

Spiritual Implications of The Trinitarian Doctrine



Why is the Trinity a matter of such discussion? Some have made it a divisive argument, which separates fellowships and churches. Creation Seventh Day Adventists are not quite at that level of dogmatism for this particular doctrine. Some firm non-Trinitarian groups will contend, “If they are worshipping a Trinity, they are paying divine respect to a heathen god, and not the God of the Bible.” Whereas there is a measure of truth in that statement, the same Scriptures are used to support both views, and the same general characteristics are ascribed to the Godhead regardless of what paradigm one accepts.

Instead of taking the hard line that Trinitarians are merely glossed-over pagans, the more diplomatic approach is taken: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law (i.e., the teaching), do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.” (Rom 2:14, 15a) We note that various individuals were baptized without any knowledge of the Holy Spirit whatsoever, (Acts 19:1-5) although they were later re-baptized when they learned the proper doctrine. In essence, while we are responsible for far more light than were the converts of the first century, we must be no less gracious than the teachers of those times.

The implications of this are simple: While the CSDA Church denies the validity of the Trinity paradigm, and would never claim to be a Trinitarian movement by any means, neither fellowship nor, indeed, even membership is necessarily restricted to those who are convinced otherwise. Generally speaking, a Trinitarian would either come to understand the Bible as we do or lose the desire for membership anyway, so the issue has not – thus far – come up in practice. None of our Baptismal examination questions (the examination procedure is covered in a later chapter) deals with the precise nature of the Godhead. If the applicant knows the personality of the Godhead, and is in intimate relationship with the Father through the ministration of the Son and the power of the Spirit, they will have ceased from sin, and this is the primary mark of a genuine convert.

This is not to say the issue is not important. Understanding and grasping the Victory message is far more difficult in practical life if the Godhead is not understood precisely as the Bible reveals it. We are told in no uncertain terms, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3)

It is knowledge of the Father and Son (the Spirit is not mentioned as One who may be “known” in this manner) that keeps one from transgression and leads to sanctification, (Gk: *hagiasmos*: holiness) “without which no man shall see the Lord.” (Heb 12:14) It is difficult to judge the precise extent to which a faulty paradigm of the Godhead blurs the true knowledge of the Father and Son, and thus the ability to walk in *hagiasmos*, but unless a man is willfully ignorant or rebellious, it is generally for the Judgment to decide his ultimate destiny. If the lives are otherwise upright, and the fruits of the Spirit manifest, we would likely say of baptismal candidates as Peter did of Cornelius, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (Acts 10:47)

Admittedly, this would be an extremely rare occurrence for reasons the Scripture itself implies. We read of Paul’s conversion experience, described thus: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” (Gal 2:20) This verse, which we have examined in an earlier chapter, describes the convert as being filled with the very life of the Son. Indeed, it is the Son dwelling within him, as indicated earlier by John 14:23.

Now, it is also true that the convert is filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:52) Herein lies the issue: if we accept that the Father and Son dwell within us, and also that the Holy Spirit dwells within us, but fail to understand that the Spirit is the very presence of the Father and Son – not a separate person – then we are claiming to be filled with a fictitious personage.

If a Trinitarian is asked, “Who among the Godhead dwells in a convert,” he might say, “The entire Trinity.” This would be a faulty statement, since one of the Persons to which he is referring is fictional. If he says, “The Son,” he is correct. If he says, “The Spirit” he is also correct, but failing to identify one with the other would indicate that the concept in his mind and spirit is not clear, even if he has spoken the right words. This is a subtle point, but not insignificant. When a Trinitarian speaks of “the Holy Spirit,” these words, though the right ones,

are used in a different way than when a non Trinitarian speaks, and it is the “inner man” who exists on, and reacts to, spiritual truths for the salvation of the soul. (Eph 3:16)

The statement in John 17:3 is literally true – knowledge of the Father and Son is the very foundation of eternal life. When the Messiah appears, His criteria is not the works one has done in His name, the doctrines one has professed, or the emotional content associated with one’s conversion and subsequent life. He will say to one group, “I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” (John 15:15) He will say to another group, “I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Mat 7:23)

If we are not clear in our understanding of the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we quickly begin to speak in vague generalities, and resort to the word “mystery” to avoid understanding something that was *meant* to be understood, and to avoid truly knowing Those who are inviting us to know. “The secret things belong unto Yahweh our Almighty, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deu 29:29) Ultimately the concept of the Godhead in the mind of Trinitarian individuals may become a hazy, ethereal thing not unlike a fairy-tale or distant theory, and this is one of the most subtle, but most pervasive, dangers of adopting and maintaining this model.