

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Scripture References: II Cor. 13:14. Matt. 28:19. Matt. 3:16, 17.
John 17:5, 24.

Questions:

1. Why has this doctrine given rise to opposition during the history of the Church?

The devil recognizes that since the Trinity is a mystery which human reason cannot explain, and since it is the primary object of our faith and worship, it is fertile ground for use as a stumbling block.

2. How important is this doctrine to our faith?

It is essential and vital. Without this doctrine we would not know of the love of the Father, the merit of the Son and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit in the purchase and application of redemption.

3. What is meant by the word "Godhead" in this question?

It means the divine nature that is possessed by all three persons.

4. What denomination denies the doctrine of the Trinity?

The Unitarians deny this doctrine. They teach that there is only one person in the Godhead, the Father, and deny the true deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

5. How can one prove that there are three persons in the Godhead?

This can be proved by many teachings in Scripture. It can be proved from the baptismal formula; from the baptism of Christ; from the blessing given by Paul in 2 Cor. 13:14; from John's salutation to the seven churches; from the different tasks attributed to the three persons.

6. Could you give an example of these different "tasks"?

Yes, I Peter 1:2 gives an example of their different tasks in the work of redemption. It speaks of the Father's foreknowledge, the Son's death for His people, and the Spirit's task of sanctification.

7. How is it that all three could be one God?

The doctrine teaches that "God is One in one sense, and Three in a different sense. He is One in substance and Three in persons." (J. G. Vos). The Scriptures assert that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God and are equal with the Father. True, this mystery is difficult to understand. But we now believe it by means of the Word of God and can look forward to enjoy the perfect knowledge of it in heaven.

8. How can we best state the doctrine in simple terms?

One of the best statements is: "There is but one God, the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each God, and the Father and the Son and the Spirit is each a distinct Person . . ." (Dr. L. Boettner).

THE NECESSITY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the Trinity is taught unquestionably in our Standards and our reception and adoption of this doctrine is an important part of our Christian faith. In addition, however, the doctrine of the Trinity plays an important part in our Christian living. The confession of this particular doctrine of the church is of the greatest importance for the spiritual life.

Dr. B. B. Warfield pointed this out when he said, "Without the doctrine of the Trinity, his (the believer's) conscious Christian life would be thrown into confusion and left in disorganization if not, indeed, given an air of unreality; with the doctrine of the Trinity, order, significance and reality are brought to every element of it. Accordingly, the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of redemption, historically, stand or fall together." (Biblical Doctrines, p. 167).

It is interesting to note that Article Nine of the Belgic Confession, regarding the proof of the Trinity, states: "All this we know as well from the testimonies of Holy Writ as from their operations, and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves." This does not say that Christian experience is a second source of revelation. There is only one source of revelation and that is Scripture. But the experience of the believer, based upon Scripture, teaches him that he needs the Triune God for his Christian life.

The believer needs the Father. The Father who is the Creator, the Lawgiver, the Judge, the Supplier of every need — the Father who loved him enough to send His Son to die on the Cross for his sins.

The believer needs the Son. The Son is the only-begotten of the Father. The Son who is the Teacher, the Redeemer, the Highpriest, the eternal King who rules with the Word and the Spirit.

The believer needs the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who regenerates and leads into all truth. The Spirit who is his Comforter, his Preserver, the One who causes the believer to share in Christ and all His benefits.

Without this doctrine, the sum of the Christian religion, creation or redemption or sanctification could not be maintained. Any departure from it leads to error in other realms of doctrine. We believe in, and are thankful for, the doctrine of the Trinity!

Published By:

THE SHIELD and SWORD, INC.

Dedicated to instruction in the Westminster Standards for use as a bulletin insert or other methods of distribution in Presbyterian churches.

For information write to: The Shield and Sword, Inc., Box 237, Port Gibson, Mississippi. A non-profit religious organization.

Vol. 1

No. 6

June, 1961

Price

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To Churches — \$1.50 per 100
Individuals — \$1.00 per year

Back Copies

To Churches — \$2.00 per 100
Individuals — 10c each

