

Glimpses of God Lesson 1 1Q 2012

Merry Christmas and what a great topic to start this Christmas weekend –

The Triune God

Thoughts or questions about this topic?

Have you heard questions about this? Have you heard the resurgence of those in the church or argue against the Trinity?

What arguments have you heard?

- There is no Trinity
- Jesus is not fully God
- Jesus is a created being
- Jesus came after the Father
- The Holy Spirit is only God's Spirit and extension of the Father
- The word Trinity doesn't exist in scripture
- The Trinity is a Roman Catholic belief
- The Bible doesn't teach the Trinity
- The Trinity was infused into Christianity from paganism specifically Babylon

What evidence have you heard to support the position that the Trinity does not exist?

The truth can afford to be fair and loses nothing by close investigation, so we should be willing to look at any evidence. There are three general arguments against the trinity, none of which provide evidence:

- Quotations from other theologians who wrote statements that the Bible doesn't teach the Trinity
- Documentation from history that certain pagan religions had a trinity

- Statements from history that at times in history the Trinity was not taught or understood

I actually have seen any evidence which would document the non-divinity of Christ or the Holy Spirit. So, let's look at the evidence we do have and see where it leads us.

The first question is about Christ, is He fully God, equal with the Father or some lesser being?

This is Christmas weekend, what famous text comes to mind?

Isaiah 9:6:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Who was born? Was it not Jesus? Would this text teach Jesus is less than God or fully God?

What about other Biblical Evidence?

- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him... No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. John 1:1-3, 10, 18

What do you hear this text saying? The Word was God, who created, and became flesh – we have two entities – the Word and God. One who remained in heaven, the other who came to earth.

Who was the Word that became flesh? Jesus, and Jesus was with God from the beginning and it was through Jesus that all things were made:

- For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col 1:16,17

Wouldn't this mean Jesus Himself is Creator God? Jesus did claim to be God:

- "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" John 8:58
- I and the Father are one." John 10:30

The Apostles recognized Jesus as God:

- Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:28
- We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1John 5:20

So here we find in the New Testament, from the Apostles and Jesus' own testimony, that Jesus and the Father are both God.

One of the founders of the SDA church also understood Jesus was fully God:

- Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father,--**one in nature, in character, in purpose**,--the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. "**His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace**" (Isa. 9:6). His

- "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).--Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 34. {7ABC 437.2}
- The Jews had never before heard such words from human lips, and a convicting influence attended them; for it seemed that **divinity flashed through humanity** as Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he **put forth the claim that he and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes.**--The Signs of the Times, Nov. 27, 1893, p. 54. {7ABC 437.3}
 - Yet **the Son of God was the acknowledged Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father.**--The Great Controversy, p. 495. {7ABC 437.4}
 - "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). It is not physical life that is here specified, but immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God. The Word, who was with God, and who was God, had this life. Physical life is something which each individual receives. It is not eternal or immortal; for God, the Life-giver, takes it again. Man has no control over his life. **But the life of Christ was unborrowed.** No one can take this life from Him. "I lay it down of myself" (John 10:18), He said. **In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived.** This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift if he will believe in Christ as His personal Saviour. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). This is the open fountain of life for the world. {1SM 296.2}

In the setting of the Great Controversy over God's law and character of love, why is it important to know Jesus is God, and what problems do we have if we suggest Jesus is not fully God?

- What were the allegations Satan made against God in heaven? Our church has historically understood the conflict as follows:
 - Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation. The Scripture says, "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." Ezekiel 28:17. "Thou hast said in thine heart, . . . I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will be like the Most High." Isaiah 14:13, 14. Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself. Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator. Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavor to secure their service and loyalty to himself. **And coveting the glory with which the infinite Father had invested His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power that was the prerogative of Christ alone.** {PP 35.2}
 - **To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator, had become the purpose of this prince of angels.** To this object he was about to bend the energies of that master mind, which, next to Christ's, was first among the hosts of God. But He who would have the will of all His creatures free, left none unguarded to the bewildering sophistry by which rebellion would seek to justify itself. Before the great contest should open, all were to have a clear presentation of His will, whose wisdom and goodness were the spring of all their joy. {PP 36.1}
 - The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him, that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. **The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One**

encircled both. About the throne gathered the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng--"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5:11.), the most exalted angels, as ministers and subjects, rejoicing in the light that fell upon them from the presence of the Deity. **Before the assembled inhabitants of heaven the King declared that none but Christ, the Only Begotten of God, could fully enter into His purposes, and to Him it was committed to execute the mighty counsels of His will.** The Son of God had wrought the Father's will in the creation of all the hosts of heaven; and to Him, as well as to God, their homage and allegiance were due. Christ was still to exercise divine power, in the creation of the earth and its inhabitants. But in all this He would not seek power or exaltation for Himself contrary to God's plan, but would exalt the Father's glory and execute His purposes of beneficence and love. {PP 36.2}

- The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as the gift of God and called forth no gratitude to the Creator. He gloried in his brightness and exaltation, and aspired to be equal with God. He was beloved and revered by the heavenly host. Angels delighted to execute his commands, and he was clothed with wisdom and glory above them all. Yet the Son of God was the acknowledged Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father. **In all the councils of God, Christ was a participant, while Lucifer was not permitted thus to enter into the divine purposes. "Why," questioned this mighty angel, "should Christ have the supremacy? Why is He thus honored above Lucifer?"** The Great Controversy, p. 495.

What are the allegations of Lucifer in heaven?

That God is unfair, arbitrary, plays favorites, doesn't love His creatures equally, biased, bigoted, prejudiced, because Christ was chosen over Lucifer to enter counsels of the Father.

Now, consider these allegations and then the question of whether Christ is fully God or not?

- If Christ is fully God, then what do you conclude of all of Lucifer's allegations?
- But, if Christ, is, as some suggest, less than fully God, what of Lucifer's allegations?

So if you believe there is a controversy over God's character and trustworthiness, then it appears, that those who argue that Christ is less than fully God, ignorantly support one of Satan's allegations against God.

What other problems exist if Christ is not fully God?

- God is selfish
- What do we learn of God, if God sends a created being to earth to die to save mankind?
 - That God is willing to sacrifice others, but He is not willing to sacrifice Himself.
 - We learn an angel is loving but God, we still don't know??
 - Our church has always understood this was another of Satan's arguments against God:
 - **“Satan had accused God of requiring self-denial of the angels, when he knew nothing of what it meant himself, and when he would not himself make any self-sacrifice for others. This was the accusation that Satan made against God in heaven;** and after the evil one was expelled from heaven, he continually charged the Lord with exacting service which he would not render himself. **Christ came to the world to meet these**

false accusations, and to reveal the Father.”
Review and Herald, February 18, 1890

- In the work of creation, Christ was with God. He was one with God, equal with him, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person, the representative of the Father. He alone, the Creator of man, could be his Saviour. **No angel of heaven could reveal the Father to the sinner, and win him back to allegiance to God. But Christ could manifest the Father's love; for God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.** {ST, February 13, 1893 par. 7}
- **Had God the Father come** to our world and dwelt among us, veiling His glory and humbling Himself, that humanity might look upon Him, **the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed** in unfolding its record of His own condescending grace. **In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God.** In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father. Letter 83, 1895.
- So, why might Satan want people to argue that Christ is not fully God?
 - Because it supports his two great allegations
 - That God is arbitrary in choosing Christ into counsels that Lucifer was not permitted to enter, AND
 - That God is selfish, willing to sacrifice others but will not sacrifice Himself for His creatures.

Realizing Christ is fully God destroys these allegations of the devil.

Questions about Jesus' divinity?

If you accept Jesus as God, then the Trinity becomes easy, because now we have Jesus (God in human form) who taught there was a third member of the Godhead called the Comforter, Counselor or Holy Spirit:

- “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept *him*, because it neither sees *him* nor knows *him*. But you know *him*, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14:15-17
- But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26
- “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, *he* will testify about me. John 15:26

One of the founders of our church also taught the divinity of the Holy Spirit:

- In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart... The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail... Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the **Third Person of the Godhead**, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church. {DA 671.2}

- **There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit--**those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ.-- Evangelism, p. 615. {7ABC 441.9}

Now what of the Old Testament? Does it teach the Trinity?

We already read Isaiah 9:6, the child born is “mighty God”.

The Old Testament teaches God is a plurality, not a singularity:

- Then God said, “Let **us** make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness... Genesis 1:26

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Even the text quoted by Jews and Muslims that “God is one” teaches a plurality, not a singularity:

- Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: DT 6:4
 - Notice the passage in English uses “Lord” and “God”. The reading of this passage with the Hebrew names for “Lord” and “God” would go like this: “Hear, O Isreal: *Yahweh* our *Elohim*, *Yahweh* is One.”
 - What is interesting is that the word *Elohim* in Hebrew is plural and is the same word used for God in Genesis 1:26. Thus an accurate English reading might go like this: “The One is more than One yet is One”
 - Further support is that in the Hebrew there are two words for one, *Yacheed* and *Echad*. The first indicates singular unity as in one and only, the second indicates compound unity, as the oneness of two or more. In this text *Echad* is used along with the plural name of God *Elohim* indicating the oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament also provides texts in which all members of the Godhead are referenced:

- And now the **Sovereign Lord [Father]** has sent **me [Son]**, with his **Spirit [Holy Spirit]**. This is what the Lord says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: Isaiah 48:16,17
- “Here is **my [Father] servant [Son]**, whom **I [Father]** uphold, **my [Father] chosen one [Son]** in whom **I [Father]** delight; **I [Father]** will put my **Spirit [Holy Spirit]** on **him [Son]** and **he [Son]** will bring justice to the nations. Isaiah 42:1

The Old Testament teaches the close love relationship between them:

- Awake, O sword, against **my [Father] shepherd [Son]**, and against the man **that is my [Father] fellow [Son]**, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. Zech 13:7 KJV
 - The Man who is my friend NCV
 - The Man who is close to me NIV
- **Then I [Christ] was the craftsman at his [Father] side. I [Son] was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his [Father] presence, rejoicing in his [Father] whole world and delighting in mankind. Proverbs 8:30 NIV**
 - I was beside him like an architect, I was his daily source of joy, always happy in his presence-Proverbs 8:30 GN
 - Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, NASB95

So, it seems the Bible gives strong evidence for the plurality of our One God, supporting the idea that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a perfect unity of three separate individualities.

But, for me all the above evidence is not what is most compelling. The most compelling evidence for me that God exists in plurality rather than singularity is the nature and character of God Himself.

The Bible says, “God is love.” 1John 4:8. Further the Bible teaches that this love is “not self seeking.” 1Corinthians 13:5. Love is outward moving, other-centered. Therefore, God, being love, could not be love in isolation because love requires an object to pour itself upon.

Love is other-centered! God’s nature and character of love, rightly understood, is the most powerful argument for the plurality of God and we see this in the Old Testament texts above as the Father is delighting in the Son and the Son rejoicing in the Father and the Spirit loving them both.

Therefore, when God created us in His image He created “them male and female” and the “two shall become one” united in a triune relationship – husband, wife and God indwelling their hearts via His Spirit!

Satan from the beginning of his rebellion, has sought to misrepresent the character of God, and make God out to be selfish rather than love. The arguments that seek to destroy the truth about the plurality of the Godhead seek to destroy the truth about God’s character of love and, in so doing, place an obstacle to the only healing remedy for sin: God’s “perfect love [that] casts out all fear.”

As we see the truth about God, as revealed in Jesus, the lies about Him are removed and we are won to trust and in that trust He pours His love (Himself) into our hearts (Romans 5:5) and we are transformed to be like Him!

Questions?

Some suggest, based on Jesus' prayers to His Father and other statements, that Jesus is subordinate to the Father and thus not His equal. What would you say to this argument?

First, many of the statements when Jesus prayed to His Father, were being made from His human self, during His journey on earth, while He wrought out our remedy to sin. As such, He assumed a position, lower than the angels, and from that position He fought the fight over sinfulness.

Elsewhere, in regard to His divine nature and that of the Godhead, the way I understand it, (recognizing of course that our finite minds are trying to probe the Infinite One so we will inevitably come up short of complete understanding), is that the Godhead voluntarily assumes different roles or functions for the accomplishments of Their purposes (a loving way all share together in giving for Their creation). Any of the three could have assumed any of the functions. We would err in concluding that when one of the three assumes a function that He was not capable of functioning in the role of one of the others.

As I understand their chosen roles, the Father acts as the source of all that is good. The Son is the medium, mediator, advocate, conduit, agent through which the Father reveals Himself or acts and the Holy Spirit is the actualizer or applicer of what the Father and Son have achieved. Thus God was in the Son reconciling the world to Himself (2Cor 5:19). Jesus' work on earth was the acting out of the Father's heart. His completed mission and victory over sin are applied to the lives of believers by the work of the Holy Spirit. In creation we have the Father as the source, the Son as the architect, designer, and builder and the Spirit as the actualizer or implementer of Their design.

So, with this understanding we realize what Christ meant when He said, "I do nothing of myself." Christ takes from the Father to fulfill all the Father's purposes for His universe. In this sense we can see any references to Christ turning to the

Father and supplicating the Father, not as evidence of the need of the Father to be persuaded, but as evidence of the unity of the Godhead and Christ's role to receive the fullness of the Father's purpose of love for His creation and carry that purpose out in meaningful action!

THURSDAY

Read third and fourth paragraph, "Of special..." thoughts?

They are right to argue for the full divinity of Christ – no question, but their argument regarding the plan of salvation is within the framework of Imperial Rome's Imposed Law construct, which distorts the character of God.

If Christ were not fully God then, His mission doesn't inform us God is love, but of the love of a created being, and instead suggests, if not confirms Satan's allegations that God is selfish sacrificing a creature instead of Himself. Further, only the Designer, could perfectly correct all the defects to His design and restore His template of love into mankind.

But the need to restore His creation is not understood if one accepts Imperial Rome's Imposed law. Instead, one believes a penalty needs to be paid.

The lesson states, "If Christ were not fully God, then all we have is the Lord shifting the punishment for our sins from one party to another, as opposed to taking them upon Himself."

Problems with this thinking:

- Sin requires punishment be inflicted
- God becomes the punisher of sin
- Punishment is still shifted from one being to another, just not one sinful being to another sinful being
- The focus is not our condition, but our behaviors or crimes and God's attitude toward those behaviors, which is one of punishment and wrath

The next paragraph states, “Think about it: if Jesus were merely a created being, and not fully God, how could He – as a creature bear God’s full wrath against sin?”

- Yes think about it- what is the problem in their estimation?
 - God’s wrath, which must be borne by Christ
 - What did one of the founders of our church say?
 - In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. **Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan**; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice. DA 761
 - While **God has desired to teach men that from His own love comes the Gift which reconciles them to Himself, the archenemy of mankind has endeavored to represent God as one who delights in their destruction.** Thus the sacrifices and the ordinances **designed of Heaven to reveal divine love have been perverted to serve as means whereby sinners have vainly hoped to propitiate, with gifts and good works, the wrath of an offended God.** PK 685.

Read next paragraph, “Were Jesus not divine...” thoughts?

How are they using the word “atone”? Does it sound like they mean at-one, unity, unify, or instead does it sound like appease, punish, propitiate, pay some penalty?

What are your thoughts about this construct? Any truth in the idea that the law needed to be “atoned” for?

If a parent tells a child never to use illegal drugs, and as an adolescent the child is at a party, in which all the kids bring pills, put them in a bowl, and everyone randomly ingests pills from the bowl. And this child takes a combination of pills which cause loss of consciousness, arrhythmia, seizure and pulmonary edema – and the child is rushed to the ER and is in the ICU on a ventilator.

- Did the child break any laws?
- What laws did the child break?
- Which laws were God's and which were man's?
- What does man's law require?
- What happens when God's law is broken?
- Does God's broken law need to be appeased?
- Does a penalty need to be paid to the broken law of health?

What if the parent went to the ICU and shot themselves to atone for their child's breaking of the laws of health? Would that solve the child's problem?

What is the child's problem? They violated the laws of health and that violation is incompatible with life and the child is dying. What would solve the problem?

What is our problem since Adam's sin? We are actually out of harmony with the law God built life to operate upon. Does God's law need to be paid, or atoned for? What does need to happen?

Would the parent in the story be wrathful at the disobedient child? As the disobedient child is seizing, frothing at the mouth, would the parent need to shoot the child to ensure justice is served?

Would the parent hate, not the child, but the breaking in the laws of health that the child engaged in and which are now destroying the child?

What does God hate? Sin, which is violations of His design for life. Why does God hate sin? Because sin destroys His creation, that which He loves!

Think about the implications of appeasing or propitiating God's wrath – it means somehow God's wrath is placated – but is it? No! God will always be wrathful – to sin, like a doctor is wrathful to disease! God wants to destroy sin, like a doctor wants to destroy disease.

Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah, I will get relief from my foes and **avenge myself on my enemies.** ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you; **I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.** Isaiah 1:24,25

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to **bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,** ² to proclaim the **year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,** ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion— **to bestow on them a crown of beauty** instead of ashes, **the oil of gladness** instead of mourning, and **a garment of praise** instead of a spirit of despair. Isa 61:1-3

What is the vengeance of God? Turning enemies into friends – His vengeance is not on sinners but on sinfulness. He attacks and destroys sin! This is His vengeance which purges and cleanses the sinner! The greatest vengeance God can have on Satan is healing and restoring all those who trust Him!

The last paragraph states, “our assurance of salvation through what Christ has done for us – and not through our own works – comes from the fact that God Himself paid the penalty for our sins.”

Thoughts?