Athanasian Creed #1; (1-15); Dt. 6:4-5; II Cor. 13:14; The God who Is I. Wrong Views Exposed II. God’s Unity Defended III. God’s Person Identified

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the word “Trinity” is a very familiar word that we often use to describe God. This particular word means “three in one.” But how would you describe God if you could not use this word- or how would you speak about God if you lived many years ago? We often take for granted the creeds and confession of the church. However, these creeds were often the result of years of conflict and even chaos concerning the teaching contained in the Scriptures. Today we begin a two-part series on the Athanasian Creed. Now the Athanasian Creed is the youngest of the 3 creeds- the Apostles and Nicene Creed came earlier. Being written around the mid 400 AD, this particular creed comes after years of conflict and even heresy concerning the nature and person of God. The focus of the Athanasian Creed is two-fold. This week we see that this creed outlines the proper understanding of the Trinity; and Christology will be our focus see next week. Now although it is clear that Athanasius did not write this creed, his input and clarity of thought can be seen in its words. So we start with the Trinity this week. What must we know and believe about God as a part of our Christian faith. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the unity and diversity of the Godhead for the comfort of the church.

**I. Wrong Views Exposed**

In our first point, we consider the wrong views that this particular creed is going to guard against. As you will remember, the early church was plagued with various heresies and false teaching. These either denied the unity of the Godhead or the diversity of he Godhead. So the first error that needs to be exposed is that of drastic monism- or that there is only one God and one person. This is followed up by what is called modalism. In this false teaching, God is seen as a chameleon that changes his colors. God is like an actor on stage, taking off a mask and then putting on another. He appears in different modes or forms. In this teaching, the one God takes on the form or the name of Father, Son and Spirit at various times in history. Specifically, in the OT God was the Father, in the NT God was the Son, and today God is known as the Spirit. This false view of God makes God appear to be one being who just takes on different forms depending on his work. Always one and never three. This teaching can be found in some Pentecostal circles and what is called “oneness theology.” So some believe that there is only one God who is only one person at a time. The next false teaching swings to the other extreme. Identifying that there are in fact three distinct persons who each have the attribute of God, the result is a belief in 3 gods. This is tri-theism. This false teaching identifies the Father, Son and Spirit as all being God but overlooks their unity in being. It is a sort of pluralism- a panel of gods. This teaching is a carry-over from Roman and Greek mythology where there are various gods that are each acting independently. You can still find this teaching in Mormonism today- where there are multiple and distinct gods. This summary of false teaching concerning the Trinity sets the stage for us- God is not three gods- nor is he only one person. Article 11- there are not three eternal being but one eternal being. He has revealed himself as three in one. And again in article 16- there are not three gods, but one God.

**II. God’s Unity Defended**

Next, lets move into the proper and true teaching. God is one in His being and essence. How many gods are there? Just one. BC art 1 says that there is one simple and spiritual being whom we call God. The Christian faith is a monotheism- we worship one God and Him alone. We read this in our text from Dt. 6- hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one! The Israelites needed to be taught that there is and can be only one divine! Unlike the gods of the Egyptians and the gods of the Canaanites, God has no competition, and he has no rival. This is proven by the fact that God is supreme and without equal. Our creed says that God is uncreated, all powerful, immeasurable, almighty and eternal. When speaking about God, there can be only one who is all knowing and all powerful. Only one who is uncreated and above all. If there were multiple gods, then god could not be all powerful! If God had competition, he would not be unique. We live in a world where many created things are worshipped as if they were god- many object are looked to for being and purpose. There are many different ways in which people try to provide for themselves or secure stability- many plans go into setting up a life without want and care. But these are not gods- they are but products of man’s hand. They are creatures or created things that have no ultimate power in themselves. Everything has a beginning- everything has a source except for the one, true God! He alone is uncreated- without beginning and end. Now why is this such an important point? Why must we be clear that there is only one, true God? Well, our reading from Dt. 6 goes on to apply this fact- Hear O Israel, the Lord our God- the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength! Knowing God means that you will hear Him, listen to His word, love him, fear him, and worship Him alone! In other words, don’t listen to the gods of the nations- don’t fear them- for what can they do? Don’t worship created things for they are but products of the one, true God’s hand! As article 27 says, knowing the who is the one true God is a necessary part of worship! So love God- the only true God! Worship Him alone because He alone is God and deserves your adoration! He is the LORD your God! Yahweh- the God who is! The God of the covenant- the God who hears, sees and saves! He alone is God and there is no other as Isaiah 45 says. Now in reading this creed, you can see how the authors rightly struggled and wrestled with words. This doctrine is rightly called a mystery beyond comprehension. We want to be careful to teach and believe what the Bible says- while guarding against heresy and false teaching. But we also want to avoid confusion- and in speaking we do not want to fall into heresy ourselves! So God is one- and yet God has revealed Himself as three in person.

**III. God’s Person Identified**

So in the pages of Scripture, God speaks about Himself in a distinct way. Already in creation- He said- let us make man in our image. So who is this “us” and “our?” Who is this one speaking, who is the Spirit that hovered over the water? Well, as we get into our last point, we see that each person of the god-head is distinct in name and work. To be clear, they are each fully God- and yet there is not more or less divine essence when they are considered together. So their essence or being is not divided- and yet each is fully God in their own person. As article 6 says- the Father, Son and Spirit are divine- but there are not three divine beings. Each has their own work revealed in Scripture- the Father’s work is seen in creation and providence, the Son in our redemption and the Spirit in our sanctification. Distinct work- the Father did not die on the cross and the Son was not poured out on Pentecost. But although their work is distinct, it was not performed in abstract. The persons are not divided- but remain united in their work. At creation, the Father spoke, the Spirit hovered, and the Son was the one through whom all was made. In our redemption, the Father chose, the Son secured and the Spirit applied. So although their work is distinct, it also stands that each person is active in that work as well. So they are not the same- nor are they divided! The Son was begotten, the Spirit proceeds and the Father is the fount and source. And yet, there is no hierarchy in the godhead. As art. 25 says, none is before or after, none is greater or smaller. They remain coequal. So the Father is not older or greater than the Son or the Spirit! No, there is unity in the Trinty. We catch a glimpse of this unity in Matthew 28- here at baptism we find that believers are washed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And yet, the church remains under the name of God. One God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we also found in our reading from II Cor. 13- the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. In this closing benediction, each person of the Trintiy is identified alone with a unique blessing. The Trintiy is a doctrine of comfort- grace, love and fellowship from and with God is possible because of who He is!

As we close, why do we need to know this? Why should we care about the doctrine of the Trinity? Well, we want to know God so we can worship Him rightly! As you may be aware, there is a new Bible version called the RJPS that is gender sensitive. This new version seeks to be inclusive by removing the male aspect of God- but ends up twisting the truth about God! God is one- He is God alone- and He is to be worshipped as God! At the end of the day, no illustrations are of help here. No diagram can explain this doctrine- we are creatures who simply acknowledge what God has revealed about Himself! He is God; and the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is this God whom we acknowledge, love and worship! Jesus Christ reveals the unity and diversity of the Godhead for the comfort of the church. So love this God with all your heart!