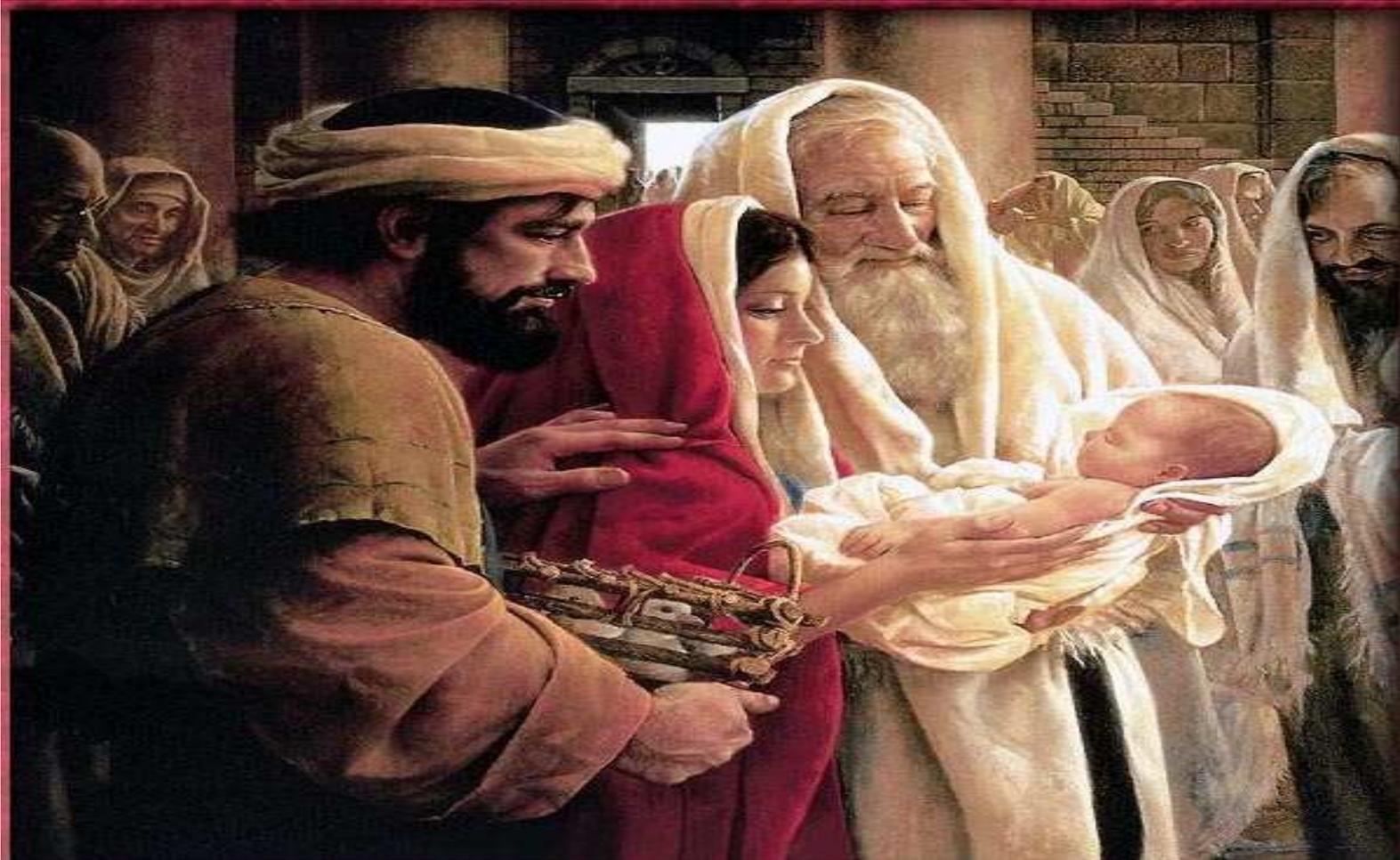


Lecture 3: Introduction to Trinity:



Lecture 3: The Trinity

- Definition and Meaning of Trinity
- Descriptions of the Trinity:
- Biblical Proofs used for the Trinity:
- Illustrations of the Trinity

Definition of Trinity

*Dallas Theological Seminary Catalogue,
2000-2001, pg. 155*

We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit-and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes, and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence, and obedience (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 12:29; Jn. 1:14; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:4-6).

The Meaning of the Word “Trinity”

The Word “Trinity” means that God is a triunity: He is a plurality within unity. God has a plurality of persons and a unity of essence; God is three persons in one nature.

Essential Elements of Trinity:

- “Trinity” is never used in Bible but it is considered to be the best explication of the biblical evidence.
- Elements of the Trinity:
 - 1. God is One.
 - 2. Each of the persons within the Godhead is Deity.
 - 3. The oneness of God and the threeness of God are not contradictory.
 - 4. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal.
 - 5. Each of the persons of God is one of the same essence and is not inferior or superior to the others in essence.
 - 6. The Trinity is ultimately mystery that goes beyond our realm of understanding.

False Views: Modalism & Tritheism:

- **Modalism:** Also called sabellianism after its founder in 217-220, Sabellius, Modalism holds that God is only one person who appears in different modes or roles at different times in the divine economy.
- **Tritheism:** the belief that there are three gods or three separate beings in the Godhead. Few, if any, have held this view consciously, though unwittingly many have fallen into it verbally by their incautious language about the Godhead.

Descriptions of the Trinity:

- There is only one “What” (essence) in God, but there are three “Whos” (persons) in that one “What.”
- God has three “I’s” in His One “It”.
- There are three “Subjects” in one “Object.”

Descriptions of the Trinity:

- There is only one “What” (essence) in God, but there are three “Whos” (persons) in that one “What.”
- God has three “I’s” in His One “It”.
- There are three “Subjects” in one “Object.”

Biblical Proofs of the Trinity:

- God is One: Deuteronomy 6:4; cf. 20:2-3; 3:13-15; 1 Tim. 1:17; cf. 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; James 2:19
- Triunity within Godhead:
 - Father: Psalm 2:7; 1 Peter 1:2; cf. John 1:17; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:11
 - Son: Psalm 2:7 cf. Heb. 1:1-13; Psalm 68:18; Isaiah 6:1-3; 9:6; Matt. 3:16-17; Revelation 1; Revelation 4-5;
 - Holy Spirit: Genesis 1:1-2 cf. Exod. 31:3; Judges 15:14; Isaiah 11:2; Acts 5:3-4 cf. 2 Cor. 3:17.

Illustrations of the Trinity:

- Though no illustration of the Trinity is perfect, some are more biblical (and helpful) than others:
 - The following are *poor illustrations* because they tend to imply modalism or tritheism:
 - Three States of Water;
 - Three Links in a Chain;
 - Human body, soul, and spirit.

Illustrations of the Trinity:

- Though no illustration of the Trinity is perfect, some are more biblical (and helpful) than others:
 - The following are *better illustrations* because three different elements exist in an undivided oneness at the same time:
 - A Triangle.
 - One to the Third Power.
 - God is love (1 John 4:16).
 - Mind, ideas, and Words.

Poor Illustrations of the Trinity:

- Three States of Water:

One popular used and bad illustration of the Trinity is one that teaches that the Trinity is like water, which has three states (solid, liquid, and gas).

The problem with this is that no given drop of water is in all three states at the same time (there is a state where different drops of water in various stages of solid, liquid, and gas at the same time. But this would not illustrate trinitarianism, where one and the same drop to be in all three states at the same time). Yet God is both three and one at the same time. So despite the good intentions, this illustration implies the heresy of modalism (that God has one essence but is not three distinct persons).

Poor Illustrations of the Trinity:

- Three Links in a Chain:

Trinity is a three-link chain. The problem here is that the links are three different things. So in spite of whatever good motivations there may be behind it, what is being illustrated is tritheism, not trinitarianism. God is only one thing (substance), not three different ones joined together in some way.

Poor Illustrations of the Trinity:

- Human Body, Soul, and Spirit:

God is like man, who has body, soul, and spirit and yet is one. Even apart from the implied trichotomy, one problem with this is that the human soul and body separate at death. The members of the Godhead are inseparable. Further, God, has no body-He is pure Spirit (John 4:24).

Better Illustrations of the Trinity:

- A Triangle:

God is like a triangle, which is one figure yet has three different sides at the same time—there is a simultaneous threeness in the oneness. Of course, no analogy is perfect, since in every analogy there is a similarity and a difference. The difference here is that “corners” are not persons. Nonetheless, they do illustrate how there can be a “threeness” and a oneness at the same time.

Better Illustrations of the Trinity:

- One to the Third Power: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$.

God is three ones in One; He is not $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$.

That is the heresy of tritheism, which holds three different gods, not just one God.

Better Illustrations of the Trinity:

- Love is Trifold:

“God is love” (1 John 4:16), and love involves three elements: a lover, a beloved, and a spirit of love. These three are one. One advantage of this example is that it has a personal dimension, in that love is something only a person does.

Better Illustrations of the Trinity:

- Mind, Ideas, and Words:

God is like the relation between my mind, my ideas, and my words. They are all distinct, yet they are united, for one's words cannot be separated from his ideas, and his mind behind them. What is the essence?