

LORD'S DAY 8

24. Q. How are these articles divided?

A. Into three parts:
the first is about God the Father and our creation;
the second about God the Son and our redemption;
the third about God the Holy Spirit
and our sanctification.

25. Q. Since there is only one God,¹
why do you speak of three persons,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

A. Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word²
that these three distinct persons
are the one, true, eternal God.

1 **Deuteronomy 6:4** "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"

Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God."

Isaiah 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me,

1 Corinthians 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.

1 Corinthians 8:6 ...yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

2. **Genesis 1:2,3** The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Isaiah 61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

Isaiah 63:8-10 For He said, "Surely they are My people, children who will not lie." So He became their Savior. ⁹ In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them.

Matthew 3:16,17 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 28:18,19 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Galatians 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Titus 3:5,6 ...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior...

In this Lord's Day we speak about God's being, His essence, His nature, about what God is. This is very hard for us to do, for whenever we want to describe something that is unknown to us, we compare it to something we know. We say that the unknown is like something else, except that it differs in this or that respect. Yet when we speak about God, we have nothing with which to compare Him. *"Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."* (Psalm 40:5). *"To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?"* (Isaiah 40:18).

When we speak about God, we must be careful to limit ourselves to what God reveals concerning Himself in Scripture. We must not draw our concept of God from anything that we see in this world. This is what the natural man does. He makes God a reflection of himself or of other things that he sees in creation. In Romans 1:23f. Paul says that the ungodly *"changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things... They worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator."* Therefore we must draw our concept of God from the Scriptures and not from our own mind.

Even when we draw our concept of God from the Scriptures, we have difficulty to comprehend God. We are finite, but God is infinite. We are limited in our knowledge, but God is illimitable. God says about Himself, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8,9) We must realise then, that we are very limited in understanding, especially when we speak about God.

Nowhere is that more true than when we discuss the doctrine of the Trinity.

Trinity means three. When we speak about the Trinity, we speak about the three Persons who make up the one God. There is one God, not three. Yet this one God is comprised of three divine Persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

On what do we base such a doctrine? First of all, we should realise that we do not find the word "Trinity" in the Bible. Neither do we find in Scripture such an elaboration on the Trinity as we might like. There is no place where this doctrine is set forth in specific words. Nevertheless, we are not left without a basis for this doctrine. The truth of this doctrine is found in the Bible. It is not something which man has dreamed up. The very fact that this doctrine transcends the comprehension of man would argue that it does not arise out of man's mind. For the things that arise out of man's mind can be understood by the mind of man. Yet the Trinity is not really understandable. For this reason man is inclined to deny it and adopt a doctrine which he can understand.

There are texts in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, which speak about God being One. Think for example of Deuteronomy 6:4, *"Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!"* Also 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, *"...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him..."*

The Athanasian Creed (cf Book of Praise, pg 439-440) describes what this oneness or unity in God means. There is but one God, not three. The Father, Son and Spirit are equal in power, glory and majesty. None of them are created, but all three of them are eternal, without beginning and without end. Whatever the Father is, that is the Son and Spirit also. Thus there is but one God.

Nevertheless, Scripture also shows that in the one Godhead, there are three Persons.

In the very beginning of the Old Testament we read that God refers to Himself in the plural: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness (Gen 1:26).

Furthermore, we read in Genesis 1:2 that the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters at the time of creation.

In Isaiah, 63:8-10, we read, *For He said, "Surely they are My people, children who will not lie" so He became their Saviour. In all their affliction, He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and he fought against them."* This is one place in the Old Testament where the Trinity is referred to, though not in the specific terms as we are familiar with today. *He* refers to God the Father, who has adopted the Israelites as His sons and daughters. We also read about *the Angel of His Presence*, which is normally understood as a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ. Lastly, it speaks about the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity is more clearly revealed in the New Testament. That is understandable. Before the Son became incarnate, and before the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all flesh, there was little need to speak about these distinct Persons in the Trinity. Yet since the Son took upon Himself our human nature, and since the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us, the Scripture speaks about these three Persons of the Godhead.

We see the Trinity at work at the baptism of Christ. We see Christ in the water; we hear God the Father speaking from heaven; and we see the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:18).

At the end of Christ's ministry on earth, prior to His ascension, He said to the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). (For a discussion on the deity of Jesus Christ and

of the Holy Spirit, I would refer you to what is written under Lord's Day 14 & 20.)

The apostle Paul closes his letter to the Corinthians with this triune benediction: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen*" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The doctrine of the Trinity is important to us when we consider the work that the three Persons of the Godhead accomplish. It is with respect to their work that we find comfort in the knowledge that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all true God. The Catechism also stresses this when it ascribes a particular work to each Person in the Trinity:

1. God the **Father** and our **creation**; which is the divine work whereby God brings into existence things that formerly did not exist.
2. God the **Son** and our **redemption**; which is the divine work whereby God reclaims man from his bondage to sin and death, and binds man to Himself in faith and love.
3. God the **Holy Spirit** and our **sanctification**, which is the divine work whereby God purifies man from his corruption and depravity, making man a new and holy creature again.

What a comfort to know that the Father is true God. As Creator-God, He has the whole world in His hand, so to speak. All things in creation are in His control. Nothing happens by chance, but according to His divine will. The Catechism will deal further with this in Lord's Day 9 & 10.

What a comfort to know that Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is true God. As we have already seen in Lord's Day 5 & 6, our redemption depends upon Christ's deity. Only through His divine power was He able to bear the wrath of God against the sin of the whole world. Only because of His divinity did His sacrifice have sufficient value to make payment for our great debt.

What a comfort to know that the Holy Spirit is true God. For the work that He

must do in recreating man is just as great as the work of creation. He must give life to those who are spiritually dead in sin. He must heal the broken mind of man; He must implant a new heart in man; He must set the will free. These are operations that no man can accomplish. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit is true God and can easily accomplish these works in us.

We have apportioned each of the various works of creation, redemption and sanctification to one of the three Persons in the Godhead. We describe Father's work as the work of creation. Yet we do not mean that the Father was the only divine Person involved in the work of creation. From John 1:3,4, we learn that all things were created through the Son (the Word). The Spirit, the Author and Giver of Life, was also present at creation (cf. Genesis 1:2).

The work of redemption is assigned mostly to the Christ Who gave His life. Nevertheless, it is not only His work. The

Father so loved the world that He sent His Son (cf. John 3:16). It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary, and this power strengthened Christ throughout His earthly ministry. It is the Spirit who also applies the work of Christ to the elect (cf. John 16:14). He binds them to Christ by true faith and imparts to them what they have in Christ.

The work of sanctification that is assigned to the Spirit, is not only the Spirit's work. We read in Scripture that Christ lives within men and He enables them to live holy lives (cf. Romans 8:9; Ephesians 3:17).

From these texts we learn that there is essential harmony and co-operation between the three Persons in the Trinity. They are one in essence, and they are also one in their work. Thus both the work of creation and the work of recreation are the work of our one Triune God, *Yahweh*.



Questions:

1. What is God's *being*? Why is it difficult to say anything about the being of God?
2. To what must we limit ourselves when speaking about the being of God?
3. What does *Trinity* mean? When referring to God, to what does it refer?
4. Is the word "*Trinity*" found in the Bible? If not, why do we use it?
5. What does it mean that God is one?
6. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity more clearly revealed in the New Testament?
7. What works are assigned to the various Persons of the Trinity? Describe what each work means.
8. How does the deity of the Father (that He is God) comfort us? How does the deity of the Son comfort us? How does the deity of the Spirit comfort us?
9. Are the works that the Catechism has assigned to the Father, Son and Spirit, unique to them alone? What can be said about the works of creation and recreation?