

God as Trinity – Christian Theology of God as One in Three Persons

A. Introduction:

- a. Theology is best understood when you see it worked out in redemptive history.
 - i. Apart from the context of God’s overarching creative and redemptive plan, theology may become at best distorted and at worst detached from the Gospel and the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - ii. Redemptive history begins at the Fall, and ends in restored perfection in Revelation. Thus the Bible is a unified story of God’s personal revelation, as well as the progressive advancement of restoration.
- b. Jesus presents a simplified view of theology:
 - i. OT – is based on the Great Commandment – the love of God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your strength [Shema], and loving others as yourself [social justice].
 - ii. NT – is based on the Great Commission – going into all the world and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus [evangelism] and teaching them to know and obey all my commandments [discipleship].
- c. Theology may be approached in several ways – as systematic [topical], historical [marking its changes throughout the church age], Biblical [based on sound Scriptural exegesis and explication], and apologetic [foundational presentation to argue the case for God]. Each of these approaches have their merits... but Biblical theology must be the starting and ending point. To decouple theology from Scripture necessarily distorts it.
- d. Theology is the Heart of God wooing the heart of humanity through the ages into eternity.
 - i. Humanity could not find or think their way to a knowledge of God who is Spirit and Holy.
 - ii. God necessarily had to reveal Himself to humanity.
- e. Theology is necessarily flavored and takes shape from our personal experiences with God.
 - i. Biblical authors represent slightly differing theological perspectives which are observable in the writings they left us under direction of the Spirit. Pauline theology is slightly different from Johnine, and both differ from Peterine... the same is observable in the OT.
 - ii. “Theology is not something you get out of a book... theology develops when we see things that make no sense to us that forces us to cry out to God – help me makes sense of this.” ... Danny Bauman evangelist.

B. 6 Categorical aspects of Theology –

- a. Static vs. Diachronic:

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- i. **Static** is how classical systematic theology is taught. It is God defined by facts believed about Him in a topical formulation.
 - ii. **Diachronic** is seeing what God is doing through time and catching up with what the Spirit is revealing in each age.
 - iii. Thus, **diachronic** tells the story of how God uses His attributes through time in the redemptive process – it involves the whole story of scripture.
 - iv. In this **diachronic** context, God’s **eternality** doesn’t make sense outside of His wanting to share it with humanity. The end result is relational, not merely factual.
- b. Diametric contrast:**
- i. You can best appreciate the fullness of **Who God is**, by knowing the balanced nature of God – what He has said and revealed about Himself.
 - ii. God’s **grace** is balanced [contrasted] with His **justice**. God’s **eternality** is balanced with His **temporal acts** in history. ETC.
 - iii. **Diametric contrasts** give meaning to the tensions we live in as we grapple with **theological contrasts and conundrums**.
- c. Spherical wholeness:**
- i. **Theology** encompasses the fullness of **relational life**, and cannot be dissected independent of **relational intimacy** which is at the heart of God’s purposes.
 - ii. How we interact with God will look different and assume different aspects as we relationally interact within our **social/cultural context** with –
 - 1. **My children**
 - 2. **My spouse**
 - 3. **My work place**
 - 4. **My church**
 - 5. **My society**
 - 6. **Etc.**
- d. Christocentric** – a “**High Christology**” is consistent in NT authors:
- i. **Jesus** is rightfully the central aspect of **normative Christian theology**.
 - ii. **Jesus birth, life, message, work, death, and resurrection** changed everything for all time.
 - iii. **Theology** must be looked at in context of **before and after Jesus**.
 - iv. The **wholeness of God and the Unity of God** is revealed in **Trinity**, but the connection to humanity is necessarily through **Messiah**.
 - v. **Eternality** takes meaning for humanity in the **2nd Person of the Trinity**.

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- e. Valuated:
 - i. There are relative values that can be presumed of each element of God's nature as He relates to creation and humanity.
 - ii. God as eternal is manifest in creation; but also in redemption, judgment, grace, etc.
 - iii. We know God is Spirit and is all-powerful, but since we don't have an objective understanding of what these are, elements such as the Gospel with revealed Grace and Hessed love have far more significance to humanity because it is through them that we enter into intimate relational experience with God.
 - f. Gospel centered:
 - i. Centrality of the Gospel and Jesus' work forward and backward through redemptive history.
 - ii. The cross is the seminal event in all of history – preceded by Jesus' incarnation and ministry; followed by His death and resurrection; looking forward to His reign for eternity in which Christians will play a necessary assigned part.
- C. Characteristics of God's Nature as revealed in Gen 1-3:
- a. Eternal – Gen 1:1
 - b. Creator – Gen 1:1
 - c. Spirit moving – Gen 1:2
 - d. Spirit omnipresent – Gen 1:2
 - e. Intentionality – creation displayed God purposefulness, His actions followed a pattern He conceived and then spoke into existence.
 - f. Justice – God alone determines and declares what is good and what isn't.
 - g. Comprehensiveness – not only is there an order in which God acts, but He acts in a completeness of His own conception.
 - i. One of the wonders of the Cross is that the exact time of Jesus' entering into history to rescue humanity was determined before creation occurred.
 - ii. Since the stars and constellations are fixed in their orbits, their precise alignment declaring Christ's arrival, passion, and resurrection were known as revealed in Scripture [the the DVD "The Bethlehem Star" and/or go to this web site].
 - h. Sovereignty – Gen 1:16 shows that while God has established creation, it was His intention that it would be ruled by regents:
 - i. Sun would rule the day – active energy
 - ii. Moon would rule the night – passive or reflective energy

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- iii. Humanity would rule all plants and animals
- i. Relational – Being in Community – Gen 1:27
 - i. God is not alone – the Trinity is referenced.
 - ii. Heavenly host is also referenced as being present and observing God’s actions, though in a passive role as witness.
 - iii. The fullness of relationship in the Trinity provides a context for the marriage relationship and social community – it’s not good for man to be alone.
- j. Blessedness is expressed in God’s Love for humanity – Hessed love [OT] and Agape love [NT] – God is wholly other oriented, and it is His desire to bless others – Gen 1:28:
 - i. Light was not created so God could see; it was created for the sake of the function of life on earth and for humanity who would care for it.
 - ii. Creation story makes sense in the context that God is preparing something wonderful for humanity – God made it Good for humanity to enjoy.
 - iii. The fall makes sense in context of humanity’s error – humanity’s choice fouled creation.
 - iv. God’s judgment in cursing Satan and the ground on which he crawls makes sense in context of God’s perfection and justice... Satan subverted God’s perfect order in deceiving humanity and usurping their rightful rule.
 - v. Jesus’ coming to redeem and restore [make things perfect again] is the ultimate example of Hessed love... only God could do it.
- k. Generous – Gen 1:29 demonstrates it is God’s nature to share.
 - i. God’s jealousy is less that He needs something from others to make Him complete... He is already Perfect and Trinity is relationally complete.
 - ii. Creation is all about joyously sharing what He has done with those He loves. God didn’t need creation to provide a context for His Being as He is Spirit. Humanity had to have creation as a context as we could not live without it.
- l. Omnipotence
 - i. God’s name as ‘Almighty God’ and ‘I Am’ indicate that he has life in and of Himself; He is complete and needs nothing else to be whole.
 - ii. He is capable of doing anything He pleases. The only limitations upon God are voluntary – He does not act in conflict with His nature.

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- iii. God voluntarily restrains Himself – He allowed Satan and humanity to choose – to obey or not... thus the consequences of the decisions are their resultant responsibility.
- iv. God could have solved humanity's mistake with a word – instead He voluntarily chose to limit His action, choosing to work in and through humanity.
 - 1. We can only conclude that “free will” was a preferential state to compelling obedience.
 - 2. In God's sense of economy, choice and the possibility for error is preferential to compulsion and the existence of created beings as forced rather than free agents.
- v. Jesus was tempted – but where Adam/Eve failed, He succeeded through the Word, the Logos.
 - 1. Jesus is the New Adam – the standard for what all of humanity can strive for.
 - 2. The Alpha and Omega take shape in the context of redemptive history and eternity.
- m. Compassionate – Grace is introduced along with judgment and the cursing of Satan and the ground is rendered – 3:14-17.
 - i. God correctly adduced that Satan was disproportionately responsible for subverting God's order – hence he was cursed indirectly.
 - ii. Humanity was duped but culpable for our part in rebelling against God's decreed order, God's grace is displayed in that humanity was cursed indirectly... the earth being directly cursed.
 - iii. The promise of a Messiah who would crush Satan's seed holds out the hold for restoration that would come in God's own timing.
- n. Major Groupings of God's Characteristics in classical theology – Immutable and commutable aspects:
 - i. Immutable aspects are those that pertain only to God and pertain to no other being.
 - ii. Commutable aspects are those things that God grants humanity though in a lesser and incomplete form which pertain to having been made in God's image and called in His service.

D. Practical Theological Applications of Themes:

a. Contrast Themes in Gen 1:1

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| i. Eternity | Death/temporality |
| ii. Spirit | Material |
| iii. Omnipotence | Free will |

b. Eternity

- i. Scripture presumes that God was Pre-Existing and Eternal.**
- ii. God creates the material world with the intent of sharing this eternal aspect with humanity with necessary boundaries.**
- iii. The Fall changes everything – it introduces death. Death proves the curse upon the material world is true.**
- iv. Death is the result of curse – but it is also a veiled blessing as well.**
 - 1. The worst thing would have been for humanity to live forever in their fallen state in a fallen world.**
 - 2. God driving them out of Eden was a kindness – and it opened the way for Messiah to end death and to restore our spiritual life [accomplished at Christ’s 1st coming], to restore creation and material life [to occur at Christ’s 2nd coming], and finally to return us to Eden [the Kingdom of God] – where we live with God forever.**
 - 3. The death of Christ is the penal resolution of the Fall.**
 - 4. The resurrection of Christ is the promise of the return to our intended eternal state.**

c. Hope

- i. Hope is introduced as a major redemptive theme introduced by the power of the resurrection.**
- ii. In our fallen state... everyone dies – the best is to die with hope for resurrection in Christ.**
- iii. The absence of hope is the second death.**
- iv. The obliteration of our individual self either as absorption into the god-head or in ceasing to exist is an evil God never intended.**

d. Truth

- i. God’s knowledge is wise, true, and good – it has the power of conviction and transformation through the auspices of the Holy Spirit.**
- ii. Creation – is “general revelation”... God’s eternal truth, power, and majesty are written into the fabric of creation and bear testimony of His existence and His presence.**
- iii. Scripture – is “special revelation”... God’s redemptive plan is revealed through special revelation [Scripture].**
 - 1. 90-95% of humanly experienced truth is consistently expressed in Scripture, but there is this 5-10% remainder that just doesn’t always make sense.**

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- a. The Bible is not intended to solve all the mysteries of the Spiritual realm of the material world.
 - b. The Bible is intended to reveal God in such a way that we may know Him and have intimacy with Him.
 2. Scripture reveals what we need to know theologically, morally, and ethically – and we are challenged to believe and obey.
 - a. Obedience is our choice in our own normative experiences.
 - b. Scripture has the ability to convict me of sin – it points out my failings, but offers no power in itself to live a life that pleases God.
 - c. Transformational life had to wait for the release of the Spirit at Pentecost.
 3. The 5-10% remainder is where God's sovereignty is expressed in unconventional ways – as where Balaam's donkey spoke for God, or where God used a nation less righteous than Israel to deliver God's punishment and exile.
- iv. Experiential nature of revelation –
1. It is true that God continues to speak to humanity and to use vision, dreams, etc. to reveal His message – to the extent we remain open and responsive, expecting the Spirit to lead and guide us [charismatic (Spiritual) revelation].
 2. These messages are never to be in conflict with normative scripture. New theology or new knowledge is not revealed though personal or other non-normative revelation.
 3. Conviction and illumination continues through the work of the Spirit.
 - a. God continues to work in the inner-man through the Spirit.
 - b. Indwelling occurs in those who have responded to the Gospel message and have received Jesus as Savior and Lord.
 4. Normative revelation of Scripture has ceased... no new authoritative Scriptural revelation can occur.
 - a. Prophetic ministry involves making the existing authoritative Scripture relevant for the social/cultural environment.

- b. The Apostolic ministry and witness which gave rise to the development of the New Testament no longer occurs... this is the extent to which we are dispensationally cessationist. The remainder of the gifts of the Spirit remain in play.
 - c. God has been known to reveal Himself directly to those who would otherwise not have access to Scripture of the Gospel message, when this occurs it is consistent with existing Scripture revelation – no new authoritative revelation occurs.
- v. Christian Life Decisions
- 1. There are actions that God permits [permissive will] and actions that God decrees [prescriptive will].
 - 2. God leaves it to us to decide most of the things we would do – God empowers us with a heart, a mind, and choice, and expects us to be responsible them.
 - 3. God’s omnipotence does not negate my choice in the areas where He has prescriptive designs – in fact, to the alert disciple seeing God acting in us and through us is one of the great wonders of life with God.
 - 4. God’s interaction adds a sense of wonder and amazement that He would involve Himself directly in me and offer bigger purposes beyond me.
- vi. Non-Christian Life Decisions
- 1. General revelation has written eternal truth on our minds and hearts of what is right and what is good. [See Eternity in their Hearts by Don Richardson]
 - 2. Our conscience resonates and identifies actions that are proper or not – most people know what is good and true, and as we listen and obey we become more sensitized to this prompting.
 - 3. When we ignore this prompting, we lose the sensitivity to it and ultimately lose the ability to identify right and wrong [searing of our conscience].
 - 4. The Spirit does not indwell and lead non-Christians, but that doesn’t mean that He doesn’t influence them positively... since the Spirit is everywhere and holds all things together.

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5. The Spirit also convicts us on sin as a precondition of our choice of saving grace through repentance and faith. Then the Spirit leads us on into righteousness with our cooperation.

e. Omnipotence

i. How does God reveal His will and work in my life?

1. He has chosen us to be His Vice-regents conscripted to the service of our Lord Jesus and empowered by His Spirit within.
 - a. God doesn't necessarily need us to do His work, but He delights in using us so.
 - b. God's partnering with us is one of the amazing blessings of Christian life – it gives us eternal purpose and meaning.
 - c. God's partnering was commissioned in the Garden and continues throughout redemptive history.
2. He expects us to pray
 - a. Prayer brings our heart/spirit close to His.
 - b. Prayer should be that His will be done – God's will is perfect and best.
 - c. Prayer should include our daily needs – God knows what we need and the difference between our needs and wants is clear to Him, though not usually clear to us.
 - d. Prayer is not wrestling with God to persuade Him to give us what we want – He is not our magic genie in a bottle.
 - e. God does not promote confusion – everything about Him speaks of clarity, purpose, order, and constancy. Prayer puts us in touch with God's heart and mind and promotes His work in us and through us.

ii. How do we intercede on behalf of others? Does God heal emotionally, spiritually, or physically? Does how we pray – our technique, passion or fervor matter to God?

1. As God's vice-regents He expects us to identify with His purposes which include being a blessing to others and seeking to meet the needs of others. By demonstrating we earnestly care because God matters to me, it is a conviction and comfort to others.
2. God doesn't care about formulas or technique, but rather the intent of our heart. When we are properly aligned with God, we can be used properly in the lives of others. It isn't about me or demonstrating my righteousness or goodness – it is all about

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God and meting out help in His name and for His Kingdom purposes.

3. My responsibility is believing what He has revealed to me and being obedient.
4. There are times to pray believing for what we need, and there are times to expect that God's answer may be 'no' or no apparent observable action.
 - a. Because I have prayed and nothing has happened doesn't mean I have prayed wrongly or lack faith.
 - b. In Gethsemane Jesus prayed 3 times to have 'this cup pass by' – but God didn't allow it. Scripture says that Jesus prayed earnestly – to the point of sweating blood. Jesus didn't keep praying, but He resolved to be obedient to death.
 - c. Paul prayed 3 times to have the 'thorn removed from his flesh' – then he was told that 'My grace is sufficient.'
 - d. When we expect/demand that our prayers be answered we run the risk of putting our will above God's. We need to be humble, faithful, submissive, and obedient.

f. **Suffering**

- i. Although no one likes it or necessarily wants it, there is something about the human condition where we are refined and grow spiritually as Kingdom minded disciples under the impact of pressure, temptation, and suffering.
- ii. It is a means through which God refines us and changes us.
- iii. In OT thinking, suffering was endured with the hope of material blessing – Sinai Covenant was about blessings and curses in the land.
- iv. NT suffering is endured for the hope of eternal blessing.
- v. The cross changed everything – but experience is the only means where faith changes suffering into patient endurance for spiritual gain.

g. **Salvation of infants and those before the age of accountability**

- i. OT Sinai wilderness experience of Israel had the older generation wander around until they died off – they were not permitted to enter the land of promise.
- ii. The younger generation that didn't commit the sin of rebellion and doubt were not subject to this sentence. By extrapolation you can reasonably conclude that God doesn't withhold the promise from the Godly because of the failure of the ungodly.

- iii. This is a picture that can be applied to infant mortality having access into eternity.
 - iv. Additionally, Jesus welcomed the children and exclaimed that one had to become as 'one of these' – innocent and trusting to enter the Kingdom of God.
- h. Forgiveness
- i. Forgiveness is always balanced by justice with God.
 - ii. Forgiveness is something to prayerfully contemplate before God, so the heart may be softened and forgiveness realized.
 - iii. Forgiveness is often a process that occurs over time, rather than a once dealt with matter.
 - iv. While we are warned in scripture that 'we must forgive if we expect to be forgiven' – in practical terms there are those who have been so hurt, damaged or traumatized that they are incapable of true or complete forgiveness at this time.
 - v. In the later situation the idea of God's justice may provide comfort and even hope – as the example of the saints calling out from under the altar in Revelation.
 - vi. Forgiveness may bring:
 - 1. Hope in the case of distant abuse [such as genocide] where God's justice is an ultimate reality to be feared.
 - 2. Hope of immediate abuse in present conditions – freeing the bondage of the one who is suffering.
 - 3. Knowledge that you can't always tie an act of forgiveness to the future realization of benefit to the person suffering.
 - vii. Vengeance is God's responsibility – and He will act to protect the rights of His people.
 - 1. The desire of personal vengeance poisons the soul in addition to the pains of the wrongs suffered.
 - 2. Holding on to vengeful hatred leads to bitterness and wrongly colors our view of reality around us.
 - 3. Hope rests in the peace of God and His sense of right and wrong and in His timing to mete out justice.
 - 4. God's judgment is balanced with mercy, goodness, and grace.
- E. Applying Scripture to Real Life Applications of these themes
- a. Hope in Jesus' 2nd coming is to be encouraged – Christians don't think enough about this hope. Similarly, end times judgment will come at the end of history, and we worry too much about this.

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- i. Revelation is not a historical book documenting the history of the end – it is a statement about end-times theology and is symbolic not literal.
 - ii. Rev 16 has a sequence of judgments – 1st bowl = sores [skin cancers?], 2nd bowl is pollution of the seas and 3rd bowl is pollution of fresh water [don't we have both now?], and finally the 4th bowl indicates high heat [possibly brought about by global warming and ozone depletion].
 - iii. What do you say to someone who is teaching these as fact? Whipping up expectations that the time is now?
 - iv. Remember, we don't know the time. It will come as a surprise – men and women will be giving in marriage & life will go on....
 - v. Focus attention of the Hope of resurrection – God's Kingdom is coming whether I'm alive or not to see it is another thing altogether. When we die – we enter the Kingdom. It's all good!
- b. We speak of Philippians and the peace that transcends understanding – how do we apply it?
- i. God promises our burdens will be lifted, if we will just lay them down and trust Jesus. Problem is we like carrying them around and showing others how tough we have it.
 - ii. Place emphasis on forgiving and letting go... God is the final judge, it is not our job to mete out punishment to wrong doers or for obtaining recompense for wrongs suffered.
- c. Whenever you deal with issues – tie it to biblical principles. Don't rely on clever speech – rely on biblical imperatives.
- i. Don't provide false comfort – it is not necessarily our job to end their pain or suffering... though when we can meet their physical/emotional needs we should act appropriately.
 - ii. Don't presume you know their problem or their hurts – just stand with them in their problems/hurts. Be a friend and advocate. Listen well and don't multiply words.
 - iii. Provide scriptural examples and let them through the Spirit make the connections that by faith are appropriate for them.
- d. Applied theology always presents truths about God – with context overlapping between scripture and real life.
- e. Emotional healing may take time to play out in faith.
- f. Spiritual healing is immediate and complete even though we don't feel it.
- g. Physical healing may or may not play out influenced by God's will, personal choice, fallen creation, etc. – it has to do with aspects of God's omnipotence – God's permissive and/or proscriptive sovereignty.