

October 6, 2013

Deut. 6:4-9 / Matthew 28:16-20 / I Thess. 3:13-17

The Attributes of God (#2): The Necessity of Our One God Being a

I need to begin my message today by telling you that for the first 23 years of my life I DID NOT BELIEVE the things I am about to share NOW as a convinced believer! I did believe in God. But I did NOT believe He was Triune, three-personed, a Trinity or Triadic in nature. And, of course, the primary reason I did not believe it was because I had not yet come to believe the Bible.

I always believed that God existed. In fact, I cannot remember a time when I did not believe in God. In fact, as one who grew up fascinated with nature, and animals, and the creation -- even being the grounds-keeper and later a camp counselor at the local Audubon Nature Sanctuary about a half mile from my house -- I found no other viable explanation for the wonders and intricacies of creation except a wise, intelligent, orderly Creator.

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Thus my struggle was NOT believing in God, it was determining or defining what the God I believed in was like. I knew He existed and I even had some personal ideas of what He must be like from my observations and study of what He'd made.

But in all honesty I wrestled intensely with whether He was simply the God of nature, or the God of the Bible. An impersonal, silent, uninvolved and distant God who worked solely through the laws of nature He Himself had established (as the deist's and some of my nature-loving friends would suggest)...

**OR** a personal, loving, redeeming, prayer-hearing, miracle-working God, who cares about our lives, and what we do, and will even (on occasion) break in upon the affairs of this world to speak, guide, heal, protect, help, punish or save (as we see in the Bible).

I wasn't yet sure if THE CREATOR I BELIEVED IN was holy or had established moral laws along with the laws of nature. In fact I questioned if He even cared about human morality at all.

After all, He didn't seem to care about morality among animals (if I can put it that way) -- snakes eating poor defenseless frogs alive, female praying mantis's eating or cannibalizing their husband as soon as they mate, territorial ant wars with their massive death tolls, or the seemingly random sexual practices of farm animals in heat.

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As one who noticed things like that, I sometimes struggled equating the God I saw in nature / with the God I read about in the Bible. And nowhere was that struggle more pronounced than when it came to the Trinity.

And I do grant you it may have had a bit to do with the fact that I was raised in New England. For there, the anti-Trinitarian sentiments of the Unitarianism coming out of Harvard and Yale, and the Deism of many the founding fathers have left a deep and lasting imprint upon the religious psyche of people in that area.

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Yet be that as it may, my problem was this: To accept the Bible's teaching on the Trinity or to accept that the Creator who is is tri-personal or consists of three distinct yet indivisible personalities within that solitary Godhead -- automatically nullifies even the suggestion that God is somehow impersonal, distant, uninvolved or does not care about us or what we do in regard to our moral, social, sexual, interpersonal or lifestyle choices.

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So, what brought about my eventual "conversion" to a Trinitarian view of God? The Holy Spirit working through the teachings of the Bible to bring me to faith in Christ.

It was the victorious conquest of my soul by the Holy Spirit. After 12 long years of agonizing over what the Bible says about Jesus, the Holy Spirit convinced me that what it says about Him was true. A conquest that simultaneously required belief in the Trinity.

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That's the **FIRST** thing I need to point out: What the Bible teaches is NOT a generic monotheism, or the simple belief that God exists, but the truth that the One God who does exist, exists in a three-personed plurality within that indivisible oneness.

The Bible assumes that everyone believes in God, except the fool, who has somehow managed to convince himself otherwise, against overwhelming evidence, reason & common sense (Rom. 1:18-21). / It's the "**fool,**" says Ps. 14 and 53, who "**says in his heart, 'There is no God.'**"

Which means that atheism is not the product of an enlightened mind, but as Paul says, a darkened mind that refuses to admit what should be plain to all (Rom. 1:20, 21 & 28).

That's why the Bible can start out in the very first verse by saying: "**In the beginning God created...**" assuming as it does, that everyone reading it will have weighed that overwhelming evidence and agree with that statement. That's why it gives no prior arguments or philosophical proofs of His existence -- just the plain & obvious statement that God is and has created all that is.

Yet from that initial point of agreement, what the Bible does is turn to drive home what that God (who's existence all but the atheist affirm), is like. What His "Name" is, since His Name (or His many Names) are a way of describing certain characteristics about Him, or what He is like.

So, what does it tell us about the God who is? It tell us He is good and all-powerful and faithful. That He provides, protects, can and does works miracles and that nothing is impossible for him! That He's a God that's all-knowing, everlasting, unchangeable, righteous, just, perfect, wise and right in all He does and ordains!

That in contrast to the nations around Israel, who believed in different gods, or many gods, He is the only God -- and awesome beyond compare! Great, sovereign and holy. A God to be revered, and feared, and obeyed. A God to kneel before, and adore, because He alone is worthy of such worship.

A God who keeps His covenant, fulfills His promises, judges evil and punishes sin. A God who is the uncontested Lord over the entire universe and all that is in it.

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THAT is what the Bible is intent to do. Not just assure us that God exists, but tell us what He is like. Not simply solicit a generic belief in one God, but give us specific details about that one God and call us to believe each one!

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You see, what we need to remember is that all the nations surrounding Israel believed in a god or many gods. But that wasn't the issue!

Because the question the Bible puts before us is NOT, "Do you believe in God?" The questions it puts before us are: "What is His name?" "What is His nature?" "What are His attributes?" "What is He like?"

In fact, that theme is so prominent in the Bible that even among the Jews who claimed to believe in the God of Scripture, Jesus could say: **"He who rejects ME rejects the Father who sent me,"** or again, **"He who has seen ME has seen the Father."**

It was His way of saying: If you think you know and worship God yet don't think He is like Me, then you don't really know the God you think you know and worship! Christ is (as the author of Hebrews affirms in chap. 1:3): **"the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His Being"** (Heb. 1:3). Jesus was sent into this world to reveal the nature of God as He really is.

That's why the question every person needs to answer is NOT do you believe in God! But, do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe He is Lord? Do you believe He's one with the Father? Do you believe He is Deity clothed in human flesh and thus the clearest revelation of what the Father He is One with is truly like.

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And listen: ***You can't say "yes" to any of those truths about Jesus without also embracing what the Bible has to say about God's Triune nature, His being Three in One, or one God in Trinity.***

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That's the **SECOND** thing we need to see. If, **"the Lord our God, the Lord is one,"** as Deut. 6:4 makes crystal clear, and thus we are truly monotheistic, believing in one and only one God and yet Jesus says, **"I and the Father are one,"** (John 10:30) / and **"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,"** (John 14:9) / and claims to have existed before Abraham existed / and took for Himself the divine name **"I AM"** (John 8:58) / and allowed people to worship Him (Matt. 28:17) / and let Thomas call Him God (John 20:28) / and imparted the Holy Spirit to people merely by breathing upon them (John 20:22) / and claimed that through Him was life / and to know Him was the only way to have eternal life (John 14:7 / 17:2-3).....

If God is ONE, and yet Jesus says all those things about Himself (and the apostles confirm them) then it becomes pretty clear that the ONE GOD OF THE BIBLE MUST EXIST IN AT LEAST TWO PERSONS!

I don't care if you're able to understand or formulate it like the creeds we sometimes repeat. But I will say this: You cannot read the Bible without seeing, nor accept what it says without believing that Jesus and the Father are One. That the Father is God, and the Son is God, and yet there are not two God's but only one in two distinct and yet indivisible personalities.

Whether one likes it or not (or is willing to admit it or not) the Bible proclaims that the Father is God, and Jesus (the Son), is also God.

John said it in the prologue to his Gospel in chap. 1:1 and 14: ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth."*** He is distinct from the Father because He is said to be "with God," yet though with God, He "is God."

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Paul likewise confirms the same thing numerous times, as in Col. 1:15-16 where we read of Jesus: ***"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by Him and for Him."***

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Its a truth he repeats again in Col. 2:9, where we read: ***"For in [Christ] all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form..."***

And again in Titus 2:13 where he calls Him: ***"Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."***

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And again in Rom. 9:5 where the best translation (as the NIV has it) is: ***"Theirs are the patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."***

Even Frances Young, one of the scholars who co-authored the book, "The Myth of God Incarnate" (and does not believe in the deity of Christ) couldn't get around the fact that in that in Rom. 9:5 Paul explicitly refers to Jesus as God.

And of course, we can't leave out Peter, who speaks of: ***"those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, have received a faith as precious as ours."*** (II Pet. 1:1)

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And let's not forget the Apostle Thomas. After sticking his fingers in the holes in Jesus wrist and side he cried out: ***"My Lord and my God."*** An outburst that would have received an instant and fierce rebuke from Jesus (and all the other disciples) had it not been true.

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Then we come to the **THIRD** thing we must see if we are to affirm this attribute of God's triune nature -- the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit.

We have already seen (and there is little disagreement) that the Father is God. And for the person who accepts the Bible as His Word (and therefore as true) there is also little question that Jesus is God as well, in the sense that He shares the Father's nature, deity, eternality and glory, is co-equal with Him in majesty, power, and authority, and like the Father, is both infinite, uncreated (begotten and not made) almighty, unlimited, and omniscient, with His Spirit being everywhere present.

Which leaves us only to prove the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit, if we are to affirm the Trinity. I grant you that the word "Trinity" does not appear in Scripture.

Yet that matters little, since it is descriptive of an attribute Scripture does speak about and would have us affirm. The term *"end times"*

doesn't occur in Scripture either, but it also is a valid way of describing the period of time just before, "***the end of this present age.***" A term doesn't have to be directly from the Bible to affirm it, it merely has to be descriptively true to a concept taught in the Bible.

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So, what about the Holy Spirit? I had a friend in seminary who once told me, "*The Holy Spirit was not a person, it's an impersonal force or power, like electricity.*" And thus, he was not of Trinitarian persuasion, but what I will call of "bitarian" persuasion -- believing only in the deity of Jesus and the Father.

Yet, the Bible does not teach two persons and a power in the God-head, it teaches three persons of equal power! So, how can we be sure the Holy Spirit is a "person" and also "God," thus completing and affirming the doctrine of the Trinity?

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1.) Because we see Him (like the "Word" or Jesus in His pre-incarnate form) actively engaged in the work of creation (Gen. 1:2). God the Father spoke, God the Son carried out His creative decrees, and God the Holy Spirit moved to manifest God's immediate and sustaining presence over all that was made.

In fact, that's surely one of the reasons the Hebrew word "*Elohim*" though in the plural form, is allowed in Scripture in reference to our one God. Along with Gen. 1:26, where God says, "***Let us make man in our image,***" it's a hint of the Trinitarian nature of God imbedded in the OT text right from the very beginning and is found in other OT texts such as Gen. 3:22 / Gen. 11:7 / Ex. 3:2-6 / Ex. 23:20-22 / Ps. 110:1 / Prov. 8:22-31 / Is. 6:8 / Is. 9:6 / Is. 40:3 / Is. 48:16 / Is. 63:10 / Ps. 45:6-7 / Ps. 51:11 / Hos. 1:7 / and Mal. 3:1-2 and many more.

And we shouldn't be surprised, because for God to be Triune in nature, He must always have been Triune in nature!



The Trinity cannot be true if it is simply a NT invention. Or worse yet, something the Catholic Church invented and instituted at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., as Dan Brown suggests in *The DaVinci Code*.

That was another reason I had a hard time accepting the Trinity. Because I thought it was a New Testament invention. And young as I was, I knew enough to know that for God to be a Trinity, He would have needed to be one from eternity past.

In fact, it was only when I came to see Jesus as being with God from the beginning (in Prov. 8), that my stumbling block was removed and I came to faith.

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2.) The distinctness, and yet full Deity of the Holy Spirit is set forth again in the baptismal formulation in Matt. 28:19. There the Holy Spirit is mentioned separately, and yet classified on an equal level with the Father and the Son.

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3.) His Deity is made plain by the attributes He is said to share with God, such as: omnipresence (Ps. 139), all power (Lk. 1:35), all knowledge (I Cor. 2:10-11), eternity (Heb. 9:14), the ability to give life eternal (Jn. 6:63 / 7:39), raise Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8:11), give new birth and empower believers for service (John 3:5-6 / I Cor. 12-14).

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4.) And His Deity and personhood are both confirmed by the fact that in Acts 5:3-4, Peter asks Ananias: "**Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...? You have not lied to men but God.**"

If the Holy Spirit were merely an impersonal force like electricity, it would be foolish to suggest you could lie to it! You can't lie to electricity! And the same could be said of: The personal guidance He gives and the intercession He makes for us "**with groans too deep for words**" (I Cor. 12:8-11/Rom. 8:26).

Only One with personhood can do those things, or have them done to Him -- showing us the Bible does indeed teach the mystery of ONE God in three persons (the word "Trinity" merely being an attempt to clarify that mystery).

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And **LAST**, why does it even matter? Because if that's what God is really like -- and His Word says it is -- any description of Him that denies it is idolatrous and thus deviant and sinful. Not only that, if God is not a Trinity, then Christ cannot be God, and if Christ is not God, the atonement is nullified, for how could another created being bear the full penalty for all our sins?

Likewise, if Christ is not God, then the common accusation that is God cruel and arbitrarily chose an innocent victim to bludgeon and torture is true. But if Christ is God, then that means that, "***on the cross,***" as J. S. Whale states, "***God was being cruel to no one but Himself.***"

An act of unspeakable cruelty becomes the greatest and most extraordinary act of sacrificial love in the history of the world -- ***IF*** Jesus is God. And He can only be God if God is a Trinity.

And again, if He is not God that also means our justification is called into question, our songs which praise and worship Him are little more than expressions of sin and a violation of the 2nd commandment, we should not pray to Him or in His name, nor should we attribute the title Savior to Him, for salvation is, "of the Lord" -- and if He's not, we should reject Him, not worship Him!

That's why Hermann Bavinck could say: "***Christianity stands or falls with the confession of the deity of Christ and the Trinity.***"