

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2019

Week 6: February 3-9

What do we mean by Trinity?

Read: Genesis 1:1-3, 26-27; 6:3; 18:1-2; Exodus 3:14; 22:20; Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Samuel 10:10; 2 Kings 19:19; Psalm 2:11-12; 90:2; 93:2; 102:27; 110:1-4; Isaiah 9:6-7; 44:6; 48:16; 57:15; 61:1; Malachi 4:2; Matthew 1:23; 3:16-17; 11:27; 17:1-8; 28:19; Luke 1:35; 3:22; 11:13; John 1:1-5, 14-18; 5:17-18; 10:30, 33, 38; 14:9, 16, 26; 16:7-8; 17:5, 10; Acts 5:3-4; 7:59; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 2:8, 10-11; 12:3, 13; **2 Corinthians 13:14**; Galatians 3:20; **Ephesians 2:18; 3:11; 4:5**; Philippians 2:5-6, 11; **Colossians 1:15-16**; James 2:19; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:7, 11-14; Revelation 1:17; 19:13; 22:13. Also, read Hebrews 1 in completion.

Okay, if there is something that trips people up, it is the idea that the word "Trinity" (or "Triune") never shows up in the Bible. Sometimes people feel as if we are going to have a point of theology then we need to find a proof-text somewhere in the Bible that uses the word. In fact, the earliest use of the word dates back to the second-century theologian, Theophilus of Antioch though the third-century theologian, Tertullian is usually credited with formulating the word's definition.

If you keep in mind, though, that sometimes words are created or adopted with the aim of describing something else. For example, for centuries people have been writing "Science-Fiction" or "Sci-Fi" stories, but the term "Science-fiction" was not popularized until 1954 with the writings of Forrest Ackerman. The idea had been around, but a common term to describe the idea had not been embraced. The Trinity is the same way. The understanding that God is three in person and one in being goes back to the very earliest days of the Christian church, but the term itself was adopted later.

The earliest creedal explanation of the Trinity is found in the Athenasian Creed — a later creedal statement named in honor of the great 4th century theologian, Athanasius of Alexandria. The section of the creed dealing with the Trinity reads as follows:

*"We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity,
Neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence.
For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
The person of the Son is another;
and that of the Holy Spirit is still another.
But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
Their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.
What the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.
The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated.
The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.
The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal.
And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being.
So too, there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;
There is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.
Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty.
Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being.
Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God.
Yet there are not three Gods; there is but one God.
Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord.
Yet there are not three Lords; there is but one Lord.
Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods of lords.
The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.
The Son was neither made nor created; He was begotten from the Father alone.
The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; He proceeds from the Father and the Son.
Accordingly there is one Father and not three Fathers; there is one Son and not three Sons; there is one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.
Nothing in this Trinity is before or after; nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.
So, in everything, as was said earlier, we must worship their Trinity in their unity and their unity in their Trinity.
Anyone who desires to be saved should think thus about the Trinity."*

The Athenasian Creed continues on to define the dual nature of the Son, but for our purposes here, this will suffice. Yeah, lots of words, but you need to understand that the creed is trying to take an infinite concept and describe it in human language. You also need to understand that there were lots of heretical ideas popping up in the early church surrounding the nature of the Trinity and the Creed is also trying to develop language that prevents people in the church from falling into heresy.

Analogies

Because our minds are limited, we often use analogies to help us understand things that are bigger than we are. We often do this without even thinking about it. For example, when I think about the church building, the first image that comes to my mind is the bell tower...for others, it might be the fellowship hall or the sanctuary.

With that in mind, many people have used analogies to describe the Trinity. For example, St. Patrick is famous for having used a clover to symbolize the Trinity — three leaves but one plant. Others have used water: three states (water, ice, steam) but still water. And the analogies abound.

It should be noted that while the Bible describes a Triune God, it never gives us an analogy for the Trinity. The closest thing that we have to such an analogy is marriage, where two persons become one flesh in the eyes of God (Genesis 2:24).

We should also be careful to never build a doctrine on an analogy because every analogy breaks down. For example, the analogy of the clover implies that the Father, Son, and Spirit are separable from one another (the heresy of polytheism) and the analogy of water implies that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the same person, just taking on different forms (the heresy of Modalism). That does not mean that analogies cannot be used, we just need to remember that when an analogy breaks down it does not invalidate the truth to which it points. Still, care must be used when using an analogy and they ought to be used sparingly.

Subordination in the Trinity

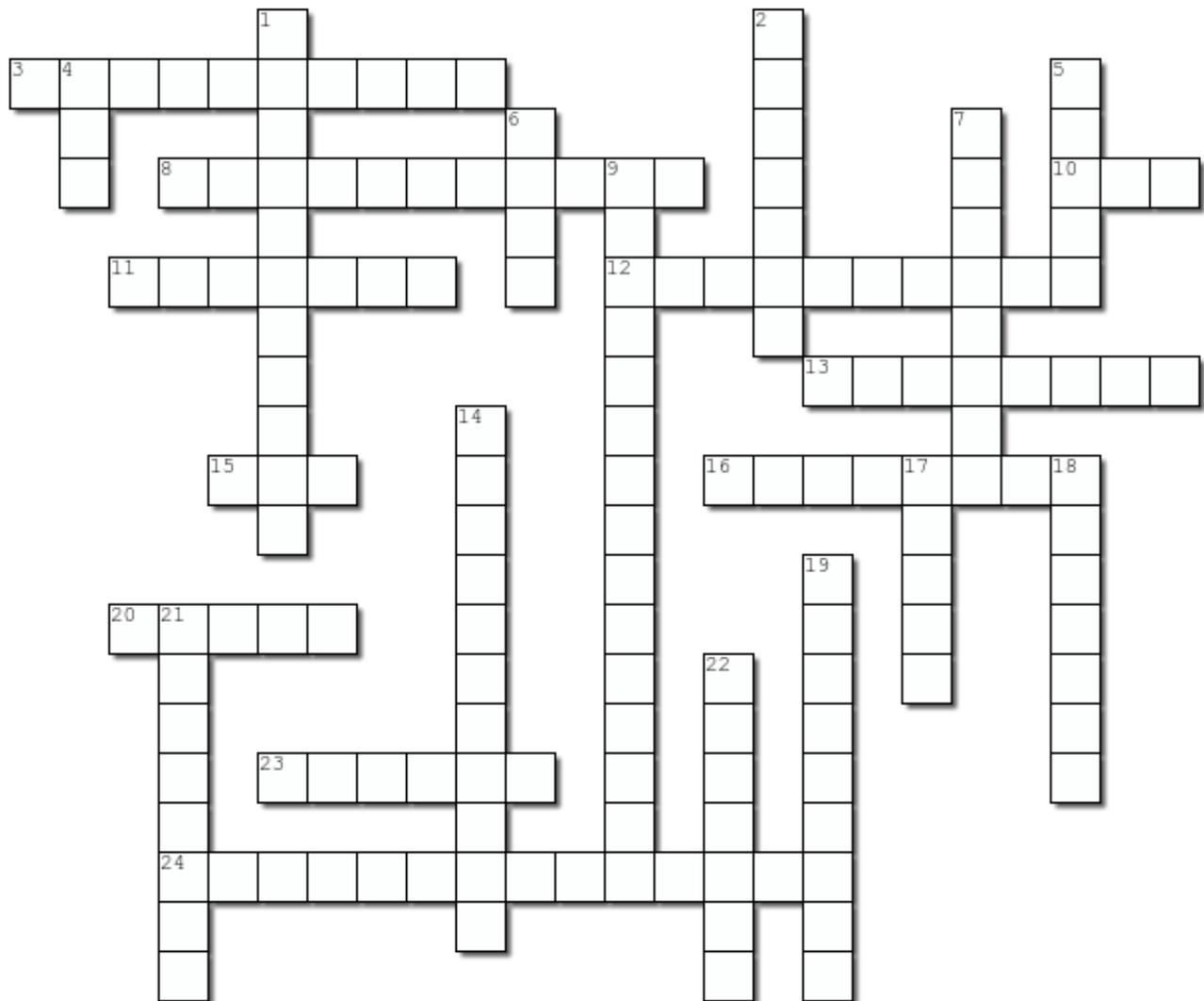
Over the last 4-5 years, this has become a touchy subject in evangelical circles. Subordination implies that one member of the Trinity submits to the will of the other. This, of course, is how Jesus spoke when he spoke of his ministry in earth (John 14:10-11). Yet, if one is not careful, one can imply that there is some sort of hierarchy within the Trinity — a view that would undermine the definition of the Trinity. Thus, there are two clarifications that need to be made:

Ontological and Economic Distinctions: Wow, that is a mouthful! "Ontological" refers to one's essential person; "Economic" refers to the "ordering of the house." Thus, when we talk about subordination, we are only talking about an economic subordination, not ever an ontological subordination. In other words, each member of the Godhead is exactly the same in being and fully worthy of Glory and Worship and they are inseparable from one another. Yet, the works of creation and election are typically attributed to the Father, the work of redemption to the Son, and the application of that redemption to the Spirit.

Temporary or Eternal Subordination of the Son: While economic subordination of the Son is clear in the text of the Gospels, the scriptures also point to the fact that this subordination comes to an end in the glorification of the Son after his Ascension into Heaven. Thus, there is no economic subordination of the Son any longer nor will there be a subordination in eternity.

Granted, this is a lot to remember...then again, we are dealing with the character of our Triune God. Thus, when we present him, it is our obligation to present Him as He presents Himself in the Bible.

Week 6: Trinity



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Across

3. He is called 'the Helper' by Jesus. (2 words)
8. The Bible attributes this military title to both the Father and the Son. (3 words)
10. 'Kiss the _____ lest he be angry and you perish in the way.'
11. We are to do this in the Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.
12. The creed named after him gives us the formal, creedal 'definition' of the word Trinity.
13. This name of Christ means: 'God with Us' or 'God is in our midst'
15. Whoever has the _____ has life.
16. When the Spirit comes he will convict the world of sin and judgment.
20. John says that there are this many who testify.
23. 'My _____ is working until now and I am working.'
24. This is when God made the Heavens and the Earth. (3 words)

Down

1. He alone comprehends the thoughts of God (3 words).
2. This man was struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit.
4. 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ____.'
5. All things are made by him and for him.
6. 'And the _____ became flesh and dwelt among us.'
7. 'Let us make man in _____' (2 words).
9. The Father, the Son, and Spirit are all present at this mountaintop experience in Jesus' life.
14. Jesus' Priesthood is in the order of this person.
17. The Lord appeared to Abraham by these oaks in the form of three men.
18. This is the term that we use to describe our God: 3 in 1.
19. This is one of the titles that Isaiah attributes to Christ (2 words).
21. In creation, the Spirit of God did this over the face of the deep.
22. The Father, Son, and Spirit are all present at this event in Jesus' life.