

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER IV

GOD THE TRINITY: HIS PERSON AND DEITY

Man recognizes the existence of God by intuition or innate knowledge. This means that the fact of God's existence is self-evident to a degree that attempted proofs are unnatural to the mind, and therefore uncalled for. Those facts which are received by intuition are more evident than others. Men do not ask for proofs of their own existence nor of the existence of material things which they recognize by their senses. Though God is unseen as to His person, His existence and immanence are so evident that men generally require no proofs of the fact of His being. However, man's innate conceptions of God are greatly strengthened by the contemplation of His works in creation, preservation, and providence. So, also, man's thoughts of God are enlarged by tradition, or those accumulated impressions which are passed from father to son; but the knowledge of God is perfected when due consideration is given to that complete revelation which He has given of Himself in the Scriptures of Truth.

The ancient philosophers were deprived of any knowledge of the Bible revelation, and there are those, also, who through prejudice or unbelief will not receive the testimony of God. Both of these classes of men are of necessity left to mere speculation regarding the person of God and

His creation. The theorizings of men throughout the ages have resulted in certain systems of philosophy: (1) Polytheism, with its many gods; (2) Hylozoism, which suggests that God Himself is that life principle which is found in all creation; (3) Materialism, which contends that matter is self-functioning, and toward this theory all modern evolution tends; and (4) Pantheism with its claim that matter is God and God is matter, that God is impersonal and therefore coeternal with matter.

The arguments of men by which they have attempted to prove the existence of God apart from the Scriptures are also in four classes: (1) Ontological, which contends that God must exist because men universally believe that He exists; (2) Cosmological, which contends that every effect must have its sufficient cause and therefore the universe must have a Creator; (3) Teleological, which contends that every design must have its designer, and therefore the whole creation must have a designer; and (4) Anthropological, which contends that the very existence of man as a living person is assurance that there is a living God.

The child of God turns from these human arguments to the divine revelation with a sense of relief; for in the Word of God he discovers complete and satisfying revelations concerning God and His creation. In the Scriptures there are, however, certain distinctions to be noted:

I. THE UNITY OF GOD AND THE TRINITY

The Old Testament emphasizes the unity of God in particular (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 44:6; Exod. 20:3), with intimations as to the Trinity (.Gen.. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 7:14; 9:6, 7; Psa. 2:7; Gen. 1:2; Isa. 48:12-16; 63:9, 10). The New Testament emphasizes the Trinity -- the Father, Son, and Spirit -- in particular (note Matt. 28:19; John 14:16), with intimations as to the unity of God (John 14:9; 10:30; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:15; 2:9). The Old Testament references to Deity by various names are not references to the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit unless so specified, but to these Three in One.

The fact that there are three Persons in One is a revelation which belongs to the sphere of Heaven's perfect, understanding (1 Cor. 13:12), and while we can now believe and receive all that God has said to us, these truths cannot be compressed into the limited sphere of human understanding. There is one God who subsists in a threefold personality. The Father says "I," the Son says "I," and the Spirit, also, is in every sense a person; yet these Three are not three Persons, but they are One. They are equal, and to them should be ascribed the same attributes, titles, adoration, worship, and confidence; yet they are not three Gods, but they are one God. In this divine relationship, three Persons are seen to be One; yet without blending or confounding the separateness of their infinite Beings. And in like manner, One Person is seen to be Three without a dividing of substance. The Trinity consists in three essential distinctions in the substance of the one God; yet these distinctions are presented as separate persons to the extent that the Father sends the Son into the world (John 17:18), and the Son sends the Spirit into the world (John 16:7). This procession or exercise of authority, it should be observed, is never reversed. If all this seems incomprehensible, it is only because the finite mind is unable to grasp infinite truth.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT NAMES

In the Old Testament, when referring to Deity, three primary names are used. This fact alone suggests the Trinity. These names as translated in the Authorized Version of the Bible are: "God," "LORD," and "Lord." The name LORD when printed in capital letters means Jehovah, and the name Lord when printed in small letters means Master. These primary names are often combined as LORD God, and Lord God. (The meaning of these names and all other divine titles will be found in the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible, or in any good Bible dictionary).

III. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

From the Scriptures it is revealed that there are certain qualities belonging to God. In no sense has He acquired these attributes; they are what He is, and ever has been, and ever will be, and He is the beginning or fountain source of each and all of them. God is a spirit (John 4:24), God is life (Jer. 10:10), God is self-existent (Exod. 3:14), God is infinite (Psa. 145:3), God is immutable (Psa. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17), God is truth (Deut. 32:4; John 17:3), God is love (1 John 4:8), God is eternal, (Psa. 90:2), God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:5), God is omnipresent (Psa. 139:8; Jer. 23:23, 24), God is omniscient (Psa. 147:4, 5), and God is omnipotent (Matt. 19:26).

The greatness of God cannot be fully comprehended by man, but it can at least be said that God is greater than the universe to the extent that the Creator is greater than the thing which He creates; yet His very greatness includes His ability and desire to care for the smallest detail of His creation. Not a sparrow falleth without His knowledge and by Him every hair of the head is numbered. His greatest undertaking is seen in the provisions He has made for the eternal salvation of sinners whom His infinite holiness must otherwise condemn for ever.

IV. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

God is supreme over all. He yields to no power, authority, or glory. He represents perfection to an infinite degree in every aspect of His being. He could never be surprised, defeated, or uncertain. However, without sacrificing His authority or jeopardizing the final realization of His will, it has pleased Him to release some measure of freedom of choice to men in the limited sphere of their own experience, and for its exercise He holds them responsible. The Bible states that men do not turn to God apart from the moving of His Spirit in their hearts (John 6:44; 16:7-11); yet it is declared that, on the human side, they must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Likewise, it is written that it is God who works in the believer both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13); yet He appeals to them to yield themselves to Him (Rom. 12:1, 2). Since God is supreme and since He controls the hearts and wills of men, it is necessary to believe that, when the history of the universe is completed, God's purpose and plan will have been wrought out according to His will even to the last degree. "He doeth all things well."

V. THE DECREES OF GOD

There are certain divine decrees, or undertakings, in which no other being can share; being wrought by God alone in His sovereign wisdom and power. The major decrees are: His creation, His preservation, His providence, His unconditional covenants, the dispensations, and His grace.

QUESTIONS

1. What things do we recognize by intuition?
2. Is God, even though unseen, so recognized?
3. Name various ways by which we learn more about God.
4. Compare what men know apart from the Bible revelation with that which is known through that revelation.
5. Name and describe each of the four systems of philosophy regarding the Person of God.
6. Name four general arguments by which men have sought to prove the existence of God.
7. Regarding the Unity of God and the Trinity, where in the Scriptures are these two aspects of truth especially emphasized?
8. To what conception of God do His Old Testament names generally refer?
9. Why cannot man understand the doctrine of the Trinity?
10. Give a general statement of what may be known of the Unity of God and the Trinity.
11. Give the three primary names of God found in the Old Testament.
12. Name the attributes of God.
13. Has God acquired His attributes or are they an essential part of His Eternal Person?
14. Why is it reasonable to believe that God is greater than the sum total of all that He has created?
15. What is divine sovereignty? How is it exercised in the saving of men?
16. Name the decrees of God. Why are they termed decrees?