

The Holy Trinity: One God in three Persons

GOLDEN TEXT

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mathew 28:19)

USEFUL PRACTICE

We believe in one God, eternally subsisting in three distinct Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit equal in substance, glory, power and majesty.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:13

1 Corinthians 12:4 - There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

5 - There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

6 - There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

2 Corinthians 13:13 - All God's people here send their greetings.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To know that we believe in one God, eternally subsisting in three distinct Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- (I) To explain** Trinitarian biblical constructions;
- (II) To show** that God is triune and unique;
- (III) To know** some inadequate beliefs about the Trinity;

(IV) To present some answers to objections about the Trinity.

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity is the most crucial truth of Christian thinking, but how to reconcile the monotheism revealed in the Old Testament with the deity of each Person of the Trinity? This is the focus of this lesson.

I - TRINITARIAN BIBLICAL CONSTRUCTIONS

1. Unity in the Trinity (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

A cursory reading of this passage may lead one to argue that the text does not say that each one of these Persons is God, as certain so-called Christian groups usually do. The apostle Paul refers to the Trinity by using another language. He affirms the unity of God, one essence and substance, in the diversity of manifestations of each distinct Person, and declares that the Spirit is the same, the Lord is the same and the Father God is the same. It is unity in diversity.

2. The Benediction (2 Cor. 13:13).

There is here a certain parallelism with the Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24-26). This final greeting is not common in the Pauline epistles. There seems to be no intention here to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. It is about the customary pronouncement by the minister of worship to say goodbye to the faithful at the close of the meetings in the first decades of the Church's history. If this can be confirmed, it means that Christians were already aware of this divine reality very early in the life of the Church. The source of the Lord's grace is the love of God in the Holy Spirit. It is a Trinitarian greeting.

3. The revealed triune God (Eph. 4:4-6).

Here we have the diversity of operations and functions in the unity of God. It is God who calls us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus is our Lord, the source of our faith and hope. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal in power, glory, and majesty, subsisting since eternity in one indivisible substance, but manifest in the history of salvation in personal forms and distinct functions (1 Pet. 1:2).

II - THE TRIUNE GOD

1. A crucial issue.

The Bible shows quite clearly the deity of the Son: "and the Word was



God" (John 1:1). It is about a full and absolute divinity: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9).

The Scriptures also affirm that the Holy Spirit is God: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16); and is also Lord: "Now the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17, NKJV). How to reconcile this truth with monotheism ratified by the Lord Jesus himself? (Mark 12:29-30). This is not about Tritheism, that is, "three gods," for there is one God, and God is one (1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 3:20). The only explanation is the Trinity.

2. The Trinity.

The Trinity has been present in the Bible since the Old Testament (Gen. 1:26, 3:22, Isa 6:8). The Lord Jesus presents the Father and the Holy Spirit in a kind of relationship "I, You, He" (John 16:7-16). Before his ascension to heaven, Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). This is the most assertive biblical passage in favor of the Trinity. Here we have a very clear and vivid Trinitarian concept. It is an overview of the divine reality taught during his ministry about himself and the Father (Mt 11:27) and the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:28).

The Church, since ancient times, summarizes these Bible passages in the faith in one God, who subsists eternally in three distinct Persons.

III - INADEQUATE BELIEFS

1. The dynamic monarchianists.

It is about a movement that emerged after the middle of the second century around Christian monotheism. Tertullian, one of the Christian leaders of that generation, argued with them, calling them monarchianists (from Greek, *monarkhia*, "government exercised by a single ruler"). They taught that Jesus received the *dynamis*, "power," in Greek, at his baptism in the Jordan River; others affirmed that Jesus became divine at the time of his resurrection. All the ideas of the movement denied the absolute divinity of Jesus and contradicted the belief from the Apostolic Age, which considered Jesus "the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). They are the ancestors of Arianism.

2. Modalistic monarchianists.

These are thus identified because they taught that God appears in different forms. For them, God appears under the mask of the Father in the work of Creation, under the mask of the Son in his birth and ascension, and thereafter he appears under the mask of the Holy Spirit. Father, Son

and Holy Spirit are not three Persons, but three faces, countenances or masks. It is the unicist doctrine that denies the Trinity. This is a huge theological mistake, because the Bible is clear in its distinction of these Persons (Matt. 3:16, 17; John 8:17, 18; 2 John 3). Bishop Sabellius was the leading exponent of this doctrine, therefore it is known as Sabellianism. His spiritual heirs are still out there. Their theological summary is this: God is Jesus; however, the Bible teaches that Jesus is God.

3. Arianism. It is the name of the doctrine formulated by Arius and of the movement he founded in Alexandria, Egypt, in the year 318. His doctrine contradicted the orthodox belief followed by the churches since the Apostolic Period. Arius taught that the Lord Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father; He was a creature, created out of nothing, a divine class of inferior nature, neither divine nor human, a third class between divinity and humanity. The slogan of his followers was: "There was a time when the Word did not exist." But the Bible teaching supported by the churches from the beginning asserts that the Son is eternal (Isa. 9:6), because He transcends creation: "And he is before all things, and all things hold together through him" (Col. 1:17).

IV - RESPONSE TO OBJECTIONS ABOUT THE TRINITY

1. Clarification.

Modern unicists preach that the doctrine of the Trinity is an invention of the Council of Nicaea, by order of a pagan Roman emperor. But these movements are mistaken, for more than a hundred years before Tertullian had already formulated the doctrine of the Trinity. Moreover, the theme of the referred to Council, the Son, reaffirms the deity of Jesus and his consubstantiality with the Father. The Creed does not bring any information about the Holy Spirit. The document adopted in Nicaea became a starting point, rather than an end point. The controversy continued for two main reasons: the return of Arianism and the lack of definition about the Holy Spirit.

2. Tertullian's definition.

He was the neologist of the Church, who created the term "Trinity" in the following statement: "All are of One, by unity (that is) of substance; while the **mystery** of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three *Persons*—the **Father**, the **Son**, and the **Holy Ghost**: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power,



inasmuch as He is **one God**, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the **Father**, and of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Ghost**." (*Against Praxeas*, II / original text.) One God, therefore essence, substance and power are one, but the difference lies in the degree, form, and aspect that we call "Persons" (Matt. 28:19).

3. Definitive Formulation of the Trinity.

This happened only at the Council of Constantinople in 381, based on the works of Athanasius, which opposed the Arianists and also groups opposed to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, such as the Pneumatomacians and the Tropicians; and based on the works of the so-called Cappadocian fathers: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed reaffirms the Creed of Nicaea and defines the deity of the Holy Spirit, establishing once and for all the doctrine of the Holy Trinity

CONCLUSION

In view of what was said above, it is clear that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical and it is present from Genesis to Revelation.