

We Believe: Foundations of the Christian Faith

Session 1: The Trinity - God the Father

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Why this course?

The need for Christian catechesis

- Catechesis - “to sound down,” teaching and instruction in the faith and initiation into the Christian journey of discipleship
- Catechesis provides believers with the essential foundations of faith
 - Doctrine
 - Ethics
 - Practices
- A measuring stick for Christian doctrine, faith, and life vs. false teaching and practice
- Connection to Christian believers across time and space

Sources of Christian Catechesis

General Sources

- General Sources:
 - The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament - contain all things necessary for salvation
 - The Nicene and Apostles' Creeds - early witness of the Church
 - Ethics: The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount
 - Practices: Core disciplines of the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments
 - Ecumenical catechisms and confessions of faith

Sources of Christian Catechesis

Methodist Sources

- The Articles of Religion - adapted from the Church of England (from 39 articles to 25 articles)
- The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren - contains more Wesleyan distinctives
- The Sermons of John Wesley - instruction in Wesleyan theology and practice
- Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old and New Testaments - inform Wesleyan biblical hermeneutics

We Believe

Course Objectives

- Provide an overview of the basic Christian doctrines on the Trinity, Scripture, Salvation, the Sacraments, and the Church along with some distinctive Wesleyan understandings and practices relating to these doctrines
- Provide a measuring stick for participants to compare historic and orthodox Christian doctrine to the claims of other unorthodox versions of Christianity
- Enable participants to say hear the Scriptures, say the Creeds, and participate in the Sacraments in worship with greater understanding and purpose

The Trinity: God the Father

Creeds and the Trinity

Statement of the Christian understanding of God

- The Nicene and Apostles' Creeds are primarily focused on the doctrine of the Trinity
- They each have a Trinitarian format - We believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit - one God in three persons
- The doctrine of the Trinity is also primarily a doctrine about Jesus, whom Christians believe to be an equal part of the Godhead with the Father and the Spirit
- Metaphors for the Trinity often fall short
- In the Trinity we embrace both reality and mystery - God as one-in-three, three-in-one

The Articles of Religion

Article I

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost

The Confession of Faith

Article I

We believe in the one true, holy, and living God, Eternal Spirit, who is Creator, Sovereign, and Preserver of all things visible and invisible. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and love, and rules with gracious regard for the well-being and salvation of men, to the glory of his name. We believe the one God reveals himself as the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, distinct but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power.

“The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith; with all vital religion.”

John Wesley, Sermon 55, “On the Trinity”

Key Notes on the Trinity

The ground of the Christian understanding of God

- There is only one God, who exists in three persons
- The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all of the same “substance” - all are God individually and collectively
- The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Scriptures, but the teaching and presence of the Trinity is present throughout
- Attempts to explain the Trinity often lead to heresy. It is a reality to be believed rather than fully explained

God the Father

God the Father in the Creeds

- Nicene Creed
 - We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
- Apostles' Creed
 - I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Why “Father?”

A statement of relationship

- God is not a force, an “it” but a person
- God is not understood as a solitary figure, but as one who is in relationship
- God is eternally the Father of Jesus Christ
- Jesus refers to him as Father
- God is not gendered, but his relationship with us is as initiator, protector, provider, savior, and judge
- Other terms are used for God, but we cannot reject the image of God as Father because of “the patriarchy” or because of connotations to our earthly fathers

The Almighty

Power, Strength, Authority, and Might

- “Father” and “Almighty” denote a God who is all powerful, but exercises that power in a way that reveals his love, compassion, and care
- We believe that God is:
 - Omnipotent - all powerful
 - Omniscient - all knowing
 - Omnipresent - present everywhere

Maker of Heaven and Earth

God as Creator

- While “Father” is something God *is*, creating is something the Father God *does*
- Genesis 1:1 - “in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...”
- Psalm 102:25-26 - “Long ago you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure.”
- Our existence is dependent upon God, the source and sustainer of life
- God creates human beings in his image to be stewards of creation. Psalm 8
- God’s posture toward creation is love

Misunderstandings of God the Father

A look at common heresies

- Deism - God created the world and then stepped away from it, no longer intervening in its affairs
- Gnosticism - A evil, ignorant, malevolent god fashioned the material universe (a demiurge, equated with the God of the Old Testament) while a different God sent Christ to save humankind from the demiurge's evil world
- Marcionism - believed the Old Testament is not authoritative and denied that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament
- Naturalism - Material universe came into being through natural processes with no need for a creator

Key Affirmations in Christian Doctrine

The goodness of God and the goodness of Creation

- God created the world out of love, and created humans out of love to tend it and to be in relationship with him
- Christians affirm the goodness of the material world as God's good creation
- Christians affirm the goodness and sacredness of the human body as being designed and created by God
- The same God who created the world is the same God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ
- Salvation is not just for human beings but for the whole creation (Romans 8)

Quiz Time! Holy or Heresy?

Evaluate each statement:

- Instead of using patriarchal terms like Father, Son, and Spirit to describe the Trinity, we can substitute them for more inclusive terms like Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.
- The Trinity is like a hot cherry pie, where on the surface crust there are three pieces but underneath it all runs together.
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when needed to solve a problem.
- Although in redemption terms God is the Father only of those who are in Christ, and we are his children only by adoption and grace, yet in creation terms God is the Father of all humankind, and all are his offspring, his creature, receiving their life from him.

Questions?