

SESSION 2—HOLY TRINITY IN THE SCRIPTURES

REVIEW

1. Last week, we decided that before we delve into the mystery of what or who the Holy Trinity is, we should first try and determine whether it was worth our while at all to spend our time doing so. The question that guided our inquiry last week was “Holy Trinity-Who Cares?”
2. The answer to that question is that the Armenian Church and all traditional Christian churches have cared, very much about this understanding of the nature of God. Last week we followed a principal of determining the relative importance of anything in our church; If it is important in our worship, it is important for our church.
3. We talked about the dozens of places the Holy Trinity is prayed, sung, represented visually and motioned. How it is in our fundamental statement of faith the Creed, how we have three hymns to the trinity, and how it is of primal importance in our confession. And perhaps the most frequently occurring and evocative example of the trinity’s importance in worship is something we say and do dozens of times in worship, invoke the trinity and make the motion of this triune God over our bodies, minds and souls (not accidentally another reflection of trinity). This stands as our shortest and most powerful form of prayer which is not just said and it is ritually enacted, like a handshake manifests and affirms the greeting of a new encounter, so crossing oneself manifests and affirms a new daily encounter with our God.
4. We then mentioned, in a somewhat cursory way because of time restraints, how the trinity features heavily in all our major sacraments, both in words and in ritual movements; taking baptism as one example, it in itself is three rituals in one baptism, chrismation and first worship/communion, and in each of these the trinity is invoked we baptize you the name of the father son and holy spirit, we chrismate you with 3x3 crosses on your body, we bow with you 3x3 times on the altar for first worship.
5. So in answer to our question “Holy Trinity-Who Cares?” The answer can’t be overstated, we do. We Armenian, Orthodox, Catholic, Episcopal Christians have always held that the three-fold shape of God is something essential to understand about God and his creation of which we are a part, and not some abstract theological decoration. And from our little experiment of determining the importance of the Trinity by its prominence in our worship and sacraments, I think we are forced to conclude that believers over the generations in our churches found something crucial to their faith life in the Trinity that we may have lost, and so spending a little time to recover this aspect of our faith will be well spent. For if we believe that God is the author and sustainer of all of creation and humankind was made in His Image, then the “shape” of God his three-fold nature is key to knowing and loving God and everything else which is created in his image.

THE BIBLE & THE HOLY TRINITY

6. Now as a transition between last week's question of "Who Cares about the Holy Trinity?" and our coming weeks' question of "What is the Holy Trinity?" we are going to ask the question; "What does the Bible say about the Holy Trinity." The Bible is our strongest record of God's interaction with humankind over the centuries. So if the Bible does say anything about the trinity, we really increase our answer to the "who cares?" question and also may get hints about this mystery of the trinity. So let's get you all to work on answering your first question: **Does the Bible say anything about the Holy Trinity?**
7. Some Christians who only interpret the Bible very literally, would say that the Trinity isn't in the Bible. What they mean is that nowhere in the Bible does someone ask God who God is, and God replies I am the Holy Trinity; Father Son and Holy Spirit. There are actually a few passages that nearly accomplish just this literally revelation of the Trinity that we will look at. But as our Bible itself tells us the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life, the spirit of the Gospels is always more important than literalism. And the Trinity is one of those doctrines not revealed merely in words but instead in the very action of the Triune God and interaction with humanity in its redemption! We know who God is by what He has done in bringing us to himself! And the Bible is the record of God's interactions with his people.
8. Quick question about the Bible, (let's give you an easy one after the last hard one). **How many parts does it have?** Yes two, the Old & New Testaments. But of course it's also more complicated than that. There are further divisions within each testament, for Jews especially, the Old Testament has parts within it; the Torah (1st five books), then prophets, wisdom literature, etc. For us Christians, the new testament also has one key division within it. This division is important in our church and will factor in this talk. **Does anyone know the "two parts" of the New Testament?** Clarifying Hint. **What book is on every Armenian Church Altar?** No not the entire Bible, and not even the entire New Testament; but the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which are the foundational texts about Our Savior Jesus, but the rest of the new testament is made up of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles the letters to Christian churches. **Is Jesus in these?** No (except brief appearance in beginning of Acts). **Why?** Because he was crucified of course. So therefore, all other books of the New Testament reflect "life after Jesus." That's how they are distinct from the Gospels, and make a third part of the Bible. **Is it a coincidence that there are three "parts" of the Scriptures and three "parts of God?"** Let's find out!

OLD TESTAMENT

9. The first "third" of the Bible is the Old Testament, which describes God's revelation as One, as creator, as totally good and interested in our goodness. This was absolutely new and revolutionary in world history, and God's chosen, the Jews, were the first to know God more as he actually was; as a Father and creator. It's true that God's revelation as one, changed the face of human history as well as the human heart. Until then—with a pantheon of competing gods—truth, goodness, the arc of history did not converge, but instead were totally relative and tribal. Our tribal god fights your tribal god as we fight you, may the strongest survive. Good is what is good for us, not you. The gods themselves were violent, jealous, infighting, immoral and fickle, so were humans. Contrast this with God's self-revelation, and the Jews reception of God as one God. Truth is one, good is one, justice is one, history has a moral progression and God is the founder of it all.

10. We still believe this of course, it is a cornerstone of our Christian faith that God is one, the creator of all things, all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing. God being one establishes forever that there cannot be any god or part of God that is contradicting and divisive in God. It leaves the door open though, as to whether there can be fellowship and relationship in God's self. So God is one remains the truth, but not the complete and fullest truth. The fuller truth would develop and be revealed in time (like everything else in God's creation).
11. Ok, so let's quickly look at a few texts from the OT about the trinity and see if we discern the sketch of anything that will come into full relief in the New Testament:
- a. You don't have to go far to find an OT reference, look at the very first words of the bible, you will see the Holy Spirit mentioned: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Gen 1:1-2
 - b. For Christians the entire Old Testament is sprinkled with prophecies which foretell the coming of the Savior who we believe is the second person of the trinity. But the one passage I want to look at closer is just a few verses later in Genesis, which may surprise you about our One God:
 - c. Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Gen 1:26-27
12. **Did you know about God referencing himself as plural?** These passages have been famously difficult for Christians-never mind Jews and Muslims-to explain How could the One God be speaking in plural? **What do you think this means?** As you ponder, let me give you the context because it is crucially important. God referring to God's self as plural only happens in the context of God creating humankind, deliberately and repeatedly. What could this mean?
- a. It seems that, from the very beginning, God the Father wants to be known not just by His "I" but by "We" in His relationship to humanity.
 - b. It seems that diversity and relationship is something essential to God that was reflected in His creation in us.
 - c. Since we were made in God's image, it appears that we aren't isolated individuals-we are made for fellowship in our DNA-for relationship to Him and to one another.

NEW TESTAMENT-GOSPELS

13. Ok, so in the Old Testament there was only mention in sketch of another "personality" of God within God's self. But the Old Testament predicted in 100 ways that a Savior was soon coming to reconcile God's unruly creation with its Father. Those predictions called prophecies were fulfilled in time; in the coming of Jesus, in the Gospels which describe the life of Jesus. And this revelation of God's diversity and inner fellowship truly changed the face of God and the world.

14. Intuitively you can clearly see hear, that even if the Bible didn't say anything literally about the problem of God being one and many, the entire Bible and all of Christianity begs, screams the question. When you read these Gospels about the man Jesus, you just have two options. This man is demonic/crazy or the Son of God. And if you believe He is the Son of God, then immediately the question of the Trinity arises. **Is this Jesus Christ distinct from God or the same as God?** Don't try to answer that. He was both. And that is precisely the 2nd spoke in the wheel of the trinity.
15. How is he both? First let's look at how Jesus was distinct from God. We can use a Sunday School riddle to discern this. **If Jesus was God, then who was he praying to?** Yes, of course, he was distinct from God. Every other word of the Gospels is about Jesus' love and obedience to His Father in Heaven.
16. Yet at the same time, the first words of the Gospel to its last, witness to the fact that this man Jesus Christ was God incarnate, God's self. Jesus himself made it explicit in many different ways (though his life was threatened whenever he did) "The Father and I are one," "the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Jn 10:30,38. And strikingly "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." Jn 8:58
17. There are dozens more examples, but let's take look closely at just one example of the trinity in the New Testament, where Jesus spells out the trinity to his Apostles, and at the same time makes the key transition from the second part of our scriptures the Gospels (about the Son), to the 3rd part of scriptures about the Christian church (about the Holy Spirit):
- "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name [singular] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19)."
18. Well you can't get more literal than that or more direct from the source than that. This is the end of the Gospel of Matthew, and this is Jesus' post-resurrection command to his Apostles. Just as he is the intersection of heaven and earth, God and man, he is the intersection of God past and God future. The first person of God's trinity, the Father, had led God's chosen people to Jesus in the Old Testament. Now the second person, Jesus the Son, is revealed in the Gospels, and soon He would send the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, to inspire future followers. **(If time is an issue, we could stop here. I could also potentially end with how the time span of God's revelation in scripture, and its diversity of genres, people's etc. reflects a diverse, trusting, loving God as opposed, for example to the Quran and its reception.)**

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS, EPISTLES)

19. During his life, as recorded in the Gospels, Jesus was keenly aware that he would have to die, he would have to return to His Father, but that he would remain in Spirit, send the Holy Spirit to guide, comfort and keep his followers. Here is two such text of Jesus speaking about such things from the Gospel of John:

- “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” Jn 16:7
- “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” Jn 14:16-17

20. This Spirit of God is alternatively translated as helper, comforter and advocate, and this Holy Spirit is what powers and animates the rise of the Christian and with it the world's transformation in the past 2000 years. The clearest image of this power is of course Pentecost, in the third part of our Bible (Acts of the Apostles). The promised Holy Spirit descends on Jesus' followers, and these people who were formally divided by tribe, language and culture are united in the Spirit of Christ.

21. This Holy Spirit does not just advise us like God the Father, though it does this. The Holy Spirit doesn't just walk alongside us as the Son does, though it does this. The Holy Spirit, because of God coming as man and reconciling us, now dwells within us. John's passage said “You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” There are many such passages highlighting that the Holy Spirit allows for God to dwell within believers, to grow within us. Here is one example:

- “What?” says Paul, “do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 1 Cor 6:19

DELEGATION, EXPANSION & PERSONALIZATION OF GOD'S LOVE

22. The most powerful way, I think, to conclude and review this survey of God's three-fold interaction with humanity which the Holy Scriptures record, is to see everything we have said as simply the ongoing deepening of God's love for his people. In each period of history, reflected in each portion of the Scriptures, God-like a good father- has personalized, expanded and delegated his love for his people.

23. In the Old Testament, God ruled as a strict but loving Father to one chosen people. He gives rules and laws which is just what we need when we are spiritual infants. But as his chosen people grew in love, he was ready to love them more deeply, expand his love to others beyond His chosen, and delegate to all believers more responsibility to be lovers of others as God loves them.

24. Jesus Christ did just this. He bent down the love of the father from heaven to earth, stooping down to our level to lift us up to God's. Jesus' love expanded God's relationship beyond a tribe to offer himself to Armenians, Africans, all of humanity. Jesus got very real and

concrete about what love of others looks, giving himself in love even unto death, thereby putting much responsibility on believers to model the same.

25. This then set the stage for the last delegation and expansion of God's love in the Holy Spirit, now God is like the air around us and within us. This Holy Spirit dwells and grows among us in our churches, within and through us as individuals if we are willing.

26. Let's end with a short prayer which our short prayer which reaffirms our God who is one and three. Hanoon hor yev vortvo, yev hogvooyrn srpo.

God for us, we call you "Father." / God alongside us, we call you "Jesus." /
God within us, we call you "Holy Spirit." / Together, you are the Eternal Mystery / That
enables, enfolds, and enlivens all things, / Even us and even me. Help us to know you in
the fullness of your persons and grow in your love. Amen.

NEXT WEEK

Next week, we will move on to answer more about "What is the Holy Trinity?" But we will start to see how coming to know God in God's three persons is not just beautiful theology, but also of great practical importance to learn to live life as it was designed by Our creator, in intimate relationship with God and our neighbor.