

STUDY GUIDE TO ACCOMPANY THE LEARNING SERIES

*The Mystery
of the Trinity*

R. C. SPROUL



LIGONIER MINISTRIES
RENEW YOUR MIND

P.O. Box 547500 • Lake Mary, Florida 32854 • 1-800-435-4343

Editor: Pete Nadeau

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P.O. Box 547500, Orlando Florida 32854
www.ligonier.org
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Written by Pete Nadeau

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Dr. R.C. Sproul and Ligonier Ministries

Hearing and doing the Word of God in all of life—this is the passion of Dr. R.C. Sproul, chairman of Ligonier Ministries. Watch his videos, read his books, listen to his tapes, experience his seminars and you see, hear, and experience passion. Passion for truth and knowledge. Passion for transformation and reformation. But more than anything, passion for Jesus Christ.

Dr. Sproul has also had a distinguished academic teaching career. He taught systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary beginning in 1980, where he later served as the John Dyer Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology for eight years. From 1995–2004, he served as Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Knox Theological Seminary.

In addition to his teaching career, Dr. Sproul has served on the national boards of several organizations, including Prison Fellowship and the Coalition for Christian Outreach. Dr. Sproul also served as president of the Executive Committee of the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy. Dr. Sproul currently serves as Director of Serve International, and Senior Minister of Preaching at Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Florida.

In 1971, R.C. helped establish Ligonier Ministries, a ministry designed to fill the gap in Christian education between Sunday school and formal seminary education. R.C.'s goal for Ligonier is "to flood society with articulate, well-equipped Christians who will minister to the pain of our world." To achieve this, Ligonier offers a wide range of resources for adult Christian education—resources not just for restricted use in the classroom, but for frequent and practical applications in everyday situations. These resources are available on audio and video tapes on subjects such as apologetics, theology, ethics, culture, and Bible study. Ligonier's ministry also includes R.C.'s books, *Tabletalk* magazine, conferences, and curriculum which accompanies many of the audio and video tape series.

1

Monotheism

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity has caused heated debate and controversy in the history of the church. Many have misunderstood the doctrine as involving a basic contradiction regarding how God could be one God and yet three persons. The Religious-Historical School of the nineteenth century endeavored to label the doctrine as a late development in biblical thought. Yet the original teaching of Scripture and the confession of the church is that God is one in essence and three in persons. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul introduces the doctrine of the Trinity.

SCRIPTURE READING

Exodus 1–20

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To define the nature of progressive revelation and its relevance for the doctrine of the Trinity.
2. To identify and explain the Religious-Historical School.
3. To emphasize the New Testament's teaching regarding monotheism and the Trinity.

QUOTATIONS

“The divine nature is really and entirely identical with each of the three persons, all of whom can therefore be called one.”

—St. Thomas Aquinas

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The doctrine of the Trinity has caused heated debate and controversy in the history of the church.

- B. Many have misunderstood the doctrine as a basic contradiction as to how God could be one God and yet three persons.
 - 1. The confession of the church is that God is one in essence and three in persons.
- C. Progressive Revelation is a gradual revelation of God and His plan of redemption.
 - 1. Progressive Revelation may expand or further develop previous revelation, but never contradicts previous revelation.
- D. The nature of the triune God is not clearly revealed at the beginning of Scripture.
- E. The unity of God is very clear in the pages of Scripture.
 - 1. The Bible affirms monotheism over against the polytheism of the surrounding cultures.
- F. Biblical monotheism stirred a philosophical controversy in the nineteenth century.
- G. G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) was one of the premier philosophers of the nineteenth century.
 - 1. Hegel developed a philosophy that attempted to explain the evolution of history and religion.
- H. The Religious Historical School argued that all things evolve from the simple to the complex including religion.
 - 1. The school suggested that animism is the most primitive form of religious belief.
 - 2. Animism is the belief that spirits inhabit trees, rocks, and many other elements of nature.
 - 3. Animism gradually evolves into a polytheism that worships the gods of fertility, wisdom, war, etc.
 - 4. Polytheism gradually evolves into henotheism wherein one god is worshipped by a culture without denying the existence of other gods.
 - 5. Battles between nations were often explained as battles between gods.
 - 6. Henotheism eventually evolves into monotheism which affirms the existence of only one god over the entire universe.
 - 7. Scholars debate when Jewish monotheism was firmly established in the nation.

- I. Orthodox Bible scholars have challenged the claims of the Religious Historical School arguing that the unity of God is clear in the early pages of Scripture.
 - 1. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* (Gen. 1:1)
 - 2. The domain of the God of Creation is heaven and earth and not a limited geographical area.
- J. Critics see multiple gods in the Creation text because of the two names God is given: "Elohim" and "Yahweh".
 - 1. It is possible to translate Elohim as "gods" although it is used with a singular verb.
- K. Critics see animism in the biblical text because of Abram's worship at the oaks of Mamre, Eve's conversation with the serpent, and Balaam's conversation with an ass.
- L. Critics argue for henotheism in the Bible because of the conflict between the God of Israel and the god of other nations.
- M. The first commandment given at Sinai is a strong avowal of monotheism.
 - 1. *"You shall have no other gods before me."* (Ex. 20:3)
 - 2. The second commandment banning all forms of idolatry supports even further the monotheism of the Israelites.
 - 3. The prophets continually inveighed against the false gods and useless idols of the other nations.
 - 4. The prophets mocked those who worshipped gods in the rocks, trees, or sky.
- N. Although the New Testament develops our understanding of the three persons of the Trinity it still affirms the monotheism of the Old Testament.
 - 1. The three persons of the Trinity do not fragment the essence of God into three independent entities.
 - 2. The New Testament affirms the unity of the godhead.
- O. Augustine explained the relationship between the Testaments with the following phrase.
 - 1. "The New is in the Old concealed. The Old is the New revealed."
 - 2. There is a unity of thought in the two Testaments that is not compromised regarding the three persons yet one essence of the godhead.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The confession of the church is that God is one in ____ and three in ____.
 - a. person, essence
 - b. essence, substance
 - c. essence, person
 - d. person, substance
2. ____ revelation is a gradual revelation of God and His plan of redemption.
 - a. Apocalyptic
 - b. General
 - c. Special
 - d. Progressive
3. The nature of the ____ is not clearly revealed at the beginning of Scripture.
 - a. creation
 - b. Trinity
 - c. universe
 - d. Fall
4. The Bible affirms ____ over against the ____ of the surrounding cultures.
 - a. polytheism, monotheism
 - b. monotheism, henotheism
 - c. henotheism, atheism
 - d. monotheism, polytheism
5. G.W.F. Hegel was one of the premier philosophers of the ____ century.
 - a. seventeenth
 - b. eighteenth
 - c. nineteenth
 - d. twentieth
6. Polytheism gradually evolved into ____ wherein one god was worshipped by a culture without denying the existence of other gods.
 - a. henotheism
 - b. monotheism
 - c. atheism
 - d. agnosticism

7. Henotheism eventually evolved into ____ which affirms the existence of only one god over the entire universe.
 - a. polytheism
 - b. monotheism
 - c. atheism
 - d. agnosticism

8. Although the New Testament develops our understanding of the three persons of the Trinity it still affirms the ____ of the Old Testament.
 - a. henotheism
 - b. monotheism
 - c. polytheism
 - d. atheism

BIBLE STUDY

1. How does God reveal Himself to Moses in Exodus 3? How does God identify Himself in Exodus 3:6? How does God's self-identification here challenge the Religious-Historical School?

2. How does God reveal Himself as a relational God in this passage? How does this self-description of God contrast with the descriptions of the other gods of the Ancient Near East?

3. What is Moses' reaction to God's appearance in 3:6?

4. What does God acknowledge or hear in Ex. 3:7? How is this fact consistent with God's character as a relational God? What else does God hear and acknowledge in Scripture?

5. In what sense do the Israelites have a polytheistic perspective in Ex. 3:13? How will Moses reassert a monotheistic perspective when he returns to Egypt?

6. How does the name God gives to Moses in 3:14 reflect God's unity and self-existence? How does God's self-declaration here refute animism, polytheism, and henotheism?

7. How does the Lord make the conflict between Himself and Pharaoh a very personal conflict? What does the Lord seek to teach the Israelites about Himself through the plagues and Exodus?

8. How do the first three commandments (Ex. 20:2–7) summarize the lessons the Israelites were to learn from the events of the Exodus? What are the other gods that will compete for the Israelites' affection in the wilderness?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do the first twenty chapters of the book of Exodus refute the claim of the Religious Historical School that the faith of the Israelites was not always monotheistic?

2. How did the events leading up to the Exodus present a showdown between the Lord God of Israel and the multiple gods of Egypt? How does the Lord God humiliate the gods of Egypt?

3. Why is the profession of faith in Deuteronomy 6:4–5 so central to the faith of the Israelites? How does this confession of faith contrast with the faith of other nations?

4. How does Jesus reveal the Father and the Spirit in the New Testament and yet at the same time affirm the monotheism of the Old Testament (cf. John 5, 14)?

APPLICATION

1. Reflect on why it is comforting to the believer to know that the Lord is God, the Lord is One.

2. Consider what the relationships within the Trinity mean for the believer's relationship with the Trinity.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Sproul, R.C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*.
Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*.

NOTES

2

The Biblical Witness

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Skeptics have argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is a New Testament addition to biblical faith. Some scholars have suggested that the idea of a triune God is a concept completely foreign to the pages of the Old Testament. A closer examination of Scripture reveals several allusions to the Trinity in the Old Testament and a fuller explanation of the doctrine in the New Testament. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul shows how the doctrine of the Trinity is a consistent reality in Scripture from beginning to end.

SCRIPTURE READING

Acts 17:16–34

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To demonstrate the presence of the doctrine of the Trinity throughout the pages of Scripture.
2. To reveal the allusions to the Trinity in the Old Testament.
3. To reveal the affirmations of the Trinity in the New Testament.

QUOTATIONS

“How can plurality consist with unity, or unity with plurality? To examine the fact closely is rashness, to believe it is piety, to know it is life, and life eternal.”

—St. Bernard of Clairvaux

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The Trinity is not explicitly explained in the Old Testament, but there are several allusions to the triune God in its pages.
- B. The name of God “Elohim” may be a reference to the triune God because it is a plural noun used with a singular verb.

1. However, Elohim may also be the editorial form that does not necessarily indicate plurality of persons, but rather plurality of majesty.
 2. The word form may also indicate plurality of intensity wherein all glory and power is ascribed to God alone.
 3. The name Elohim is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity and may serve as a reference, but the name is not necessarily connected with the doctrine.
 4. The unity and diversity of the universe is captured in God Himself.
- C. The Spirit of God is referenced early in Scripture and ascribed the qualities of deity.
- D. Psalm 110 is the Old Testament passage most frequently cited in the New Testament.
1. *“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”* (Ps. 110:1)
 2. There seems to be a conversation within the godhead here as Yahweh says to Adonai “sit at my right hand”.
 3. Jesus refers to this passage asking how David’s son could be the Messiah yet also his Lord.
- E. The New Testament reaffirms the Old Testament teaching of monotheism.
- F. *“So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”* (Acts 17:22–23)
1. Scholars have noticed that even the most primitive followers of animism acknowledge a supreme or unknown god above all the other gods.
- G. *“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and*

imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:24–31)

1. Paul is reaffirming classical Jewish monotheism in this passage.
- H. *“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ – yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”* (1 Cor. 8:1–6)
1. Paul ascribes deity to Christ and affirms the oneness of God in the same passage.
- I. The New Testament consistently describes God as one and yet still ascribes deity to each of the three persons of the Trinity.
1. Jesus refers to Himself several times in John’s Gospel as the “I Am” thus identifying Himself with God.
 2. Jesus continually invites people to acknowledge Him as the Son of God.
 3. Jesus accepts worship agreeing with the confession of others that He is God.
- J. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* (John 1:1)
1. John alludes to the mystery of the Trinity in the first sentence of his Gospel.
 2. The Word is described as distinct from God and yet is with God and even is God.
- K. *“He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”* (John 1:2–4)
1. Divine characteristics are ascribed to the eternal Word or Christ throughout the New Testament.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The name of God ____ may be a reference to the triune God because it is a plural noun used with a singular verb.
 - a. Yahweh
 - b. Elohim
 - c. Adonai
 - d. Jesus
2. The name ____ is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity and may serve as a reference, but the name is not necessarily connected with the doctrine.
 - a. Yahweh
 - b. Elohim
 - c. Adonai
 - d. Jesus
3. The ____ is referenced early in Scripture and ascribed the qualities of deity.
 - a. Bible
 - b. name of Jesus
 - c. Spirit of God
 - d. Creation
4. Psalm ____ is the Old Testament passage most frequently cited in the New Testament.
 - a. 91
 - b. 100
 - c. 110
 - d. 23
5. There seems to be a conversation within the godhead in Psalm 110 as ____ says to ____ “sit at my right hand”.
 - a. Adonai, Yahweh
 - b. Elohim, Yawheh
 - c. Adonai, Elohim
 - d. Yahweh, Adonai
6. The New Testament reaffirms the Old Testament teaching of ____.
 - a. polytheism
 - b. monotheism
 - c. henotheism
 - d. animism

7. Scholars have noticed that even the most primitive followers of ____ acknowledge a supreme or unknown god above all the other gods.
 - a. polytheism
 - b. monotheism
 - c. henotheism
 - d. animism

8. The ____ consistently describes God as one and yet still ascribes deity to each of the three persons of the Trinity.
 - a. prophet Isaiah
 - b. Old Testament
 - c. New Testament
 - d. Psalmist

BIBLE STUDY

1. How does Psalm 110:1 reveal a multiplicity of persons in the godhead? Which persons in the Trinity does this verse reference?

2. How does Psalm 110 forecast the military triumphs of the Messiah? What role will God Himself play in His triumphs? Who are the enemies of the Messiah?

3. Why is Zion the starting point for the Messiah's kingdom? What honor and privileges are associated with the capital city of the Messiah's kingdom?

4. Who are the willing people that will join the side of the Messiah on the day of battle? How are God's people at war every day? In what sense will the Messiah and His people be renewed each day?

5. How does the Psalmist associate royalty, warfare, and priesthood with the Messiah in Psalm 110? Why does the identification of the Messiah as a priest remove any fear we may have of the other two images of the Messiah?

6. What is the significance of the priestly line of Melchizedek (cf. Gen. 14)? How is the Messiah's office as a priest related to the perseverance of the saints?

7. What images does the Psalmist use to describe the victories of the Messiah? How have you witnessed the victory of Jesus in your life?

8. What does this psalm teach you about God, the Messiah, Israel's king, and the citizens of the kingdom?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the New Testament writers made such extensive use of Psalm 110 in their writings? Why do the Pharisees fail to answer Jesus' question in Matt. 22:41-46?

2. How do the military images in this psalm expand your perception of Christ? In what sense does Jesus fight on behalf of His people?

3. How have heretics in the past attempted to subtract from the deity of Christ? How do false teachers today detract from Jesus' true identity?

APPLICATION

1. Reflect on the truth that Jesus fights against your enemies every day.

2. Consider the truth that Jesus is not only the warring Messiah, but also the interceding priest.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Sproul, R.C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*.
Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*.

NOTES

3

Early Controversies

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Logos Christology dominated the theological reflection of the early Church. The concept that the Word *was* with God and yet also *is* God originated from the first chapter of John. Yet the early church also had to combat heresy and errant interpretations of Scripture regarding the nature of the Trinity. There was no shortage of debates and councils in the early centuries of the church as the early church fathers developed and presented a clear doctrine of the Trinity. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul continues to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity.

SCRIPTURE READING

Acts 17:16–34

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To explain the early church's view of Christology.
2. To examine some of the Christological heresies in the early church.
3. To detail the decisions of the Council of Nicaea.

QUOTATIONS

“Now the Catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance, for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; but the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal...”

—Athanasian Creed

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Logos Christology dominated the theological reflection of the early Church.
 1. The concept that the Word was *with* God and yet also *is* God originated from the first chapter of John.

- B. The early church also had to combat heresy and errant interpretations of Scripture regarding the nature of the Trinity.
 - 1. The Council of Nicaea (4th century) and the Council of Chalcedon (5th century) were convened to resolve some of these doctrinal disputes.
 - 2. The prominent question in these councils was how to reconcile the person of Christ with a biblical monotheism.
- C. Monarchianism was a heresy that attempted to preserve the unity of God and monotheism at the expense of a pure Christology.
- D. Modalistic Monarchianism was one of the earliest heresies that the church had to combat.
 - 1. Modalism was an offshoot of Neo-Platonism that argued all of reality from angels to rocks exist in a certain mode of God.
 - 2. All reality to some extent is a manifestation of the Being of God.
 - 3. Sabellius argued Christ was an emanation of the Father just as sunbeams are an emanation of the sun.
- E. Sabellius' ideas were condemned by the church at Antioch in A.D. 267.
- F. Dynamic Monarchianism was an attempt to revive the heretical ideas of Sabellius.
 - 1. Paul of Samosata and Arius popularized these ideas.
 - 2. Arius said the Logos is less than God, but greater than man because the Logos was created by God.
 - 3. The Logos is incarnated in the person of Jesus.
 - 4. Jesus was adopted by the Father as the Father's son.
 - 5. Jesus becomes the son of the Father dynamically or through a change brought about by His obedience.
- G. The Council of Nicaea was provoked by the Arian controversy.
 - 1. The Council declared Christ was begotten and not created.
 - 2. Christ is co-substantial and co-eternal with the Father.
 - 3. Christ and the Spirit are the same substance, being, and essence as the Father.
- H. God is three in persons and one in essence.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. ____ Christology dominated the theological reflection of the early Church.
 - a. High
 - b. Low
 - c. Logos
 - d. Modalistic

2. The prominent question in the early councils was how to reconcile the person of Christ with a biblical ____.
 - a. polytheism
 - b. monotheism
 - c. henotheism
 - d. agnosticism

3. ____ was a heresy that attempted to preserve the unity of God and monotheism at the expense of a pure Christology.
 - a. Gnosticism
 - b. Arianism
 - c. Monarchianism
 - d. Arminianism

4. ____ was an offshoot of Neo-Platonism that argued all of reality from angels to rocks exist in a certain mode of God.
 - a. Pelagianism
 - b. Arianism
 - c. Monarchianism
 - d. Modalism

5. Dynamic ____ was an attempt to revive the heretical ideas of Sabellius.
 - a. Pelagianism
 - b. Arianism
 - c. Monarchianism
 - d. Modalism

6. ____ argued that Christ was an emanation of the Father just as sunbeams are an emanation of the sun.
 - a. Pelagius
 - b. Arius
 - c. Sabellius
 - d. Athanasius

7. Sabellius' ideas were condemned by the church at ____ in A.D. 267.
 - a. Jerusalem
 - b. Antioch
 - c. Nicaea
 - d. Chalcedon

8. The Council of Nicaea was provoked by the ____ controversy.
 - a. Pelagian
 - b. Arian
 - c. Monarchianism
 - d. Modalism

BIBLE STUDY

1. What saddens Paul tremendously as he enters the city of Athens? How can we relate to Paul's experience? What does Paul do amidst his circumstances in Athens?

2. The Epicureans focused on pleasure and the Stoics emphasized fatalism. How do you think Paul applied the Gospel to the specific hearts of his listeners? How can believers apply the truth of God's redemption to their culture today?

3. How does Paul acknowledge the truth in what the Athenians believe? How does he acknowledge the errors in their thought? How can believers adopt Paul's approach in their own evangelism?

4. How does Paul reach the Athenians where they are, but yet point them to a greater knowledge of the truth? How does Paul expand the Athenians perspective of the one true God?

5. What is the purpose behind all of God's transcendent works according to Acts 17:27? How have you witnessed God work in this manner in your own life?

6. How does Paul move the Athenians understanding of God from the impersonal to the personal? How is Christian monotheism unique in this manner?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is the resurrection simultaneously God's greatest work of transcendence and immanence? How is this gift the greatest and most personal gift the one true God can give?

2. How do the Athenian gods lack immanence? How does Paul reveal the true God to be immanent and transcendent?

3. How does Paul's experience in Athens correspond with his words in Rom. 1:18-20? How do you see evidence of the truth of Paul's words in Creation?

4. What does it look like for believers to be in the world, but not of it? In what area of culture has God called you to bring His redemptive purposes?

APPLICATION

1. Consider how the Lord is leading you towards a more personal relationship with Him?

-
2. Reflect on how God has worked in your life to broaden your perspective of Him.

3. Rejoice that we can love and worship the God who can be known.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Sproul, R.C. *Mighty Christ*.
Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*.

NOTES

4

Fifth-Century Heresies

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The controversies of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries sharpened the church's understanding and defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. These were dramatic centuries in the history of the church as new strands of heresy attempted to distort the truth regarding the essence and nature of the person of Christ. The Council of Chalcedon was a pivotal council for the church to clarify the truth regarding orthodox Christology. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul continues to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity.

SCRIPTURE READING

Colossians 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To identify and define Monophysitism.
2. To identify and define Nestorianism.
3. To discuss the significance of the Council of Chalcedon for defining orthodox Christology.

QUOTATIONS

“All heretics generally deceive by the ostentatious promise of science; and reprehend the simplicity of believers.”

—St. Augustine

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The controversies of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries sharpened the church's understanding and defense of the doctrine of the Trinity.
- B. The Monophysite heresy was developed in large part by Eutyches.
 1. Monophysite means “one nature.”

- C. The confession of the church has been that God is one essence or nature and three persons.
 - 1. Christ is one person with two natures: human and divine.
- D. Eutyches argued Christ only had one nature, which he called “theanthropic” — a divinely human nature or a humanly divine nature.
 - 1. The church realized this heresy negated both a fully divine and a fully human nature for Christ.
 - 2. The two natures of Christ are being mixed together or confused.
- E. The church also had to fight the Nestorian heresy at the Council of Chalcedon.
 - 1. Nestorius argued Christ was two separate persons.
 - 2. There is a difference between distinguishing the natures of Christ and separating the natures of Christ.
- F. The Council of Chalcedon was a pivotal council for defining orthodox Christology.
- G. The Council declared Jesus to be truly God and truly man.
 - 1. Christ’s human nature was fully human and His divine nature was fully divine.
- H. Christ’s two natures are united without mixture, confusion, division, or separation.
 - 1. The Monophysites confused and mixed the natures of Christ.
 - 2. The Nestorians divided and separated the two natures of Christ.
- I. Each nature of Christ retains its attributes in the incarnation.
 - 1. God does not give up any of His attributes in the person of Christ.
 - 2. Humanity does not give up any of its attributes in the person of Christ.
- J. Orthodox Christology declares Christ to be one person with a human and divine nature.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. The heretical controversies of the third and fourth centuries sharpened the church’s understanding and defense of the _____.
 - a. doctrine of Predestination
 - b. doctrine of Scripture
 - c. doctrine of Justification
 - d. doctrine of the Trinity

2. The Monophysite heresy was developed in large part by _____.
 - a. Eutyches
 - b. Pelagius
 - c. Arius
 - d. Nestorius
3. Monophysite means _____.
 - a. “one nature”
 - b. “one god”
 - c. “one person”
 - d. “one appearance”
4. The confession of the church has been God is one ____ and three _____.
 - a. person, essences
 - b. person, natures
 - c. essence, persons
 - d. god, essences
5. Eutyches argued Christ only had one nature, which he called ____ — a divinely human nature or a humanly divine nature.
 - a. theanthropic
 - b. therapeutic
 - c. theophanic
 - d. theological
6. The church had to fight the ____ heresy at the Council of Chalcedon.
 - a. Gnostic
 - b. Nestorian
 - c. Waldensian
 - d. Anabaptist
7. The Council of ____ was a pivotal council for defining orthodox Christology.
 - a. Trent
 - b. Basle
 - c. Chalcedon
 - d. Constance
8. Christ’s two ____ are united without mixture, confusion, division, or separation.
 - a. persons
 - b. natures
 - c. purposes
 - d. deaths

BIBLE STUDY

1. Why does Paul rejoice in thanksgiving for the Colossian believers in Col. 1:3–6? What effect has the Gospel had on their lives?

2. What impact has the Holy Spirit had on the lives of the Colossians according to Col. 1:8?

3. What does Paul ask God to give the Colossians in Col. 1:9–10?

4. What is the switch in kingdom citizenship Paul identifies in Col. 1:13? What are the attributes Paul seeks to find in those with a new kingdom citizenship?

5. What does Paul mean by saying Christ is the visible image of the invisible God? What does this verse teach you about Christ's relationship to the Father?

6. What role did Christ play in Creation according to Col. 1:15–17? What role does He continue to play in the Creation?

7. Why do you think Paul details the offices and glories of Christ in the first chapter of Colossians? What types of heresies do you think they were facing in this church?

8. What does Col. 1:19 teach you about the nature of Christ? How does this verse relate to the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so important to understand the two natures of Christ as truly God and truly man? What are the negative consequences of any other Christology?

2. How does knowing we stand before God blameless (Col. 1:22) affect our view of ourselves and our approach to God?

3. How are the lives of kingdom citizens better off than the lives of non-citizens? How are their lives more difficult?

APPLICATION

1. Reflect on the fact that Jesus is your Creator, Savior, and Lord.

2. Meditate on the truth that Christ has made you blameless before the Father.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Sproul, R.C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*.
Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*.

NOTES

5

Contradiction vs. Mystery

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Some have attacked the doctrine of the Trinity as irrational and contradictory. Because critics have not completely understood the doctrine they have labeled it as inherently unintelligible. Yet there are concepts that are mysterious to us, but are understood by God. The claim that Christ is one person with two natures is not a contradiction, but rather a mystery only to us and not God. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul discusses the doctrine of the Trinity.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Peter 2

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the objections against the doctrine of the Trinity as contradictory.
2. To explain the difference between a contradiction, paradox, and a mystery.
3. To discuss the tri-unity of the Godhead.

QUOTATIONS

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

— John 1:1-5

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Some have attacked the doctrine of the Trinity as irrational and contradictory.
- B. Three important concepts for discussing the doctrine of the Trinity are: contradiction, paradox, and mystery.

1. A paradox is an idea that sounds contradictory but which is really not upon closer scrutiny.
 2. A mystery is a concept we believe to be true although we cannot explain why it is true.
 3. A contradiction is a concept that is not consistently logical.
- C. All contradictions are beyond understanding because they are inherently unintelligible.
1. Even God is not above the laws of logic because the mind of God is not full of confusion and chaos.
 2. The mind of God does not work in the chaos of contradictions.
- D. There are concepts that are mysterious to us, but yet are understood by God.
1. Even in heaven we will still be finite creatures who cannot possibly understand everything.
- E. The claim that Christ is one person with two natures is not a contradiction, but rather a mystery only to us and not God.
- F. It is important to distinguish between the personhood of God and the essence of God.
- G. The word *Trinity* does not appear in the Old or New Testaments.
1. The word Trinity is an extra-biblical word imposed on the text of Scripture.
 2. Critical scholars have suggested that the concept of the Trinity is an invasion of Greek abstract thinking into the text of Scripture.
- H. The important question is whether or not the concept of the Trinity is found in the Scriptures.
1. The word *Trinity* was chosen to identify the unity as well as the tri-personality of God.
- I. Theologians use words such as Trinity to explain and defend theological concepts in order to face the sly assertions of heretics.
- J. “Studied ambiguity” is the favorite trick of heretics.
1. Heretics introduce words or phrases that leave a concept intentionally ambiguous and therefore open to error.
 2. Studied ambiguity is the hiding place of the heretic.

- K. Belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is a test for heresy that many will try to sneak away from discussing.
- L. Employing the word *Trinity* to describe the unity and tri-personality of God is the church's best effort towards theological precision.
 - 1. Heresy always provokes the church to pursue the highest precision in its theology.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. Some have attacked the doctrine of ____ as irrational and contradictory.
 - a. Worship
 - b. Sin
 - c. The Trinity
 - d. Justification
- 2. A ____ is an idea that sounds contradictory but which is really not upon closer scrutiny.
 - a. mystery
 - b. contradiction
 - c. paradox
 - d. puzzle
- 3. A ____ is a concept we believe to be true although we cannot explain why it is true.
 - a. mystery
 - b. contradiction
 - c. paradox
 - d. puzzle
- 4. A ____ is a concept that is not consistently logical.
 - a. mystery
 - b. contradiction
 - c. paradox
 - d. puzzle
- 5. All ____ are beyond understanding because they are inherently unintelligible.
 - a. mysteries
 - b. contradictions
 - c. paradoxes
 - d. puzzles

6. The claim that Christ is one person with two natures is not a _____, but rather a _____ only to us and not God.
 - a. contradiction, mystery
 - b. paradox, mystery
 - c. mystery, contradiction
 - d. puzzle, contradiction

7. The word _____ is an extra-biblical word imposed on the text of Scripture.
 - a. tongues
 - b. Trinity
 - c. predestination
 - d. sanctification

8. A word or phrase that leaves a concept intentionally ambiguous and open to error is an example of a _____.
 - a. studied ambiguity.
 - b. contradiction
 - c. mystery
 - d. paradox

BIBLE STUDY

1. Why does Peter’s warning against false teachers follow his exhortation to grow in the grace and knowledge of God? What is the greatest antidote for false teaching?

2. Why does Peter remind his readers that all divine inspiration originates with the Holy Spirit? Why is Peter’s warning still timely for believers today?

3. What will be the strategy of the false teachers according to 2 Peter 2:1–3? How will their actions impact the church? What will be the final destiny of these heretics?

4. What three examples of God’s judgment does Peter describe to warn heretical teachers? How did God distinguish between the wicked and the righteous on these occasions?

5. What are the characteristics of the false teachers according to 2 Peter 2:9–22? In what sense do the heretics follow after evil desires? In what sense do good desires characterize the righteous?

6. Why does Peter cite Proverbs 26:11 regarding a dog returning to its vomit? Why will judgment be greater for those who backslide from the truth?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do Peter's remarks regarding false teachers ring true today? What heresies or ungodly belief systems threaten the purity of the church today?

2. How do ungodly teachers promise freedom yet in reality deliver only greater bondage? What are the lies that threaten your freedom in Christ? How are you tempted towards slavery?

APPLICATION

1. Ask the Spirit to give you the power to discern between truth and error.

2. Ask the Lord to show you how your freedom is threatened by sin and lies.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Sproul, R.C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*.
Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*.

NOTES

6

One in Essence, Three in Person

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most perplexing and yet most important doctrines in Christian theology. For centuries great minds in the church have attempted to explain the triune nature of God. Ultimately no explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity can be complete. Yet no explanation must ever dilute the essence of deity or confuse the persons of the Godhead. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul discusses the meaning of the term “person.”

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 7:14–8

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss Tertullian’s word for distinguishing the persons of the Godhead.
2. To discuss the nature of the Hypostatic Union.

QUOTATIONS

“The Trinity is one God, not so that the Father be the same Person, who is also the Son and the Holy Ghost; but that the Father be the Father, and the Son be the Son, and the Holy Ghost be the Holy Ghost, and this Trinity One God.”

—St. Augustine

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”* (Heb. 1:1–4)

1. The person of the Son is distinguished from the person of the Father.
- B. Tertullian introduced the Latin word *persona* which had two meanings.
 1. Persona could refer to an individual's estate or legal holdings.
 2. Persona could also refer to the masks that were used in Greek drama to distinguish between characters on the stage.
- C. The Greeks used the term "Hypostatic union" to describe the Trinity which included three important concepts.
 1. Essence – the basic and real nature of something.
 2. Existence – the becoming nature of something.
 3. Subsistence – a living or livelihood.
- D. The Trinity is composed of one essence and three subsistences or persons.
- E. The real distinctions of persons in the Trinity do not disturb the deity of the Godhead.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. ____ introduced the Latin word *persona*, which had two meanings.
 - a. Athanasius
 - b. Arius
 - c. Tertullian
 - d. Ignatius
2. Persona was a Latin word that could refer to:
 - a. a person's identity
 - b. a person's legal holdings
 - c. a person's spouse
 - d. a person's hobbies
3. The ____ used the term "Hypostatic union" to describe the Trinity, which included three important concepts.
 - a. Greeks
 - b. Persians
 - c. Romans
 - d. Gauls

4. ____ is the basic and real nature of something.
 - a. Essence
 - b. Existence
 - c. Subsistence
 - d. Sustenance

5. ____ is the becoming nature of something.
 - a. Essence
 - b. Existence
 - c. Subsistence
 - d. Sustenance

6. ____ is a living or livelihood.
 - a. Essence
 - b. Existence
 - c. Subsistence
 - d. Sustenance

BIBLE STUDY

1. What is Paul's struggle in Romans 7:14–25? What does Paul say regarding his identity in this passage?

2. How does Paul answer the question he asks in Romans 7:24? How are you tempted to find substitute answers for this question?

3. What does Romans 8:1 teach you about God's attitude towards His children? How does appreciating this truth alleviate numerous burdens on our hearts and minds?

4. According to Romans 8 what role does each member of the Trinity play in our salvation? What do each of their roles teach you about the nature of the Trinity?

5. Contrast a life lived in the Spirit with a life lived according to the sinful nature.

6. What will be the ultimate blessing of having the Spirit live within us (8:11)? What are the more immediate blessings we enjoy from living in the Spirit?

7. What is the identifying mark of the children of God according to Rom. 8:14? What does it mean to live for God through Christ in the Spirit?

8. Read Romans 8:15. Why can the lives of God's children be free of fear? How are God's children privileged to approach God (v. 15)?

9. What is the message or identity the Spirit speaks deep into our hearts according to Rom. 8:16? How in a multitude of ways does the Spirit communicate this message?

10. What are the treasures the children of God will share in according to Rom. 8:17? How do God's children share in Christ's glory? How do they share His sufferings?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the eager expectation of all of creation? How will the surroundings you see each day be transformed at the end of the age?

2. How are the saints filled with longing as they wait for the consummation of the age? How can the saints take heart amidst their current circumstances?

3. How does standing firm in the love of Christ impact our relationships with our allies? How does it impact our relationships with our enemies?

APPLICATION

1. Describe the identity God has given you in Christ through the Spirit.

2. Contrast being alive as a citizen in God's kingdom of light with being lost and dead in the kingdom of darkness.

3. Reflect on the truth that regardless of your current circumstances nothing can separate you from the love of the Father and He will make all things in your life work together for good.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Sproul, R.C. *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*.
Sproul, R.C. *Grace Unknown*.
Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*.

NOTES

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

(as approved by the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Definition of Chalcedon

(as approved by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD)

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these “last days,” for us and behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness.

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten — in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the “properties” of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one “person” and in one reality. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of Fathers [the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed] has handed down to us.