

## Theology 1.7 - Trinity

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### Character of God thought development assignment:

- Consider writing a letter to a non-believing friend in which you describe God based on what the Bible reveals about Him. Obviously, the primary thing you would have to go by are His Scripturally revealed character attributes, and how they play out in redemptive history.
- Another piece of the puzzle you would need to be mindful of, are the attributes that God alone possesses, and those humanity shares in a lesser capacity – these are part of our being made in God’s Image (Imago Dei).
- Obviously, you could not take a 1 dimensional approach to the Sovereign Will of God... Look at it from several different perspectives.
  - Job and Jonah certainly portray different approaches, and of great importance is the understanding of the participants involved in the stories. In Job, the hero does most of the suffering for reasons he doesn’t understand, and is ultimately vindicated by his faith. In Jonah the Jews did the suffering by the hands of the people Jonah was sent to preach to so they wouldn’t be destroyed... with Jonah wanting no part of saving these wretched oppressors.
  - Jer 1:5 – demonstrates a Sovereign appointment – sort of a draft notice from God.
- In thinking about this, do not be willing to think specifically in regards to judgment, instead think in terms of love and discipline:
  - How would you use God’s attributes as a means to speak into the life of people especially on difficult concepts?
  - Different attributes will speak into different situations in different people’s lives – someone who has suffered abuse may focus more on God’s judgment... the expectation that people who wrong others will be called into accountability. But instead of looking at it judgmentally, think in terms of God’s attribute of Justice – that He desires mercy, not sacrifice. That He holds those in power more responsible... that we are held accountable not just for what we have done, but those things we failed to do as well, etc.
  - You would need to think through what will be useful in expressing truth in a loving and comforting way that will help people grow.
- Obviously, God’s Grace takes center stage in redemptive history... and all of God’s attributes play out in Grace.

### CONCEPTS:

### GOD’S ATTRIBUTES:

#### Suffering:

#### Wisdom & Knowledge

Answers the question why.

- a. God uses suffering to help You grow & to help others.
- b. 1Cor7:20 – parable of talents, 1<sup>st</sup> shall be last – is a twisting Of the human from the divine Perspective.
- c. Concept of God employing a handicap to level the playing field. God is exceedingly fair and knows each person’s limits, and He adjusts accordingly.

#### Compassion, Grace, Mercy

Answers based on restoration  
And mercy.

#### Righteousness, Justice

Human suffering is nothing compared To what God suffers over human sinfulness Roman’s approach – OK for Bible believing Christians, but you won’t get far with post modern thinkers.

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- How can a proper understanding of the character of God give you a more balanced approach to ministry? Too often Christians are denounced because they are quick to offer platitudes and pat answers, rather than having really worked their theology... God is the King with absolute rule, but He is also our friend. We have all been in situations where we had to be circumspect with someone in a position of authority over us... a boss, a parent, etc. You can't forget the authority side in favor of the friend side... both need to be represented and balanced.
- Though true, apologetic and legal/sovereign approaches to theology don't provide much comfort for those in need or despair.
- You need to see the bigger picture (diachronically – in terms of redemptive history) to find a response most appropriate to the situation.
  - Don't rely on a one way approach to every situation – you need more arrows in your quiver.
  - Listen first to God's Spirit before you speak... this is an error we all make over and over again.

**A. THEOLOGY OF DISPENSATIONALISM:** is especially noted by the rejection of the belief that the church fulfills and replaces Israel in the divine plan for humanity, and instead reads the Old Testament Israel and New Testament Church as successive institutions in Biblical History.

Dispensationalism is a form of "Premillennialism" – thoughts about the things necessary as a necessary prophesied prelude for Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming... including the Pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Classic dispensationalism had its beginnings with Darby and Scofield and is focused on the different epochs of redemptive history and specifics of what God does differently in each period of time. The notion that God "can't" do something runs contrary to God's Sovereignty... the notion that God "won't" do something runs along the track of God reveals about His character in each epoch of redemptive history.

- Premillennialists – hold that the Kingdom of Christ will be inaugurated in a supernatural and cataclysmic manner. The world will get continually worse, bringing apostasy, the spread of evil, persecution of the righteous, and the misplaced hope in the Antichrist. There will be signs and wonders... including wars, earthquakes and famines, followed the great tribulation under the rise of the Antichrist. Jesus will then return and a millennium of peace and righteousness in which Christ and His saints will rule with the Jews figuring prominently. The curse against nature will be removed, Christ will restrain evil through His authoritarian power. After this golden age of peace and prosperity, there will be a final rebellion of the wicked against Christ and His saints that will be crushed by God. Then the dead are raised and the last judgment conducted and eternal states in heaven or hell established.
- Postmillennialists – emphasize the present aspects of God's Kingdom that will ultimately reach fruition in the future. They hold that the millennium will be brought about by the advancement of the Kingdom of God through the preaching [evangelism] and teaching [discipleship] of faithful Christians. Such activity will progressively result in a more godly, peaceful, and prosperous world. The new age will not be essentially different from the present, but evil will be reduced as the Kingdom of Christ advances. The period closes with the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment.
- Amillennialists – hold that the Bible does not predict a period of rule of Christ on earth prior to the last judgment. They predict a continuous development of good and evil until the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming when the dead are raised and the last judgment conducted. They hold the Kingdom of God is now present

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in the world as the victorious Christ rules His church through the Word and the Spirit. The future glorious perfect Kingdom is the new earth and life in heaven after the church age.

- Cosmology has played a distinctive part in what the church's responsibility is regarding issues of social justice, and evangelizing – some see the issues as moot as God is in control of working out matters, thus human intervention is unnecessary. Others hold that the world will never reach its climax until God's people fulfill their calling and responsibility.

- 4 perspectives form the core of dispensational thought briefly outlined:

<b>THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES:</b>	<b>IMPACT ON JEW'S NOW:</b>	<b>IMPACT ON SPECIAL HOPE-JEWS</b>	<b>IMPACT ON SPECIAL JEWISH LAND HOPE</b>
○ 1) A-MILENIUM	Saved w/all others	No future	No reconstructed Temple
○ 2) A-MILENIUM +	"	Yes-Romans 11	No-land was based on obedience
○ 3) CLASSICAL DISP	"	Yes-future mass conversion	Yes-hope for restoration remains
○ 4) PROGRESSIVE DISP	"	No future mass conversion	No future land hope

- Some major thinkers/groups known for their dispensational approach to social issues, and how they influenced history:

1) Darby – Plymouth Brethren – represented by theologians Ashley Looper Shaftsbury & Edwin Hadder

- a) Shaftsbury [Dr Louie's prototype hero] – was a social justice reformer in England...
  - i) Reformed child labor laws – as children were typically sent to work at age 6 into difficult circumstances such as coal mining and factory work for 10 hours a day. Children had no rights, no representation, were essentially slaves compelled to work for little pay or for payment for living in squalid and overcrowded work houses. Shaftsbury championed reform that pushed back the age to start work to 13.
  - ii) Championed the rights of those in mental/insane asylums – where people were typically chained to a wall and left there. These people were looked upon as less than human with separation and restraint being the operant method of treatment. Shaftsbury championed reform that initiated the beginning of humane and respectful treatment of the mentally ill.
  - iii) Shaftsbury also pioneered "opportunity loans" for individuals and small businesses, which resulted in many people emerging from poverty and hopelessness.
  - iv) Shaftsbury championed schools for homeless youths and street 'urchins'.
  - v) Shaftsbury championed opium reform in 3<sup>rd</sup> world China.
  - vi) Theologically, Shaftsbury was a dispensationalist who viewed the reward of a faithful servant believer would receive in the future in Heaven, was based upon what you did now in the present to help others. His was a literal interpretation of the Book of James.

b) Wilberforce... another social justice reformer in England:

- i) The movie "Amazing Grace" aptly chronicles the story of William Wilberforce and how "One man's passion and perseverance changed the world" by bringing an end to the slave trading practices in England, and began the process that would bring an end for slavery in the world.
- ii) Wilberforce was a post-millennial thinker who similar to Esther leveraged his position to positively influence the Kingdom of God.

2) Amish – are literalists – they won't do anything that is not specifically written about in scripture.

- a) They have rejected the technological progress of automation, automobiles, power tools, electronics, etc because they are not written about in Scripture.
- b) Horses and buggies are OK because they were written about. Hand tools are similarly ok.

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- c) **Negatively, they maintain a very wooden, inflexible and strict interpretation of Scripture, that allows for no change in terms of the cultural progress of humanity. They refuse to engage their world outside their closed society. They are an example of a church community that has closed its doors and turned inward.**
- d) **Positively, they have maintained a pretty consistent Christian community, identity that has been lost or forgotten by most other Christian groups.**
- e) **Does not square with Jesus' call to be "in the world, but not of the world."**
- 3) **Scofield – Scofield Bible [Pre-Millennial, 1909] – popularized dispensationalism.**
  - a) **In his thinking, there were 7 dispensations each of which led to failure and judgment.**
  - b) **Dispensationalism is the view that there is much variety in the divine economy in the Bible, that God has dealt differently with men during different eras of biblical history. A dispensation is "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God," according to C.I. Scofield.\***
  - c) **Some variety exists among dispensationalists, but Scofield's scheme of seven dispensations is widely accepted. The seven dispensations are:**
    - 1. **Innocence (before the Fall)**
    - 2. **Conscience (from the Fall to Noah)**
    - 3. **Human Government (from Noah to Abraham)**
    - 4. **Promise (from Abraham to Moses)**
    - 5. **Law (from Moses to Christ)**
    - 6. **Grace (the Church age)**
    - 7. **The Kingdom of God (the Millennium).**
  - d) **The close of the Millennium ushers in the Eternal State.**
  - e) **J.N. Darby is usually regarded as the founder of Dispensationalism, although some of its elements are found in Augustine.**
  - f) **All dispensationalists are necessarily Premillennialists, but the reverse is not always the case.**
  - g) **Dispensationalism was greatly popularized through the Scofield Bible:**
- 4) **Classic Dispensational thought rose to prominence in the 1950's.**
  - a) **They considered the early form as hokey.**
  - b) **Held to the notion that 'proof-texting' (eg: quoting Scripture as a means of demonstrating sound doctrine) demonstrating verification of faith experience. Problem is that most such proofs are out of context, and have little connection to the shape of redemptive history. Not unlike the Jews in Jesus era, they know what it says, but misrepresent what it means.**
  - c) **Classic dispensationalists:**
    - 1. **During the 1920's dispensationalists created charts that traced development and failure-judgment through each dispensation; these were later pretty much abandoned during the 1950's.**
    - 2. **Was the basis for early dispensational thinking of the 1920's and readopted in the modern movement of the 50's.**
    - 3. **This thought became the eschatological interpretation for many denominations and was taught by the theology professors from Biola, Moody Bible Institute, Dallas and Grace Seminaries.**
    - 4. **Held that whatever system of belief you held needs to be fleshed out in Scripture with necessary proofs.**

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5. Did not encourage and at times would not tolerate hybrid forms of theology... where some Calvinist and some Arminianist thought was co-mingled.
  - d) Christian church and Israel are 2 tracts of dispensational development.
  - e) Set the stage for futurist thinking of Hal Lindsay and Tim LaHaye – in popular pre-trib rapture writings.
  - f) Viewed Revelation as being more spiritual and symbolic nature, rather than literal historical.
- 5) Progressive Dispensationalism – Craig Blazing – 1990
- a) The 2 tracts of development of God’s people (Israel and the Church) was abandoned for 1 people of God. Israel is no longer the favored nation, but part of God’s people in a linear development of redemptive history.
    - i) One program of hope and land – hope is eternal, and the land is Heaven.
    - ii) “Authorial intent” was a big thing in the 1950’s in how they interpreted Scripture. Present hermeneutics favors discovering the author’s intended message and employing Biblical Theology, with less emphasis on Systematic Theology which takes concepts and develops them independently. The older approach of authorial intent allowed theologians to claim the author didn’t understand dispensational distinctions, thus they took a literal Israel versus a world approach to redemption.
    - iii) The only hermeneutical conclusion they could take in the classic form was that of a closed loop. Progressive dispensationalism remedies those previous interpretive errors.
  - b) Cosmology – end of days are looked at differently in progressive vs. classical dispensationalism:
    - i) How the history and the succession of events leading to the end of days is less of an issue than the reality and hope of the New Heaven and Earth that is coming. It takes Jesus teaching to heart that no one knows... only the Father.
    - ii) The falling of stars and destruction will actually happen – it needs to occur to fulfill prophecy, this is not just spiritual symbolism or allegorical thinking... it is real. Other prophecies were already really fulfilled in historical timelines – such as exile, destruction of the Temple, etc. Bible is seen in progressive terms as being more consistent with how things have actually played out in history.
    - iii) 75% of current seminary theologians now hold to the concept of progressive dispensationalism. Classic dispensationalism is dying out as a result of better translation resources that have been discovered that has shed new light on Scripture. Dead Sea Scrolls among others are contributory to this change. We know so much more now than even 20 or 25 years ago. Many theologians of the earlier era have theological systems that are clearly outdated.
    - iv) The destruction of the Temple meant an end of the Jews as God’s exclusive people. The Jews rejected their Messiah, who has rejected them and taken a global approach in the worldwide Church.
    - v) God’s tolerance with Israel ended when they killed the Son – it was one thing to kill the prophets, another to kill the King of Glory.
    - vi) God will not view the rebuilding of the Temple and re-institution of cult ritual as a good thing.
    - vii) The simplistic conclusion that futurist theology determines social conscience is wrong. We need to be obedient with what we know that God has revealed to us and not worry how the rest plays out. Social justice is important because God says it is... not because through it we’re making the world better and working toward the ecclesiastical conclusion of the age.

### **B. TRINITARIANISM:**

1. **Classic Trinitarianism is 3 Persons who are One God – each exhibits all of the attributes of God.**
  - a. **It is Unity in diversity. This is a mystery of unity and diversity we cannot understand, but can glimpse relationally with the relational aspects of marriage and community.**
  - b. **Although equally God, there is an internal hierarchy of function within the Trinity:**
    - i. **Father – plans and directs.**
    - ii. **Son – implements Father’s plan.**
    - iii. **Spirit – holds everything together, convicts, nurtures, etc.**
  - c. **Although we refer to God as male, Scripture reveals there are both male and female aspects of God. Father & Son are the locus of the male characteristics, the Spirit is the locus of female characteristics.**
2. **Diachronic Trinitarianism – looks at the development of revealed change through time in redemptive history... waiting for the revelation to be made clear to show the importance of each Person in the Program of God.**
  - a. **One of the unfortunate results of denominations pressing their own versions of theological doctrinal orthodoxy is we focus more on who is right or wrong, that what we know to be true. See Gerry Breshears “Degrees of Certainty” – page 4 of the Authentic Discipleship Introduction to Theology.**
  - b. **What can we say we need to know to be saved?**
    - i. **We have come to realize that we don’t need to understand all of the complexity of Trinity to be saved.**
    - ii. **However, we do need to understand the Trinity for knowledge of the fullness and beauty of the Plan of God... which transforms our faith experience and our life in God.**
    - iii. **Trinitarianism is unique to Christianity. The faithful prior to Jesus had some understanding of God, Messiah, and Spirit – but Trinitarianism as we know it was not known.**
    - iv. **As we look back at Scripture with this knowledge, we see the Trinity everywhere... that was not necessarily the case then.**
  - c. **Scriptural ‘unfolding’ of Trinity – a few insights:**
    - i. **Genesis – ‘Shema’ – God is One.**
      1. **‘Let Us make’ – 1:26**
      2. **‘In our image’ – 1:27**
      3. **Companionship – ‘not good to be alone’ – 1:27, 2:18**
      4. **‘Let Us go down’ – 11:7**
      5. **OT – manifestation of Spirit came upon chosen servants – King David, prophets. Some displayed miraculous power from the Spirit that was upon them – Elijah, Elisha. Moses was something else... like Abraham – they walked with God.**
      6. **NT – explosive manifestation of Spirit on all believers – both in power and in number, where the Spirit is the energizing influence that unifies faith and enables ministry in Jesus name.**

- ii. Isaiah – the so called “Servant Songs” – these are passages about Jesus foretold 800 years before His birth – which He literally fulfilled. Each song adds a different aspect of Jesus and the Gospel:
  - 1. Chapter 42: “the Lord’s Servant – the perfect and the defective”
    - a. 1-4 – God’s role as ‘Father’ is shown as planner, the Spirit’s roles as empowerer, and the servant’s role as bringing covenant life to all people of earth.
    - b. Servant’s character is gentle and appears to be restorative... bring back into wholeness what has gone wrong.
    - c. God’s normative approach to redemption is to extend servant’s role to co-regent man.
    - d. 18-20 – servant is at peace with God.
  - 2. Chapter 49: “the Lord’s Servant – the restoration of God’s people”
    - a. 1 – “pay attention you peoples” – calling of the Gentile nations.
    - b. 2 – “out of His mouth a sharp sword” – close to God, foreshadowing of the humanity of his spirit and his sharp purpose.
    - c. 5 – “from the womb” – the humanity of the Servant.
    - d. Restoration of Israel and nations accomplished through servant’s human frailty.
  - 3. Chapter 50: - “Israel’s sin and the Servant’s obedience”
    - a. Fellowship with humanity is accomplished by God’s disciplining the servant... substitutional atonement.
    - b. 4-10 – Servant will be displayed, he will be abused, he will be sustained, he will be vindicated. Those obedient to God will obey the Servant.
    - c. 11 – those disobedient to the Servant will be destroyed.
  - 4. 52:13-53:12 – “the suffering Servant and His vindication”
    - a. God’s purpose fulfilled – He will be lifted up, his appearance will be marred, he will sprinkle the nations – redemption.
    - b. 53:4-6 – atonement
    - c. 53:7-9 – man of sorrows – suffered in silence like a lamb to the slaughter, cut off by the oppressor for the transgression of God’s people, assigned a death with the poor and a grave with the wealthy.
    - d. 53:10-12 – justification – a guilt offering, substitutionary debt paid.
    - e. Perfection & judgment assured.
- iii. Messiah displayed in other portions of Scripture:
  - 1. Jeremiah 1:5 – I formed you... I knew you... Ps 139, Is 49:5.
  - 2. Synoptics – Jesus displayed humanity.
  - 3. John 1 – Jesus as God existed before creation... He is eternal God.
  - 4. Mat 16:17 – blessed are you because this was not revealed by man...
  - 5. Jesus announced who He was in reading Isaiah 4:17-21 – this is fulfilled in your hearing.
  - 6. Jesus is God – for us as Christians... anything that denies Jesus’ deity is a deal breaker, and is not acceptable doctrine.
  - 7. John 8:58 – ‘I AM’ = Jesus is God.

8. Upper room discourse in John 13:
    - a. 13:31 – Son of man is glorified...
    - b. 14:6 – I AM the way, truth & life...
    - c. 14:9-15 – Jesus/Father relationship explained
    - d. 14:16-18, 26-27 – Spirit predicted, and ministry explained.
    - e. 15:23-27 – Father/Son/Spirit – Trinity is not called as such, but the nature is revealed, and is obvious this side of Pentecost.
    - f. 16:1-15 – it is your advantage that I go away... Father won't send the Spirit unless I go... Spirit will convict the world of sin & righteousness & judgment.
  9. Eph 1:1-14 – humanity now included in intimacy in Trinity
- iv. Cross:
1. Suffering of Jesus was both as human and deity – there was more going on spiritually than what was obviously going on physically..
  2. Suffering servant bore all sin & transgressions.
  3. Jesus 'let this pass' prayer in the Olive garden showed that He knew what He was in for... many people were killed by crucifixion and Jesus wasn't a wimp... but we have no idea what the whole Personal cost was, and we have little idea of what the Spiritual cost was.
- v. Pentecost:
1. Something fundamental has happened – we now observe the disciples on steroids... they are not the same people they were.
  2. Believers are empowered, enlightened, and equipped by the Spirit.
  3. God is now closer to humanity than in the garden... the Spirit indwelling believers is intimacy not known before... we are now invited into the community of the Trinity... caught up with God into eternity.
- vi. Revelation:
1. Spirit's Presence is tied up with the Angels of the churches... mystical connection and care going on.
  2. Once judgment began, the Spirit seems to withdraw... as if the role to nurture, convict, illuminate, enlighten, enable, and empower are no longer needed.
  3. Power role shifts to Father and Son and to their angelic servants.