

Understanding the Issues

David Clayton

Definitions of various concepts of the Trinity/godhead debate

HOW MANY GODS?

There is Only one God. This is an incontrovertible biblical truth. Both the Old and the New Testaments declare this fact in unmistakable language (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:6). Every single person who holds the Bible as supreme authority acknowledges this truth. The biblical insistence on monotheism requires that God be defined as a unit. As a He. There is only one of Him.

HOW DOES ONE GOD BECOME THREE PERSONS?

The Bible also clearly teaches the divine nature of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as well as the Father (John 1:1; 1 Cor.3:16). how can this be reconciled with the fact that there is only ONE God? At the council of Nicea in 325 AD they wrestled and wrangled over this question. Finally the council reached a decision and formulated the doctrine of the Trinity which has remained with us (with slight modifications) ever since.

THE HISTORICAL (CATHOLIC) CONCEPT OF THE TRINITY

What the council decided is that the word "God" really refers to a single substance or Being. This substance manifests Himself (itself) as three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who are not three Gods, but one God in three modes. This term "being" does not mean that He is one Person, but rather that He is a single *substance* called "God," and that this substance expresses Himself (itself?) in three ways, as three manifestations or persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore Jesus and the Holy Spirit are said to be "consubstantial" (of the same substance) with the Father. The observant person will notice that this is a radical departure from the Scriptural concept of God who is always regarded in the Bible as a personal, individual Being whom we may regard as Father and with whom we may enjoy personal fellowship. The Nicean concept of God turns Him into a faceless impersonal substance. It should be evident that if God is the Being with three modes, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then God, the Being or substance must be greater than either Father, Son or Holy Spirit, since He is the whole of which the three persons is each only a manifestation.

We should not believe that the word *being* as used in the Trinitarian definition means the same thing as we ordinarily understand it to mean. While the word *being* normally refers to a person it apparently is given a different definition when used in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity. The following excerpt from a book on the subject of the Trinity describes this definition of God.

"The doctrine of the Trinity is simply that there is one eternal being of God - indivisible, infinite. This one being of God is shared by three co-equal, co-eternal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

"It is necessary here to distinguish between the terms "being" and "person." It would be a contradiction, obviously, to say that there are three beings within one being, or three persons within one person. So what is the difference? We clearly recognize the difference between being and person every day. We recognize what something is, yet we also recognize individuals within a classification. For example, we speak of the 'being' of man—human being. A rock has 'being'—the being of a rock, as does a cat, a dog, etc. Yet, we also know that there are personal attributes as well. That is, we recognize both 'what' and 'who' when we talk about a person.

"The Bible tells us there are three classifications of personal beings—God, man, and angels. What is personality? The ability to have emotion, will, to express oneself. Rocks cannot speak. Cats cannot think of themselves over against others, and, say, work for the common good of 'catkind.' Hence, we are saying that there is one eternal, infinite being of God, shared fully and completely by three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. One what, three whos.

Taken From: A Brief Definition of The Trinity - by James E. White (not related to Ellen White's husband)

Again however, this completely destroys the biblical concept of God as a loving feeling individual. A character with whom we may interact and have fellowship, rather than an impersonal existence inhabited by three persons.

In actual fact, the Trinity concept is not far removed from the pantheistic ideas of the New Age movement and eastern mysticism which view God as a universal existence encompassing and including everything in the universe, rather than as a personal individual with His own unique personality.

THE SDA TRINITY

The present Seventh-day Adventist denominational concept of the trinity is different. Some Adventists have preferred to refer to this concept as ***the godhead***, or ***the triune God***. This concept teaches that there are, always has been and always will be three separate Beings or Persons, who are exactly identical and equal in authority, power and eternity, each of whom is God in the absolute sense. In this concept these Persons are said to be "One God" and this is explained by stating that they are in perfect harmony in everything which they do. However, they are not one in substance, but are separate, individual Beings. When this concept is properly understood and appreciated it will become evident that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not monotheistic, but in reality, believes in and worships **three Gods**, whatever the protestations to the contrary.

The present SDA concept of the Trinity emerged as a result of the Le Roy Froom inspired drive to bring Adventism into line with popular Christianity. Back in the 1920s when Trinitarianism was being insinuated into Adventism, the Adventist concept of God was unique in Christendom in that it was strictly based upon the teachings of Scripture and not upon religious traditions.

THE HISTORIC SDA BELIEF

Adventists believed in: One God, who was one Person, one Being, the Father. Two divine Beings, the Father and His Son. Three divine personalities (expressions of the nature of God) the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To simplify this, they believed in one God, the Father who brought forth a Son in His own image, from His own substance, who also possessed the attributes of divinity and that this one God, the Father, was present everywhere in His invisible spirit form called "The Holy Spirit." Through this "personality" of the Holy Spirit, the Father manifested Himself in a different way than He manifested Himself sitting on a throne in heaven in His bodily form.

We can see that this concept does not take away the divine nature of Christ or the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit, but at the same time acknowledges the truth that there is only one God.

a. The one true God is the Father. Exclusively, absolutely. There is no other God but He. He is the supreme authority and the source of all things and all persons. "*...there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things...*" (1 Cor. 8:6).

"The Ancient of Days is God the Father... It is He, the source of all being, and the fountain of all law, that is to preside in the judgment. (GC S- 479).

b. Jesus is not this one true God, neither is He **another** true God, nor is He a part of the **same** substance of the one true God. He is the **Son** of the one true God, having been born of, brought forth from God, he originated from the same "substance" or being of God, but became, at birth, a separate, independent, self-existing being, inheriting from His Father all the attributes and powers of divinity. He is, always has been and ever will be subject to the authority of His Father, the only true God (John 17:3; 1 Cor. 15:27,28).

c. The holy spirit is the invisible manifestation of the Father (Matt. 10:20). It is the personality of the Father operating independently of His bodily form. It is the means by which God the Father is omnipresent, sees all and influences all, though His bodily form is always present in heaven.

Since God manifests Himself in two ways, as a personal visible Being, limited by space, sitting upon the throne of the universe in heaven, and as an invisible, personal, universal presence who fills heaven and earth, it is evident that God has two personalities, or manifestations of Himself, and since Jesus as God's begotten Son is the "express image" of His person who reveals His Father in everything He does, then we can see that there are three personalities in the godhead, two divine Beings, and only one God.

This understanding of God is the only one which can be harmonized with the teachings of God's word. Here, God is, in harmony with the Bible, one Person only, the Father. Here, Jesus is, in harmony with the Bible, a divine Being, but not God

Himself. Divine because He originated from the same substance as God and inherited all His attributes, but not God Himself, because He exists as a separate, individual Being who is subject to God and who originated from God. Here, the holy spirit is God, a personal Being who possesses all the characteristics of personality, not a third Being but rather another manifestation of the Father's personality.

THE CHANGES OF ADVENTISM

What Froom & Co. did was to make adjustments to this Biblical concept and then give it the label of "Trinity." This resulted in a mongrel concept which is neither in keeping with the popular trinity doctrine, nor in harmony with the teachings of the Bible. Adventism, in fact, may be said to have created its own personal heresy.

What adjustments did they make to the Biblical truths?

(a) Instead of God being an individual Person, the Father, they made Him a committee of three.

(b) Instead of Jesus being the Son of the one true God, divine by nature, but subject to His Father, they made Him God Himself. Not truly God's Son, but an equal God, separate from, but absolutely equal to the Father in every respect.

(c) Instead of the Holy spirit being a personality or a manifestation of the Father, they made it into a separate God with His own individual personality and being.

(d) Upon this enigma they fixed the label of *Trinity*, and the evangelical world, failing to carefully examine the Adventist Trinity, accepted Adventism with open arms and welcomed it to the fellowship of the apostate. Yet, the Adventist concept of God is not monotheistic. It is deceptive and contrary to reason to state that Adventism teaches that there is one God. To arrive at this conclusion we must first of all drastically change our concept and our definition of God. From a person, an individual, He must be made a committee. From a "He," He must become a "they," or an "it."

Most Adventist supporters of the three-in-one God have blinded their eyes to these realities and to every appeal to the Scriptures and reason they have taken refuge behind the crumbling defense of "mystery."

NON-HISTORIC "REFORMERS"

Several independent ministries within Adventist circles have rejected the word, "Trinity" as it relates to God. They have preferred to use the word, "godhead," confessing that the popular Trinity which teaches a three-in-one God is far removed from the biblical reality of God. Failing to take the Bible as their ultimate authority, however, they have ended up in confusion equally as false and offensive as the Trinity.

- a. They have refused to accept that the only true God is the Father.
- b. They have refused to accept that Jesus is the literal Son of God, born of , brought forth from (not created by) the Father.
- c. They have clung to the misconception that Jesus' divinity is in no way related to the Father's divinity. That is, that they are two completely separate and unrelated individuals who have always coexisted, yet are absolutely equal in power , authority and nature.
- d. They have continued to hold the same error concerning the Holy Spirit making it also a third, separate, unrelated, individual and independent Being, one with God and Jesus, only in the sense that they have the same goals, purposes and attitudes of mind and cooperate together.

Clearly, incontrovertibly, these brethren are teaching that there are three Gods. If the union of God, Jesus and the holy spirit are only in the fact that they think alike, have similar attitudes and characters etc. but are totally unrelated in terms of substance or being, then clearly we are speaking of three Gods. There is no way of denying it and in spite of the fact that this flies so blatantly into the face of the biblical declaration that there is only **ONE** God, some have been bold enough to openly declare that there are **THREE** Gods! Robert Sessler, in his book, *The Godhead, 1,2, or 3 Gods?* Has stated on page 28,

"Thus the Godhead is made up of three distinct divine Persons, Beings, and Gods - making a heavenly trio - united together in one purpose."

While I admire his courage in openly acknowledging where his conclusions have led him, I must question the reasoning which makes him abandon the plainest and most fundamental truth of the Scriptures in favor of the traditions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Kenny Shelton also speaks of "three deities" although he cannot bring himself to say "three Gods." (*Trinity or Godhead video - Part 2 by Kenny Shelton*). In this sermon he quotes the verse which states that there is only one God who is the Father (1 Cor 8:6) and acknowledges it to be true. However, his understanding of the godhead as he explains it, clearly teaches three independent, unrelated, exclusively omnipotent Beings. His conclusion is that there are three "deities" though he will not say, "three Gods!"

This is the confusing situation which faces us today and the truth is that most of the advocates of the Trinity do not have even the slightest understanding of the ideas which are involved in the doctrines which they embrace. Yet, if knowing, loving and worshipping God is the most vital aspect of any Christian's experience, then it is clear that one of the things which we must understand as a matter of the highest priority is the true identity of the God whom we worship.

Diagram Illustrating One God

