

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 2016

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED: UNITARIANS

Unitarianism is historically a Christian theological movement named for the affirmation that God is one entity, in direct contrast to Trinitarianism, which defines Gods as three persons in one being. (from: *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*). Webster defines a Unitarian as "One who believes that God exists only in one person."

Brain Holt, in his book *Jesus God or the Son of God* wrote: "For those who have only a passing interest in the discussion (of the Trinity), one may wonder whether it really matters what we believe as long as we believe in Jesus and accept him as our personal savior. It is understandable that one may have that viewpoint, since confrontation and debates are certainly not enjoyable and in reality, seldom productive. Yet, we must realize that the identity of God is the most important subject that can be discussed in the religious arena. If the God we pray to does not exist, it can hardly matter what else we do or do not believe. In fact, the Bible condemns those who so easily put up with someone who preaches a Jesus other than the one it preaches (II Cor. 11:4) Does it matter how much we 'love' Jesus if we do not believe his own words about who he is, if we do not have an accurate knowledge of God? (see Romans 10:2). Thus, rather than have a casual interest in this subject, delve into it deeply and be certain who you believe is 'the only true God' (John 17:3, I Cor. 8:6)."

The common defense of the trinity is it cannot be explained or understood, but we are to believe it despite this. As Steve Berg stated in *Christianity Today* "The trinity can't be explained, it is mysterious, it can't be understood but that doesn't make it untrue." Deuteronomy 29:29 states "the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." God's word is a "revelation" and many things that are said to be a "mystery" are explained in the context in which they are written. So there are no longer any "mysteries" that cannot be understood. And the trinity is never said to be a "mystery." In fact, the trinity is never mentioned in Scripture and God is never said to be a "triune" God. He is always referred as being One. We are commanded many times to know and understand the things which have been revealed. We "have received the Spirit from God that we might know the things freely given us by God" (I Cor. 2:12). If God has revealed Himself in his son, to make it something mysterious, complicated and unable to understand is a contradiction of God's revelation in Scripture. They can't explain or understand it because it is a confusing doctrine based upon man made creeds and not the Scripture.

During the first three centuries after Jesus' crucifixion, the idea of the Savior separate from God and subordinate to Him was the accepted doctrine of the church. There was no doctrine of the trinity taught or believed in the early church. Perhaps the reason for this is it is not in the Scriptures. The year was about 319. In a meeting of the presbyters (priests) in Alexander, the "Bishop" of Alexander, coincidentally named "Alexander," began to lecture on

the theological mystery of the "Holy Trinity." One of the presbyters, Arius, a native of Libya, dropped a bombshell in Alexander's meeting by announcing "If the Father begot the son, then he who was begotten had a beginning in existence, and from that follows there was a time when the son was not." Arius gained a following which was destined to shake not only the professing church but the entire Roman Empire and result in a conflict so fierce that intense persecutions from both sides gripped the entire civilized world.

Most theological teachers today look upon any doctrine akin to Arius as heretical and blasphemous. This means that in most church circles today to not believe in the trinity is to deny that Jesus was the son of God and make him a mere man on the level of other men. So as in Arius' day anyone who is not a Trinitarian is also labeled heretical and blasphemous. To deny the trinity is said to deny the "Deity" of Christ. The word "Deity" appears only one time in the New Testament (translated "Godhead" in the KJV). The phrase "Deity of Christ" is not in the Bible. Colossians 2:9: "For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." This means the fullness of God (the Deity) dwells in him. Further: "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him" (Col. 1:19). This fact does not make him God. In Ephesians 3:19 Paul is concerned that the Ephesian Christians "may be filled with all the fullness of God" (this does not make them God) and in Colossians 2:10 he states "And in him you have been made full."

Back to the effect of the meeting in Alexander on the church and the Roman world. The quarreling and contention among the two arguing sides which erupted into physical battles and persecutions came to the attention of Emperor Constantine, said to be the first "Christian" emperor, who decided in the year 318 to put an end to the controversy by convening a council of Bishops. The small town of Nicea was chosen and it was Constantine's aim to not only put an end to the quarreling but establish a standardized creed which would bring about some unity of faith to the church. According to Norman P. Tanner in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* the council of 318 "Bishops" opened June 19th in the presence of the emperor, but it is uncertain who presided over the council. The aim of Constantine to present a creed that would foster unity of the faith did not work out as planned. From the beginning of the session of the developers of the creed there was much division in theology on the Godhead. The Emperor Constantine had ordered the council of Nicea to resolve the difference in theology on the Godhead. The council developed into a heated battle that ended in a victory for the Trinitarians. The Trinitarian position was to strengthen the Trinitarian conceptions. No other views were allowed. St Augustine, a century later, developed this teaching into a doctrine of the trinity, in which all three persons were separate personalities, were all co-equal and co-eternal. It is sad to see a belief held so sacred today by the majority of Christians was actually given birth by quarreling "bishops," a questionable creed and a Roman Emperor who knew little about the teaching of Scripture, and who continued, after his conversion, to worship his "Sun god." The Nicean creed, which establishes the belief in the trinity is in itself ridiculous. The majority of religious people who avidly believe in the trinity do not know where it came from and

certainly do not know any of the content of the creed. Neither do the elite clergy who preach it as if it came directly from the Bible. Note the description of Jesus from the creed: "The son of God begotten from the Father, only begotten, that is, from the *ousia* (substance) of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, *homoousios* (same substance) with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made." (brackets mine). Add to this words of the Athanasian creed which came a little later: (From *The Catholic Encyclopedia*) "The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal." How could such confusing words become the basis of Christian belief held by so many sincere people? Compare the words of the creeds with John 17:3: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

The doctrine of the trinity has been preached, believed, and practiced for over 1700 years. Does this not make it credible and Biblical? Anthony Buzzard wrote in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*: "The trinity has lasted as long as it has because of *oppression*. The Church with the state to back it up obliterated anyone who opposed any so-called orthodox doctrines. They also destroyed any writings of books that opposed their views." A good example of this fact is the death of Michael Servetus, a Spanish physician and theologian, who as one of the first Protestants to challenge the Trinity, was burned at the stake in 1553 at the instigation of the Protestant reformer John Calvin. If the Trinitarian formula created in the fourth century was of the Holy Spirit, why did it produce centuries of hatred and bloodshed? Times have changed. Today to not believe in the trinity one is branded as a Jehovah's Witness and looked upon as denying the Word of God, and Christians continue to blindly depend upon pastors and church creeds, and tradition for infallible truth, which we are expected to accept without question. It is evident that today's elite and esteemed religious leaders do not take seriously any efforts to deal with the question of the trinity. The fact is these religious perpetuators of the accepted norm do not take seriously any effort to verify their belief in the trinity. This is seen in some of the silly and inane ways preachers try to explain the trinity. Common expressions are: "The trinity is like water, ice and steam, different but the same." Try this one: "it is like cherry pie, top crust, bottom crust and the filling." Or "it is like an egg, the shell, the white and the yolk." The common expression "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit" is nowhere found in Scripture and Jesus never indicated that he was God. It seems that if this concept were true it would be mentioned at least once in the Scriptures, and quoted numerous times by the Apostles in their Epistles.

We will note some common arguments used by Trinitarians and later look at several Scriptures they say teach the Trinitarian position.

Jesus was God because he could do things no man could do. Answer: The gospels record many miracles Jesus did. He healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the multitudes, walked on water,

raised the dead and other miracles we will not mention. Jesus did none of his mighty works because he was God. However, we are told how he was able to do them: Acts 10:38: "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with him." Jesus himself tells us the source of his power: Luke 4:18: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives. And recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are down-trodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." It was because God anointed His sinless son with the Holy Spirit and power and because God was with him that he could do these things. Here are two passages which tell us how Jesus could do his mighty works, and neither of them mention that he could do them because he was God. If these things were things "that only God could do" why did Jesus say to the Apostles: "He who believes in me the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father" (John 14:12). In the book of Acts we see this coming to pass.

Jesus was God because he forgave sins and only God can forgive sins (Luke 5:21). Answer: I find it strange that Trinitarians use the same reasoning the Scribes and Pharisees used. They were offended when Jesus forgave a man's sin and said, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus' answer is the opposite of that argument. He said, "in order that you might know that the 'son of man' has authority on earth to forgive sin..." Jesus was a sinless man, born of a virgin, son of God, yet flesh, and thus he had power to act on God's behalf. Note also John 20:22, 23: "and when he said this he breathed on them and said 'receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven, if you retain the sin of any, they have been retained.'" Were these men God? They were human beings, yet Jesus says through the Holy Spirit (his presence in them) they would have the power to bind and loose on earth (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). They would become his representatives. If this is true, why can't we take Jesus at his word: "the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins?"

Jesus is pictured as the coming Judge (Matthew 13:41-43, 25:31-46, II Thessalonians. 1:7-9) Only God can judge, therefore Jesus is God. Answer: John 5:22, 27: "for not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the son...and He gave him authority to execute judgment because he is the son of man." Why cannot the son of God, being sinless, do what God has given him authority to do? Further: Matthew 19:28: "...when the son of man will sit on his glorious throne, you shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Are they God? Also: I Corinthians. 6:2, 3: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world...do you not know we will judge angels?" Are we God? In dealing with a sinning man in Corinth, Paul stated: "I although absent from the body and present in spirit have already judged him who has committed this, as though I were present." (I Cor. 5:3).

Some questions for meditation: Is the trinity in harmony with God's word? Who is the only true God according to scripture? Did Jesus or his followers teach the trinity? Is Jesus Christ Almighty God? Who is the Father according to scripture? What is the Holy Spirit according to scripture? Are these important questions?

To be Continue next month