

This past Thursday evening in the city of Saint John, New Brunswick, the Calder Cup finals began. The Calder Cup championship is the American Hockey League's version of Stanley Cup. Last year at this time, the team from Hartford — the Wolf\*Pack — was playing for championship of the American Hockey League. They won against the Rochester Americans. This year the Wolf\*Pack was eliminated after the first round of the playoffs. I enjoy watching and paying attention to the Wolf\*Pack. I consider them my team. I truly enjoy the abilities and skills of the players.

I bring up the Wolf-Pack because I want to call attention to a team. Using the English language we speak of a team, the word is classified as a singular word — team, one team. But when we refer to a team we are also referring to a collection of individuals — plural. Thus, with a word like team we have a singular word which recognizes a plural.

We have other words which do the same sort of thing. For example, the word, flock. In the fall time you can look up and see a flock of geese flying overhead. One flock, many birds. A singular word which recognizes a plural.

Or another example might be the word “herd”. You can drive by a dairy farm with a herd of cows. One herd, many cows. A singular word which recognizes a plural.

A fourth example would be the word “family”. We can have a family sitting here in church. One family, many individuals. A singular word which recognizes a plural.

I bring this concept up today because I am going to move to the second belief of the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs the belief in the Trinity, or God in three persons. Let me read the belief —

***There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.***

I led off today talking about words like team, flock, herd, and family in order to give a framework in which to think about the Trinity. Many people find it difficult to conceive of the idea of Three beings as one. But if we can think of the word “God” as we think of the word “team” it may become a little easier. Or if we think of the word “God” as we think of the word “family” we can possibly grasp the concept of God — a singular word, One God — but consisting of three co-eternal persons.

There is Biblical justification to look at the word in this manner — for if we simply go to Genesis 1:1 — “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. . .” In this verse we have the word God in the singular form. But if we read it in the Hebrew language we would

read the ELOHIM — a plural form.

At different times I have mentioned to you that the Hebrew word “EL” is the word for God. We find this on the end of names such as DaniEL, MichaEL, JoEL, EL is the word for God, and ELOHIM — used in Genesis 1:1 — is the plural of EL. Moses, writing Genesis was not trying to tell us that there were many gods present at creation. But Moses is telling us that the full-team, or the family of God was present at the creation — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Before I get to the end of my sermon today I hope to demonstrate why this teaching is so important and why it needs to be stated within our fundamental beliefs. But at the outset it appears so basic and so simple. Throughout the history of the church the idea of the trinity has been attacked, and many off-shoots throughout the history of the Christians church have left because of a lack of recognition of the trinity. Opponents to the teaching of the trinity will say — “The word Trinity is not even found in the Bible. So, how can you believe in something that is not in the Bible?”

It is true — the word Trinity is not found in the Bible. But I remember during the late 1980's President Bush, #41, was having a debate through the press with Senator George Mitchell, the Senate Majority leader. This debate through the press was over some sort of tax. Senator Mitchell kept saying it was not a tax it was a user fee of some sort. President Bush said it was tax and then said — “if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and sounds like a duck — it must be a duck.” His point was, the senates proposal may have not been called a tax, but it was a tax.

The same can be said of the Trinity — The word Trinity may not be in the Bible. But when reading our Bibles and considering the personhood of God — if it looks like, walks like, and sounds like a trinity — It must be the Trinity!

Let us look at one of these spots in the Bible where it looks like, walks like, and sounds like the Trinity! 1 Peter 1:1, 2

***1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen***

***2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.***

Peter is very careful to point out that the election of the Christians was through the work of all three persons of the Trinity, or the God-head.

In the Gospel of Luke, in chapter one, Mary is visited by the Angel of the Lord with the announcement that she be bear a Son. Let us read in Luke 1:34, 35.

***34 And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"***  
***35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.***

Thirdly, let us consider the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Consider who was present — Jesus, the Son was in the water. We are told that the Holy Spirit descended symbolically as a dove. The Spirit also drove Him into the wilderness. And thirdly, there was a voice from heaven saying — “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” Tell me — who would call someone a Son? A Parent. And Scripture uses the word Father to describe the parent of the Son. Thus, at the Baptism, all three beings of team-God were present.

Again, the word Trinity may not be in the Bible. But when reading our Bibles and considering the personhood of God — if it looks like, walks like, and sounds like a trinity — It must be the Trinity!

Although this can be seen in the Bible the first great theological controversy — past the time of the New Testament was started by an elder in the church in Alexandria. In the early 300's a man by the name of Arius, began to teach that when the Bible calls Jesus the “begotten” this implied that He had been created by the Father. He would also teach that Jesus, after having been created by the Father then when on to create the world. Thus for Arius, Jesus was a mini-god. He was God, but definitely not equal with the Father.

Elder Arius developed quite a following. The church was being shredded. Was Jesus truly God or not? Emperor Constantine, newly converted Constantine, did not want to see his empire torn to shreds because of theology so he had the first church council called together in the year 325 AD. The bishops or elders from all the leading cities in the empire were called to a place in Asia called Nicea. Arius was called to present his teachings while others submitted papers to the contrary. In the end Arius, and His Arian controversy were put down. What came from that council was a creed — the Nicene Creed.

***We believe in one God, father almighty, maker of all things, both visible and invisible. And in one lord, Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten from the father, only-begotten, that is from the being of the father, God from God, light from light, true God from True God, begotten not made, one in being with the father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those on the earth, who because of us human beings and because of our salvation descended, became enfleshed, became human, suffered and rose on the third day, ascending to the heavens, coming to judge the living and dead. And in the Holy Spirit.***

There is nothing in the Nicene Creed which is offensive to our understanding of Scripture. But here we can see a difference between a creed and a statement of faith, or a doctrine. Since 325 the words have remained the same. There is no room for new light. There is no room for further Bible study. The words have been set in concrete. If one holds to the creed — Why study anymore? One doesn't need to study. One doesn't need to learn more, because the creed says it all. To vary from the creed with a syllable is to become a heretic. There is no incentive to grow.

Last week we looked at the first doctrine — The Word of God — but I also spent some time talking about the nature of doctrine and the development of doctrine within the Seventh-day Adventist church. In regards to the development I mentioned how in 1872 a pamphlet was published with 25 distinct beliefs, and in 1889 for the first time the SDA Yearbook had

published a formal statement containing 20 beliefs. In 1931 — 22 beliefs. And in 1980 we have the 27.

In the early lists of beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists you will find no mention of a belief in the Trinity or Godhead. There are reasons.

Let us remember that in the 1980 listing there was for the first time a preamble attached that stated what had been believed throughout our history. That is to say we believe that as time should last we can expect God to lead us into a better understanding of the scriptures and give us better language to explain. Doctrines are a snap-shot of time, not monuments for eternity.

The first reason, that there is no mention of a belief in the Trinity is that it was not important at the time.

The second reason that the early lists contained no mention of the belief in the Trinity is that there was a mini-debate concerning the trinity among some of the brethren. I have talked about Arius and his controversy. Some of the early Adventist leaders had Arian tendencies.

For example let me read for you a statement by James White in an article he published in the Review and Herald, August 5, 1852. He wrote,

“To assert that the sayings of the Son and His apostles are the commandments of the Father, is as far and wide from the truth as the old trinitarian absurdity that Jesus Christ is the very and eternal God.”

During the first fifty years of our churches history the issue was not nailing down a neat, and tidy theology of the trinity. The issue at hand was getting the good news out that Jesus was coming soon. Health Promotion, Education, literature publication, and the emergence of missionaries were all geared up to get this message out to the whole world. Making neat and tidy theological statements of faith was far down on the priority list.

There were several leaders like James White who did not have the doctrine of trinity worked out. But what is clear from their writings is that their desire was not to diminish Jesus. There big concern was to highlight the Father who would judge the living and the dead.

Thank God we do not belong to an church which is held captive to the writings of men. And thank God that we belong to a church which has an established principle of allowing for God to lead us better today, than yesterday.

As a side-bar: You may be asking — If James White had difficulty in conceiving of the three co-eternal persons of God, and all the members of the Trinity being equal, Why did not his wife just set him straight on the issue? There is not public statement of rebuke, or correction. But in the late 1880's and early 1890's the issue of the trinity became a little more heated. It was just at that time that Ellen White wrote the book, “The Desire of the Ages.” Read that book, and tell me she did not support and try to articulate a belief in the full divinity of Jesus.

Finally today, I want to close by looking at two more verses. The first is in Matthew 28:19.

***"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,"***

We are baptized into one name with three persons. The Team of God was present when Jesus was baptized, and the same team-God is present when we are baptized. The three work together in unity, in purpose, and in common purpose to bring us into salvation and care for us throughout eternity.

You may ask a very practical question — why does God — why does the Trinity need to divide the work of salvation? Why three persons who need to work together for eternity? Why not just one God and one person?

The answer is actually simple. Let us read 1 John 4:8.

***The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.***

I want to focus on the part that says — God is love. This is a statement of being. When the word is is used equality is being stated. For example, when we say 2 plus 2 is 4, we mean just that 2 plus 2 is not 5, nor is it 3. 2 plus 2 is equal to 4. There is no debate.

John tells us that God is love. This is His being; His nature. Nothing more; nothing less. God is love.

The word used for love here is that famous word — AGAPE. It is the word of self-sacrifice. It is the word of service. It is the word of humility. Agape, says Paul, is what gives all of living meaning and purpose. The study of AGAPE is a series of sermons in itself. But this self-sacrificing, humble, serving, all important word is the nature of God.

One thing we learn about AGAPE is that it does not happen in a vacuum. John himself will say of this Agape love in 1 John 3:18 "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." Agape is a word that describes loving action in relationship to others. In other words, if there were only one person in the world, then there could be no agape, because that person would be unable to lovingly relate or serve another person. It takes two people for agape to have a chance of being present.

The same is true of Team-God. God could not be agape love if there was only one being. AGAPE love demands at least two or more beings. God is agape, and knows agape because within the trinity themselves there is mutual service and humble sacrifice. God can show us sacrificing love, because that is all they are about.

This is the importance of understanding the truth of the trinity. When we talk about Christian growth and taking on the Character of God we are talking about taking on the very nature the God has always practiced. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sacrifice for each other, serve each other, and are humble before each other. This is the nature of Agape. Team God wants that same essential nature to be present in us. The study of the Trinity is not the study of dry theology, but it is a look into the very character God wants us to be. The self-sacrificing nature of God is the nature that shall inherit eternity because Team-God is eternal.