

Give Us This Day Our Daily Dilemma

Tricky Trinity

On what part of the Bible is the doctrine of the Trinity based? Certainly these two verses play a leading role, although they aren't the sole basis for the doctrine.

1 John 5:7-8: (KJV)

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

But those verses are found only in the King James Version. In other translations, the Trinity evaporates.

1 John 5:7-8: (NRSV)

There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.

The vast majority of Greek texts do not have the KJV wording in them. Which version is the inspired Word of God? Does it make any difference, really? Someone purportedly being inspired by the Holy Spirit thought so as he was copying the text or translating it. Did the Holy Spirit inspire both versions? Why? The doctrine of the Trinity is pretty doggone important to Christians, and one would think the omniscient, omnipotent God (all three of him) would want to make it perfectly clear. Oops. He (all three of him) blew that one.

By the way, with three parts to work with, you'd think God might have made at least one of them female, just to help balance things out. What does God (all three of him) have against women? Plenty, judging from the Old Testament.

Great Drops of Blood

How was Jesus feeling as he prayed on the Mount of Olives shortly before his death? How much was he suffering?

Luke 22:44:

In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

Well, that answers that question pretty graphically. But some Greek manuscripts do not include those words. Is that important? Without them, we get the impression that Jesus was cool, calm, and collected. That seems to be the picture Luke intended, because he stripped out of Mark (one of his sources) all references to Jesus' pain. Therefore, this verse seems to have been added later by a Christian who was more eager than Luke was to emphasize Jesus' agony.

Some manuscripts have those words, and others don't. Which version was inspired by the Holy Spirit? Both? Why? It's a powerful, moving, and revealing glimpse of Jesus' humanity, and if it is true, why would Luke, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit, remove it? If it didn't happen, why would someone later, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit, make it up and stick it in the inerrant, infallible Word of God?

Wonder Bread

That isn't the only stuff found in Mark that Luke tossed in the trash can. Luke eliminated all of Mark's references to Jesus' death as atonement for sin. But, once again, some good Christian must have taken upon himself to add this to Luke's gospel. Luke 22:19-20:

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Part of verse 19 and all of verse 20 are missing from the earliest and best manuscripts.

Was the Holy Spirit laying down on the job with Luke, or when some scribe or editor came along later with a holy assist? Was Luke maybe not inspired at all by the Holy Spirit? That's not likely, because that would mean that pretty much all of Luke's gospel is not quite up to par. So why did men later, inspired by the Holy Spirit as they were, include Luke in the canon? Or maybe it was the scribe or editor who wasn't inspired by the Holy Spirit? Why then, how then, did this verse get into the Bible? If Luke didn't buy into that whole atonement for sins thing, why should we?

Suspended Sentence

And then there is this story with which virtually every Christian is quite familiar.

John 7:53-8:11:

Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they

heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

This episode appears only in John's gospel, and sometimes not even there. It isn't found in some manuscripts of John. Once again, those scribes and editors were busy little beavers, not leaving such important work to that unreliable Holy Spirit to tell John exactly what to say. Did it happen? If so, why is it not in all the inspired texts? If not, why is it in the canonical gospel of John? What difference does it make? It obviously made a pretty big difference to somebody. Why? What lesson are we to learn from this anecdote? That Jesus was more compassionate than the Scribes and Pharisees? That's the way I always heard it explained.

But there is another important feature that I never heard about in Sunday School or from the pulpit. The Scribes and Pharisees were right in saying that Jewish law handed down from Moses required that a woman guilty of adultery was to be stoned to death. And Jesus was a Jew who believed in adhering to Jewish law. So, why would Jesus defy Jewish law in this case? Was he teaching us to obey the laws and rules sometimes, but not others? One could certainly interpret the story that way. The law didn't say anything about the executioners having to be sinless before they could do what they were commanded to do. That came from Jesus, extemporaneously. If Jesus' spin on it was what God had originally intended, it was a frivolous, feckless part of the Law, because God certainly understood that no man is without sin. Otherwise, the story of Adam and Eve gets stepped on big time.

Fear No Poison

What about this little gem? Mark 16:14-18:

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness,

because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

Did Jesus really say that believers would go around handling snakes and drinking poison without harming their bodies or dying? Yes, in some manuscripts, no, according to others. That’s pretty powerful stuff. If Jesus really said that, why would it be missing from some texts and from the other gospels? If Jesus did not say that, why would it be present in some texts? And why would it make its way into the canon?

If the Bible is the infallible Word of God, then Jesus must have actually said those words. And if Jesus said it, it must be true. So, why don’t we see examples of it in action today? Believers should be able to handle poisonous snakes and drink poison without suffering any harmful effects to their body. And if believers can do that, surely we would see some believers doing it and pointing to these verses in the Bible as proof that Christianity is the real deal. After all, Jesus went around performing miracles in John to impress people and prove that he was divine. Surely believers today would want to follow his example. I’ve never heard of an example of this happening. I have heard of believers who died from snake bites trying it out. Is the Bible wrong? Drink a glass of arsenic and grab a couple of rattlesnakes and find out. Let us know how that works out for you, okay?

What Did Jews Know and When Did They Know It?

Sometimes scribes and editors left out parts of the text instead of adding to it. This statement by Jesus was sometimes omitted in the second and third

centuries by Christians who felt strongly that Jews knew very well what they were doing. These scribes weren’t inclined to let Jews off the hook, no matter what earlier Christians, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had said.

Luke 23:34:

Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

Maybe the Holy Spirit didn’t know what He was doing? Maybe Jesus didn’t know what he was saying?

Christian Women Don't Have to Shut Up After All

Women will be happy to find that these words were not spoken by Paul after all.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35:

As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

This was added later by scribes who were keen on keeping women in their place. I wonder how God feels about that? Unless the Christian God is a misogynist, why would He allow that little nugget to slither into the canon?

Making a Theological Mountain Out of a Canonical Molehill

Some Christians actually argue that all these discrepancies in the manuscripts and the canonical New Testament aren’t important, they don’t matter, and they don’t really change anything significantly. That’s a strange argument coming from people who have a gift for making a theological mountain out of a canonical molehill. I agree with them only in the sense that none of the Bible really matters, because Christianity is a fraud. But if they want to

cherry-pick the parts they consider important, I can do that too.

Mark 16:18:

they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover

Come on, Christians, what's holding you back?
Why aren't you out there healing the sick?