

L LORD

OF HEAVEN & EARTH:

*LESSONS ON THE NATURE AND CHARACTER
OF THE GOD OF SCRIPTURE*

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LORD OF HEAVEN & EARTH: Lesson Notes

****Class participants can prepare for each session by reading through the lesson notes and being prepared to discuss the Thought Questions in class****

LESSONS

1. TOTHEPRAISEOFHISGLORY

A lesson on Christian theology as a basis for praise to God

2. ETERNAL POWER & DIVINE NATURE

A lesson on the results and limitations of recognizing God in nature

3. MAKER OF HEAVEN & EARTH

A lesson on the identity of God revealed in the act of creation

4. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

A lesson on the transcendent nature of God

5. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

A lesson on the immanent character of God

6. HOW LONG, O LORD?

A lesson on God and the problem of evil

7. THE GOD OF ISRAEL

A lesson on the story of Yahweh, Israel, and the blessing of the world

8. GOD WITH US

A lesson on the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth

9. FATHER, SON & SPIRIT

A lesson on the Trinity revealed in salvation

10. ALPHA & OMEGA

A lesson on the God who makes all things new

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LESSON 9: FATHER, SON & SPIRIT – The Trinity of God revealed in salvation

- ❖ Some consider the TRINITY early in a study of God as a reflection upon God's inner being (ontology). However, this class treats this topic until near the end as a reflection upon the manner of God's saving activity for the world.
- ❖ Scriptural Basis
 - The term 'Trinity' does not appear in Scripture. However, belief in one God as a tri-unity of three persons is still rooted in the way that Scripture reveals the dynamic activity of God in creation and redemption of the world.
 - The OT contains various 'personifications' of God described as separate entities. These do not amount to a Trinity, but they describe the work of God in ways in that stretch the limits of a 'unitarian' account of God.
 - Wisdom of God – prominent in Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes), the figure of Wisdom is said to be involved in creation and an influence for righteous behavior. (Prov. 8)
 - Word of God – a figure of God's authority, God's Word goes into the world to confront humanity with God's will. (Is. 55:10-11)
 - Spirit of God – God's energy and personal presence in the world. The Spirit is active in creation and in the Messiah, and is the agent for restoration of life and new creation. (Gen. 1:2, Is. 42:1-3, Ez. 37:1-14)
 - The three-fold pattern of God's saving activity is clearly discerned in the NT.
 - The Father is divine as the God whose purpose is for fellowship with his creation. The Son is divine as the incarnation of God who defeats sin by his death/resurrection.
 - The Holy Spirit is divine as the presence of the Father and the Son to enable God's people to accomplish his will.
 - Christ's ministry is empowered by the Spirit in his baptism
 - The teaching of Jesus' disciples is authorized by the Spirit of God
 - The Spirit reveals truth, transforms lives toward love and righteousness, makes God present in individual lives, and guarantees future salvation.
 - The Trinitarian pattern of God's salvation is manifested throughout the NT, especially Paul's letters – see Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Thess. 1:2-5; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-6.
 - The story of God as known in the church is a Trinitarian story.
- ❖ Divinity in Three Persons
 - The Godhead is a Tri-unity of the Father, Son & Spirit. These exist as three separate persons so that the Father, Son and Spirit are not each other, but they all exist as God, and collectively as the One God of Scripture.
 - Church history introduces a number of terms to try to explain this:
 - NATURE – the essential properties and characteristics that make a thing what it is. The doctrine of the Trinity states that the three persons of the Godhead have one divine nature in common.

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- PERSON – individual traits, thoughts and actions are characteristic of ‘personhood.’ The three persons of the Trinity are distinguished from one another in their distinct actions in God’s work of creation and salvation.
 - RELATION – The three persons of the Trinity are related to one another. Classically, this relies on the biblical images that the Son is ‘begotten’ by the Father (John 1:14) and that the Spirit is breathed out by the Father and the Son (John 20:21-23).
 - ESSENTIAL TRINITY – one particular approach to talking about the Trinity which focuses on God’s ‘internal being,’ that is, who God is.
 - ECONOMIC TRINITY – another particular approach to talking about the Trinity which focuses on God’s actions in the ‘economy of salvation.’ This is a Trinitarian view of what God does.
 - This labels the Trinity as ‘Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer.’
- ❖ Common Misunderstandings
- Misleading accounts of the Trinity typically emphasize one side of the doctrinal balance over the other, either the ‘one-ness’ of God or the ‘three-ness’ of God.
 - MODALISM – only one God exists, and he acts in three different ‘modes’ or ‘masks.’ This denies the actual persons of the Trinity.
 - TRI-THEISM – the Father, Son & Spirit exists as three distinct, autonomous gods. This denies biblical monotheism in favor of a view that is closer to polytheism.
 - We should remember that the truth of the Trinity is not grounded in the terminology, but in the biblical witness to the One God’s actions in history in three persons to save his people and his creation.
- ❖ Reflections on a Triune God
- God as a communal being – God is in himself a community of persons. God’s purpose for fellowship with creation is patterned on a fellowship that already exists within God.
 - Salvation as a predestination of God’s love – It is inherent to God’s nature to love and desire for ‘another.’ This is the reason for God’s decision to create and then redeem the world. The salvation of God described in Ephesians 1, which is the work of the Father, Son and Spirit, is predestined in God’s love.
 - Trinity and Praise – All persons of the Trinity are worthy of our prayer and praise as the True and Living God. The Father, Son and Spirit should all be acknowledged in our discourse to, and about, God.
- ❖ In Praise of God
- 2 Corinthians 1:19-22 / 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5
- ❖ Thought Questions
- What does it mean that the story of God as known in the church is a Trinitarian story?
 - What distinctive ideas do either of the Trinitarian labels ‘Father/Son/Spirit’ and ‘Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer’ carry that the other does not? Is one preferable to the other?
 - In what ways is belief in God as Father, Son and Spirit practical? Are there ways that the Trinity affects our lives more deeply than a simple ‘unitarian’ view of God might?