



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.5 – The Doctrine of God

The Relationship of the Three Persons in the Trinity

As we have seen, the Bible clearly teaches that there is one God and yet there are three separate entities that are called God. In the sixth or seventh century, the church wrote the *Athanasian Creed* in order to combat the false teachers who denied the Trinity and to clearly set out the Bible's teaching that there is one God in three Persons. The *Athanasian Creed* emphasizes the oneness of the Deity and at the same time the distinct differences between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance... The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God – and yet there are not three gods but one God" (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 24). Each Person is 100% God and 100% of God is in each Person. "For in Him (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 1:19).

The Bible uses different terms for the relationship of the three Persons of God to one other. The Son is called "the only begotten" (John 1:18). If the Son is the begotten one, the Father must be the One who begets. This must, of course, be a different kind of begetting than that found among humans. In the case of human beings, a father is, of course, older than his son. But in the Trinity both the Father and the Son are eternal. So, we say with Martin Luther that we believe that Jesus Christ, true God, is "begotten of the Father in eternity" (*Luther's Small Catechism*, explanation to the second article of the Apostle's Creed).

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is "the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father" (John 15:26). Since the Holy Spirit is also called "the Spirit of His Son" (Galatians 4:6), we confess in the *Nicene Creed* that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son" (*The Book of Concord*, p. 23).

The *Athanasian Creed* summarizes these teachings by saying: "The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is from the Father alone, not made or created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made or created or begotten but proceeding" (*The Book of Concord*, p. 24).

Some False Teachings about God

In the history of the Christian church on earth many teachers have arisen who have denied the Trinity. Both Muslims and Jews teach that there is one God but they reject the teaching that the Son is God or that the Holy Spirit is God. Some have taught that there is only one Person of God, appearing at times as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Holy Spirit. They teach that God the Father was crucified.

The *Nicene Creed* was written to oppose to the teachings of Arius. Arius taught that there was a time when there was no Son of God. He denied the eternity and the full deity of Jesus.

Today, many Christian teachers and leaders are really Unitarians rather than Trinitarians, because they deny the full deity of Jesus or His bodily resurrection from the dead that proves Him to be true God. Among the Pentecostals there is at least one anti-Trinitarian group that teaches that Jesus is God but they deny the Trinity. Jehovah's Witnesses also deny the deity of Jesus. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons) teach that the Father, Son, and Spirit are really three separate gods, and that Mormons can become gods as well.

Another false teaching of our time is known as “process theology”. According to this teaching God is limited in understanding and power. He is in a process of growing or evolving and does not fully know what the future will bring.

There are also feminists who reject the use of the word “He” in the Bible to refer to God. They say we should say “she” instead. They call God their Mother or their Father-Mother. Some consider Earth or Nature as their Mother God. Although we realize that God is not a sexual Being, like most of His animal creatures, the language used uniformly by the Bible leads us to speak of God as “He”. This includes of all the three Persons of God.

God’s Revelation of Himself

Everything we can know about God has been revealed to us by God Himself in the holy Scriptures. It is from the Scriptures we learn that there is only one God in three Persons. If we could fully understand how this can be, or if we can fully understand the inner workings of the three Persons in God, we would be equal to God ourselves. We must remain humble and simply accept what God has revealed about Himself without doubting or questioning.

Above all, we rejoice in the fact that this one true God in three Persons is our Savior. He has revealed Himself as the Trinity in connection with His plan of salvation. He has revealed himself as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. As soon as the first human sin occurred, God immediately came with His promise of a Savior (Genesis 3:15). All of His revelation in Scripture carries forward this same theme, all the way to the last verse of Revelation.

Questions

1. Which of the three ancient creeds goes into the most detail on the Trinity?
2. What word does the Bible use to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son?
3. What word does the Bible use to describe the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son?
4. What are some of the false-teaching groups that deny the Trinity?
5. Which of these groups has the greatest influence in your area?
6. Why do we use masculine pronouns when we speak about God?
7. In what way does process theology contradict Bible teaching?