

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year C - Holy Trinity Sunday, Text: John 8:48-59
Year C - Holy Trinity Sunday, Text: (John 16:12-15)

John 8:48-59

***Editor's Note:** Dr. Wendt did not write a commentary for this specific text, did give some general insights for Holy Trinity Sunday. Additional commentary was written for the text by John B. King, Jr.*

General Insights for Holy Trinity Sunday (Wendt)

Jesus has just said, "I will send the Spirit" (John 14:7). The Holy Spirit is as much the Spirit of Jesus as He is the Spirit of the Father; see 1 Corinthians 3:17-18. The Spirit is not a freelancer, working on His own. Everything that the Spirit does points to Jesus and His glory. The Spirit of truth leads to Jesus who is the truth (14:6, 17). This is the chain of authority: The Father assigns to the Son His servant task and saving mission, and the Son tells the Spirit what to speak on His behalf. Any claim to possess the Spirit which does not glorify and reflect Jesus is a fake claim; see 1 Corinthians 12:3 and 1 John 4:1-3.

When dealing with the theology of the Trinity, it is important to focus on the function of each Person rather than on the fractions of each Person; namely, "Is each person a third of God or is each fully God?"

Trinitarian Theology and the Bible

Commentary on John 8:48-59 (John B. King, Jr.)

In the discussion below, we will first consider Trinitarian theology in general and then the import of John 8:48-59 in particular.

The New Testament does not give us a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, it gives us a Trinitarian problem which demands the doctrine of the Trinity as its solution. In this regard, the Trinitarian problem results from the seeming contrast between the unity of God and the divinity of Christ. On the one hand, the Bible teaches us that God is one. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deuteronomy 6:4)." Yet, the New Testament also teaches us that Jesus is divine: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58).'"

So here we have a problem. How do these statements fit together? If God is one, how can Jesus also be God? And if Jesus is God, how is God one and not two? (And, of course, this problem is compounded when the deity of the Holy Spirit is introduced into the discussion.)

Because the Bible is God's word, we know that both of the above statements must be true and also consistent with each other. However, at first glance, we don't see how they are consistent with each other since we don't know how to reconcile them. Demonstrating the consistency of these statements is thus an outstanding theological task. This is precisely the Trinitarian problem, and its solution is the doctrine of the Trinity which took its final form three centuries later.

In addition to a Trinitarian problem, however, the New Testament also provided data that guided theologians along the path to a solution, ultimately demanding the doctrine of the Trinity. To demonstrate this point, consider how just three Biblical texts produce seven derived statements which together demand the doctrine of the Trinity:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Deuteronomy 6:4)."

1) God is one.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19)."

2) The Father is God.

3) The Son is God.

4) The Holy Spirit is God.

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing (Acts. 2:32, 33)."

5) The Father is not the Son.

6) The Father is not the Holy Spirit.

7) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.

Clearly, these seven derived statements demand the doctrine of the Trinity. However, there is a problem here since it is cumbersome and unwieldy to use seven statements to express our view of God. This would be particularly disadvantageous in an evangelistic situation.

Fortunately, the Church Fathers took a different path of using philosophy to integrate the Biblical data into a more compact form. They said that God is three persons in one essence. Here, the terms “person” and “essence” come from philosophy, not the Bible. Yet the Fathers took these philosophical terms and reworked them to carry Biblical content. As a result, they gave us a doctrine of the Trinity that is Biblical in substance and philosophical in form. Moreover, since it is compact, it is easy to store in memory, retrieve from memory, and explain to others.

The Particulars of John 8:48-59

In light of this broad context, we can better see the contribution of John 8:48-59 to Trinitarian theology. In these verses Jesus both implies and asserts His divinity, thereby creating the tension of the Trinitarian problem. In this regard, the key verses are listed below:

“Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge (John 8:50).”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death (John 8:51).”

“If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God (John 8:54).’”

“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad (John 8:56).”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58).”

These five verses provide a strong witness to Christ’s divinity since Christ implies His divinity at multiple points and then directly asserts it. In regard to His implications, Jesus says 1) that He is glorified by the Father (v. 50, 54), 2) that His words give life (v. 51), 3) that He is eternal (v. 56), and that He is self-existent

(v. 58). Thus, Jesus implies His divinity by ascribing divine properties to Himself. In regard to His direct assertion of divinity, Jesus claims the divine name “I am” for Himself (v. 58). Given the multiplicity of these claims, therefore, this passage provides a strong assertion of Christ’s divinity and thereby sets up the Trinitarian problem.