

"The Only Begotten God"

John 1:28

What does John mean? Who is God? Of all the varieties of Christian beliefs, one centuries' old belief claims to stand beyond the reach of logic.

It also claims to be separate from Scriptural interpretation. It also maintains it should not be judged because of the decisions and reverses of councils in church history. That doctrine is the belief that Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and these three are mysteriously one, co-equal, co-eternal.

Although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned, John 1:1 is called upon to establish the trinity, "The Word (Logos) was with God, and the Word was God." But the common translation contains a contradiction, for how can the Word both be God and with God at the same time? Aside from logic, this contradiction is not supported by the Greek text: "the Word was with God, and a god was the Word." (EMPHATIC DIAGLOTT, INTERLINEAR)

Contrary to some popular beliefs of his day, Apostle John was expressing the thought that Jesus had a pre-human existence as "a mighty one" ("a god"). The Everlasting God Himself had no beginning. "He is from everlasting to everlasting." But "in the beginning,"—the Word's beginning—the Logos was with God as the "only begotten God." (Vs. 18) The common version hides the correct translation by rendering "only begotten Son." But the Greek shows "only begotten theos" ("God"). Jesus in his pre-human existence, indeed, was "a mighty one" who received life (was "begotten") from the Father. Tertulian writing in the second century said, "There was a time when the Son did not exist." THE EARLY CHRISTIAN FATHERS. P.21

Jesus, A Son

John's account of the Gospel is full of allusions to Jesus' relationship to God as really a Son. Jesus acknowledged his Father as greater and whose will Jesus continually sought to do. Jesus was not God himself, but the obedient "only begotten Son," sent of God (I John 4:9):

"I go unto the Father, for my Father is greater than I" "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 14:28; 5:30)

Direct scriptural statements like these show us God is greater than Jesus and that Jesus was not God, but obedient to God who sent him. John also compares the Christian's relationship to God as being the same as Jesus' relationship to God:

"Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me, that they may be one as we are" "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you" "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 17:11, 22; 20:21,17)

Just think! We are called to be part of this intimate oneness of God and His Son. Certainly, we are not part of a trinity too.

When Jesus claimed he was the Son, "The Jews sought the more to kill him, because he said also that God was his Father, making himself equal to God" (John 5:18, 19). Jesus, first of all, never claimed to be God, but God's Son and that was enough to infuriate the Jewish leaders of his day. They never assumed he was claiming to be God, but "similar" (Strong's Concordance #2470 for "equal") to God as His Son. The Pharisees never said Jesus was "equal" to God. The translators did! In fact, Jesus disclaimed his own authority and rank saying, "The Son can do nothing of himself..."

The Scribes and Pharisees could not appreciate Jesus' prehuman existence when Jesus proclaimed he existed before Abraham. They took up stones to cast at him when he said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:57-59). Jesus was saying "I am" as the subject and verb of an ordinary sentence meaning simply that from before Abraham's time until the present he had had a continuous existence. To make "I am" a title in this sentence—as appears in Exodus 3:14 referring to God as the "I AM"—is not possible. In any case, the word "Jehovah" does not really mean "I am" but "He Who Becometh," as J. B. Rotherham (a recognized Protestant authority) explains in his translation of the Bible. The popular rulers of the day could not tolerate Jesus' claim that he existed before and was sent by God his Father in Heaven.

God's Mind

The Holy Spirit was also sent of God. The Holy Spirit was not God Himself. The "Spirit of God," the "Spirit of Liberty," the "Spirit of Understanding" and the "Spirit of Love" are a few of the scriptural terms used to describe the one mind, the disposition or influence of God. These are not titles of one or more Gods, any more than the opposite terms—the

"Spirit of Bondage," the "Spirit of Fear" and the "Spirit of Antichrist"—are names of one or more devils.

The Holy Spirit is the power that energizes the true Christian in the service of the Lord (Rom. 8:11). Although Jesus had the Holy Spirit "not by measure" (John 3:34), we have impediments to the full working of the Holy Spirit in ourselves. So we are encouraged to be "filled with the Holy Spirit"—not a person, but the influence of God's mind working in us instead of the "spirit of the world." "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." (I Cor. 2:11-16).

The Holy Spirit of God is vastly powerful, but its work in our hearts is a delicate operation, subject to our willingness to be led by it. Therefore, we are exhorted by Paul that we "quench not the Spirit," the influence of God in our hearts. (I Thess. 5:19) It is not God that we are not to quench. Could God Himself be quenched? Rather, the influence or new mind of the one true God in our hearts should not be killed, but allowed to dwell in us richly.

A Mystery

Those who hold the trinity dear concede that the doctrine is out of the realm of logic to explain how a person could be sent of God and be God Himself. . . how Jesus could pray to God and be praying to Himself at the same time. . . and have Jesus say his Father is greater and yet be equal, etc. The scripture, they say, that says God and Jesus are one—in the same way as Christians are to be one—does not simply mean that at all. This is called the "mystery" of the trinity.

But what does the New Testament say about "mysteries" and Christian understanding? Nowhere is the term "mystery" attached to the unexplainable doctrine of the trinity. Rather, what is a mystery to outsiders, the Christian knows: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt. 13:11). Paul asked prayers for help in preaching "that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19). What a profound privilege to be given the responsibility of understanding the mysteries of God: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25).

Our faith is reasonable and we accept scriptural language, unless symbolic, at face value. When questioned on our faith, we should be able "to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that

is in you with meekness and fear" (I Pet. 3:15).

The History

If the trinity is not reasonable, logical nor taught in the Bible, where did it begin? Then what is the source of this doctrine? After the twelve apostles died, a gradual falling away from the original faith occurred. Great numbers of Pagans entered the Church, bringing with them Pagan ideas. The trinity is one of many Pagan concepts which corrupted Christian doctrine during the early centuries of the Christian Era. [Originating in Babylon, the "trinity concept" spread throughout the ancient world and became a prominent feature of the Egyptian, Persian, Grecian, Roman, Japanese and Indian mythologies.]

During the early years of the fourth century, a heated controversy raged between the Arians and the Trinitarians, led by Athanasius. The Arians maintained that Jesus is a created being, pre-existent, though having a beginning in time, a son in the normal sense of the word and subordinate to the Father. The Athanasian party argued that the Son is fully God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

Fearing that religious dissension might disrupt the political unity of the Empire, the Emperor Constantine summoned a general council of bishops to settle the dispute. The Council of Nicea in 325 AD chose the teachings of Athanasius and formulated the Nicene Creed. Arius was excommunicated and banished with the other bishops who resisted the decision of the majority. The decision was reversed ten years later in 335 AD But the basic trinitarian position was finally forged at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD The question, rather than settled by the Scriptures and sound reasoning by spiritual men, was settled by those who had more political power and the means to physically enforce a decision by use of arms.

Therefore, the tradition of the doctrine of the trinity is not validated by church history that would give one confidence to believe a doctrine, which is not reasonable or scriptural. Jesus was a mighty God, begotten, created of Jehovah, truly the Son of God.