

The Mystery of God

Zhang Cheng

Plausible or Specious

Trinitarianism brings a lot of confusion to the Christian faith, which pastors or ministers cannot explain or resolve. Some may say, although Trinitarianism seems illogical and incomprehensible to men, what is impossible with men is not so with God as all things are possible with God. Specious explanation like this has fooled many people who are not familiar with the Bible. After being Christians for a while, they cease to think, reason or explore when reading the Bible or listening to sermons, as whatever is impossible with men, it can be possible with God. All that we think illogical can be perfectly logical to God, so in the end it is all because of our ignorance.

The Athanasian Creed is widely believed to be the most exhaustive creed of Trinitarianism. This creed was widespread in churches since the 6th century A.D. Today the Catholic Church, Anglican Church and Lutheran Church all adopt this creed. Those who believe Trinitarianism but are not familiar with this creed, can refer to the Athanasian Creed included at the end of this article.

Scholars agree that this creed was not authored by the early Trinitarian Athanasia. The main reason is that the creed was originally written in Latin, not Greek; and it was widely circulated only in western churches (i.e. the Latin Churches, in contrast to Eastern Orthodox Churches such as the Eastern Orthodox Church).

The Athanasian Creed says that “we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost....So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God”. It also says that “we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.”

Although this pile of words were not taken from the Bible and were incomprehensible, Christians must accept it unconditionally and without any doubt, as the creed says at the very beginning that “whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith, which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly”. At the end of the creed it is reiterated that “this is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved”.

According to the Athanasian Creed, “the Father is God; the Son is God; and the

Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God”; “we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord”; “So are we forbidden to say, there are three Gods”, which essentially means that although God is three (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) but is still only one, that is, $3=1$ and $1=3$.

Such argumentation is not justifiable judging from linguistic, mathematical or logical perspectives. But Trinitarians do not care about mathematics or logic, they simply “firmly believe” that whatever impossible with men is possible with God!

Some Christians try to prove that what is impossible with men is possible with God by claiming that “God can draw a circular triangle”. Such claim is pure fallacy. God cannot draw a circular triangle, because circles and triangles are totally different shapes. If we believe that God can draw a circular triangle or that $3=1$, $1=3$, we are imposing our own fallacy and illogical reasoning on God. This is blasphemy, erroneously representing God.

The truth is: not all things can be done by God. For example, God does not lie (Heb 6:18, Num 23:19) or commit sin as men do (Jms 1:13), nor does God speak words that are illogical and self-contradictory. The Bible does say that God is omnipotent, but we cannot cite or explain the Bible according to our own interpretation, otherwise we will be misrepresenting God.

When faced with many inexplicable issues from Trinitarianism, many pastors and ministers resort to another way out which stops inquisitive people from getting to the bottom by claiming the word “mystery”. They will claim Trinity to be God’s mystery, which cannot be fathomed by ordinary people. What it literally means is that it’s natural that one cannot understand Trinity and the act of asking means not trusting God and lack of faith.

Such explanation is intimidating and puts people to silence, leading people to think that Trinity is really God’s mystery, holy and unchallengeable. As a result the word “mystery” becomes Trinitarians’ handy weapon that easily silenced many Christians’ query.

Once confronted with forceful refutation based on biblical evidence, Trinitarians will use their third method – labelling the other party as heresy, thereby strangling all questioning and refuting voices.

Although the Bible never teaches about God in Trinity, the Church arbitrarily made up its doctrine and proclaimed that if Christians did not believe in Trinity, they deviated from the “truth” of the church and would perish eternally beyond salvation (ref. Athanasian Creed).

The intention is obvious. To challenge the creed of the Catholic Church is to challenge the power of the Pope and this is unfavorable to the church. Therefore the Church must quell the dissidents that question Trinitarianism, classify them as heresy and excommunicate them from the churches. However, actions like labelling others as heresy do not necessarily prove one's own correctness. Wasn't Apostle Paul also accused of preaching heresy by the Pharisees (Acts 24:14)?

Trinitarianism is protected by specious claim such as "with God everything is possible", "mystery" and "heresy" so that Trinitarianism can be spread in the church.

The Mystery of The Bible

The Bible does mention about mystery but many Christians do not seek to understand the word "mystery" well. According to the biblical definition, a "mystery" refers to something new that God reveals to people, which was hidden from ages but now made manifest after God's revelation (Colossians 1:26).

That by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. (Ephesians 3:3-5)

Paul told the disciples in Ephesus that the gospel he preached was revealed (*apokalupto*) to him by God, therefore Paul referred to it as "the mystery". The gospel was about Jesus Christ, so Paul also called it "the mystery of Christ". Why was Christ a mystery?

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 16:15-17)

We can see from Jesus and Peter's conversation that without the Heavenly Father's revelation (*apokalupto*), nobody could know from his heart that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus is a mystery because without God's revelation we will not really know who Jesus is, let alone understand the great plan that God will fulfill through Jesus. Therefore one cannot believe that Jesus is Christ, Son of God by relying on his rational thinking only, as it has to do with our spiritual perception and insight. Then, how do we perceive and understand God's mystery?

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

*But holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.
(1 Timothy 3:9)*

Paul called himself a steward of the mysteries of God. It is because he was found trustworthy that God revealed the mysteries to him. Paul also exhorted Timothy to hold to the mysteries entrusted to him with a clear conscience. Therefore, a clear conscience and trustworthiness before God are extremely important. No one with selfish motives and an unclean conscience can accept or fathom the mysteries of God, let alone hold to them.

If we want to have clear spiritual insight into the truth, we must hold onto a clear conscience, and stay trustworthy to the truth that God revealed to us, and practise what we hear. So God's servants must behave honestly without craftiness (2 Corinthians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:3). A dishonest person cannot have a clear conscience, nor can he be a steward of God's mysteries. Dishonesty will make us blind, unable to understand or preach the truth, and we end up like a blind man leading the blind.

But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness (1 Thessalonians 2:4-5)

These two verses sum up Paul's principles when preaching the gospel. First of all, we must be trustworthy, because God only entrusts evangelical missions to those who can live up to examinations ("approve" in verse 3, "examine" in verse 4). Secondly, we preach the gospel to please God, not men. Thirdly, we do not preach the gospel out of greed or selfishness. We not only want men to be our witness ("as you know"), but also want God to be our witness.

Paul mentioned in verse 5 that God could be his witness that he preached the gospel out of honesty (as opposed to covetousness) and according to God's will (as opposed to flattering men). If we preach out of selfishness, we will use dishonest means that contradicts the truth, and even words of flattery (words that appeal to men) to court and draw people to believe. We end up preaching ourselves, not Jesus Christ or his gospel.

If we preach only to care about superficial effect, we will not care how God sees us. This is very dangerous and will eventually harm ourselves and others. Therefore we must bear Paul's advice in mind: only when we keep a clear conscience and stay trustworthy will God reveal to us his truth. Ministers with such qualities will show forth honesty in their daily life. This is extremely important.

And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. (Ephesians 6:19)

Praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; (Colossians 4:3)

Paul mentioned twice that his task was to preach the mystery of the gospel, the mystery of Christ. He used the word “mystery” to describe the gospel and Christ, not because the gospel is unfathomable or inexplicable, but that it was received through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Without the revelation of the Holy Spirit, no one can understand the mystery of the gospel. But once people receive the revelation, they can understand the mystery (1 Corinthians 13:2) and have the obligation to pass the mystery onto others. It was for this reason that Paul called himself a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1), and his duty is to hold onto and preach the mysteries that God revealed to him.

Do Not Abuse the Word “Mystery”

We must be careful when using the word “mystery” and never use it to cover our own ignorance or fallacy. The “mysteries” mentioned in the Bible are not incomprehensible and mystical teachings. Through God’s revelation people can understand the mysteries of God. Those who have received God’s revelation, not only understand the mysteries of God, but also bring them to light which has been hidden (Ephesians 3:8-9).

God revealed his mysteries to us so that we can tell the others. That means, if a Trinitarian evangelist does not understand what he is talking about, this proves that God hasn’t given him any revelation; otherwise he is surely able to explain it clearly.

Be it discussions of the Trinitarian teaching or biblical Monotheism, do not abuse the word “mystery” to cover up our own ignorance, lies and fallacies. If we regard fallacies as “incomprehensible truth”, the God of truth will be seen as a God of fallacy because of our dishonesty. We must preach the truth with godliness and purity of heart, and only in this way can we please God.

Nowadays it’s common to see Christians debating on Christian websites due to different opinions. It can be seen in the process that some talk nonsense, some talk irrationally, some hurl insults, while some accuse people with different opinions of heresy. Such behaviors not only dishonor God, but also set a bad example to young and newly-baptized believers. They cannot prove the truth, on the contrary, they show that they themselves do not understand the truth, that they need to use such means to cover up their ignorance. On the contrary, a Christian of truth who

understands the truth will surely manifest Christ-likeness.

If we want to understand the mysteries of God and accurately preach the mystery of gospel, we must keep a pure and honest heart before God. Purity of heart is pivotal, as our spiritual insight hinges on it, because Lord Jesus said,

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
(Matthew 5:8)

Appendix: The Athanasian Creed

1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith.
2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence.
5. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost.
8. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated.
9. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited.
10. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal.

11. And yet they are not three eternal; but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite.
13. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty.
14. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty.
15. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God.
16. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord.
18. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
20. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten.
23. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.
25. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another.
26. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.
29. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully

the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

30. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;
31. God, of the Essence of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Essence of his Mother, born in the world.
32. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.
33. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood.
34. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ.
35. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God.
36. One altogether; not by confusion of Essence; but by unity of Person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ;
38. Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead.
39. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the God the Father Almighty,
40. from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead.
41. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies;
42. And shall give account for their own works.
43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.
44. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasian_Creed