yet, in light of what we have learned about the Trinity this analogy is misguided. The Trinity means that God is at the same time Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Something cannot be water, steam, and ice at the same time. It is either water or steam or ice. I like the way Billy Graham explained the Trinity by using mathematics. He said, “The Trinity is not $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$. The Trinity is $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$.” The Trinity is one God revealed as three persons. This is the God of the Bible, and this is the God that we must worship.

Pastor Mark