

GLEANINGS — August 9, A.D. 2015  
Bad Illustrations

John came baptizing in order that the Lord Jesus Christ "...should be made manifest to Israel", John 1:31. In His baptism, Jesus was indeed manifest as the Son of God - the Second Person of the Trinity - as God the Father spoke from Heaven, and God the Holy Spirit came down in bodily form like a dove upon God the Son incarnate. The one true God exists eternally as three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the baptism of the Lord Jesus, we see the involvement of all three Divine Persons.

The triune being of God...the blessed and holy Trinity, is a profound mystery infinitely beyond human comprehension. This should not surprise us, for a "god" fully understandable by the human mind would be inferior to man! Almighty God is exalted above all His creatures in every way. Job's friend Zophar the Naamathite well expressed this truth when he asked, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7)

Some have nevertheless tried to illustrate the incomprehensible Trinity, but none of the illustrations are adequate for this lofty truth. Let us examine them and see why...

**Bad illustration # 1:** The Trinity is like an egg. An egg is a unit, yet it exists in three distinct parts: the shell, the white, and the yolk. Sorry! This illustration fails to do justice to the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity because according to the Bible, each member of the Trinity shares fully and equally in all that being God entails. The Father is eternal, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Spirit (See John 1:1-3, Hebrews 9:14, et. al.)

The same is true of omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, sovereignty, and all the Divine attributes: Father and Son and Holy Spirit each possess them all. The egg surely gives us an example of unity. However, the shell, the white and the yolk have different attributes. The shell is hard, but the other two parts are not. The yolk is yellow, but the other two parts are not, and so forth. The members of the Trinity are not "parts" of the indivisible unity of God.

**Bad illustration # 2:** The Trinity is like one man who has three distinct roles: a father to his boy, a son to his own father, a sibling to his brother. He is one man, but wears "three hats". Sorry! This illustration also fails to adequately portray the Divine mystery of three Persons, one God. The distinction of the Persons of the Trinity is quite real. The Father is not the Son, and neither the Father nor the Son is the Holy Spirit. The unity of the Divine being cannot be divided, yet the three Persons are truly distinct.

**Bad illustration # 3:** Identical triplets. Sorry! This illustration makes a valiant effort, but still fails. The Persons of the Trinity are indeed distinct, as has just been affirmed. However, they are one being...one God, not three gods.

To sum up, the "egg" illustration affirms the unity of God at the expense of the co-equality of the Persons. The "three roles" illustration also affirms the unity of God, but at the expense of the genuine distinction of the Persons. The "triplets" illustration affirms the distinction of the Persons at the expense of the unity of the being of God. Three strikes, human attempt at "illustrating" the Divine Trinity is o-u-t! Nothing in creation is quite like the Uncreated Lord God!

There are several strong "proof texts" for the doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture, such as Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, and 1 John 5:7\*. There is veiled revelation of the Trinity in the Old Testament, such as we see at Genesis 1:26 and 11:7. In addition to the three Gospel records of Christ's baptism by John, there are other inescapably trinitarian passages such as the upper room discourse of the Lord to His apostles (John 13-17). Moreover, the more we study Scripture, the more we find that the doctrine of the Trinity, being the chief doctrine of the very being of God, is like a deep, rich dye that has Divinely colored all the fabric of Holy Writ.

Is it necessary to believe in the Trinity in order to be saved? Absolutely YES. However, as we said at the outset, no one fully understands it.

Many of the heresies which beset the ancient Church - Arianism, Sabellianism, Patripassianism, etc. - can be seen as a cluster of errors surrounding the orthodox, Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. These heresies disclose a mindset of proud denial of the Trinity because it surpasses human knowledge. A child of God the Father humbly affirms that this mystery is beyond his knowledge, but has been taught by God the Holy Spirit that the Trinity is according to the truth as it is in Jesus, God the Son.

(\*The authenticity of 1 John 5:7 has been questioned by some scholars. This is reflected in the way the verse reads in some translations. In this writer's opinion, the reading provided in the A.V. (King James) and the New King James is correct.)