Trinity

I. Introduction to the course

A. The course content

1. Can God Be Known, and How? –
2. I Believe in God –
3. The Father and the Son Are God –
4. The Holy Spirit is God –
5. Trinity: Terms Used by the Church –
6. Trinity: Three Persons –
7. Trinity: One God –
8. Some Ancient Errors and Their Modern Counterparts –
9. Arianism –
10. Modern Anti-Trinitarian Errors –
11. We Believe: Creeds and Confessions –

B. What we will try to learn

1. Who is God that you really worship?
2. Who the LORD God is.
3. Why we believe in the Trinity.
4. Ancient and modern errors about the nature of God.

C. How to prepare for each session

1. Read the chapters from the book.
2. Answer the questions on the handouts.
3. Consider the issues that are being raised by the readings.

1. Who is God?

1. How does nature testify about God?

2. What is the testimony of conscience about God?

3. Why are nature and conscience inadequate?

4. Through what sources does God reveal Himself to mankind?

5. What are some of the names of God used in the Bible?

6. How do the LORD's attributes relate to His being?

7. Pick two of the attributes of the LORD and explain them as best you can.

8. What is the difference between believing and trusting?

2. The Three Persons of God

1. Who is God the Father?

2. Of whom is God the Father father? Why?

3. How does Jesus relate to the second person of the Trinity?

4. When did Jesus become God? When did He become man?

5. Why do we believe that Jesus is God?

6. How do we know the Holy Spirit is God?

7. What is the work of the Holy Spirit?

8. Explain the “Filioque Controversy.”

3. The Trinity Defined

1. Why might we call the concept of the Trinity a practical doctrine?

2. Where do the words “person,” “essence” and “Trinity” come from?

3. What are the key verses about the Trinity in the New Testament?

4. What are the key verses about the Trinity in the Old Testament?

5. What point does the writer of Hebrews make in chapter 1 by using the Old Testament?

6. Cite Scripture to show that the LORD is unique as God.

7. Pick an analogy of the Trinity and explain its strengths and weaknesses.

8. Which activities of the Trinity are divided and which are not divided?

4. Ancient Errors

1. What did the Ebionites teach?

2. What is Docetism?

3. Who were the Apostolic Fathers?

4. What is Gnosticism? What are its chief teachings?

5. What is Modal Monarchianism? How does it differ from Dynamic Monarchianism?

6. What is Arianism?

7. Why was it so hard to resolve the Arian controversy?

8. What were two unusual characteristics of the councils at Nicaea and Constantinople?

5. Errors and Creeds

1. What is the central belief of Unitarianism?

2. What is the basis of Humanism?

3. Why is Christian Humanism so dangerous?

4. What is Deism?

5. How does Polytheism differ from Pantheism?

6. Why were creeds developed?

7. Where did the Apostles Creed come from?

8. Why do some people object to the Athanasian Creed?

Trinity

1. Who is God?

II. Can God Be Known, and How?

A. Signs of God in Nature.

1. Revealed in nature – If one looks around one in this world, one can only marvel at the complexity of the universe from that which is immense to that which is incredible tiny. That people all over the world have spontaneously worshipped nature and the "gods which control it" shows how impressive it is to the human mind. {*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* Psalm 19:1 *Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.* Romans 1:19-20}

2. Creation – When one sees something of immense complexity and size, one immediately realizes that there is some great intelligence that devised it. Throughout the ages how the universe came about has always been ascribed to some supernatural being. The Bible also opens with such a claim. {*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1}. It also claims God sustains creation {*"Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."* Acts 14:17}.

3. History – As various human civilizations arose throughout history, some achieved such dominance that it was inconceivable that they would fall. Despite this, the empires of the wise and the mighty crumbled. This is illogical in a human sense and shows that a power greater than that of man is orchestrating events. {*He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including the tribe of his inheritance--the LORD Almighty is his name. "You are my war club, my weapon for battle--with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms, with you I shatter horse and rider, with you I shatter chariot and driver."* Jeremiah 51:19-21}

4. The folly of atheism – The great folly of atheism is that it asserts the non-existence of God with not even anecdotal evidence to support the claim. {*The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.* Psalm 14:1} It is easier to understand the agnostic, who merely is uncertain that a god exists, than the atheist.

5. Purpose of God's revelation in nature – God did not want people to say that they had no reason to believe that He exists. He therefore created enough awe-inspiring phenomena in nature to make even the skeptic look on and marvel. {*"God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."* Acts 17:27}

B. Signs of God in the heart.

1. Natural Law – There is a sense of right and wrong in every person. It is deeply ingrained in the human mind and heart. {*"You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.' "* Mark 10:19 *Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.* Romans 1:32} It is what is left of the perfect law that the LORD gave to Adam and Eve. Governments and many religions are based on this law.

2. Conscience – Conscience is the preacher that lives within every human being. It delivers sermons based on the law that is in the heart. Even the vilest people are condemned by their consciences when they sin. {*(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)* Romans 2:14-15 *But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."* Luke 23:40-41}

3. The trap of self-righteousness – Spurred on by a troubled conscience, many people have accepted religions that give them a way to "get right with God" by doing good works, which they hope will appease God's righteous anger. These rules of men only worsen their situation with the LORD. {*" 'They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' "* Matthew 15:9}

C. The Biblical revelation.

1. More than natural knowledge is needed – Without more knowledge about the LORD and His will, trying to do His will is like trying to disarm an assortment of landmines without circuit diagrams and while blindfolded. There is no way for someone to avoid sin and God's wrath. {*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.* James 2:10 *An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.* Psalm 36:2}

2. God revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ – The LORD chose to reveal Himself to mankind through His Son. He did this because only God knew Himself well enough to communicate with mankind about His nature and will {*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.* John 1:18 *"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."* Matthew 11:27}

3. God revealed in Scripture – To reach all those who did not meet His Son personally, the LORD revealed Himself and the work of His Son through the Bible. Over more than 1500 years He put out the message through His prophets and apostles {*"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me…If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."* John 5:39,46 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* John 20:31 *From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:15-17}.

III. I Believe in God

A. The name of God – The Bible uses numerous names and terms to designate God and in the process to try to describe him. Below are some of the most important.

1. אֱלֹהִים (God) – This name (Elohim - always plural) is used as a more generic term for God, but more specifically refers to his creative and preserving presence. {Genesis 1:1}

2. יְהוָה (LORD) – This is the name for the Savior God (YHWH) and is so holy that the Jews do not pronounce it, but they substitute Adonai when they read it. Adonai means master. {Genesis 3:1}

3. אֵל שַׁדָּי (Lord Almighty) – This name implies power beyond our understanding. It is the name for ultimate being. {Genesis 17:1}

4. אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה (I AM who I AM) – This name implies that God's very existence is His name. {Exodus 3:14}

5. κύριος (LORD) – This the Greek word for the Hebrew יְהוָה and is used for both God the father and Jesus Christ. {Romans 10:13}

6. Ρατρός (Father) – Jesus and the apostles use this name to designate God as known by the Jews (Matthew 26:53)

B. The attributes of God – The LORD has many attributes, and His attributes are so intense that they cannot be understood completely apart from Him. He is literally the attributes. Below are only some attributes of many.

1. Love – The LORD's love for humankind is beyond our comprehension because we could never love something so vile and contemptible. {*God is love.* 1 John 4:8b}

2. Eternal (אֵל עוֹלָם) – That the LORD is eternal means that He does not dwell in our time frame of reference; that is, He does not move through time. {*Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.* Genesis 21:33)

3. Omnipresence – The Lord is in all places at all times, and all of Him is in each place. {*"Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.* Jeremiah 23:24}

4. Omnipotence – The LORD has all the power in existence, and nothing happens unless He delegates power for it to happen. {*"For nothing is impossible with God."* Luke 1:37}

5. Omniscience – There is nothing big or small that the LORD does not know about simultaneously through all of time. {*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.* Hebrews 4:13}

6. Just – The LORD always judges completely fairly. He cannot be bribed and is not influenced by the power or position of those being judged. {*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.* Psalm 89:14}

7. Compassionate – The LORD knows the pain that His people feel, and He looks with mercy upon those who are suffering. {*The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.* Psalm 145:9}

C. I believe means "I trust"

1. Not "faith of the head" – Merely knowing the facts about the LORD's plan of salvation and acknowledging their truthfulness is not sufficient to be saved. We must trust in the plan. {*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.* James 2:19}

2. Salvation "by grace through faith" – To be saved one must trust in the correct message. Believing a false message will do no good. {*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.* Ephesians 2:8-9}

3. Faith as a reluctant beggar – We do not reach out our hand to God to receive His free gift but rather draw back our hand from something so wonderful. But the Holy Spirit opens our hand and gives us the free gift of salvation and possession of that gift gives us the strength to accept it. {*No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* 1 Corinthians 12:3b}

4. Faith only through the word – We can trust in God only after we have heard the message and come to believe it. {*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.* Romans 10:17}

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2. The Three Persons of God

IV. The Father and the Son Are God

A. The Father is God

1. Creator of all that is – There has never been any question that the Father is God, as all references to God as the creator, preserver and defender in the Old Testament were regarded by the Israelites and later the Christians as referring to God the Father unless otherwise indicated. The work of the Father begins in the very first verse of the Bible. {*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1}

2. Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

   a. Jesus testifies He is the Son of God – He used the words "father" and "son" to indicate a relationship between Himself and the God in whom the Jews believed that indicated that He Himself was God. {*Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me."* John 8:54}

   b. The Jews understood Jesus' claim. – When Jesus asserted that He was the Son of God, they knew what He was declaring about Himself because they believed that a firstborn son would inherit his father's wealth and position and therefore was equal to his father. {*For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.* John 5:18}

   c. The apostles echoed Jesus' claim – The writers of the New Testament knew that Jesus was Himself true God and so identified Him with God the Father. {*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!* 1 Peter 1:3a *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.* 2 Corinthians 1:3}

3. Father of those who believe in Jesus

   a. The Fatherhood of God recognized in the Old Testament – That the "God of the Hebrews" treated His people as if they were His children was expressed by the prophets. {*Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?* Malachi 2:10}

   b. Jesus noted that God's fatherhood extended to His followers. – While Jesus' Sonship was eternal and made Him equal to God the Father, the rest of us are adopted children who are able to approach God as our Father because of what Jesus did on our behalf. {*Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "* John 20:17}

c. The apostles also claimed God as our Father. – The adoption of Christians as sons and daughters of God is something that makes our salvation more sure to us, since God is not about to cast His dear children into hell. {*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* Galatians 3:26}

B. The Son is God.

1. Jesus was truly human.

a. Jesus was not just docetic. – Jesus was a real man, not just God with human flesh wrapped around him. He did appear in various forms, including human form, in the Old Testament, but after His birth He was fully human. {*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.* Galatians 4:4}

b. Jesus was human except for sin. – Jesus came as our high priest to offer a perfect sacrifice, namely Himself, for our sins. He could only do this in our place if He were completely like us. {*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.* Hebrews 4:15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.* Hebrews 2:14-15}

c. Jesus had human lineage. – Both Matthew {chapter 1} and Luke {chapter 3} give the lineage of Jesus, Luke taking him all the way back to Adam. In the first two chapters of Luke His conception and birth are discussed. The literal meaning of the Bible is obvious, and there is nothing that would justify taking the account any other way. {*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.* Matthew 2:1}

d. Jesus had human attributes. – He showed many of the same attributes that we have. He was hungry {Matthew 4:2}, He slept {Matthew 8:24}, He wept {John 11:35}, He was filled with sorrow {Matthew 26:38} and He thirsted {John 19:28}.

2. Jesus was truly God. – The Son did not stop being God when He became man through His birth by the virgin Mary. He was still God, and the Bible calls Him God. {*Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.* Acts 20:28b *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be flaunted, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* Philippians 2:6-7}

3. Divine works and attributes – Here are some examples.

a. Creation – The Son was involved in the creation of everything that exists. {*Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.* John 1:3}

b. Preservation – The Son is involved in the preservation and maintenance of the whole creation. {*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.* Hebrews 1:3}

c. Omniscience – Jesus knew all things, including the thoughts of those with whom He was dealing. {*Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?"* Luke 5:22}

d. Omnipotence – All nature responded to His commands, and even the demons were subject to Him. The people seeking His works knew they were the works of God. {*He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"* Matthew 8:26-27 *The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him."* Mark 1:27}

e. Divine forgiveness – Jesus claimed the authority to forgive sins, an authority which only God has because sins are against God. *{"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."* Luke 5:24}

f. Raising the dead – He made the dead to live again, which only divine authority can do. {*When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.* John 11:43-44a}

g. He defeated death and the demons – When Jesus rose from the dead, the power of death was broken for all who believe in Him. {*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* Colossians 2:15}

h. Judgment – Jesus will return to execute God's judgment on the world at the final day. {*Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.* John 5:22-23}

4. Divine names

a. Son of God – Being the Son of God made Jesus equal to the Father in the eyes of the Jews. Many times He is called this by believing Jews, demons, the writers of the Scriptures and the angel Gabriel. {*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.* Luke 1:35 *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Matthew 16:16 *He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"* Mark 5:7-8}

b. Christ the Lord – Being called "the Lord" gave Jesus the same name that the Greek version of the Old Testament used to refer to the Savior God by the people of Israel. {*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.* Luke 2:11 *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.* 1 Peter 2:15a}

5. Divine honor

   a. Jesus demanded it. – Jesus repetitively made statements that He and the Father were similar in all respects, including honor. {*The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.* John 5:22-23}

   b. The apostles proclaimed it. – The message of the apostles had power only if the Christ that they preached had power. He who had that power deserved the honor. {*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Philippians 2:9-11}

   c. The chorus of heaven validates the claim. – In John's vision of heaven, all of the saints, angels and other creatures are continually proclaiming the honor of the Christ in the various guises in which He appears. {*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"* Revelation 5:13b}

6. "All the fullness of the Deity" {Colossians 2:9b}

   a. Miraculous birth – The angel Gabriel left no doubt that Jesus was God joining with man. {*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.* Luke 2:35}

   b. John's overview – So the no one would get lost in the details of Jesus' life and miss His full divinity, John starts his gospel clearly addressing this point. {*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning….The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1:1-2,14}

   c. Jesus' claim – If Jesus' claim that He was fully God is rejected, then He is either a liar or a lunatic for making such a claim. {*Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?* John 14:8-10a}

V. The Holy Spirit is God

A. Personality

1. The Holy Spirit is "shy." – In His work of proclaiming God's word through the prophets and the apostles, He does not call attention to Himself, but rather keeps the attention focused on the Father and the Son.

2. The Holy Spirit is angered by unbelief. – As might be expected, the person of the Trinity whose emphasis is to bring all mankind to faith is displeased when His work is frustrated by man's intransigence. {*Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.* Isaiah 63:10 *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Ephesians 4:30}

3. The Holy Spirit is active. – The Holy Spirit is involved in the proclamation of God's word and the conversion of souls. {*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* 2 Peter 1:21 *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.* Titus 3:5}

B. Identified as God – The Holy Spirit is plainly identified as God when the same acts are credited to God in one phrase and the Holy Spirit in another. {*Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."* Acts 5:3-4 *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?* 1 Corinthians 3:16 Also Isaiah 6:9 ascribes a statement to the LORD while Acts 28:25-26 ascribes the statement to the Holy Spirit.}

C. Divine attributes – A few are given below.

1. Eternal – {*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!* Hebrews 9:14}

2. Divine Knowledge – {*God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.* 1 Corinthians 2:10}

3. Omniscience – {*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.* Psalm 139:7-8}

D. Divine works – A few are given below.

1. Creation – {*When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.* Psalm 104:30 Also see Genesis 1:2}

2. Gospel proclamation – {*"For it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."* Matthew 10:20}

3. Divine assistance – {*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.* Romans 8:26}

4. Divine Gifts – {*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.* 1 Corinthians 12:11}

E. *Filioque*

1. It was not in the original Nicene Creed. – The original creed of Nicea was modified into its present form at the Council of Constantinople. Neither version had "and the Son."

2. The western church added it unilaterally – The addition was made to bring the creed into line with the Bible. It was not decreed by the bishop of Rome, but was accepted by western bishops over the course of several centuries.

3. It is Scriptural. – The Bible clearly states that the Holy Spirit is also the "Spirit of the Son." {*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."* Galatians 4:6 *For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.* Philippians 1:19}

4. It split the church. – The eastern church rejected the addition. Its bishops felt that it was the eastern church that had combated and defeated Arianism. The western church had been virtually absent at the critical times and should not afterward be injecting their ideas into the creed.

Trinity

3. The Trinity Defined

VI. Trinity: Terms Used by the Church

A. A practical doctrine

1. The Father promised and sent a Savior. – The whole Bible centers on the Father's plan of salvation and the actions that He took to make it take place. {*"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel."* Genesis 3:15 *"From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised."* Acts 13:23}

2. The Son did the work of obtaining salvation. – The Son became incarnate for the purpose of carrying out the work of redemption that is the heart of the Father's promise. {*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* Galatians 4:4-5}

3. The Holy Spirit converts individuals and builds the church. – It is the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers and sanctifies all those who will be saved according to God's eternal predestination. {*I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.* Romans 15:16}

B. Some helpful language

1. The "threeness" of God – Attempts by church writers to explain the nature of God became essential after 75 AD, by which date almost all of the apostles were dead or in exile. The threeness of God was clarified during the dark period between 75 and 150 AD.

2. The origin of the word Trinity – Tertullian is the first author who is known to have used the word Trinity in His writing at the beginning of the 3rd Century.

3. The eternalness of the Son – Origen clarified the concept that the Son existed already when time began.

4. The pre-existence of the Word – The Synod of Antioch (269) affirmed that the Son (pre-incarnate Logos) existed before Jesus was born of Mary.

C. Understanding the words

1. The word *being* – "Being" is a synonym for "substance," which was the Latin term for a single entity.

2. The word *person*
   a. Party – In Latin a "person" is a "party" to a case involving an entity.
   b. Independent identity – A person is not a definable part of something, but can be identified separately.
   c. Self-conscious and self-determining – A person is someone who is conscious of himself and able to act with intent. An arm or a leg, for example, cannot do either of these things.

3. The word *Trinity*
   a. Coined by the church – The word does not exist in the Bible even though the concept does.
   b. Philosophical abstraction – Just as the laws of physics are abstractions of actions that occur in nature, so the word "Trinity" abstracts the statements of the persons of God in the Scriptures into a definable concept.
   c. Combated heresy – To prevent various passages of the Bible from being distorted to create a false image of God, the church fathers used the concept of the Trinity to unify the teachings of Scripture.

VII. Trinity: Three Persons

A. The Trinity in the New Testament

1. The announcement – {*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."* Luke 1:35}

2. The baptism – {*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* Matthew 3:16-17}

3. The working arrangement – {*"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."* John 15:26}

4. The commission – {*"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* Matthew 28:19-20a}

5. The work completed – {*Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.* 1 Peter 1:2}

6. The blessing – {*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* 2 Corinthians 13:14}

7. The internal knowledge – {*All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* Matthew 11:27 *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."* Matthew 16:17 *Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* 1 Corinthians 12:3}

B. The Trinity in the Old Testament

1. The use of singular and plural

a. Creation of man – {*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness* (נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ), *and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* Genesis 1:26-27}

b. The fall – {*And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us* (כְּאַחַד מִמֶּנּוּ), *knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."* Genesis 3:22}

c. Babel – {*"Come, let us go down and confuse* (נֵרְדָה וְנָבְלָה) *their language so they will not understand each other."* Genesis 11:7}

d. Commissioning a prophet – {*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us* (יֵלֵךְ־לָנוּ)*?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"* Isaiah 6:8}

2. Triple blessing

a. Aaronic blessing – {*"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."* Numbers 6:24-27}

b. Angelic praise – {*And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."* Isaiah 6:3}

C. Old Testament passages that mention all three persons

1. {*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.* Isaiah 11:1-2}

2. {*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations."* Isaiah 42:1}

3. {*"Come near me and listen to this: From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there. And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit."* Isaiah 48:16}

4. {*"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, …."* Isaiah 61:1}

D. Old Testament quoted in the book of Hebrews

1. {*For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father?"* Hebrews 1:5a (Psalm 2:7)}

2. {*And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."* Hebrews 1:6 (Psalm 97:7)}

3. {*In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."* Hebrews 1:7-9 (Psalm 104:4; Psalm 45:6-7)}

4. {*He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."* Hebrews 1:10-12 (Psalm 102:25-27)}

5. {*To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?"* Hebrews 1:13 (Psalm 110:1)}

VIII. Trinity: One God

A. There is no other God.

1. Not before or after – The LORD does not have a beginning or an end. Therefore it is not possible for some other being to exist before Him (and therefore to have the ability to affect His coming into being) or after Him (and therefore to be able to change what He has decreed). {*"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior."* Isaiah 43:10-11}

2. Not in addition to – There is no appeal from the judgments of the LORD because there is no other god who can overrule Him. {*"I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."* Isaiah 45:5a}

B. God is not divided. – {*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה׀ אֶחָד׃) Deuteronomy 6:4-5}

C. Analogies

1. Do not give a full picture of God. – The LORD is not a physical being in our universe and therefore creating an image that exactly describes Him is not possible. We are limited by what our minds can envision, but the LORD is not.

2. Sun = fire, light and heat – The sun has many more properties than these three, and these three poorly describe it.

3. Person = body, soul and spirit – The body and soul are of completely different natures, and the word "spirit" is used in many different ways.

4. Mind = understanding, will and memory – Using something that is difficult to understand to model something that is impossible to understand is of little help.

5. Equilateral triangle – This emphasizes the equality of the persons of the Trinity, but gives us no depth of understanding of how the Trinity works.

6. Three interlocking circles – This can be useful to show relationships and activities, but does not help us understand how the Trinity is internally structured.

7. Shamrock has three leaves. – While the three leaves have a point of unity, each is capable of existing if one of the other ones is destroyed.

8. Water, vapor and ice – Any molecule of water can only be in one of these three states at the same time, which is not the way the Trinity exists at all.

D. The triune God's activity

1. In and toward the created world: undivided
   a. Creation – The work generally ascribed to the Father was also participated in by both the Son {*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* John 1:1-3} and the Holy Spirit {*Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* Genesis 1:2 *When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.* Psalm 104:30}.

b. Redemption – The work generally ascribed to the Son was also participated in by both the Father {*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16} and the Holy Spirit {*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed."* Luke 4:18}.

c. Sanctification – The work generally ascribed to the Holy Spirit was also participated in by both the Father {*"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."* John 17:17} and the Son {*"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Matthew 28:20}.

2. Within Himself: divided

a. Interpersonal actions are eternal. – There was no time at which the structure of God was different than what it is now. The nature of God is unchanging. {*"I the LORD do not change."* Malachi 3:6}

b. The relationships are not symmetrical. – There are not three Fathers or three Sons. The relationships among the persons of God are fixed and not identical. {*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.* John 1:18 *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* John 14:26}

c. The three persons are equal. - Because the persons of God are one in essence, they must be equal. None can be "more God" than the others. {*"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."* John 5:22b-23}

Trinity

4. Ancient Errors

IX. Some Ancient Errors and Their Modern Counterparts

A. Beginning of the saga

1. Introduction – When it comes to proclaiming the LORD's message to the world, nothing much changes from generation to generation. {*What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.* Ecclesiastics 1:9} The demons have their arguments against what God is and wills, and they bring them up over and over, using different names to catch those who are ignorant of their designs. {*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.* 1 John 4:1}

2. Denials of Christ's true divinity

   a. Ebionites – They believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but he was only human. He came to provide mankind with a more perfect way to serve God than did Moses.

   b. Elkesaites – Elkesai claimed to have received the true teachings of Jesus directly from heaven (prefiguring the Mormons). Elkesaite teachings influenced Muhammad in his understanding of Christ.

3. Docetism – denial of Christ's true humanity

   a. Docetists – They believed that the holy and eternal God could never bring Himself to become human, so they taught that He merely appeared human for a while to communicate His will more fully to mankind.

   b. Marcion – He reconstructed the New Testament, keeping only Luke of the evangelists and only some of Paul's epistles. He edited what he kept to remove material that opposed his ideas, claiming that they were later additions. (For example, Luke 24:39)

4. Defenders of Christ's dual nature

   a. The apostolic fathers – Between 70 and 150 AD these men tried to take the place of the apostles in the leadership of the church. While they recognized the members of the Godhead, they often failed to articulate the relationships. Their work was the source of many errors with which we still struggle today.

   b. Apologists – These men of the Second Century tried to defend the teachings of the church against both Greek and Jewish opponents. In doing so, they were often driven by their desire to refute their opponents' errors rather than by presenting the Biblical teachings correctly.

B. Gnosticism

1. Historical issue

a. Roots – Gnosticism began as an effort by Greek philosophers to explain the conflict they saw between a good god and an evil world. They sought a better system than the lusty deities of Greek paganism. They created a complex arrangement of demigods based on the various virtues and vices.

b. Conflict with Christianity – The Gnostics first viewed Christianity as another form of their religion because it featured "new" knowledge and opposed Greek paganism. As a result, they attempted to merge their ideas with those of the Christian church.

c. Counterfeit Christianity – When it became clear Christianity was wholly different in its approach to God, some Gnostics generated their own "Christian" literature, such as the gospel of Judas, to try to alter the course of Christianity. {*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.* Colossians 2:8-9}

2. Modern examples of Gnosticism

a. Christian Science

b. Unity School of Christianity

c. Mormons

d. Jehovah's Witnesses

C. Monarchianism

1. Historical issue – There is only one God and therefore, logically, there can only be one person. In trying to combat Gnosticism, some moved closer to Judaism to establish a more easily explainable deity.

2. Modal Monarchianism

a. Nature – This approach pictures God as one person who alternately wears 3 different masks like in a Greek play so that he can play different roles.

b. Oneness Pentecostalism – Starting with the general ideas of Pentecostalism, this group merges the three persons in the Trinity into one.

3. Dynamic Monarchianism

    a. Nature – Jesus was a man into whom God poured his being so that he had the power of God while he dwelt upon earth.

    b. Adoptionism – Jesus was a perfect man who God elevated to divine status through giving him some of His divine power and majesty.

D. Subordinationism

1. Nature – The Son and the Holy Spirit are God, but they are lesser in the Godhead than the Father.

2. Justin Martyr – He taught that the Son and Holy Spirit did not have all the attributes of the Father.

3. Origen – He taught that the Son was God from eternity but always lesser than the Father. The Son was, in effect, a demigod of sorts.

4. Biblical teaching – The Son subordinated Himself to the Father for the purpose of carrying out the plan of salvation. He set aside some of His divine majesty so He could become united with a human nature and therefore be under the Law and subject to death. {*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* Galatians 4:4-5}

X. Arianism

A. Arius

1. The man – Arius was an ambitious fellow who had stirred up dissension in the churches of Northern Africa. He was made a presbyter under questionable circumstances. He was defrocked for improper teaching and regained the office of presbyter from another bishop against the advice of Bishop Alexander.

2. The issue – He claimed that bishop Sabellian was a Modal Monarchian.

3. The error

    a. The Son was not of the same substance as the Father (*homoousius*).

    b. The Son is a lesser God than the Father,

    c. The Son was created out of nothing in eternity when no time yet existed,

    d. He confined the word *monogenes* to a human form of begetting.

B. The Council of Nicaea (325)

1. Composed of 318 church leaders (only one from the Latin church).
2. Presided over by Emperor Constantine (a man not yet baptized).
3. *homoousius* versus *homoiousius.*
4. Athanasius championed the concept of the Trinity.
5. The Trinitarians carried the day when the emperor sided with them.
6. A creed was drafted and Arianism anathematized.

C. Problems after the Council of Nicaea

1. The emperor wavered in his confession and the office changed hands.
2. Arius did not go away but continued to campaign to overturn the verdict of Nicaea.
3. Arguments over the meanings of words divided even those who agreed.
4. The fear of resurgent Monarchianism added to the unrest after Nicaea.
5. Athanasius was frequently exiled from Alexandria.
6. Macedon and followers denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
7. Apollinaris of Laodicea claimed that Jesus did not have a human soul.

D. The church agrees on terminology (362)

1. Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianz & Gregory of Nyssa
2. hypostatis = person
3. ‘ousius = essence
4. A Trinitarian creed was drafted (Creed of Jerusalem)

E. The Council of Constantinople (381) and our Nicene Creed

1. Co-emperors Theodosius I and Valentinian II called the council.
2. Only the eastern bishops came.
3. Revised Creed of Jerusalem was adopted Nicene Creed
4. Arianism persisted for several hundred more years, particularly among the German tribes.

Trinity

5. Errors and Creeds

XI. Modern Anti-Trinitarian Errors

A. Unitarianism

1. Miguel Servetus and Faustus Socinus – These men denied the Trinity in the 16th Century and built an underground anti-trinitarian movement in Eastern Europe.

2. Unitarian Universalists – These groups formed in Great Britain and the United States during the 19th Century to promote a "reasoned" instead of a superstitious approach to religious teachings.

3. The United Church of Christ – This church, created by merger, has failed to confess the Trinity and relies on continuing revelation to guide its teachings.

4. Jehovah's Witnesses – While this group's beliefs are Arian rather than strictly Unitarian, they aggressively deny the Trinity.

B. Liberal Protestantism (Christian Humanism)

1. Demythologizing – Neo-orthodoxy was a movement that tried to restore some spiritual content to the church after it had been devastated by theological Liberalism in the 19th Century. It tried to capture the spiritual essence of the Bible while dispensing with the "fairy tale" stories the Bible used to express it.

2. Humanist revolution – Humanism that grew out of the Renaissance gradually began to affect every aspect of intellectual activity, including theology. Secular Humanism in the political arena was pushed by such men as Voltaire and Karl Marx. It was systematized by B. F. Skinner so it could be pushed into every part of society. It has produced a love child with Neo-orthodoxy called Christian Humanism, which is now the dominant theology in mainline Christian church bodies.

3. Love theology – "Christian love" has been redefined as "non-judgmental acceptance" and "God" has become a non-descript being who is characterized by such love.

C. Deism and Freemasonry

1. Lord Herbert of Cherbury – Rebelling against the rigorous dogma of the Christian church, Herbert pushed God into a remote custodial role. Man could make amends for his sins, and therefore no divine Savior was needed.

2. Freemasonry – This movement, which led to the lodges, developed among those who considered themselves wise in the things of the world and hemmed in by churches that took too detailed an interest their members.

D. Polytheism and Pantheism

1. Tritheism (Mormons) – The Mormons and similar groups have hidden their real teachings about the gods in which they believe to such an extent that outsiders are often deceived into believing that they hold Christian views of God and salvation.

2. Polytheism – This view exists in primitive and also some Eastern religions. Various gods control the things of nature and man's destiny.

3. New Age

   a. All is one.

   b. All is God.

   c. We are all God.

   d. A change of consciousness.

   e. All religions are one.

   f. New age coming.

4. Rosicrucianism – This religion believes in a sevenfold godhead which reveals itself in the form of the Trinity. It is by no means Christian.

F. A female deity

1. Female gods have a long history (Isis, Asherah, Queen of Heaven [Great Mother] and Frey)

2. Groups have tried various approaches to feminize all or part of the Godhead.

XII. We Believe: Creeds and Confessions

A. Creeds unite and divide

1. Unite – They tell what beliefs are shared.

2. Divide – If clearly written, they force people to choose whether to stand with or against those who accept the creed.

3. Limited – Creeds are not all encompassing of doctrine, but are often limited only to those doctrines in active dispute.

4. Early developments – Confessions of faith were required at baptism to verify that people held the correct beliefs about God.

B. The “Rule of Faith”

1. Local “symbols” – Each congregation was responsible for verifying that its new members held the correct doctrine. They developed statements of faith (creeds) for this purpose. They were drafted to exclude those who held common heresies. Intercommunication among church helped to standardize these creeds.

2. Old Roman Symbol – This creed was developed during the 2nd Century by the churches in the area of Rome. It was in Latin, and it gradually spread through the Latin-speaking part of the empire.

3. Apostles Creed – This resulted from efforts to standardize the confession of faith so that misunderstandings would not develop among congregations. It contains much of the Old Roman Symbol.

4. East versus West – The Greek-speaking part of the church did not standardize its statement of faith until the Council of Nicaea.

C. The Nicene Creed

1. The product of three councils (Nicaea - developed, Constantinople - refined, Chalcedon - legislated).

2. The unifying catholic statement – No other creed is used by both east and west.

3. Clearly defined the Christian understanding of the members of the Trinity.

D. The Athanasian Creed

1. It was not written by Athanasius, although he certainly would have approved of it.

2. It was written in Latin in southern Europe during the 6th Century.

3. It was used in the West only as part of Prime by 800 AD.

4. It deals with both the Trinity and the person of Christ.

5. It condemns those who fail to accept it in its entirety.

E. Martin Luther’s catechisms

1. Small Catechism – For fathers to teach to children. The explanation of the Apostles Creed explains the main points of the Trinity in simple words.

2. Large Catechism – It expounds the same teachings as the small catechism, but in greater depth for those who will teach others. Today it should be read by all adult Christians.

F. The Lutheran Confessions

1. They present the doctrines of the Bible in clear form to prevent misunderstandings.

2. The Augsburg Confession and its Apology indicate that the Lutheran church believes in the historic view of the Trinity.

3. The Smalcald Articles go into more detail about what the LORD has done.