

(by Bill)

“If you believe in a Trinity you’re being illogical.”

“How can three be equal to one?”

This question used to stump me. I felt kind of ashamed as a new Christian, and avoided conversation that mixed science and religion, because I had fallen for the new definition of "faith": "faith means you believe something even when you don't have any evidence." I took the advice of Christian associates who said, "Don't take any courses in Philosophy. People who think too hard are liable to lose their faith." I was intimidated into the belief that you shouldn't trust logic or intellect, because "the just shall live by faith". And faith was obviously opposite to logic. I was to be a "fool for Christ's sake."

But it all bothered me. My first step out of this circular mind-trap was accomplished while I was taking an advanced physics course and found that scientists believed some strange things, too. In the study of quantum mechanics we found that there are two ways of describing matter - look at it one way, and it consists of little hard balls; but from another viewpoint, it's a wave. This is called the "particle-wave duality principle", and you end up saying all matter is made up of fuzzy little wave-packets. Furthermore, you can't tell exactly where they are if you know how fast they're going, and vice versa. All this gave me some courage to conclude that maybe my belief that God is three persons and yet one is not so contradictory after all!

That course gave me the incentive to begin to think; and to my amazement and joy I found that logic is not anti-Christian after all. However, you have to realize that "illogical" and "incomprehensible" are totally different concepts. I am convinced that this difference is what confuses most people.

Let me introduce another mind-boggling concept: Einstein's theory of relativity. The basic idea behind it is that the speed of light is the same no matter how fast you are moving - that is, if

you struck a match while riding on a moving train, light would move away from your match in all directions at the same speed, whether the train was still or moving. That seems innocent enough at first, but with some simple algebra you can show that if this is true (and it is) certain experiments will give us results that are incomprehensible to the human mind. The derivation is quite logical, the results, incomprehensible. Let me cite four examples.

(1) Suppose that the speed of light was somehow slowed down so that it was 10 m.p.h., just for the sake of discussion (incidentally, if this was true, nothing could be made to move faster than 10 m.p.h.).

Now, let's say you travel north at 9 m.p.h. and pass a friend going south (compared to some landmark on the ground) at 9 m.p.h. How fast would you be moving away from your friend? The answer is not 18 m.p.h., as you would expect, but 9.94 m.p.h. Speeds don't add directly. They only seem to, because we usually move much more slowly than light (which really travels at 186,000 miles per second).

(2) Suppose you travel north at 9 m.p.h. and have arranged to hold a ruler horizontally up to your window as you pass a friend; (he is moving at 9 m.p.h. in the opposite direction, as in the above example.) he is holding a ruler up to his window, also, so that you can compare your rulers as you pass each other. You take a picture of both rulers as you pass, and find that his ruler is shorter than yours. He had taken a picture at the same instant that you had, though, and when he shows it to you, it shows your ruler to be shorter than his. All lengths parallel to motion contract in a system moving with respect to your own.

(3) Suppose that, in the above experiment, you and your friend each held clocks up to your windows and compared the rate at which time was proceeding as you passed each other (you could do it by taking two pictures apiece, just before and just after you were opposite). Your pictures would show that his clock was slow, and his would show that yours was slow. Time slows down in a system which moves with respect to your own.

(4) Now consider a three dimensional example. Suppose you agree with your friend in the experiment above to hold an unlit match out the window as you pass, and he is to do the same. The matches strike each other as you pass, producing sphere of light which moves out from your match as it's' center. As you watch the sphere of light expand (since light travels at a constant speed with respect to your moving vehicle) it is as if you are not even moving as far as the light is concerned. It moves out in all directions from your match at equal rates. Bur this is also true to your friend's match, and the same light waves travel away from his match in all directions. It's all the same sphere of light, so we have, after some time, a sphere with two centers!

Can you imagine a sphere with two centers? These concepts are hard to get a feeling for, because all our experience teaches us that time is universal. Some of these things have been experimentally verified, however. We therefore know logically that they are true, but they just don't fit in our minds. You might say our problem is that we are "three-and-half dimensional" - that is, trapped in time. God is at least four-dimensional and, in fact, He has to be, not simply infinite-dimensional, but trans-dimensional; because He cannot be constrained to dimensions. He invented dimensions in the first place!

Be careful to avoid a pitfall, however, which is to conclude that "if I can't know all about God, I must be unable to know anything about Him." That would make God totally "other", and we could have no relationship with Him. Actually, though we can't know all things, we can know some things, and the things we can know are sufficient for us.

Now, let's look at spiritual physics.

First, Archimedes' principle doesn't necessarily hold for spiritual physics; that is, more than one spiritual object may be able to occupy the same physical space (maybe there's an analogous "spiritual space" for which it holds, but it wouldn't necessarily be in the same physical place).

This principle may be related to the fact that the difference between "singular" and "plural" takes on a different meaning in the spiritual realm than we're used to in the physical. As an

example, suppose you have five Christians in a room. Each one has the Holy Spirit "in him". How many Holy Spirits are there in the room? Only one. Perhaps this is because the different physical spaces occupied by the different people are in reality the same spiritual space, and the Spirit is in that space. I don't think we can comprehend that with three-and-a-half dimensional minds, though, and besides there may be some other, equally incomprehensible (but logical) explanation to the problem anyway. The important thing is that we need to admit that certain things are beyond our ken. (One explanation, totally unacceptable, is that the Holy Spirit is like water, and the more you empty yourself, the more of Him you have. This simply divides Him into pieces, which tends to depersonalize Him, making Him to be a Force or Magic Fluid. In this explanation we take a trans-dimensional Being and try to force Him into our three-and-a-half dimensional thinking). We could as easily have chosen The Father or The Son as our illustration. Consider the words of Jesus in John 17:21: "as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." How can two Persons be inside each other? They can't be, in physical physics; but we have almost no experience with spiritual Physics.

Related to this is the fact that God is omnipresent (See Psalms 139:7,8: "wither shall from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there."). We know from this that He is everywhere; but there are places in Scripture where he is somewhere - in the pillar of cloud, or speaking to Moses on the mountain. Many people are praying to Him right now, and He gives personal attention to each one. How can this be? The problem is that we think in terms of physical physics, for which we have a feeling by experience.

Timelessness

At this point, let's consider the timelessness of God. This is closely related to the concepts of predestination, free will, and cause-and-effect. We'll start with an illustration.

One Sunday night, my wife and I prayed for some money; we told no one of our request. The next day, we opened our medicine cabinet and found that someone had anonymously left a \$10 bill. Later that day a girl came to visit us bearing an envelope from her mother which had \$7 in it. She said her mother felt impressed to send it along. So far, so good. God heard, so He

answered. But then the mail came, and in it were two checks - one from someone who wanted to pay my wife for some work she had donated and for which she had never expected payment -that was \$50; another, anonymous, had \$150 in it along with a note saying it was to be used for house expenses - exactly the purpose of our request.

Now, this was not an everyday occurrence. That happened in the mid-60's, so the equivalent dollar values would be larger now. In fact, can never remember having received so much money as an unsolicited gift, before. I would definitely call it an answer to prayer.

Wait a minute, though. The money came on Monday, and we had prayed on Sunday. That's not enough time for God to hear the prayer and tell someone to mail the money. That means He began to answer before we had asked (that's Scriptural: Isa. 65:24 - "before they call, I will answer...")

Let us speculate a bit. What if we hadn't asked; would the money have come? I don't think so. It wouldn't have been an answer to prayer if we would have gotten it anyway. "Answer to prayer" implies that our prayer had something to do with the result. Then are those who say that we don't really get "answers to prayer" in that sense – we can only find out what God was going to do anyway and then pray for it to happen. The trouble with this view is that it makes man totally insignificant, which is not the concept we see in the Bible. There, Moses intercedes for the people of Israel, and is heard; and Jesus Christ dies for man's sins. Can there be a greater statement of man's significance?

What does Christ's death on the cross have to do with man's significance? His death was because of man's sin; and without free will, there can be no such thing as sin (For-example: windup a toy robot, aim it so that it will walk off the table, tell it "don't walk off the table" and let it go. It walks off, crashing to the floor. Has it sinned against you? Of course not. It didn't decide to walk off; you made it do so. It has no free will, and therefore could not have sinned). In the crucifixion, for a period of time, the Father turned His back on the Son, because our sins were heaped upon Him, and God cannot look on sin. The Son cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", and at that time the bond between the Father and Son, which had been from forever, was broken. The whole nature of the Trinity was changed in time because of man's sins!

You'd expect the whole universe to fly apart, at least. Of course there were earthquakes! How could man be any more significant?

Man likes to be significant, but he doesn't like to be responsible. You cannot have one without the other, though. A student might like to have the significance of making an "A" in a course, but not the responsibility if he earns an "F". If everyone got an "A", though, it would have no significance. Similarly, the average man-on-the-street would like the significance of going to an eternal heaven, but he doesn't want to believe in an eternal hell. Significance and responsibility are really two sides of the same coin, which is free will (This is why our current judicial philosophy, in trying to abolish responsibility for crime, has reinforced the concept that man is meaningless).

Return now to the question of God's timelessness. He can answer a prayer before we ask it, and yet our asking it has an influence on whether or not it is answered (If this is not true, we have no interaction with God, and that makes us totally insignificant; in which case there is no sense talking, or writing, or even living). We are three-and-a-half dimensional; that is, we can conceive of height, width, depth, and time - but we can only move in one direction in time. God, however, is at least Four-dimensional, so that He is outside of time and sees it as a continuum. He can see us pray on Sunday and reach back to the previous Friday to see that someone mails a letter, so we'll get it on Monday. Now we have a problem with cause and effect can you cause something to happen by performing an action after it has happened? (1)

The Bible tells us that Jesus the Son of God became a man in historical time to die for our sins. There is now a man in heaven, but He is still God. It seems like the form of God changed (from our point of view) but we're told in Scripture that "God changes not."

Jesus is referred to as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." How can that be? It only begins to make sense when we realize that God is not bound at all by time (as we are). It is similar to the constant frequency spectrum of constantly changing sinewaves in time. In a sense, everything is always happening to God. No information is ever lost. God doesn't have to remember things.

2 Peter 3:8 – "With the Lord a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day."

In the timeless realm Christ is still being sacrificed for our sins and always will have been. Since He died for all sins past and future today's actions affect the past. Our present sins can actually increase Christ's sufferings on the cross.

Furthermore, because He is infinite God can have multiple attention at once. He doesn't have to just focus on me to give me full attention (Ps. 8:1-9).

Quantum mechanics and relativity have shown us that things can appear incomprehensible to us without being illogical.

Free will and Knowledge

When I first took algebra, a certain type of problem stumped me.. It was something like this:

"Find the number of pennies a boy has in hand. If you multiply the number by three and then subtract fourteen, you have the number."

We can write this problem in equation form.

Let x = the number of pennies. then

$$3x - 14 = x.$$

In order to find x , we have to have x , multiply it by three, and subtract fourteen. That means you have to know the answer before you can find it (so you can have it to use it to get it to use it to get it to)

But you can. Simply apply the rules of algebra, and you find $x = 7$ pennies.

I suspect that our problem in understanding how God can answer before we ask is something like my problem with the algebraic equation. I was trained to read from left to right, so I tried to solve the equation starting with the left hand side alone. You can't do it that way. You need the whole equation. Similarly, we are used to thinking in time; a cause now produces an effect later, so we assume that a prayer now produces an answer later. In reality, the prayer and the answer, or, to be more general, our free will action and God's omnipotent "response" are coupled

together in such a way that both must be considered in order to explain the whole, outside of time.

We have seen that the concept of free will is essential to our significance; now let's turn to the other side of the equation: God's sovereignty, or the concept of predestination.

Go back to the Beginning. Suppose that God decides to make a universe...

Already, our model has failed! When we consider that "God decided", we have thought of Him as trapped in time, as we are. We make decisions in time; but in order to make decision, we have to not know what we are going to do before the decision. There is nothing that God doesn't know, so that He doesn't make decisions in the same sense that we do. Moses may argue God into "changing His mind", but God knows He will change His mind, before it is ever done.

Consider what it means that God knows everything. He must know every position of every molecule in the universe for all time; it's as if all the events of our lives, including our thoughts, are on video tape in God's mind; not only those of the past, but of the future, also (2) "there is nothing hidden that shall not be made known" - Mark 4:22.

But if He knows what we are going to do, doesn't that mean we have no free will? No, the problem goes back to our three-and-a-half-dimensionality. Perhaps, though we can get a "feel" for it by going back to our inadequate model for the creation, realizing that it is inadequate, and continue it anyway. It will be something like a Flatlander viewing a sphere as a variable-radius circle.

Suppose God decides to make a universe. As soon as He conceives of it, He knows all about it - who will be saved, how many people are born, the position of every feather on every bird, the color of every hair on every head; and which way you hold your fork as you take your third bite of breakfast on August 30, 1973.

In this universe, conceived by God but not yet created (remember we're thinking of Him as being trapped in time, which is not valid), you would have made certain free-will decisions. He would certainly have influenced your decisions, because He would have created you and your surroundings, but those decisions would have been your own, unforced by Him. You might have chosen to accept Christ as Savior; you might not have.

Now, suppose God says, "No, I don't like that one," and decides create a different universe this one is exactly the same as before, except that you accept Christ, whereas you had not in the former universe. Again, it would still have been your own decision -you're not forced to do it; but God knowing it before He creates has established it .

To be complete, we have to consider that there was an infinite number of possible universes for God to pick from in creating, some differing from others in that all history was the same except for the fact that one hair on one person's head grew a bit longer in one universe than in its parallel.

We have been thinking of the creation as having occurred in time; we must, being trapped in time ourselves. But God created outside of time; in fact, what tense can we use with God? Jesus' statement in John 8, "Before Abraham was, I am", takes on a deeper meaning as we realize that not only did He never stop being, but that, from God's point of view, everything is always happening. All is present tense to Him. Perhaps "One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day" (2 Peter 3:8) is as close as we can come to understanding this concept.

Is there any practical application of the timelessness of God to us? I think so. Consider Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. In Revelation 13:8 He is called the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world". From our vantage point, in time, Christ was sacrificed once for all. Viewed by the Father, however, outside of time, Christ is-always-will-have-been-will-be-was paying-pay-paid for our sins on that cross. This concept tends to make my choice, to sin or not to sin, more personal, as it affects my Lord personally. If I sin, it's like twisting the nail in His hand a bit.

Nothingness

For many years, as a young Christian, my concept of God was that He was somewhere in space. My immersion and upbringing in the humanist - pantheist world made it hard to think of Him any other way; even if He filled all space, He had to be in space.

Now I realize this cannot be - it limits God: but this realization forces me to a new conclusion: before God created space, there wasn't any space. This "Pre-space Nothingness" is a concept that needs to be defined, but it cannot be conceived by the human mind while we are alive, because we now think in terms of three-and-a-half dimensions, and we can only conceive of things by experience. That's why Jesus spoke in parables. Our "creativity" depends on what God has already created. For instance, try to think of a "new" animal; chances are, it's made up of parts of existing ones, like octopus tentacles, lion's mane, horses hooves, and so on...

Why do I use the term "three-and-a-half dimensions"? Because of the fourth dimension: time. We move only forward in time, but God "created" time. He is outside of time, not caught in it, as we are. We blithely sing "when the trumpet sounds and time shall be no more", but there's another mind boggling concept here: we can only think of creation in terms of time; even when we say the word "creation", there is "before" and "after" the creative act, so when we say "before God created time", we are using the concept in trying to define it. Again, the limitation is in our own minds; the concept of "timelessness" is akin to that of "Prespace Nothingness".

You might think that this is all silly, but I believe it needs to be considered; otherwise we remake God in our own space-time image, and He becomes too small. Before I was a Christian, I wondered, as many people do, "what is infinity?" When you get to the "edge of space", what's after that? And if there's something, what comes at the edge of the something?" The conclusion Einstein came up with, (I think he's probably right) is that space is curved, and therefore has no edge. Here is another concept that our three-and-a-half dimensional minds can't conceive of, but it is readily accepted by many scientists. You don't

have to be able to conceive of something for it to be true, and you don't have to understand God fully for Him to be there. "In the beginning was the Word ..." and that beginning was "before" creation; there was prespace nothingness, and timelessness. There was God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - alone.

What can we conclude? God is greater than we are in ways we can't even conceive of, but this fact does not mean we should give up thinking. A concept may be incomprehensible and yet logical. I fear that many of the doctrines which separate Christians of various denominations are simply the results of squeezing God into a three-and-a-half dimensional box. We'd like to be able to say we understand all things - it takes humility to say "I don't know", and yet we should not say more than is really justified by Scripture. We can't 'know all things, but we can know some things. Let's be dogmatic only about those things we can know.

FOOTNOTES

(I) C. S. Lewis considered this, with reference to praying that a person not be involved in an accident, after the accident has occurred. He thinks you could pray effectively, but only if you didn't know whether or not the accident had happened, because you couldn't muster enough faith to pray that it not happen if you knew it already had. Perhaps, if you knew that the accident had happened and prayed for it not to, God would change history and cause it not to have happened; but the you wouldn't know that it had happened (since it hadn't, really), and would not remember that you had prayed for it not to happen when it really had. It's the old time-machine paradox, in

which someone goes into the past, changes history horribly, and then, in order to rectify the problem, goes back in time again and kills himself (his other self) before the other self has a chance to do the history-changing deed.

(2) It is unfortunate that a proverb has come up in Christian circles which says "God forgets your sins when He forgives them". This is simply not true in the sense that we forget - that is, so that we no longer have that information accessible to our minds. A better way to say it would be that He knows what our sins were, but He will not count them against us, because of the sacrifice of His Son.