

## Theology 1.6 - Trinity

---

Taking an overlook at some of the basic tenants of the faith, how do the approaches play out in the realm of the church of Christ. Both affirm the basic tenants of the “to die for” faith components listed by Gerry Breshears on page 4 of the theological introduction. It is important to understand that there is more agreement than disagreement in the faith approaches as they play out today... this was not the case in the era of Luther and Calvin. The Catholic Church launched its counter-reformation in the wake of the protestant reformation, and the two faiths have been moving closer together ever since.

A. Catholicism & Reformed Theology Reviewed and Contrasted by an Evangelical –Justification by faith, not by works – this is the probably the most foundational concept of Luther and Calvin, and forms the most striking departure of these two approaches to faith during the reformation. Some of the more important differences are:

- a. Catholicism – Is a *system* of faith belief... and it is important to understand the precepts/dogma underlying their expressions of faith. It is also important to understand that the general cultural milieu to which Catholicism was attempting to address was uneducated and illiterate. Thus the system was developed to bring deeper truth to a simplistic society.
  - i. The humanity and Deity of Jesus are examples of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> level thinking:

<u>Level 1</u>	<u>Level 2</u>	<u>Level 3</u>
General:	More descriptive:	Specific: personal
Believe in Jesus, With some church Participation.	Jesus is Savior, greater church Participation.	faith expressed - Full church participation & commitment expected.
  - ii. Those who generally accept justification by faith, or who do not completely understand Catholic dogma where the faith is not completely understood by the participants, have to ask themselves “what is more important – to focus on the personal side of faith in individual lives? Or upon the result of faith in the individual and in society? One or both are in play.
    1. In the system... the sacraments have their positive effect whether I completely understand it or rightly believe at all.
    2. The presumption... the greater my involvement, the greater the personal expressions of faithfulness, and the growing depth of the requirements of faith.
  - iii. In the system, salvation is a process based upon the participation in the sacraments supported by faith... a complete understanding of all that was believed or expected wasn’t required.
  - iv. Concept of ‘infusion’ – Jesus sacrifice has infused His righteousness into my being, which allows me to live a life pleasing to God... whether I know it or realize it or not.
  - v. Jesus works with me to work out righteousness – I can’t earn it but I can lose it.
- b. Reformed Justification by faith, not by works

## Theology 1.6 - Trinity

---

- i. Concept of 'imputation' – our sin debt has been paid for by Jesus, which we accept by faith. This is something we can't do for ourselves and accept by faith.
      - ii. Concept of 'Propitiation' is an accounting transaction – our sin account has been accredited with the Grace account of Jesus. Sin is paid off in full.
      - iii. I can't earn God's grace, and once conferred I can't lose it.
      - iv. Interestingly... the difference between Catholicism item 5 above and reformed item 3 is a major dispute between the Arminianist and Calvinist theological positions. Neither position is completely affirmed or resolved by Scripture.
2. Lord's Prayer – is followed by a conditional statement: you must forgive or you won't be forgiven.
  - a. Catholic – these conditional statements are taken literally, and failure leads to mortal sin which breaks fellowship with God and keeps you out of heaven.
  - b. Reformed – unforgiving nature and sin in general interrupts my relationship with God, but doesn't break my salvation that is guaranteed by Jesus.
3. How faith is worked out in your life – the challenge of perseverance
  - a. Catholic system deals with literal issues that require the ongoing application of Grace in the form of sacraments – forgiveness is available exclusively through the church. Ongoing application is necessary for entering heaven, and those who fall away from the continuing practice are lost. Thus the church retains a pivotal position in securing salvation to its congregants.
  - b. Reformed theology says that those who truly believe are elected and need not ever fear exclusion from heaven. But those who fall away from the faith were never truly in. Personal responsibility is more prominent.
4. Rewards in heaven – 1 Cor 3:15
  - a. Catholic system – disobedience to the church locks you out. Personal faith is expressed in terms of one's commitment and continuance of the church system.
  - b. Reformed – disobedience may cost you your reward, but it will not mean you are locked out of heaven. Personal faith is a matter between you and God, though it is expressed in community.
5. Authority of the Church
  - a. Catholic authority and belief system developed through the 7 ecumenical councils. Nicaea and Trent became the foundational ones. Justification and righteousness are completely different things and are worked out separately in the Catholic system.
  - b. Reformed authority was based on the early council statements, and qualified by the apriori position of scripture and each person's individual grasp of their faith and application of it.
    - i. Justification and righteousness in traditional thinking are actually considered the same thing secured exclusively by Jesus and applied by the Spirit.
    - ii. In the 'New Perspectives' view of thinking – justification is based upon your known future... so you are declared righteous now by what you will do in the future. Focus is more on your life now rather than you're past.
6. Doctrine, Dogma & cultural aspects
  - a. Catholics

## Theology 1.6 - Trinity

---

- i. Most don't know or understand much of the dogma, and have they have limited understanding of the theology behind the sacraments.
- ii. Most would say they believe in Jesus as Christ and savior, though allegiance to the church and regular attendance is the primary proof of their faith.
- iii. Tolerance & objective aspects of truth:
  - 1. Would a Catholic who approves of lifestyle tolerances such as sex outside of marriage or homosexual behavior, be considered truly Christian? Church standards vary with each Pope and cultural drift of the era.
  - 2. What is the proper place of tolerance and objective standards of right and wrong? Catholics tend to be more tolerant and less open to hard standards of morality. This remains a major obstacle between Catholic and Reformed believers.

### b. Protestants

- i. Although many aspire to know "sound doctrine," most know only a small part, and few can adequately articulate their faith in a convincing manner.
- ii. Almost all would say they believe in Jesus as Christ and savior, but most do not follow Jesus as their Lord... hence, they live lives that are so compartmentalized in terms of faith and practice that they are functionally indistinguishable from the society at large.
- iii. Tolerance & objective truth:
  - 1. The question of tolerance is a real problem – while holding to the ideal of loving the sinner and hating the sin, most accept a perspective that rewards hard observance of moral behavior and a willingness to shoot any mortally wounded. This is a major criticism of Christian faith... that we are the only army that shoots the wounded.
  - 2. Protestants tend to be very judgmental, in spite of the call not to judge. Most Christians fall into legalism... which is encouraged by the church leaders since it can be observed and quantified, while true internal faith is not easily qualified.
  - 3. Questions arise that we should ask ourselves:
    - a. How 'triumphant' must one's life be to be secure in their faith?
    - b. How does grace and obedience actually play out in our lives?
    - c. What is the definition of sin and moral accountability?

### 7. Issue of co-regency

- a. Catholics – deal with co-regency through the established line of the church hierarchy. The Pope as the extension of the charge to Peter has the keys of Heaven and Hades, and he determines what is right and how to apply orthodoxy.
- b. Protestants – have no lineal charge of authority and orthodoxy. Each believer is asked to wrestle with these matters with the guidance of their pastors/shepherds. This is even more of a problem in non-denominational churches that typically have no outside or senior leadership oversight. They often become individual islands of faith and are suspicious and judgmental of those they see as outside their group.

- c. **The charge to Adam continues for the church today... as we are individually and corporately God's co-regents on earth under the authority and calling of Jesus.**
  - i. **Our fallen human state – prohibits our perfect or proper responsiveness, but does not relieve us of the charge to rule.**
    - 1. **We are expected to do our best for our Lord and King in whatever role or position we find ourselves in.**
    - 2. **Having a Kingdom of God mindset and value structure is exactly what Jesus preached and demonstrated.**
  - ii. **Government and human organizations of all kinds are affected as well –**
    - 1. **Scripture addresses our need to honor and obey authority, but with the change from monarchy to democracy the clear lines of stable leadership and our prescribed obedience are obscured especially in America where we elect new leaders every 4 years.**
    - 2. **Though Scripture calls for submission to the authorities we find ourselves under, Scripture is clear that rulers and leaders have a God given responsibility to care for those under their leadership.**
    - 3. **Civil disobedience is not inherently wrong, but must be engaged in a thoughtful, prayerful, peaceful manner.**
  - iii. **What is the responsibility for believers who are called to be salt & light? How does that play out when moral and ethical consistency is lost and no objective standard exists? Now there is a question worth pondering!**
- d. **Christian reformed thought has over the years divided into several main groups:**
  - i. **Separatists – who want nothing to do with government or society and have completely separated themselves from it – like the Amish & Anabaptists, and the Essenes of the Biblical era. These groups purposefully live as a separate society within the social order they find themselves in... purposefully defining their own standard of life and faith.**
  - ii. **Reconstructionist – reformed thinking where they conclude the Law of Moses is still in play and we are obligated to further its case and cause in strict obedience. Many of these groups become legalistic critical reactionaries... these are often “reformed thinkers on steroids,” who seem more like the Jews of Jesus era, than the church of Grace Jesus founded.**
  - iii. **Dominionists – it is each believer's responsibility and God's purpose for each of us to identify so completely with His Will, His Kingdom, His program... and to expand His influence in our world. This is the primary position of the Pentecostals – especially those such as Pat Robertson.**
  - iv. **Conservatives/Fundamentalists – look for an underlying base of Christian precepts that apply fundamentally to our nation in particular and government in general. They work within the established political/social order to extend judicial rule for the people under God.**
    - 1. **Religious right – Jerry Falwell – Christian nationalizing is actually the de-Christianizing of America and is a major problem. They maintain that our country is losing its blessing and divine charter from God. The imperative is to re-establish a nation on a foundation of Christian**

## Theology 1.6 - Trinity

---

precepts... even when such an underlying influence is unclear if not missing altogether.

2. **Family values – James Dobson and Focus on the Family – demand a hard stance on family values that undergird Christian social structure and God’s standards. The evils of secular humanism have so confused our concepts of right and wrong that the evils of homosexuality and abortion become acceptable. They see secular thinking subverting God’s standards, requiring peaceful and legal civil action.**
- v. **Religious Middle – Rick Warren, Tony Campolo, and Jim Wallace – in this view, Jesus has completely changed the playing field... such that Jesus’ Grace demands a more gracious approach to governmental agendas – including social justice, response to atrocities, financial redistribution, etc.**
  1. **Laws restrain sin in the middle position to retain social civility.**
  2. **The “Christian counterculture” goal is leading people to Christ, not forming a Christian nation.**
  3. **Reaffirms that the law fails by only convicting people and restraining them – it does not enable them to rise to a higher way of living and thinking. Transformational life is exclusively experienced through Jesus under the purview of the Spirit.**
  4. **There are categories of moral sin that requires restraint... and those that can act against it ought to act... to do otherwise is to sin.**
  5. **There are categories of evil that need to be deliberately retrained... the battle is primarily Spiritual, but may require enforcement.**
  6. **Middle ethic requires Biblical standards of moral ethics as demonstrated by the prophets who lived within the Pagan nations that had conquered them. It acknowledges that such nations have a different set of rules from God’s people.**
    - a. **God’s people are expected to meet God’s standards of behavior and His moral/ethical conduct. This again is not something we can accomplish through our own human strengths... it is empowered exclusively through the auspices of the Spirit.**
    - b. **Pagan nations have a responsibility to meet a different standard... but they are none the less expected to be humane and tolerant of others... displaying at minimum a “live and let live in peace” sort of approach.**
    - c. **Look at the prophetic decrees against Israel/Judah and the nations and you will get a good idea of God’s perspective.**

### **B. Orthodox Catholic Thought – Eastern, Greek, Russian, Slavic, etc**

1. **This group has more than 300 million believers worldwide... and it is clearly the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest Christian group.**
2. **It is really quite different from Roman Catholic.**

## Theology 1.6 - Trinity

---

- a. They hold no need for justification – they believe in “expiation” which then completely changes the person and their stature with God. It is more about the newness of life experience, than about the canceling of sin.
  - b. They hold no dogmatic decrees and they tend to be more focused on mystical experience of God as sacred, rather than God as judge and condemner.
  - c. They focus on the worship of God, and the veneration of almost everything else.
  - d. Incense and Icons are primary components of worship – they give a sense of the mystical power of God.
  - e. Chanting in Aramaic not Latin or Greek... retains a timeless connection with the church since its split with Rome.
  - f. High Church feel that is in the line of the OT Temple worship feel.
  - g. Split off from Rome in 1054 AD... essentially remains somewhat frozen in time since them, focusing on the Spiritual and pretty much ignoring the secular.
3. Theological differences:
- a. Icons are not idolatry – as Jesus reflects the image of God, Icons reflect the image of Jesus and specific saints, etc. They are a means to veneration helping to focus prayer and thought, rather than objects of worship.
  - b. Have Bishops but no Pope, and no allegiance to the Roman Pope.
  - c. No celibacy of priests... most are married and have conventional families.
  - d. Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, where Rome and reformed hold He was sent by Father and Son. This is interesting... and has the Father much more active in the redemptive process.
  - e. At the time of the split with Rome...
    - i. Geo-politically, the East was much more stable and secure than the West. Rome was collapsing and losing influence, while the East was ascending. The Byzantine empire thrived until it was ultimately conquered by Islamists, though the faith endured under Muslim rule.
    - ii. West held to a legal-transactional payment for sin, East doesn't hold so much to a legal satisfaction but rather they hold to Jesus as rescuing humanity and securing their future.
  - f. East focuses more on the resurrection, while the West focuses more on the cross and atonement.
  - g. East holds to Theosis – the purpose of God for man is to make us partakers in the divine nature. We are to become more God-like.
    - i. Jesus rescue mission allows for a return to our intended ideal state.
    - ii. Services tend to promote a sense of the mystery and unknowable nature of God.
    - iii. They tend to express what God is not, rather than what He is.
    - iv. God is known experientially, not systematically or academically.
    - v. God is very transcendent, not as imminent as in the West.
    - vi. Sacraments are important, but their benefits are more of a mystery – they are not specifically spelled out or focal as in the West.
    - vii. Have a Trinitarian understanding of God, but don't really comprehend how it works.

- viii. Focus on relationship to God and others, not on decrees or dogma.
- ix. Sins are considered a hindrance to God-likeness, not necessarily something that must be stamped out.
- h. 2 Pet 1:2-4 is an example of Theosis –
  - i. “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”
  - ii. Thus the Spirit is divine and aids in the transformational “divinizing” of people’s lives.
- 4. For Orthodox – how important is level 2 knowledge for salvation? How much do they need of the specifics to be ‘Christian?’
  - a. Modern reformed thinking expects that one must understand the rudiments of salvation and be able to espouse them in public to be included in the community of faith. This is usually accomplished through church membership training and baptism.
  - b. Post modern thinking tends to see a ‘wrathless’ approach from God in viewing the violence on the cross. Many think of the need for blood as ‘vampire atonement,’ and the Father’s demand for the Son’s sacrifice as ‘divine child abuse.’ Is God really a blood-thirsty God?
  - c. OT – appeasement of God was a big deal – and because of it, early Christians became more focused on the merit derived from Jesus’ blood, and less on the claim Jesus life made on them.
  - d. The rudiments of “acceptable theology” are framed through this revisionist process through time as the church defines and redefines its calling and priorities. It is important to realize that “normative theology” has been a moving target through the ages... much in response to the historical-cultural world the church was living under and responding to. Waves of Grace have moved from Catholic to reformed, from foundational to fundamental, from conservative to liberal and back again. This changing landscape has interesting thought ramifications:
    - i. What becomes of those believers who attempt to faithfully follow what they are taught by the church if the leadership is teaching them in error?
    - ii. We know that Scripture holds leadership “who should know better” more accountable than the sheep of their flock who submit to their leadership.
    - iii. The more you know, the more accountable you are... but through it all, I think God’s Grace is far more radical than we give it credit for. God ultimately judges the hearts of individuals – as Jesus proclaimed the thief crucified alongside Him justified and worthy of heaven (Luke 23:33) and the Rich Young Ruler excluded (Mathew 19:21).
- C. Gospel Orthodoxy and the requirements of Salvation –
  - 1. Questions are – ‘What cross saves?’ How much knowledge/experience do you need to claim a new life in Jesus? Is the cross active or passive? Is substitutionary atonement (eg: Post Moderns view of “divine child abuse” loosely based on Abraham & Isaac)?

### 2. Center of the Gospel –

- a. Moral & ethical teaching in the Law was important but incomplete.
- b. The call for “mercy not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6; Mathew 9:13& 12:7) speaks to the condition of one’s heart toward others as an outworking of their faith.
- c. Cross was fundamental – sin debt had to be satisfied through atonement.
- d. Resurrection is transformational – new life is ours now and for eternity.
- e. Pentecost secures transformational life – it is not just our effort, it is God’s gift being worked out by God in our life – Phil 1:6.

**D. Age of innocence/accountability for Salvation – as Christian leaders we are often asked to give definitive responses on difficult and cloudy issues... this is a hard one:**

1. Catholics hold that fetus/babies/infants who die go into limbo – they are neither in heaven or in hell.
2. Reformed hold that if they were elected – they would go to either heaven or hell.
3. OT thinking:
  - a. 2 Sam 12:23 – David and his baby will be together... but remember that the OT did not have a well defined concept of eternity in heaven.
  - b. Gen 3 – judgment brought physical death – there was no sense of eternity in heaven.
  - c. Elsewhere in Gen and OT – scripture states that the deceased were ‘gathered to their fathers’ – they seemed to go somewhere but there was no sense of heaven.
  - d. Prophets – judgment of the nations gives a glimpse of eternity in hell.
  - e. Job – that “my redeemer lives” provides a promise of hope for eternity.
  - f. Num 14:29-31 – deals with the adults who grumbled against God – they will not see the land of promise, but will die in the wilderness. Their children however, and the 2 adults who didn’t grumble [Joshua & Caleb] would enter the land.
4. NT – innocence
  - a. Jesus says of young children ‘for such is the Kingdom of heaven.’
  - b. Unless you trust as a child you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven – Children innocently trust they will be taken care of, they don’t have knowledge of theology, etc.
5. NT – accountability
  - a. Pertains to those who have the ability to know and choose both right & wrong, and to accept or reject God.
  - b. It is the rejection of God’s provision in Jesus that condemns us.
  - c. Revelation judgment – states that ‘books will be opened, and the dead judged.’ An infant would not have the opportunity to have done anything, though they would have been born with original sin.
  - d. John 9:21 – speaks to being of age and able to speak for oneself in response to the law and authority.
  - e. The age of entering Jewish/Christian community as an adult was at age 13. By this time the Jews would have learned the Pentateuch and Catholics learned confirmation and were prepared to enter the community of faith. Before this time, they would have been under aged and not accountable.

- f. Another matter are those who are either mentally or physically handicapped to the extent they cannot understand and make a choice. Must they make a profession in public to be saved? I would conclude that God's Grace is bigger than that, and we can trust Him to love and judge in a worthy manner. It is not merely our profession of faith that saves, but God's work in us and for us.

E. Post modern – contrast of Intersivity Christian Fellowship “4 spiritual laws” of the modern age with the “4 circles of belonging” of post-modern age:

1. Modern era church & the 4 spiritual laws:
  - a. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life = unlimited atonement.
  - b. Man is sinful and sin separates us from God, therefore we can't know Him and experience His plan for my life = total depravity.
  - c. Jesus is God's only provision for man's sin, through Him you can know and experience God's love and His plan for your life = salvation & justification.
  - d. You must individually know and receive Jesus as savior and lord = specific application of atonement.
2. Post-modern church & the 4 circles:
  - a. We were designed for good – all creation was in the circle of belonging.
  - b. We were damaged by evil – we loved other things more than God stepping out of the circle of belonging to the circle of self resulting in Spiritual death.
  - c. Restored for better – Jesus died for us taking on the death we deserve circle of faith.
  - d. Sent together to heal – Jesus offers the way back into the circle of belonging.
3. People's lives & good works are an outworking of the Gospel – but they are not the Gospel. Gospel must be communicated/proclaimed by words, and lived out experientially in a life of faith that is not just defined by deeds & action, but who and what we are ('being' not merely 'doing').
  - a. This involves:
    - i. Move away from selfishness and self-centeredness – to Godliness (Imago Dei) and Christlikeness... being reformed into the image of Jesus (Imago Christi).
    - ii. Move away from a focus merely on afterlife to living a missional life – aligning myself with God's purpose and His calling with a new emphasis on gracious acts in community and in the world (Missio Dei).
  - b. Modern reformed thought concludes that you must “pray the sinner's prayer” for salvation to initiate. This is not necessarily Scriptural... in the Bible; people “believed and followed Jesus.”
    - i. Many hold that if have not prayed the sinner's prayer you are lost. I think God's Grace is again more radical than that.
    - ii. CS Lewis held that people were damned by their decisions and choices which carried into eternity. See Lewis' The Great Divorce for his answer to this problem.
    - iii. Is the “sinner's prayer” a good start for one's salvation? Absolutely! Is it the end place to secure salvation? Scripture doesn't necessarily conclude such. In the end, God desires we should know and love Him. We should avoid

## Theology 1.6 - Trinity

---

**dogmatic doctrinal conclusions, and promote an environment that ushers people into God's Presence.**