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Introduction to Systematic Theology
Lecture 3 – Doctrine of the Trinity
First Presbyterian Church of Orlando
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I. Introduction

- A. **The philosopher’s question:** Why is there something rather than nothing?
- B. **The Bible’s answer:**
 - 1. Hebrews 1:2
 - 2. The blessed Trinity
 - 3. The Bible tells the greatest love story ever told
- C. **Westminster Larger Catechism**
 - 1. **WLC 8** Are there more Gods than one?
 - A. There is but one only, the living and true God.
 - 2. **WLC 9** How many persons are there in the Godhead?
 - A. There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.
 - 3. **WLC 10** What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?
 - A. It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity.

II. Review: the Creator-creature relation and biblical language for God

- A. In terms of *design*, creatures resemble God (Gen 1.26), but God does not resemble creatures (Isa 40.18). Creatures are **“theomorphic.”**
- B. In terms of *language*, God does not speak to us in a divine language (John 1.1); God in his grace stoops down to speak to us in human language. Biblical language of God is **“anthropomorphic.”**
- C. This must shape the way we think about God’s **“oneness”** and his **“threeness.”**
 - 1. **Errors** in trinitarian theology inevitably rest on errors regarding the Creator-creature relation and biblical language for God (e.g., Arianism; **The Shack**).

- D. In order to gain a proper understanding of the Trinity, we must direct ourselves to **God's Word** (and to God's Word *alone*).

III. The revelation of the Trinity in God's Word

A. OT riddles, NT revelation

1. **B.B. Warfield:** "The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what was in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation that follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged."

B. Jesus' baptism according to Mark

1. Introduction

- a. "Showing" vs. "telling" in biblical narrative
- b. New beginning, new exodus, new revelation
- c. Two voices: Isaiah's *promise* and Mark's *surprising fulfillment* (e.g., Nazareth)

2. The return of the Lord to Zion

- a. Messenger (Isaiah) = John the Baptist (Mark)
- b. The Lord/YHWH (Isaiah) = Jesus (Mark)

3. The return of the triune Lord to Zion

- a. **Dialogue** in the OT: "before your face"
- b. **Dialogue** at Jesus' baptism: "You are my beloved Son" ("The Lord said to my Lord": Mark 12.35)

4. The *root* of the new beginning of the gospel is the *relations* that exist within the one God between the Father, his beloved Son, and the Spirit

C. Our baptism according to Matthew

1. **Matthew 28.19:** The *relations* revealed at Jesus' baptism (within the one God, between the Father, his beloved Son, and the Spirit) that are the *root* of the new

beginning of the gospel are *relations* within which we are embraced in baptism as a consequence of the gospel.

2. **Herman Bavinck**

- a. “In baptism the Father witnesses to us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us as his children and heirs (Gen. 17:7, 10; Acts 2:39). The Son assures us that he washes us in his blood and incorporates us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). The Holy Spirit assures us that he lives in us and sanctifies us to be members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13; Titus 3:5)”

IV. Summary and synthesis

A. One God: The Bible *identifies* the Father, the Son, and the Spirit with the one God.

1. **How so? WLC 11** How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father? **A.** The scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only.

2. **Example: the Son**

B. Three persons: The Bible *distinguishes* the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, by means of their “personal properties.”

1. **“Personal properties”**

- a. **Paternity:** the Father eternally begets the Son and eternally breathes the Spirit
- b. **Filiation:** the Son is eternally begotten of the Father and eternally breathes the Spirit
- c. **Spiration:** the Spirit is eternally breathed forth by the Father and the Son

2. **The root of the “personal properties” in biblical revelation**

a. **Personal names: Father, Son, Holy Spirit**

b. Illustrations

- i. **Athanasius:** “Scripture gives us such illustrations and such images that considering the ability of the human nature to comprehend God...as far as obtainable.”

ii. Example: the Son as Word, Image, Radiance

iii. Relations of origin and equality

iv. **The significance of personal properties:** they alone preserve and acknowledge that “these three [persons] are ... the same in substance, equal in power and glory” (WLC 11)

V. Conclusion

A. **The theologian’s question:** Given the blessed Trinity, why is there something rather than nothing? Because the blessed Trinity wishes to embrace us within his happiness for his glory and our good.