**Who Needs Theology?**

**Class #7**

**Doctrine of God**

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

 -If God is great and good, why is there so much suffering?

 -It seems that either God is great and not good because he does not stop suffering.

 -Or God is good but not great and, therefore, cannot stop suffering.

**God is great – God is good**

-Perhaps no set of issues related to our Christian beliefs has consumed so much time, attention, and energy as the nature and attributes of God.

-Where you start (or what you emphasize) on this issue will go on to shape the rest of your theology.

-Where you start (or what you emphasize) on this issue affects numerous practical things such as “witnessing”, “how church should be done”, – (“should we stress reverence or relevance”); both sides are often bitterly opposed to the other).

**The *both/and***

-Two themes that pervade scripture, as well as historical theology.

-God is great *and* God is good.

-We accept him as Lord *and* Saviour.

1. God is “wholly” other – holy (great).

 -Transcendent.

 -Majestic.

 -Sovereign.

 -Lord.

 -Self-sufficiency = He is the source of his own being.

 -Not served by human hands.

 -Eternal.

 -All knowing.

 -Unchangeable.

 -All powerful.

 -Glorious.

 -Jealous.

 -Wrathful.

 -Vengeful.

 -Unknowable.

1 Tim. 6:15-16 *God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever*. (NIV).

Heb. 12:28-29 *Worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”* (NIV).

1. God is personal/relational and involved in creation and history (good).

 -Immanent

 -Present/never far away.

 -Guides/directs.

 -Saviour.

 -Draws us to himself.

 -Knows us.

 -Benevolent.

 -Gracious.

 -Loving.

 -Affectionate.

 -Seeks the good of all.

 -Faithful.

 -Constant.

 -Consistent.

 -Truthful.

 -Reliable.

 -Mercy.

 -Compassionate.

 -Patient.

Matt. 10:30-31 *Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; (to God) you are worth more than many sparrows.* (NIV).

Matt. 7:11 *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* (NIV).

-The both/and – God lives in unapproachable light and yet gives good gifts to his children who approach him and ask him.

“God is immanent-personal-benevolently involved as well as holy-transcendent-perfectly free and self-sufficient. Denial/neglect of either side would amount to heresy.” - Roger Olson, p. 116

-When we see one side over-emphasized we can swing too far the other way in trying to compensate and end up falling into heresy.

**Heresies**

1. Deism – overemphasizes God’s transcendence to the detriment of his immanence.

-Any view of God that portrays him as both Creator of the cosmos and relatively uninvolved and uncaring.

-Enlightenment thinking / Age of Reason.

-The watchmaker God (Isaac Newton).

-Cutting out the miracles of the Bible (Thomas Jefferson).

-Many of the American founding fathers were Deists.

1. Pantheism – overemphasizes God’s immanence to the detriment of his transcendence.

-Pantheism – (everything is God) – never been espoused in any significant way by proclaiming Christians.

1. Pan*en*theism – God and the cosmos are mutually interdependent but not identical.

-God and creation need each other.

 -Hegel – “Without the world God is not God”

 -God eternally evolves with his creation. (Process Theology).

 -God is a “fellow sufferer who understands” – not all powerful.

 -Trying to absolve God of responsibility for the horrors of genocide.

 -If God is all powerful why is there so much suffering in the world?

Conclusion

-The task of making Christian belief intelligible includes relieving paradoxes *insofar as possible.*

1. Insofar as possible we should avoid speculation about God’s inner life apart from creation.

 “We know God only in his works, not at all in himself.” (Melanchthon).

1. In his greatness God is capable of self-limitation.

 -Can God change? (Unmoved-mover or interactions with Abraham and Moses).

 -Can God suffer?

 “Strong immutability” – impassibility and inability to suffer

 “Weak immutability” – excluding impassibility and affirming the ability to suffer

 “To say that God cannot limit himself – that is, open himself up to real interaction with creatures such that they have an effect on him – seems not only contrary to divine revelation in which God is constantly interacting (to the point of being ‘grieved’) but also illogical.” - Roger Olson, p. 130

\*Summary

**God is Three – God is One**

God is one – monotheism – by virtue of the common essence or substance

God is three – by virtue of the distinction or persons within this Godhead

The Father is God, The Son is God, The Spirit is God

The Father is *not* the Son or the Spirit*.*

The Son is *not* the Father or the Spirit.

The Spirit is *not* the Father or the Son.

\*Explain diagram

TRIUNE acronym - (Augustus Hopkins Strong)

Three recognized as God

Regarded as three distinct persons

Immanent and eternal, not merely economical or temporal

United in essence

No inequality

Explains all other doctrines yet itself inscrutable

Definition:

 The trinity states that [God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God) is a [single *being*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism) who exists, simultaneously and [eternally](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternity), as three persons: [Father](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_the_Father) (the Source, the Eternal Majesty); the [Son](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son_of_God#In_the_New_Testament) (the eternal [Logos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logos) or Word, incarnate as [Jesus of Nazareth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_of_Nazareth)); and the [Holy Spirit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Spirit) (the advocate). Since the 4th Century, in both Eastern and Western Christianity, this doctrine has been stated as "One God in Three Persons," all three of whom, as distinct and co-eternal "persons" are a single Divine [essence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ousia), or being.

**Heresies**

1. Modalism – The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three distinct persons, but merely three different modes or manifestations of the single person who is God.

-God reveals himself as a Father, a Son, and a Spirit.

-Some may say that he revealed himself as a Father in the OT times, and Jesus Christ in NT times, and as the Holy Spirit in the time of the church.

-This would then say that the Father died on the cross when Jesus did since they are the same person.

-(i.e. I am a pastor, father, and husband or water illustration).

-Modern examples – “Oneness movement” within Pentecostals denominations.

 -Many of these movements baptize only in the name of Jesus.

1. Subordinationism – The Son and Spirit are lesser beings than the Father.

 -Seen in many different forms:

 -Jesus was just a righteous teacher.

(Found in a lot of liberal theology – Jesus quests you see on TV and Unitarianism – Jesus was one of the most enlightened humans).

-Adoptionism – Jesus was adopted as the “Son of God” at his baptism.

-Arianism - Jesus did pre-exist as the highest of God creation, but there was a time when he was not (i.e., Jehovah Witnesses).

-The problem of reducing Jesus from being fully God is that we are only saved by God, and if Jesus Christ is not God we are not saved.

-Jesus merely becomes a pattern of life to follow.

-Subordinationism inevitably reduces salvation to moralism if not legalism.

1. Tritheism – The Trinity is made up of three divine persons (three gods) – A council of gods, a family of gods – each god is a part of the God-head.

-This can show-up in folk religion illustrations of the Trinity like describing the Trinity to a cheesecake, egg, or an apple.

-God is one object made up of three separate parts.

 -Cheesecake, egg, apple.

-Some who overstress “the community God” can fall into this heresy.

-The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not each a part of God, but are each fully God – yet they are distinct persons.

-They are not each fully God that they are each other (modalism).

-They are not each so distinct that they do not share the same nature/essence (tritheism).

\*Summary

Augustine

 “Whoever denies the Trinity is in danger of losing his salvation; whoever tries to understand the Trinity is in danger of losing his mind.”

**Conclusion: Great – Good / Three - One**

-Right belief and confession about Jesus Christ as Trinity is absolutely crucial to a vital, mature, God-honouring Christian existence.

-Though we might not be able to explain *how* it is we must hold to what it certainly does not mean.

-We also see the danger of simply using proof-text. You can point out all the good or great or three or one passages and neglect the others (as you know if you have ever debated with a Jehovah’s Witness).

-These doctrines don’t answer all the questions, but they are trying to hold the tension as they look at the whole counsel of God’s word.

-They are putting up guardrails to protect us from leaning too far one way into heresy.

-To emphasize God’s goodness at the expense of his greatness or vise-versa.

-To emphasize God’s oneness at the expense of his three-ness or vise-versa.

-Is to run into heresy and damage our understanding of and our walk with God

**Books**

\*A.W Tozer “The Knowledge of the Holy”

\*J.I. Packer “Knowing God”

Questions

1. Do you tend to see God’s goodness or greatness more?
2. How has this affected your thinking/relationship with God?
3. Do you believe that God can suffer and/or change his mind?

 -If so, how can we say that God is complete (perfect standard) since he continues to change, suffer, and feel pain?

 -If not, how can we say that God really interacts with us and that prayer really makes a difference since God doesn’t change and has everything predetermined?

1. Do you agree with the statement that “in God’s greatness he is capable of self-limitation?” (why/why not?)
2. Have you tended to see God more as one being who puts on three different hats or as three gods who live together in a perfect community?
3. What needs to be corrected in your thinking of the Trinity to make it more orthodox?
4. Do you think our views on the Trinity matter? Why/why not?