

THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

Unit 1c The Confession of the Trinity

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Hello. In this session, we will consider the confession of the Trinity. Now, in our last session, we took a look at the fact that the God of the Bible displays both a unity and a diversity within Himself. As we looked deeply into the unity and diversity of God, this led us to state that the fullness of God was best seen in his Triunal nature. So if you recall, we looked at Ephesians 3:14-19 as proof of this statement. Today, we want to consider the confession of the Trinity as it has been developed within church history. Let me start with a couple of comments here. First, the word Trinity is not itself found within the pages of the Bible. This is a concept that has been derived from both logic and theology. God does, in fact, reveal, as we've already seen in both the Old and New Testaments, and which we will continue to see, his Triunal nature. But the concept of the Trinity was developed by the church throughout history, through conversation based on the revelation of Scripture. Second, while fascinating, we will not cover the historical development of our modern day confession of the Trinity. This is a topic for another course filled with saints of the faith and ardent defenders of true theology. What we will focus on today is trying to understand the modern confession of the Trinity. So without further ado, let's take a look at our Trinitarian confession. You see it here in front of you. We confess that God eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is but one God.

Now, let's consider the idea that God eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Godhead are what we refer to as the three subsistences of God. Subsistence is a word that simply means essential being. So at the outset of our discussion about the three individual subsistences of God, we must state that while God is personal, his personhood is not like our own human personhood. You see, each human being has a distinct individual essence. I'm going to try and explain this using Bob, Bill, and Tom. Bob, Bill, and Tom each have their own distinct individual essence. And these three men share similar essences in that each of them are human beings made in the image of God. Makes sense so far? But here's where that similarity ceases. Because while Bill, Bob, and Tom all share a similar essence in that they are created in the image of God, Bill's essence is similar but not the same, nor is it shared in any way with the essence of Bob. Bill and Bob are unique, and they are not interrelated. Also, we can see that Bob's essence is not shared in any way nor dependent in any fashion on Tom's. And so in front of us, we have three individuals with three distinct essences.

Now, however, this is not the case with the three persons of the Godhead. The divine nature is distinguished from human nature in that it can subsist both wholly and indivisibly in more than one person, a concept that Berkhof and others note in their systematic theologies. This leads us to then say that in God, there are only personal self-distinctions within the divine essence and that these distinctions are both generically and numerically one. Generically meaning that each of the self-distinctions originates from and wholly and indivisibly contains the same essence. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit each originate from and wholly and indivisibly contain the same essence. Numerically, we mean that God has a single essence that exists wholly and individually within the three persons of the Godhead. So the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in their personhood are not like you and I in our human personhood. You and I are completely separate. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not.

So with this in mind, we can say that God exists in three persons or subsistences. These persons are the personal self-distinctions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now that we've taken a brief look at the nature of these three persons, let's look to Scripture to prove that each is presented to us as, in fact, being God. We'll start with God the Father. Here we have two passages: Genesis 1:1 and Isaiah 64:8. We want to establish both the eternal nature of the Father and, of course, the unique personhood of the Father

within the Godhead. So Genesis 1:1 reveals to us that before the beginning of creation, God existed. Now, we'll dig into this concept a bit deeper in studies to come, but suffice to say for now that the eternal nature of the Father can be seen in that He existed before time, and this is evidenced for us, among many other places, in Genesis 1:1. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Now, we can establish the personhood of the Father in many places, but here we will simply use Isaiah 64:8 as one of the many examples which prove to us the unique personhood of the Father. "But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." God the Father has eternally existed as a person of the Godhead.

Let's now turn our attention to the eternity and personhood of God the Son. For this, we will look at John 1:14. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." This is certainly a theologically dense verse, to say the least. We can capture the eternal nature of God the Son in this passage as well as his unique personhood by contrasting him against the Father. Jesus reveals the glory of the Father, and here Jesus is both associated with and contrasted against the Father. As such, Jesus is a unique person within the Godhead while also, by necessity, being an eternal being. For if Jesus is going to reveal the Father, he must share His essential nature. So God the Son is both eternally existent and a person of the Godhead.

Finally, let's consider the eternity and personhood of God the Holy Spirit. Here we will look at Genesis 1:2. In this passage, we see that the Holy Spirit was present with the Father at the moment of creation. We can establish His eternity much like we did with the Father. The Spirit existed prior to creation, which includes the creation of time. Ergo, He is eternal. Here we read that "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." This verse, in combination with Genesis 1:1 which we read a moment ago, contrasts and thus personifies God and God's spirit. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit both eternally existed as persons of the Godhead. So God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all eternal and are all personal. The three persons of the Godhead have existed in eternity as three self-distinctions of God. Matthew 28:19 gives us a great snapshot of the three working in concert. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Now, we must turn our attention to seeing that each of these persons is fully God. There are certainly multiple passages that confirm this for us. However, we will simply look at a few to set the stage for the broad truth of Scripture: Each person of the Godhead is fully God. We can see the deity of both God the Father and God the Son in the same passage, John 1:1-2. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Notice with me that in this passage, both God the Father and God the Son are equated equal in status and in deity. So God the Father and God the Son are both fully God.

To confirm the full deity of God the Holy Spirit, we can look at Psalm 139:7-10. "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." Here we see that to the Spirit is ascribed omnipresence. This is an incommunicable trait of God. That is, it's an attribute that cannot be shared. As such, we see that this passage as well as others confirm the full deity of God the Holy Spirit. So if each of the persons of the Godhead are fully God, we should expect to see these three working in concert as such. 2 Corinthians 13:14 offers such an example. "The grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Note here that we have a Trinitarian expression revealed to us in the Bible. The church is greeted in the name of all three persons of the Trinity.

So we have established that each person of the Godhead (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) is unique. We’ve established that each has eternally existed. And we’ve established that each is fully God. What remains for us to prove then is that God is, in fact, one and not three. Here we need to recall our earlier discussion about the subsistences of God’s divine nature. This is essential for our understanding of the following two passages, because in truth, God is one. This is seen very clearly in the Old Testament confession of Deuteronomy 6:4. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” That God is one is also professed in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 2:5. There it states, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Although God has three subsistences, God is still one.

So then, we confess that God eternally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And each person is fully God, and yet there is only one God. When properly understood, we can see that the Bible is not inconsistent in its presentation of God, nor is it contradictory. Rather, the Bible presents to us a Trinitarian God. So as we close, let us take a look at this picture for this picture gives us, I think, what’s a good example of how to understand the Trinity. Now, it’s taken from Ryrie’s Basic Theology, but it’s foundational to many different individuals who try and illustrate for us the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that any illustration of the Holy Spirit is ultimately going to fail to fully define what we believe to be a theological mystery. We could only explain the Trinity inasmuch as we can comprehend it rationally, being completely different. Again, if you remember the illustration of Bill, Bob, and Tom, we don’t share this aspect of God’s nature. But let’s use this as an example. God the Father is God, but not God the Son or God the Holy Spirit. God the Son is God, but is not God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit is God, but is not God the Father or God the Son. God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, the Son, and the Father are unique from one another, yet all are fully God. God eternally exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And each person is fully God, and there is but one God.