GREAT BIBLE TRUTHS

22. The Trinity (Part 1)

An Introduction

The word trinity is not found in the Bible, but it's a word that came from Latin that gives us an understanding of who God is. There is one true God, who in the unity of his own nature is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; and this distinction is his eternal being.

During the early church there was false teaching that arose about the trinity. Some said that there were no distinctions in the Godhead, the three names were just manifestations of one God. Others went to the opposite extreme and said there were three distinct persons, which led to making the Son and Holy Spirit of lesser importance than God the Father. This denies the full deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

This is why the early church formed the doctrine of the Trinity: One God, three persons. It is a word that helps us understand what the Bible says about the Godhead. Let's look at the evidence, first in the Old Testament, and then the New.

TRINITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. Unity of God in the Old Testament

The unity of God is stressed in the Old Testament. Look at Deuteronomy 6:4 and Isaiah 44:6-8

- The reason this was stressed in the Old Testament was so the people of Israel would give their full allegiance to one true God.
- It was also to counteract polytheism which was believed by the nations around Israel.
- Yet the Old Testament shows diversity within that one God.

2. Threeness of God in the Old Testament

- The Hebrew name for God 'elohim' is plural, but when it is used as a verb it is singular. Elohim is used 2000 times and suggests the tri-unity of God.
- The plural noun is used for God: 'us'. In Genesis 1:26 it says: "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness." Then in Genesis 3:22 we read: "The man has now become like one of us."
  There are other examples in Genesis 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8.
- The name of God is used for more than one person in certain passages. For example Genesis 18:1-2, Psalm 45:6-7.
- There are passages that suggest there are three persons in the Godhead: Isaiah 48:16, Isaiah 61:1, Isaiah 63:9-10.

The emphasis in the Old Testament is the unity of God, in the light of the surrounding polytheism. As someone once said, 'before there could be a clear revelation of the tri-unity of God, the consciousness of the unity of God had to be burned into the life of Israel.' Just as we have seen that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all there in the Old Testament, so there are indications of the Trinity, preparing the way for a full revelation in the New Testament.

TRINITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The distinction within the Godhead becomes more apparent in the incarnation of the Son, then the coming of the Holy Spirit. It really arose out of the question the disciples asked: "What kind of man is this?" The only

answer could be: 'Christ the Son of the Living God.' The key to the doctrine of the Trinity is the absolute deity of Jesus Christ, and as you realise who Jesus is, the Trinity becomes clear.

1. **Unity of God in the New Testament**

    The New Testament is based on the Old Testament teaching, so it repeats the unity of God. Romans 3:30, 1 Timothy 2:5, James 2:19.

2. **Threeness of God in the New Testament**

    (a) Three persons are addressed as God
        -   Father: 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 Peter 1:2-3
        -   Son: John 1:1-3, 18, Philippians 2:6-7, Hebrews 1:8
        -   Holy Spirit: Acts 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 3:18

    (b) The three persons are distinguished from the other two
        -   Christ's prayer to the Father would not make sense unless they were manifestations of the one person.
        -   Even when three persons are mentioned together, they are distinguished in the passage. Matthew 3:16-17, Luke 1:35, John 14:16-17, 26, 15:26
        -   The relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit clearly shows they are distinct persons. John 15:9

    (c) The three are linked in such a way they must equally be God
        All three are spoken of as one God.
        -   The Father and Son are one. John 10:30-31
        -   The Son and Spirit are one. Romans 8:9
        -   The Father and Spirit are one. 1 Corinthians 3:16
        -   The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. John 14:16, 23
        -   If someone is indwelt by the Spirit, he is indwelt by all three. Study John 14.

    (d)   It would not be correct to mention them together if they were not equal
        -   The baptismal formula given in Matthew 28:19
        -   The great benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14

    (e) There is no fixed order in the names
        -   Father, Spirit, Christ : 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
        -   Spirit, Christ, Father : Ephesians 4:4-6, Ephesians 5:18-20
        -   Spirit, Father, Christ : Jude 20, 21

In the light of what we have learnt in this lesson about the Trinity, why did Jesus say 'name' in Matthew 28:19?

As we have studied the verses about the Trinity, it shows us clearly that when we have given our lives to Jesus Christ, we are indwelt by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In John 14:23 Jesus says, "We will come to him and make our home with him." Isn't that amazing?