

Scriptures and Doctrine :: What is the significance of the local church

What is the significance of the local church - posted by Dave123, on: 2022/5/7 14:35

What is the significance of the local church

In the scripture there are patterns, such as the first church Jerusalem. It was called the church in Jerusalem, meaning that at every saint in that city was the church. That pattern was continued in Paul's ministry. When he went into a city, people were regenerated and they were called "the church" in such and such a city. You will never see in the word that in one city it is ever called churches. And why is this significant?

The old testament made it clear that God had established one place, Jerusalem, where the people had to come three times a year. This of course was to maintain the oneness, which oneness is the testimony of the oneness of the Triune God.

The pattern of a local church being one church in the city is based on the same principle as the feast in Jerusalem. Consider first Corinthians and the church there. In the beginning of chapter 1 you would suspect that this church is wonderful. However, as you read on you realize this may have been the worst church ever. But the first thing that Paul addresses is that they were beginning to divide according to their preferences. This was approached first by the apostle because once there is a division in the city everything else doesn't matter. If they had divided into their four preferences in that city the testimony of the oneness of the Triune God in his Body would be lost.

Also the crucialness of the one church in a city deals with what is in our heart that isn't of God. If I didn't like the elders, where could I go? If I was offended by another Saint, where could I go? As Paul pointed out, there was only place I could go: to the cross. And there, I would have to deal with my preferences and my opinions and my wonderful thoughts about myself. This operation of the cross in the church is crucial for God to bring in his kingdom.

This crucial operation on the old man would be totally lost if the division had become a reality in Corinth, for the divisions only strengthened the old Man. This is why Paul dealt with this matter first of all.

Division is against the testimony of the Triune God. God is not the author of confusion, and division is authored by Satan.

Consider a newly regenerated one in today's situation. His immediate question is where should I go? To whom should I attach myself? What is shame that a new one should have to face this confusion. If he was regenerated in Jerusalem, he would go to the only church there; to the church in Corinth, or the church in Philadelphia, no confusion at all. However if those divisions actually took place in Corinth, what to do then?

Well in Corinth they were those who were called approved. Who were they? What did they do? All we know is that in the midst of that mess, they were not part of the divisiveness or of the other problems going on with the church. However, and this is crucial, they did not separate themselves out from the church, the Lord's table, or the meetings of the church, and become a separate group. They followed Paul's admonishment in chapter 12, to blend with the uncomely. This means they were allowing that church life to deal with the problems through the cross. Paul did not encourage them to separate themselves out or to start another meeting.

Eventually the whole church turned and was on fire. This could've never happened if they had become divided in that city.

So what should we do today in the midst of this confusion we are in. Consider if those divisions had happened, the church of Paul or a polis, etc. what should the approved ones do, who should they join themselves to? They could join themselves to none of them because now they are divisions, sects. Now they had no choice but to take a stand apart from the divisions to be God's testimony in that city. You may say, well, aren't they just another division? When you are standing on the proper ground of oneness in that city, you become that testimony in that city.

Remember when Israel was divided into two, the 10 tribes and Judah with Benjamin. Which had the testimony of God? It was only Judah with Jerusalem with the temple. Remember Israel, the 10 tribes built another temple. To which temple should you go? You would have to go where the Ground of oneness was established in Jerusalem.

When the Jews returned from Babylon they were in the minority, the majority of Jews stayed in Babylon where they had become comfortable. where was the testimony of the oneness of the triune God? it was with that small minority that returned to Jerusalem

In Jesus time, while the majority of Jews were worshiping at the temple without reality, just three in a small home were with the Lord of glory in Bethany. Where was the testimony of God at that time? Surely, it was there in Bethany.

Are we willing to pay the price for that testimony here on earth, in time, in each city where we live?

Re: What is the significance of the local church - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2022/5/7 19:25

Quote:

When the Jews returned from Babylon they were in the minority, the majority of Jews stayed in Babylon where they had become comfortable.

So then are the denominations Babylon which is fallen in the Book of Revelation?

Also, I believe that the founders of some of the mainline denominations were for the most part men who knew God. The problem is not that there are many churches in a city, the problem, as Mr. Reidhead points out in Ten Shekels and a Shirt, is that many of the churches are now filled with those who have only made intellectual assent to a humanistic gospel.

Re: What is the significance of the local church - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2022/7/24 11:20

Good post, brother.

Re: What is the significance of the local church - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2022/7/24 11:26

There is one concern I have. You mention the "triune God". Really? My Bible says YEHOVAH our ELOHIM is ONE ELO MIM.

Agreed, for HIS own on choosing and purposes, HE has chosen to interface with man as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. HE is all of these, as one. Not 3. Surely HE has done all for our benefit to help us understand that HE is all in all and so much more. But three persons? That to me is a stretch I cannot reach. And I was raised the catholic, who originated this teaching. But then they also originated many other heresies supported by the protestant divisions. There is only ONE, and ONE BODY. HIS body.

Rom_16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

That's a tough assignment, but an assignment none the less.

Re: - posted by BranchinVINE (), on: 2022/7/25 2:06

Lahry

I am trying to understand what you are trying to say.

Are you saying that what the following article says is "heresy"?

<https://www.christianity.com/god/trinity/god-in-three-persons-a-doctrine-we-barely-understand-11634405.html>

Article by Dr. Ray Pritchard:

GOD IN THREE PERSONS: A DOCTRINE WE BARELY UNDERSTAND

All Christians believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. If you do not believe this—that is, if you have come to a settled conclusion that the doctrine of the Trinity is not true—you are not a Christian at all. You are in fact a heretic. Those words may sound harsh, but they represent the judgment of the Christian church across the centuries. What is the Trinity? Christians in every land unite in proclaiming that our God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those who deny that truth place themselves outside the pale of Christian orthodoxy.

Having said that, I admit that no one fully understands it. It is a mystery and a paradox. Yet I believe it is true.

I can think of at least three reasons for believing in the Trinity:

- 1 The Bible teaches this doctrine.
- 2 Christians everywhere have always believed it.
- 3 No other explanation makes sense.

Someone has said it this way: If you try to explain the Trinity, you will lose your mind. But if you deny it, you will lose your soul. Let's take a look at the definition of the Trinity and what the role of the Trinity is today

The Trinity Defined

There are many places we might go to find a suitable definition. Any of the great ecumenical creeds would serve us well in this regard. However, let's stick closer to home and simply reprint Article 8 "The True God" from the Calvin Memorial Church Articles of Faith.

We believe in one living and true God who is the Creator of heaven and earth; who is eternal, almighty, unchangeable, infinitely powerful, wise, just, and holy.

We believe that the one God eternally exists in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God, co-equal and co-eternal, having precisely the same nature and attributes, and worthy of precisely the same worship, confidence, and obedience. Matthew 3:16, 17; Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 12:29; John 1:14; Acts 5:3, 4; II Corinthians 13:14.

While I am sure that this statement is biblically accurate, I also understand that it can seem very intimidating. Let's break it down into six smaller statements about the trinity that's easier to understand:

- One God and One Only
- Exists in three Persons
- Equal and Eternal
- Worthy of equal praise and worship
- Distinct yet acting in unity
- Constituting the one true God of the Bible

As you might imagine, the early church struggled mightily over this doctrine. They eventually reduced their belief in the Trinity to two short statements. They concluded that God is

- One in Essence
- Three in Person

When we say these things we mean that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but they are not three gods but only one God. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father, but each is God individually and yet they are together the one true God of the Bible.

Have you ever seen the word "Godhead?" Theologians sometimes use that term when they want to refer to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as three divine Persons in one God.

At this point, I think we should acknowledge the chief objection to the doctrine of the Trinity, which is that it is absurd. Sometimes the Jehovah's Witnesses (who pointedly deny the Trinity) ridicule it with this little equation: $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$. In their minds, Christians worship three Gods, not one. The answer is quite simple. The doctrine of the Trinity is not absurd if that's what the Bible teaches. Furthermore, there is more than one way to play with equations. You could also say it this way: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1!$

The Trinity Explained

What exactly do we mean when we speak of the Trinity? Let's start with the negative and work toward the positive.

A. What we don't mean

First of all, Christians don't believe in three Gods. That's a heresy called Tritheism. Second, we don't believe that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are three "forms" of God—like, steam, water and ice. That's the heresy called Modalism. Third, we don't believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "parts" or "pieces" of God. That would imply that Jesus is 1/3rd God, the Father is 1/3rd God, and the Holy Spirit is 1/3rd God.

B. Where do we find the Trinity doctrine in the Bible?

I would answer that the Trinity is taught in both the Old and the New Testaments. It is taught by implication in the Old and by direct statement in the New.

For instance, the Bible contains numerous clear statements regarding the unity of God: Deuteronomy 6:4 tells us that "the Lord is one." 1 Corinthians 8:4 adds that "there is no God but one." 1 Timothy 2:5 explicitly says "there is one God." All Christians heartily affirm this truth.

However, the Bible also contains clear statements regarding diversity within that unity. For instance, in the very first verse of the Bible we are told that "In the beginning God." The Hebrew word for God is *elohim*, which is actually a plural form of the word *el*. It's a word that in other contexts is sometimes translated as "gods," referring to heathen deities. Later in the same chapter we have one of the most striking statements of diversity-in-unity:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:26-27

Notice the shift in pronouns. "Let us" in our image. So God created man in his own image. he created him." From us and our to he. Why the shift? Commentators speak of a literary form called the plural of majesty or the "editorial we." This much is certainly true. If Genesis 1 does not explicitly teach diversity-in-unity within the Godhead, it certainly leaves room for it to be developed later in the Bible.

Isaiah 48:16 seems to explicitly refer to all three Persons of the Trinity (with my additions in parentheses): "And now the Sovereign LORD (the Father) has sent me (the Son), with his Spirit (the Holy Spirit)." I'm not suggesting that Isaiah fully understood the Trinity or that the Jewish readers would have understood what it meant, but I do think that in the light of the New Testament, we can say that this seems to be a clear statement of the Trinity in the Old Testament.

Consider further this line of evidence. All Three Persons are called God in different places in the Bible.

Father — Galatians 1:1

Son — John 20:28

Spirit — Acts 5:3-4

How could the Son and the Spirit be called God unless they somehow share in God's essence? But if they share in God's essence, they are God alongside the Father.

Finally, all three Persons are associated together on an equal basis in numerous passages:

— Jesus' baptism—Matthew 3:13-17 (voice of the Father, Son baptized, Spirit descending like a dove).

— Salvation—1 Peter 1:2 (chosen by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus).

— Sanctification—2 Corinthians 13:14 (grace of the Lord Jesus, love of God, fellowship of the Holy Spirit).

— Christian Baptism—Matthew 28:19 (baptized in one name, yet three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

— Prayer—Ephesians 3:14-21 (strengthened by his Spirit, know the love of Christ, filled with the fullness of God).

— Christian Growth—2 Thessalonians 2:13 (chosen by God, loved by the Lord, sanctified by the Spirit).

This list of passages might be extended. It simply shows how easily the writers of Scripture passed from one Person of t

he Trinity to another, doing so in a way that assumes their equality of nature while preserving their distinct personhood. If the doctrine of the Trinity is not true, it would seem to be blasphemy to speak so freely of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in one and the same breath.

The Trinity Examined

In this section of the message I want to examine some of the common questions about the Trinity.

A. Where in the Bible do you find the word Trinity?

The word "Trinity" is not in the Bible. Neither is the word "Inerrancy" but we don't discard it simply because it isn't found in the Bible. The issue is not the word, but the concept or the idea. We don't believe in the Trinity because of the word, but because of what the Bible teaches.

B. Is there another word we could use?

Yes there is. Theologians sometimes speak of the Tri-Unity of God. That's a good word even though it sounds odd to our ears because it combines the two ideas of unity and diversity in one word. There is a third word you should know. Sometimes we speak of the "Triune" God. That's also another word that means the same thing as Trinity.

C. How can we illustrate the Trinity?

A number of illustrations have been suggested. They all are useful as long as you remember they are only illustrations. For water can exist as solid, liquid, or steam. That's okay, but usually water only exists in one state at a time. However, there is a physical condition in which water can exist as solid, liquid and steam at the same time which would be a much better illustration of the Trinity.

There are others we could mention. An egg is made up of a shell, the eggwhite, and the yolk. All three are needed for an egg to be complete. One of the more interesting illustrations note the different roles a person can play. I am a father, a son and a husband at one and the same time. Yet I am only one person. Perhaps a more biblical approach is to consider that a husband and wife are two persons yet in God's eyes they are "one flesh." Add children and then you have the family as a miniature (and very imperfect) version of the Trinity.

Tony Evans commented that the pretzel is a good illustration because it consists of one piece of dough with three holes. Take away any one of the holes and the pretzel isn't really a pretzel anymore. (According to some people, the pretzel was actually invented in Europe several hundred years ago by a monk who wanted to illustrate the Trinity to the children of his village so he took some dough, looped into the familiar three-hour shape, baked it, and gave it to the children as an edible object lesson.)

My personal favorite illustration comes from noted scientist Dr. Henry Morris. He notes that the entire universe is trinitarian by design. The universe consists of three things: matter, space, and time. Take away any one of those three and the universe would cease to exist. But each one of those is itself a trinity.

☞ Matter = mass + energy + motion

☞ Space = length + height + breadth

☞ Time = past + present + future

Thus the whole universe witnesses to the character of the God who made it (cf. Psalm 19:1).

It's important to remember that all illustrations fail eventually. They don't "prove" the Trinity, they simply help us understand the concept.

The Trinity Applied

I am sure that many Christians think this doctrine has no practical value. That is, even if it's true, it doesn't and shouldn't matter to them. However, that simply isn't true. Let me suggest five important ramifications of this truth.

A. The Trinity helps us answer the question, "What was God doing before he created the universe?"

This is a question little children like to stump their parents with. But skeptics like to ask it as well. You may remember Au

gustine's answer: "He was preparing Hell for people who ask questions like that!"

But the Trinity teaches us that before the foundation of the world, God was having fellowship within his own being. That's why the Bible tells us that the Father loves the Son (John 17:24). In some sense we can never understand that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have forever communicated and loved each other.

Francis Schaeffer emphasized this point in his books. This, he says, is where the human desire for intimacy and communication comes from. We were made to communicate. That design is part of the image of God within each of us.

It also teaches us that God is never "lonely." He didn't create us because he "needed" us. God could have existed forever without us. That he made us at all is a statement of his great love and the wisdom of his plan.

B. The Trinity sets the limits on human speculation about the nature of God.

There is so much we would like to know about God, but our finite minds cannot comprehend it. We are not free to create God in our own image. The Trinity sets the limits for human speculation. God is more than the Trinity, but he is not less than that.

C. The Trinity teaches us that God is beyond all human comprehension.

After all, if we could explain God, he wouldn't be God. I have no doubt that God is much more than "one in essence, three in Person," but since I can't even understand those simple phrases, I don't worry at all about what else might be true about God. If you feel baffled by the Trinity, join the crowd. The greatest minds of history have stood in amazement before a God so great that he cannot be contained by our puny explanations.

D. The Trinity exalts the Son and the Spirit.

We all know that God the Father is to be worshiped. But what about Jesus Christ? If he is God, should we not also worship him? The answer of course is yes. But that truth leads us back to the Trinity. He is not merely the Son of God but also God the Son. The same thing may be said about the Holy Spirit. He is not just a "force" but a Divine Person. Not an "influence" or some vague power, but the Third Person of the Trinity.

Let me draw one important inference. Since all Three Persons of the Trinity are equally God, we may pray to any member of the Trinity. That, by the way, is the number one question I have been asked about the Holy Spirit since writing Names of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians simply do not feel comfortable praying to the Spirit even though we often sing songs that are essentially prayers to the Spirit, such as "Spirit of God, descend upon my heart" and "Spirit of the living God, fill afresh on me." Surely if we may sing to the Spirit, we may also pray to him. If he is God, our prayers may be directed to him.

I do agree that Christian prayers will customarily be made to the Father (e.g. The Lord's Prayer). But let us not quibble or imagine that the Father is slighted if we direct our prayers to the Son or to the Spirit, according to the need of the moment. There is no jealousy among the members of the Trinity nor could there ever be.

E. The Trinity helps us understand what really happened at the Cross.

At the climax of Jesus' suffering, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" What do those strange, tortured words mean? We have a hint of the answer in that every other time Jesus prayed, he used the term "Father." But at that moment, when he bore the full weight of the sins of the world, when all that is evil and wretched was poured out upon him, in some way we cannot begin to fathom, God—who cannot look upon sin—turned his back on his own Son. Sin as it were (though not in ultimate reality) caused a rupture in the Trinity. Instead of "Father," Jesus cries out, "My God, my God!" It is God speaking to God. The eternal Son cries out to the Father at the moment when the penalty of sin has been laid upon him. If it be asked, how could one man pay for the sins of the entire race, we find the answer in the doctrine of the Trinity. Only an infinite God could bear the sins of the world!

A Doctrine that Unites and Divides

The doctrine of the Trinity has been called the most puzzling doctrine in the Christian faith and the central truth of the Christian faith. Which is it? Inscrutable puzzle or central truth? The answer is, both are true.

This doctrine unites all true Christians and separates us from those who are not Christian. You may believe and still not be a Christian, but if you deny this doctrine in your heart, you are not a Christian at all.

I come now to the end of my sermon. In so doing I end where I began. The Trinity is a doctrine that all Christians believe but no one really understands. That much should be clear from this message. If you try to explain the Trinity, you will lose your mind. But if you deny it, you will lose your soul.

Someone asked Daniel Webster, who happened to be a fervent Christian, "How can a man of your intellect believe in the Trinity?" "I do not pretend fully to understand the arithmetic of heaven now," he replied. That's a good phrase—the arithmetic of heaven.

The Trinity should cause us to bow in humble adoration before a God who is greater than our minds could ever comprehend.

Let us rejoice that we have a Triune God who has provided for Trinitarian salvation. When we were lost in sin, our God acted in every Person of his being to save us. The Father gave the Son, the Son offered himself on the Cross, and the Holy Spirit brought us to Jesus. We were so lost that it took every member of the Godhead to save us.

In 1774 a man named Ignaz Franz wrote a hymn of praise to the Trinity: Holy God, We Praise Your Name. Verse three may serve as an apt conclusion to this message.

"Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, Three we name you;
While in essence only one, undivided God we claim you.
Then, adoring, bend the knee, and confess the mystery."

Indeed it is a mystery, and with all the saints we bend the knee in worship before our great God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

How to Explain the Trinity

At best, what we have in terms of the Bible, you don't have, actually, in the Bible, a chapter that you go to that is an explanation of that. You have, if you like, a formulation of that. You have the notion of, the story of the Trinity or the reality of the Trinity is born out just in viewing things. So it's a hard one for a child, but that is, I think, the importance of catechetical teaching, in that we explain to our children, that God is three-in-one and one-in-three. Now, we may try and go to ice and steam and water. We may try and go to the shell, the white, and the yolk, but our children will be clever enough to say that, "I don't think that really gets to it either."

And we have to be honest enough to say, "No, it doesn't, that this is a profound mystery." And yet, it is so clearly revealed that Jesus is in the water being baptized, that the father speaks from heaven, that the holy spirit alights upon him as a dove, and we're there. The reality of his Gethsemane experience is explained so much, the distinction between who he is as the son, and, then, the father looking down upon his son. In fact, I think in one part of the book, and it came to mind because it struck me, I think in one part, Sinclair suggests that when Jesus finally said, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done," that Sinclair says, "And here we have the father singing, 'My Jesus, I love thee. I know thou art mine.'" And it's a wonderful thought, of the interplay between the father and the son, but it's a tough one. - Pastor Alistar Begg

Dr. Ray Pritchard is the president of Keep Believing Ministries. He has ministered extensively overseas and is a frequent conference speaker and guest on Christian radio and television talk shows. He is the author of 27 books, including *Credo*, *The Healing Power of Forgiveness*, *An Anchor for the Soul* and *Why Did This Happen to Me?* Ray and Marlene, his wife of 35 years, have three sons—Josh, Mark, and Nick. His hobbies include biking, surfing the Internet, and anything related to the Civil War.

Re: What is the significance of the local church - posted by docs (), on: 2022/7/25 13:14

I think Paul was as bothered by the divisions in the Corinthian church - "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos" etc. - bothered him as much as the fleshly indulgences he found in Corinth. Of course, division such as Paul addressed is carnality.

Re: - posted by docs (), on: 2022/7/25 13:24

/Agreed, for HIS own on choosing and purposes, HE has chosen to interface with man as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. HE is all of these, as one. Not 3./

It sound like plain and simple modalism you are advocating. If it is, it is not accepted, orthodox Christian doctrine and it is of monumental importance to get this part of doctrine correct.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (the Son), and the love of God (the Father), and the communion of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit) be with you all." (II Corinthians 13:14)