

Transcript 99

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast on today's episode we have a very special guest and I mentioned last time when we interviewed Doctor Gary Habermas about the resurrection. That he was someone I really, really wanted to get for that particular topic and today's guest Doctor William Lane Craig is another one who, someone I've been a fan of for a long time, whose writings have been hugely influential and impactful on me. So Jeff and I are excited to welcome Doctor William Lane Craig to the show today and we're going to be discussing the Trinity in both the biblical, theological, and philosophical ramifications of the journey.

Shea Houdmann

So William Lane Craig is visiting scholar philosophy at Talbot School of Theology and Professor of Philosophy at Houston Baptist University. He and his wife Jan have two grown children at the age of 16 as a junior high school he first heard the message of the Christian Gospel and yielded his life to Christ. Doctor Craig pursued his undergraduate studies at Wheaton College and graduate studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School at the University of Birmingham in England and the University of Munich in Germany, where he received a doctorate in Theology. From 1980 to 1986 he taught philosophy of religion at Trinity, during which time he and Jan started their family. In 1987 they moved to Brussels, Belgium, where Doctor Craig pursued research at the University of Louvaine until assuming his position at Talbot in 1994. He has authored or edited over 30 books, many of which Jeff and I have found hugely helpful Doctor Craig welcome to the show today.

Dr William Lane Craig

Thank you Shea. It's great to be with you.

Shea Houdmann

So just to start off, why is the Trinity so important? At Got Questions we get lots of questions about the Trinity. Some people wanting to argue against it, some people wanting to understand it better, and other people just like, why does this all this even really matter? So why is the Trinity so important?

Dr William Lane Craig

Well, at the most basic level, it's important because I believe that this is the teaching of Scripture, and since I think scripture is God's inspired word, if Scripture teaches the Trinity, then it's important that we believe it.

Dr William Lane Craig

But its theologically important I think for at least two reasons, one is that I think that the deity of Christ is essential for our salvation. In my work on the Atonement, I discovered that at the very center of the multifaceted doctrine of the atonement that we find in the New Testament is the notion that Christ died in our place to pay the penalty for our sin and no mere human being could atone for the sins of all of humanity, past, present and future. In order for one person, through his substitutionary death, to pay the penalty for all the sins of mankind, that person would have to be a divine person, someone whose

death was therefore of infinite worth. And so I think essential to Christ's atoning death and our salvation is the deity of Christ. That Jesus Christ is God, just as the Father is God.

Dr William Lane Craig

Secondly, I think that the deity of the Holy Spirit is also essential to the life of the individual Christian and of the church. When you read the New Testament, you find that in this post Pentecostal age it is in many ways the Holy Spirit who is the most important divine person to us. He is the one who regenerates us, and through whom we are born again into God's family. He then indwells the believer. He fills and empowers us for daily Christian living. He gives us spiritual gifts in order to serve the church. He produces in our life the fruit of the spirit as we walk in his fullness and the Holy Spirit guides us in our life. He and intercedes for us in our prayers he directs us in our evangelism and witness. He produces sanctification in the Christian life, conforming us to the image of Christ. And so the deity of the Holy Spirit, I think, is really essential to all of those functions. He, like the Father, and the Son, is God.

Jeff Laird

One of the things that people have discussed when it comes to the New Testament in particular, are questions about Jesus divinity. You're also talking about the Holy Spirit. Obviously we want to talk about what you've seen in Scripture that supports the idea that Jesus Christ is divine because that's a topic that sometimes come up. I'm, I'm curious to hear what your perspective is on the divinity of the Holy Spirit and how that interacts with this question.

Dr William Lane Craig

In my chapter that I'm currently writing for my systematic philosophical theology, I try to address 2 questions. First of all, does the Bible teach that there is one and only one God and I think that it does. I think you can show easily that the scriptures teach monotheism, the doctrine that there is exactly 1 God.

Dr William Lane Craig

But then the second question is, are there exactly 3 persons who are God? And this then involves an exploration of what the scripture says about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Father is called. Or, or rather, I should say God is called the Father from Old Testament times when he established the covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, he reveals himself to them as the Father of Israel and they become then the children of God.

Dr William Lane Craig

And so this metaphor of God his Father is one that is in the Old Testament, and is inherited then by Jesus and the New Testament. Jesus looked to God as his heavenly Father, and he prayed to God as his heavenly Father and taught the disciples to pray our Father who is in heaven? So God is represented in the Old Testament and in the New as Father. But then when it comes to Christ, the New Testament Christians who were Jewish and inherited this Jewish monotheism faced a real dilemma. They were convinced that Jesus Christ is divine. That he's God. But the word God in the Greek, *ho Theos*, typically referred to the Father. When you read the New Testament, the word God in our New Testament typically means God the Father, and the Christians didn't want to say that Christ is God the Father. They

they thought that the Father had sent the Son into the world. They did not believe that the Father said Himself and that was the Father who died on the cross. It was the Son who died on the cross.

Dr William Lane Craig

So they had to figure out some way of affirming that Christ is divine, just like the Father, but without calling him God, because that would be tremendously misleading and what they did is brilliant and ingenious. What they did was they went back to the Old Testament and they picked up the name of God in the Old Testament, which is Yahweh in the Hebrew. Yahweh is the name of God, but Jews wouldn't pronounce this name. It was sacred, they would not read it aloud when they read the Old Testament scriptures in their synagogue services. They would substitute a different word for the word Yahweh, and in Greek this is the word kurios and kurios means Lord the English word Lord is the translation of the Greek word, which is the name of God in the Old Testament, kurios. And these old test these New Testament Christians then use this term to apply to Jesus. He was the Lord and they would take Old Testament passages that referred to Yahweh and they would quote them in application to Jesus.

Dr William Lane Craig

So you have a great example of this in Romans 10. Paul says if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. And then He quotes the Old Testament proof text from the book of Joel for everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved, and Joel is talking about Yahweh there. That is an Old Testament passage about Yahweh, but Paul applies it to Jesus and says, if you confess that Jesus is Lord, then you will be saved. So this is just one way out of a multitude of different ways that these New Testament Christians were able to affirm that Jesus is God without actually using that word.

Dr William Lane Craig

Now, having said that, what I'm doing in my chapter is showing that there are about 7 or 8 passages in the New Testament where these New Testament Christians seem to lose all inhibition, they just throw their reservations to the wind and they do come right out and call Jesus Theos. They refer to him as God, just as equally divine as the father. So I think that there's really solid New Testament evidence for showing that Jesus is God. Now, just very quickly as to the Holy Spirit. There, the situation is somewhat reversed with regard to Jesus. There's no difficulty in showing that Jesus is a distinct person from the Father.

Dr William Lane Craig

The challenge is to show that he is God with the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, there's no problem showing it that he's God, he's he's called the Spirit of God. What you have to show is that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person from both the Father and the Son. And so I give quite a number of passages where it's very clear that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person from the Father and the Son, and therefore is a third divine person, so that in a nutshell, is the case that I'm making biblically.

Shea Houdmann

I look forward to reading this book because I love studying the doctrine of the Trinity. And it's we talked a little bit later about some of the theological and philosophical implications of it. But one thing I've always appreciated about your ministry, especially administrative, reasonable faith. It's how you help

Christians to think correctly and a struggle we're constantly dealing with at Got Questions related to the Trinity is people who they understand the Bible presents it the Father is God that Jesus is God, the Holy Spirit is God. If there's only one God, and yet because they can't understand how God can be three in one at the same time, they basically said, well, if I can't understand it, it must not be true. Why is that a fallacy and what is the best way to help someone to overcome that mental roadblock of I can't understand it therefore it must not be true.

Dr William Lane Craig

Well, the very best way to overcome that is to help them understand it. I think that there is no logical or philosophical problem in the doctrine that there is one God and that there are three persons who are properly called God, so I. We can talk about that in a moment. If you like. I think it's possible to give a perfectly comprehensible and consistent doctrine of the Trinity.

Dr William Lane Craig

But the more fundamental point, and I think it's what you're getting at, is the idea that because you don't understand something, therefore you should reject it is just silly. How many of our listeners understand quantum mechanics. Virtually nobody does. Richard Feynman, the great physicist said that you shouldn't even try to understand quantum mechanics or you'll go down the drain mentally and go crazy. He said just do the equations, apply the math and don't ask what it means or relativity theory. How many of our listeners understand general and special relativity? The concepts of space and time in these theories are almost incomprehensible, and yet we have solid empirical evidence for these theories.

Dr William Lane Craig

Even as my wife often points out, the electric lights or the television if you don't understand how these work and are possible should you not turn on the lights or watch television. Of course not. So the idea that you're going to use your limited intellect and understanding, especially if you've never studied these things as the yardstick for whether or not something is true or false or should be believed, is just foolishness.

Jeff Laird

I appreciate the perspective that you're bringing on that, especially when we talk about things like science because a lot of people do resist that idea of of saying yes, but it just seems so bizarre and it seems so strange. But that is a fact of reality that even even our greatest scientific minds, our greatest philosophical minds. We reach points of things where we say, I can, I can see evidence that tells me it's true. I can see things that lead me to believe that this really is the case. But I don't know if I can fully get my mind around it. An example I'd like to use his numbers like a billion or a trillion or googplex. We can understand those abstracts, but the human brain can't actually conceive of what those are, but we can't understand.

Dr William Lane Craig

Yeah, or just one other area, which would be the the interaction between brain and consciousness. Those who studied the brain or study the mind have no explanation of how states of consciousness are

related to the human brain. And yet, it's an undeniable fact that they are we feel and see and hear and think about things. And yet there's virtually no understanding of this at all.

Jeff Laird

One of the questions that I wanted to make sure that I at least asked or touched on. I know that some people have said that they can find a lot of evidence for the Trinity, or at least a lot of support for the Trinity in the Old Testament, and it's not necessarily something that's necessary, but I wanted to see what your perspective was on that, because as you were saying. There is a different perspective from the New Testament Christian standpoint. Do you see anything in the Old Testament that that strongly leans towards the Trinity?

Dr William Lane Craig

I don't, frankly. I think at best one can try to show that there's no inconsistency between monotheistic Judaism and New Testament Christianity. The watchword of Old Testament Judaism was called the Shammaa. Which states hear O Israel the Lord your God the Lord is one and that's an affirmation of monotheism, and Jews were fiercely monotheistic in opposition to the polytheism of its Pagan neighbors. But that word for one in the Shammaa is interesting. The Hebrew word is God, and that can comprise diversity within unity.

Dr William Lane Craig

For example, one cluster of grapes, or in the Genesis creation story it says the man and his wife became one flesh, so there you have two persons in the one flesh. So I think you can say that there isn't any inconsistency between Old Testament monotheism and New Testament Christianity, but I don't think that God has revealed himself fully in the Old Testament as three in one. I think that this is a revision of monotheistic Judaism that was forced by the person of Jesus. It was in virtue of the impact of the life and the teachings in the person of Christ that these earliest Christians felt that they had to now revise Old Testament monotheism in such a way that there was a plurality of persons in God, not simply the Father but the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Dr William Lane Craig

Some New Testament scholars have used the word mutation to describe this process. That is a result of the impact of the person and work of Christ, there was a mutation of Old Testament Judaism whereby they came to see a plurality of persons within God, and I think that's an apt metaphor, and so it's due to God full revelation in Jesus that I think that we now see the doctrine of the Trinity.

Shea Houdmann

So you mentioned earlier the idea of trying to help someone to understand the Trinity so they can get past this, I can't understand it, therefore I wouldn't accept it. I know entire books could be written on this, but if someone were to approach you with that saying I can't accept the Trinity as I can't understand it, how would you go about at least in a fairly brief manner?

Dr William Lane Craig

Right?

Shea Houdmann

Helping them to understand what the Bible actually teaches about the trinity.

Dr William Lane Craig

OK in one sentence I would say that the biblical doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one immaterial being who is tripersonal. There's one immaterial or spiritual being who is tri personal to understand what I mean by that, think of ourselves, we are souls, or immaterial beings conjoined with a body, and our souls are uni personal each of our souls holds is endowed with a set of rational faculties that are sufficient for self consciousness. Freedom of the will, rationality and so forth, and what I'm suggesting is that in God's case you have an unembodied spiritual substance. You call it a soul if you want an immaterial spiritual being who is not uni personal but tripersonal. That is to say, he is endowed with three sets of rational faculties, each of which is sufficient for personhood. And I think that that's a perfectly comprehensible and logically coherent doctrine of God.

Dr William Lane Craig

I think, honestly. That most of the philosophical problems of the Trinity do not come from that biblical doctrine of the Trinity, but they come from later creedal and confessional formulas of the Trinity that employ various philosophical concepts, extra biblical notions that then I think sometimes do become wrong, frankly incoherent, but that basic doctrine that there is a single spiritual being who is tripersonal captures the essence of the Trinity.

Jeff Laird

Something that I found helpful and I'd be interested in hearing your perspective on it, is the idea that the the Trinity helps to explain some of the attributes that we see of God in Scripture in that it it removes potential objections. One of the distinctives, for example, between the Christian God and the Islamic concept of God, is that idea.

Jeff Laird

So, for example, if prior to creation. You have a single person within God. Then there's this logical, not mystery, not lack of understanding, but a hard logical problem with things like communication and submission. Whereas in the Trinity you can have a God who is perfectly capable of engaging in all of those things without the requirement of creating. I don't know what your perspective is on that. Is that a sound approach?

Dr William Lane Craig

Well, I I do think that's a sound plausibility argument that I have put into print and used in my debates and dialogues with Muslim theologians. Muslims agree with Christians that God is the greatest conceivable being. Allah Akbar. God is great. There can be nothing greater than God, so God is a maximally great being, and I would argue that part of being maximally great is to be all loving, it is clearly morally superior to be all loving than than not to be all loving. But that occasions a real problem for any Unitarian view of God like Islam, that God is just one person because God existing alone without the world without human beings could not have any other person to love. He would only love himself. He would be completely self absorbed, and yet it's the nature of love to give oneself away to another.

And here I think we see the superiority of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. God doesn't need finite persons to relate to or to love God existing without the world is not lonely. Or solitary. He is a Trinity of three persons in a mutual love relationship. So that I think the Trinity just gives us a beautiful picture of a morally perfect, all loving being who is in himself loving because the other to whom he gives himself away is within God himself.

Shea Houdmann

So you mentioned God being love. Is that something that the Trinity helps us to make sense in terms of the attributes of God? What are what are maybe a couple of other attributes of God where the Trinity helps us to understand exactly how that works?

Dr William Lane Craig

Well. I would say personhood would be one. We don't believe in God, who is just a kind of abstract first cause, a sort of unmoved mover. But we believe in a being who is self conscious. Who makes rational free decisions and so forth, and that is of course part and parcel of the doctrine of the Trinity, because we regard God as personal, indeed tripersonal. So that would be one other property of God that the Trinity fits very well with.

Jeff Laird

The only other thing that I could think of to ask would be to see what your comments are on some of the the ways we can debunk some of the false assumptions that people make about the Trinity. I think probably from the perspective you're coming from Biblically speaking, I have heard people refer to questions about how Jesus refers to the Father, for example, Him praying to the Father or Him referring to my God, and so on and so forth. Those are things that people are going to bring up when we talk about scripture, what's your sort of elevator version of explaining why those don't sort of immediately debunk the idea of Jesus Christ being God?

Dr William Lane Craig

The fundamental point to keep in mind here is that according to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, Jesus is both truly man as well as truly God and so forth. In his human nature Christ was limited in his knowledge. He was limited in strength. He was limited in space. And and power. He depended upon his heavenly Father for guidance and empowering throughout his ministry. The Father is the God of Jesus Christ. And so we must never deny the humanity of Jesus. That would be just as much an error as denying His deity. He is the God man. And so yes, the the Father is the God of the Incarnate Jesus Christ.

Dr William Lane Craig

The other thing to keep in mind is the point that I was making before is because of its Old Testament heritage the word God, *haf theos*, and the Greek, the word God typically referred to the Father. You didn't need to say God the Father if you just said God, everybody knew whom you were talking about. You were talking about the Father, and so it would be very natural for the Bible to refer to God the Father or the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ or God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament Christians would use the Old Testament name of God, Lord, to refer to Jesus in order to express His deity, but without confusing Him with the person of the Father.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent, and that's such a powerful explanation, and like Jeff is saying we get a lot of questions about people pointing to this passage or that passage. How can God be acting Jesus be God if he says this or does this, how can there be a Trinity of this and this?

Dr William Lane Craig

Yeah, he combined his humanity and I don't think that that will be a problem. But as I mentioned, there are these passages about seven or eight of them in the New Testament where these New Testament authors just throw caution to the wind and they come right out and call Jesus God and the Gospel of John in particular, does this three times in the opening verse of the Gospel of John, the author says in the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God. So here he identifies the word which we learn later is Jesus Christ with God.

Dr William Lane Craig

And then in verse 18 of chapter one, at the end of the prologue, the author says in this stunning expression no one has ever seen God, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father. He has made Him known. And this expression, the only begotten God, was so disturbing to early manuscript copyists that many of them changed it to read the only begotten son who is in the bosom of the Father.

Dr William Lane Craig

But that's not what our best and oldest manuscripts say. The original text said. The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known and then finally, like like bookends at the closing chapter of the Gospel of John Chapter 20 and verse 28. You have the resurrection appearance to Thomas and the 12. And you remember, Thomas said he wouldn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus unless he could touch his hands and put his hand in Jesus side.

Dr William Lane Craig

And Jesus appears to him, and invites him to do so. And what does Thomas do? He falls on his knees, and he says, my Lord and my God. And Jesus says, have you believed because you have seen, blessed are those who believe who have not seen. And here Thomas uses those two New Testament terms Theos God and kurios Lord, my Lord and my God, as his confession to Christ. It is the climax of the Gospel of John, so these would be just three of these examples, all in the same gospel. Where John dares to call Jesus theos God.

Shea Houdmann

Powerful then thank you for the great reminders and encouragement to keep sticking with this and missed all the questions that the people who want to disagree and just pointing them back to what are the core issues and why they matter? Maybe that's what I'd like to close this episode with Doctor William Lane Craig with. So Doctor Craig, people who are maybe willing to accept the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, they don't have any problem with any of the theological or philosophical issues, but they maybe question why does that matter to me? So what would you say to that person who's like, OK, I fully accept the doctrine, but what does that mean to me, practically speaking? How would you address that?

Dr William Lane Craig

Here we come back to what I mentioned before about the doctrine of Christ's atoning death. In the Old Testament, God had provisionally provided a means of atonement for the sins of the people in these animal sacrifices. That would be offered in the Tabernacle and later in the temple. An animal would be killed by the worshipper, symbolizing its death in his place, and then the blood would be sprinkled by the priest on the altar as a means of cleansing the worshipper from his sin and uncleanness, and the testimony of Scripture, is that these provisional measures were finally done away with when God sent His son into the world to give His life as a sacrificial offering on our behalf for sin.

Dr William Lane Craig

So Jesus death was not some tragic accident, some unforeseen circumstance of things terribly gone wrong. He came into the world to redeem us from our sin and guilt, and as I say, to do that, he had to be God himself, because no animal, no mere human being, could atone for all of the sins of humanity and so if God has done that for you, if he has gone to such an extent of entering into human history, taking on flesh and then going to the agonizing death of the cross out of his love for you, then surely our appropriate response is to love him in return. And with gratitude and thanksgiving to give our lives to Christ as our Lord and Savior, just as Thomas did when he cried out, my Lord and my God.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, so thank you for sharing that and thank you for that encouragement. This has been the Got Questions podcast with Doctor William Lane Craig. If you'd like to learn more about him, we'll include links to both his ministry, Reasonable Faith, and some of his books, which are Jeff and I's favorite. That might be a pretty long list, but we'll try to pick out maybe our top five, just the ones that meant the most to us. So Doctor Craig. Thank you for again. For your time today, when wonderful having you on the show.

Dr William Lane Craig

Certainly. I've enjoyed talking about these important questions today with you.

Shea Houdmann

Got Questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.