

Be on Guard for Yourselves and For all the Flock

5- The Danger of the Heresy of Modalism

February 7, 2021

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.

14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"

15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.

16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him,

17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

To the Glory of God

Now God has burdened my heart to take a short “vacation” from our “journey” through the **Epistle of James** to begin this new year by preaching through a series of Sermons on the Danger of Heresies. And we see the great Danger of Heresies because of what Jude wrote:

Jude 3-4

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now as we discovered, Heresy attacks the “Essential Truth” of the Bible. And so, the Danger of Heresy is that, if a person *understands* the Heresy and *believes* it- that person is NOT saved. Because every individual, who is genuinely saved, MUST understand and agree with- Essential Truth. And this is what Jude

was talking about when he wrote about the “**Common Salvation**” in verse 3. All, who are genuinely saved- MUST be in “one mind and one accord” with Essential Truth.

And then, we also discovered that Heresy can’t be killed. It is a Belief; a Teaching- and so, even though the Christian Church SHOULD confront it; defeat it; and cast it out- sadly, Heresy will simply go somewhere else; and deceive somebody else. And so, we must be ever vigilant in equipping the saints of each succeeding generation- about the Dangers of Heresy.

Now by what Jude wrote in verse 4- we see that there always have been and there always will be, “**certain persons**”, who will creep into the Church “**unnoticed**”; who have been “**long beforehand marked out for this Condemnation**”. And these certain persons will be “**ungodly persons**”, who attack the Orthodoxy of biblical Christianity along three main lines:

1. The Grace of God
2. The Person of Jesus- in either His full Deity or His full Humanity
3. The finished Work of Jesus Christ

Now even though there are literally *hundreds* of Heresies on the earth today- there are really only seven major “roots” or “origins” of all the False Teachings that exist today. And those seven major roots are:

1. Legalism
2. Lawlessness (Antinomianism)
3. Gnosticism
4. Modalism
5. Arianism
6. Pelagianism
7. Socinianism

... and interestingly enough- all seven of these major Roots- attack either the Grace of God or the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we have already been over the first three Heresies and today, I want to look at the fourth major Root of all modern-day false Teaching- by looking at the Heresy of “Modalism”.

Now “Modalism” is the first major Heresy that rose up *after* the production of the New Testament; and *after* all the Apostles had died. So, the battle against Modalism gave the Leaders of the Christian Church- their first opportunity to use the Principle concerning confronting; exposing; and

condemning Heresies- that the Apostles had established. And thank God, they did their job well.

Jesus promised that He would...

... build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Matthew 16:18b).

... and so, God was faithful to raise up one of the early Church Fathers, a man named, “Tertullian”¹ to defend the Christian Faith against this “Doctrine of Demons”.

Now in some circles- “Modalism” is also called, “Sabellianism” and is a *perversion* of the very Nature of Jesus Christ- by attacking the “tri-unity” of the Godhead. So, Modalism denies the “Trinity”- which, in effect, denies the eternal and full Deity of Jesus.

Now *Sabellius* was a Roman, who lived in the 3rd Century, who was deceived by this Heresy and who sought to deceive others. And many scholars today link this man with this Heresy. But the Truth is that Modalism existed, in one form or another- many hundreds of years before Sabellius. A man named, *Praxeas* (another Roman) taught this Heresy way before Sabellius was born. And Tertullian did battle with Praxeas- and his effort to deceive. So, at some point prior to 208AD- Tertullian wrote a book, “*Adversus Praxean*” (Against Praxeas)- to denounce Praxeas’ Teachings- *especially* about the Trinity.

Interestingly, Modalism was an offshoot or a derivative of Gnosticism. And this proves that, without fully understanding and condemning a Heresy- it will simply return in a few years- in a “repackaged” form. Modalism teaches that God does NOT exist in three “Persons”- but rather, in three “Offices” or “Modes”. So, for example- during the time of the Old Testament- God was “Father”. During the time of the New Testament, God was “Son”. And now, in the “Church Age”- God is “Spirit”. So, Modalism teaches that- at no time- were all three Persons operating together in the earth.

And when questioned about obvious verses and passages that describe all three Persons of the Godhead operating in the earth together- Praxeas simply replied that those verses were in error and should be removed from the Bible. And this is common with all Heretics: what they say God has revealed to them is “Truth”- and *anything* that disagrees with their Revelation is wrong- **even the Bible!** And sadly, that is *exactly* what many within the Cults teach today.

¹ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (155- 240 AD); from the African City/State of Carthage. A prolific writer and early Church Father. Tertullian is perhaps known best for defeating the heresy of Modalism and being the first Latin writer to use the term, “Trinity”

For example, Seventh Day Adventism holds a woman, Ellen G. White- in high esteem as a “Prophetess”. And the official Doctrine of this Cult teaches that Mrs. White’s Revelation is “pure and unimpeachable”. They say it is the “correct interpretation of the Scriptures”. Now that may not seem to be so dangerous to some of you. But the practical way in which this works- is that, since White’s supposed Revelation is true- a convert to this false Teaching MUST read and believe her writings.² And if they do- there is really no need for them to actually read and believe the Bible.

So, in reality- a convert to this Cult is NOT following Jesus- they are following Mrs. White. And they are NOT being taught the Word of God- they are being taught White’s warped *interpretation* of the Bible- *including* her false Teaching about how lost souls are forgiven and made Righteous (Justification).³

Now this is *exactly* why I emphasize personal Bible Study among the members of this Church. I want you to hear from God- NOT me. Now, I’m trying as hard as I can to preach the Truth. And I spend an *enormous* amount of time- trying to “get the Gospel right”. And everything I teach- I honestly believe. And everything I teach- I have done my level best to assure that it is completely biblical. And when I don’t know- I say, “*I don’t know*”. But the Reality is that I’m simply a man- an unimportant, unworthy sinner- in need of much Grace. And that means that, in spite of my efforts- I could be wrong about some things. Maybe even very important things. And that Reality makes me humble and it causes me to beg all of you to pray for me- that I will not be deceived myself and that I won’t deceive anyone else either. And so, the deal I make with all of you- is that, when I find out I’m wrong about important Issues- I will *publicly* repent and I will *publicly* correct the record. And I simply don’t know how I can be any more honest than that.

Now the Truth is that the Doctrine of the Trinity is one of the *deepest* Doctrines taught anywhere in the Scriptures. And that means that it is *hard* to teach; *hard* to believe; *hard* to accept; *hard* to defend; and *hard* to adopt in everyday life. So, why is it so important? Why does God expect us to believe in something that most people find hard to even describe? Shouldn’t Salvation be based on things that are easy to teach; and easy to learn; and easy to defend; and easy to believe?

You mean easy Beliefs like God taking on human flesh and becoming Man? Or Jesus being fully God and fully Man in the same body at the same time- without conflict or contradiction? The Truth is that almost every Doctrine about Jesus is

² The “blue book” that is in many doctor’s offices- is a book from White’s Teachings and is nothing more than an attempt at converting people to Seventh Day Teachings.

³ White teaches that unless a person employs the dietary and ceremonial Laws of Moses- they are NOT justified- even if they have put their Faith in Jesus and in His finished Work.

both deep and profound- which is *why* there are so many false Understandings about Him.

Yet *many* things taught in the Bible *are* relatively easy. In fact, there is a Principle about the Bible called, the “*Perspicuity of Scripture*”. And this Principle says that the basic, fundamental Truth of the Bible is so easy and simple- a child can grasp it. And that is true- and we thank God for that. But I do find it ironic that a Principle about how easy and simple the basic Truth of the Bible is- is labeled with a word that is hard to pronounce.

But what is also true- is that there are *some* Truths in the Bible that are deep and profound. And some are *very* deep and *very* profound. But these very deep and very profound Truths are also very important. But what we must agree on- is that the deep and profound Issues are *just* as true and *just* as important as the easy ones. And that means that we should teach and believe and defend and celebrate the *hard* Truths- with just as much energy and passion as those Issues that are *easy* and simple.

But another way to look at this – is to say that *everything* that is Eternal; and *everything* that is Supernatural; *everything* that is Miraculous; and *everything* that is Heavenly- is deep and profound. I mean, we are talking about God here- not how to play checkers.

But the reason most people today see no harm in being taught by a person, who is deceived about the Trinity- is NOT because there is no danger. It is because far too many within the modern Church simply don’t understand the Trinity themselves- and therefore- they judge it to be unimportant. And so, for example, they see no harm in being taught by a renown preacher like T.D. Jakes, who has repeatedly and publicly *denied* the Trinity. And when asked about it- many will simply shrug their shoulders and say, “*But he does such great work for so many.*” Recently, Benny Hinn supposedly repented for publicly and repeatedly teaching for decades that God was actually *nine* Persons (each of the three Persons was three)⁴. I pray he did repent.⁵

And this serves to teach us that, even though Modalism is ancient- it isn’t dead. Sadly, this Heresy is alive and well and is being taught today in several churches in this city. For example, since the early part of the 20th Century- entire Denominations, comprising tens of millions of members, have fallen into the ancient heretical Teaching of Modalism and teach it to this day as being a “fundamental tenet” of their religious organizations. Religious groups like the *United Pentecostal Church* and the *World-wide Apostolic Assembly*- unashamedly teach the ancient Heresy of Modalism every single weekend.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9J8P9b0cbc>

⁵ The reason I emphasize the words “publicly and repeatedly” is to prove that this was NOT a simple mistake or slip of the tongue- which could be forgiven if turned from. This Heresy was promoted- many times- as being a direct Revelation from God by Hinn.

Now, the hope is that those who are part of those Cults either don't understand or don't believe what the Leaders are teaching. And if that is true- then there is hope that they can be saved and come out from those groups. Because we must remember that lost people are saved by what they believe in; what they trust in; and what they confess- and NOT by what group they belong to or what building they enter. And so, I pray that this is true with the overwhelming majority of those people- and that we will see, in my lifetime- a mass exodus of members from those wayward groups.

The Truth is that the Doctrine of the Trinity is an Essential Truth and MUST be taught and believed. Because even though many don't know this- it is completely *inconsistent* and *contradictory* to believe that Jesus is God in human flesh and then deny the Trinity. The ONLY way Jesus could be fully God- is if the Trinity is true. So, to preserve the biblical Truth of Jesus' full and eternal Deity- REQUIRES that we are taught and that we believe in the Doctrine of the Trinity. Yet it is one of the *hardest* Truths we have. And so, great patience and great persistence is required with this biblical Truth.

Now it is a mistake to think that as long as we don't belong to a Oneness Pentecostal Church; or as long as we don't listen to T.D. Jakes- we're okay. Christians are NOT told anywhere in the Bible to "run away and hide from bad people" or "circle the wagons" or "retreat into the safety of the four walls of the Church"- so we won't be deceived. No! We are NOT called to be safe and secure. We have been called to be faithful, fruitful, and busy in the Work of the Lord. We have been called by God to be "lights in the world" and the "salt of the earth". So, we are NOT to simply *avoid* false Teaching or false Teachers. We are called to *engage* our fellow human beings; and talk to them; and work with them; and pray for them; and labor to give them the Gospel- so they may be saved. And whereas not all are called to be Preachers or Teachers- every single Blood-bought child of God has been called, in some way, to the "Ministry of Reconciliation" (**2Corinthians 5**).

We must remember that we are NOT right with God because of what we DON'T do; or because of what we DON'T believe. We are saved by what we believe in. But our "correct believing" (Orthodoxy) must *always* translate into "right doing" (Orthopraxy). So, the very *best* way to be free from Heresy is to know and believe in the Truth- NOT simply avoid what is wrong. And so, the Leaders of the Church have a Duty and a Responsibility and a Joy- to teach the Truth- and to make sure that the members *agree* with the Truth- so that false Teaching will have no effect on the congregation.

Now every human will, at some point, be exposed to Heresy. We simply can't avoid it. But the danger is NOT that we might run into someone, who has

been deceived by a Doctrine of Demons. No, the danger is that when confronted with Heresy- we may not know the Truth enough to reject what is false or help those who are deceived to come out of that Deception. And that means that everyone of us must keep our noses in the Book and our knees on the floor.

And that also means that it is not nearly as important that we understand every detail of the Heresy- that *perverts* the Doctrine of the Trinity- as it is that we understand the Doctrine of the Trinity itself. And yet, it is fairly difficult to find many Pastors and Teachers today- who actively promote this Truth.

So, rather than go into the finer details of the Heresy- I want to spend the bulk of my time today to proclaim the Truth about the Trinity. And what better place to start- than with Jonathan Edwards. One of the reasons Edwards' understanding of God has been so helpful to me in my *own* Worship and Ministry is that he approached the Doctrine of the Trinity in two ways:

1. He explained it
2. He *didn't* explain it

So, for example, while he went further in his “explanation” of the Trinity than almost everyone else- he quickly admitted,

“I am far from asserting this as any explication of this mystery that unfolds and removes the mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of it”⁶.

So, Edwards dared to climb the Mountain of the incomprehensible Doctrine of “one God in three Persons”, because he believed...

“... the Word of God . . . exhibits many things concerning it [more] exceeding glorious and wonderful than have been taken notice [of]”⁷.

In other words, America's greatest theologian didn't think we honor God by *ignoring* the Truth about Who He is. And as I have told you before- the common effort by many, within the modern church, to *bypass; minimize; or outright ignore* hard and troubling and deep and profound Issues from the Bible- has NOT made us better off. God, in His great Love for His people, forbids any effort to *minimize* Himself- not only because that effort *dishonors* Him- but because it also hurts us as well. Because we have a great NEED for the God we worship- to be *higher; and*

⁶ Jonathan Edwards; *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, page 139

⁷ *Ibid*; page 139

more important; and better than ourselves. In other words, we have a great NEED for God to be... God- and NOT some glorified Man.

Yet, Edwards believed; and he taught- *repeatedly and passionately*- that *increasing* our Knowledge about God did NOT *decrease God's* Mystery. He was NOT one of those who believed that the Majesty of God was *magnified* by us constantly affirming how little we know about Him. So, Edwards *discouraged* believers to hunker below the “cloud-line” and speak vaguely about the Mountain that stands before us.

My own opinion is that there is something very odd and almost lazy about us saying that our Wonder and Worship of God becomes *greater* when we celebrate our ignorance of Him. And then we try to make up for that lack of Knowledge by singing shallow and vague choruses over and over and over again.

How sad it truly is that, with all the technological marvels, that we use every day- our Wonder and Worship of God has been reduced to very vague and esthetic “feelings” on the brink of a Void, rather than what we meet in **Psalm 139:1-18** that says:

- 1 O Lord, You have searched me and known me.**
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar.**
- 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.**
- 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all.**
- 5 You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.**
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.**
- 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?**
- 8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.**
- 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,**
- 10 Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me.**
- 11 If I say, “Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night,”**
- 12 Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.**
- 13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.**
- 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.**
- 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;**

16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

The Truth is that people in the modern church fear liberal politicians much more than they fear God. How do I know that? Because of the amount of time I hear Pastors speak against Liberals versus the amount of time I hear them thunder with the Truth about the Trinity. And many marvel at special effects in movies- THAT AREN'T EVEN REAL- more than they marvel at the God, Who created things we haven't even discovered yet. And many are more amazed at the latest app for their smart phones- than they are at the God, Who created both black holes and sand mites. But Edwards believed that true Learning increased four things:

1. Knowledge
2. Mystery
3. Wonder
4. Love

So, the more Knowledge we have about God from the Bible- the more of His Reality we grasp. Yet the more Reality we comprehend- the more Mysteries we see. But the more Mysteries we behold- the more we wonder after God. And as we increase in our wondering after God- our being amazed at God- we will also increase in our Love for God.

And the Benefit of increasing Mystery this way (rather than by means of preserving Ignorance) is that what we *do* know- gives direction to what we *don't* know. So, for example, we will NOT wonder- if the Mystery we *don't* grasp seems to contain a sinister God. Why? Because what we *do* grasp- directs us *away* from that sinful speculation.

Edwards explained this dynamic with the analogy of a child:

“When we tell a child a little concerning God, he has not an hundredth part so many Mysteries in view on the Nature and Attributes of God . . . as one that is told much concerning God in a divinity school; and yet [the divinity student] knows much more about God.”⁸

⁸ Ibid; page 139

And he clarified this by pointing to how the New Testament *increases* our understanding of the Trinity, while at the same time producing more Mysteries.

“Under the Old Testament, the church of God was not told near so much about the Trinity as they are now; but what the New Testament has revealed, though it has more opened to our view the nature of God, yet it has increased the number of visible mysteries and things that appear to us exceeding wonderful and incomprehensible.”⁹

So, when Edwards guides us above the normal “cloud-line” of biblical Understanding, he is “kind of; sort of”- giving us an “explanation” of the Trinity. But it would be silly to think that by us seeing just a little bit *more*- we have somehow *shrunk* the Majesty of God. Because what *remains* to be seen cannot even be fathomed by earthly minds. The Truth is that no matter how high we climb into Infinity- the distance above us remains endless.

This is a Doctrine called, the “*Incomprehensibility of God*”. And it teaches that, while it is true that we may understand *some* things about God- we will NEVER be able to grasp Him- *fully*. The finite simply *cannot* grasp the Infinite- completely. And that puts us earthly mortals in a position where we will *always* be grasping for more; *always* seeking for more; and *always* praying for more of God.

But, sadly, many people take this staggering Doctrine and they *wrongly* conclude that the Incomprehensibility of God means that we cannot know God- *at all*. That, since He has not revealed Himself *fully*- that this, somehow, *excuses* us from what God *has* revealed about Himself. Yet what God has mercifully revealed to us about Himself in Scripture is there for a grand Purpose: So, we would know Him; and so, we would understand Him; and so, we would love Him; and believe in Him and trust Him and enjoy Him forever. And if we can do all of that- with a *partial* Revelation of God- imagine how great it will be when we stand before Him and see Him in His fullness! **Philippians 3:10** is a sampling of what degree of Understanding God- we can receive from Scripture:

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

... so, if our Understanding of God does NOT produce in us the ability to suffer as a Christian and die to Self and Sin- then our Understanding of God- is false. In **1John 5:20**, the Apostle John said,

⁹ Ibid; pages 139&140

And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

So, while it is true that we will NEVER be able to understand God *fully*- God *expects*- yea, He *demands* that we understand Him- to the degree that He has chosen to reveal Himself. And the ONLY way to do that- is *in, by, and through* the 66 Books of the Holy Bible.

Edwards also was aware that human words are merely *pointers* toward eternal and absolute Reality. Statements about God are *not* God. Words- and the Reality they represent- are radically different things. For example, when Paul was caught up into the “third Heaven” and given glimpses of heavenly Realities, he said he...

... heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. (2Corinthians 12:4b)

... and from that inspired Statement, we conclude that no human language is sufficient to convey and explain the Greatness of all that God is.

But the *inadequacy* of language is only surpassed by its *indispensability*. Because language is all we have. So, being inadequate does NOT mean that language is completely useless. Language may not carry *all there is*- but what it *does* carry- can be true and valuable- *infinitely* valuable. To be sure,

“...we know in part and we prophesy in part. . . . we see in a mirror dimly” (1Corinthians 13:9, 12).

So, all human language about God, even Scripture, is “baby talk”. The great Reformer, John Calvin said,

“God lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children”¹⁰

Yet “biblical baby talk” is **sweeter than honey, and more to be desired than gold (Psalm 19:10)**. Oh, how precious the “baby talk” of God is! It is not, like “grass that withers or flowers that fade. It abides forever” (**Isaiah 40:8**). It is like **“silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times” (Psalm 12:6)**.

In other words, Edwards’s “explanation” of the Trinity is actually nothing more than “highly refined baby talk”. And that is true about *all* Sermons, and *all* theology books from *all* writers. But oh, how helpful it can be! So, keep in mind that it is merely a frail human effort to draw inferences from hundreds of passages

¹⁰ John Calvin; *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Book 1 Chapter 13; Paragraph 1

of Scripture, and then construct with words a Conception of how the God we discover in sacred Writ; and the God we know; and love; and worship is:

- One God
- In three Persons
- Who are all Divine
- Who are all equal in Essence and Dignity
- With unique Personalities
- But Who have different Roles to play in the great Work of Redemption.

But even unbelievers can grasp this- to an extent. Give them a two- minute Summary of the deep and profound Doctrine of the Trinity- without even trying to remove any of the Mystery of it- and they will be helped. Give them nothing but a human, verbal expression of how we might conceive of the Trinity- and you will find that one more barrier to Faith in Christ can be destroyed.

So, readily visible below the “cloud-line” in the Bible is the Truth that there are “three Divine Persons- Who are one God”. For example, two verses from the Apostle John:

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

... and ...

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John said, the Word “was” God. But he also said, the Word was “with” God. So, the Word was both God, and “with” God. And then, just fourteen verses later, these two designations “Word” and “God” become “Son” and “Father.” And the Word/Son becomes “flesh”- truly human, the God/Man. And then Paul wrote,

Colossians 1:13-20

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things

have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

And then this God/Man, the incarnate Son of God- Jesus, the Christ, spoke of the Holy Spirit as being a distinct (third) Person.

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 16:7-15

7 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;

9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;

10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;

11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

Now Jesus is certainly NOT speaking about some spiritual “Force” here- but a real Person- Who teaches. Yet this “Person” is entirely *distinct* from the Son of God- because Jesus speaks of Him as “**another**” Person. And the Holy Spirit is also completely *distinct* from the Father- because Jesus said “**the Father will send**” Him- in Jesus’ Name. And that would be amazing enough. But then the Bible goes on to teach that this Person, the Holy Spirit, is also “one” with the Son of God. For example, Jesus identified the coming Helper like this:

John 14:16&17

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

... signifying that when the Holy Spirit comes- He will dwell “with” us and “inside” of us- *continually*. But then in verse 25, Jesus said,

These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you.

... signifying that, at that time- Jesus Himself was also “with” them. So, what should we conclude from this? The Holy Spirit is “one” with the Son. And the Apostle Paul pointed to the same thing:

Romans 8:9&10

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Here, we see that Paul used phrases like “**the Spirit of God**” and “**the Spirit of Christ**” and “**Christ**” and “**the Spirit**” in such a way as to treat them, in some sense, as Them being “one”. So, if you have the one- you *automatically* have the other.

And from these, and many more infallible Passages, the Christian Church has *unapologetically* taught for over two thousand consecutive years that:

God is “one” in His Essence AND is eternally manifested in three distinct Persons of God the Father; God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit

... NOT three gods; NOT Offices; and NOT unrelated. And this is the normal and common Summary of the Doctrine of the Trinity. And this much has been clear for most people- below the “cloud-line” where most Christians can see it with Joy and Amazement- even without full Comprehension.

But every once in a while- somebody like Jonathan Edwards penetrates through the “cloud-line” and pushes farther up the Mountain of Trinitarian Truth. And he attempts to provide a Conception of the Trinity that is true; that is firmly

rooted in Scriptural language; that is intelligible; and that is helpful- even while making no pretense to fully comprehend the Mystery.

Now I realize that most of you won't grasp this. But my Goal in exposing you to Edwards' Summary of the Trinity is simply to *emphasize* just how important this Doctrine really is. Okay- let's look first at his Summary Statement of how all three Persons are one God, yet each a "Person".

- **The Father** is the Deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated, and most absolute manner, or the Deity in its direct existence.
- **The Son** is the Deity generated by God's understanding, or having an Idea of Himself, and subsisting in that Idea.
- **The Holy Ghost** is the Deity subsisting in Act, or the divine Essence flowing out and breathed forth, in God's infinite Love to and delight in Himself.

... and then Edwards said,

"And I believe the whole divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the divine idea and divine love, and that therefore each of them are properly distinct persons."¹¹

Now look, even though Jonathan Edwards rode a horse and used an outhouse- he breathed in that "rare air" that is way above most of our pay grades. It literally took me years before I could read more than a few paragraphs from the guy. And so, we need to try to understand that he had a technical and/or philosophical reason for using the words like "subsisting" and "subsist" instead of "existing" and "exist" (emphasizing that the independent Reality of the Universe [God] uphold all other realities- rather than stemming from them). But for our simpler purposes here, we should understand Edwards to say,

- **The Father** is Unoriginated and Absolute¹²
- **The Son** is the Father's "Idea" or "Understanding" (Image) of *Himself*
- **The Spirit** is God's Love to, and Delight in- *Himself*

Now if we stopped here- this may *seem* like Edwards actually *lowered* the view of the Trinity. Because this sounds like the Son is nothing but an *impersonal* Idea; and the Spirit is nothing but an *impersonal* Emotion. But remember- this is

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards; *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, page 131

¹² Please don't hear in the word "unoriginated" the implication that the Son and the Spirit have a *beginning*. They don't. They "originate" eternally as well

Edwards' *Summary* Statement. In actuality- Edwards said a whole lot more than this.

Yet notice that his Conception may not be so far-fetched since, in **John 1:1**- the Son of God is called God's "**Word**" or "Logos," which can mean "Reason" or "Thought," which is not so far from "Idea". And the term, "Idea" as used here- is NOT far from the word, "**Image**". And the Holy Spirit is, obviously, a Spirit. Keep in mind that the *entire* Godhead is called, "Spirit" in **John 4:24**, when Jesus said,

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

So, God, Who is Spirit *Himself*, also is Spirit, Who is entirely *distinct* from God the Father because this Person of the Godhead "intercedes" to the Father (**Romans 8:27**) and He also "**... searches all things, even the depths of God**" (**1Corinthians 2:10b**).

... so, might not this Spirit of God, Who is Spirit, also be God's essential Nature: the Spirit of Love? (**1John 4:8**)

But we need to let Edwards himself clarify what he meant by calling the Son the "Understanding" or the "Idea" that the Father has of Himself- and has had from all Eternity (so that the Son is coeternal).

"If it were possible for a man, by reflection, perfectly to contemplate all that is in his own mind in an hour, as it is and at the same time that it is there, in its first and direct existence; if a man had a perfect reflex or contemplative idea of every thought at the same moment or moments that that thought was, and of every exercise at and during the same time that that exercise was, and so through a whole hour: a man would really be two. He would be indeed double; he would be twice at once: the idea he has of himself would be himself again. . . .

... as God with perfect clearness, fullness, and strength understands Himself, views His Own Essence (in which there is no distinction of substance and act, but it is wholly substance and wholly act), that Idea which God hath of Himself is absolutely Himself. This Representation of the Divine Nature and Essence is the Divine Nature and Essence again. So that by God's thinking of the Deity, [the Deity] must certainly be generated. Hereby there is another Person begotten; there is another infinite, eternal, almighty, and most holy and the same God, the very same Divine Nature.

And this Person is the second Person in the Trinity, the only begotten and dearly beloved Son of God. He is the eternal, necessary, perfect, substantial,

and personal Idea which God hath of Himself. And that it is so, seems to me to be abundantly confirmed by the Word of [God].”¹³

Now to grasp what Edwards was trying to communicate, we have to expand our understanding of the word, “Idea” as he used it. Edwards is trying to help us see that God’s “Idea” or “Understanding” of Himself is so perfect, and so full of all that God is- as to *be* the living *Reproduction*, or the “Begetting” or the “Image” of Himself. And that means that God the Son is *coeternal* with the Father; and equal in both Essence and Glory- along with being deserving of our Worship.

And to support this claim, he points to the Bible that, in various places, describes the Son as being the “**Form**” and the “**Image**” and the “**Representation**” and the “**Word**” of God.

Philippians 2:6

who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

2Corinthians 4:4

in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Hebrews 1:3

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

... so, Edwards said,

¹³ *Writings*, 116–117

“The Scripture teaches us that Christ is the “Logos” of God [**John 1:1**]. It will appear then that the “Logos” is the same as the “Idea” of God, whether we interpret it as the “Reason” of God, or the “Word” of God”¹⁴

... then Edwards turned his focus on the Holy Spirit.

“The Godhead being thus begotten by God’s having an idea of himself and standing forth in a distinct subsistence or person in that idea, there proceeds a most pure act, and an infinitely holy and sweet energy arises between the Father and Son: for their love and joy is mutual, in mutually loving and delighting in each other. **Proverbs 8:30, “I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.”**”

This is the eternal and most perfect and essential act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree and in the most perfect manner possible. The Deity becomes all act; the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, viz. the Deity in act.”¹⁵

And Edwards cites numerous texts, including **1John 4:8** to root this Conception firmly in the Word of God:

“We may learn by the Word of God that the Godhead or the divine nature and essence does subsist in love. **“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1John 4:8)**. In the context of which place I think it is plainly intimated to us that the Holy Spirit is that love, as in the twelfth and thirteenth verses: **“If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, because he hath given us of his Spirit.”**¹⁶

Okay- but how can this “Love of God” also be a “Person” in His Own right? Words feel very inadequate here. But may I say that the Love between the Father and the Son is so perfect; so constant; and carries so completely all that They are in Themselves- that this Love stands forth itself as a “Person” in His Own right? C.S. Lewis tried to put this very Issue into a conceivable analogy when he said:

¹⁴ *Writings*, 120

¹⁵ *Writings*, 121

¹⁶ *Writings*, 121

“You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club or a trades union, people talk about the “spirit” of that family, club, or trades union. They talk about its spirit because the individual members, when they’re together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they wouldn’t have if they were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it isn’t a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that’s just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a *real* Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God.”¹⁷

So, we need to know and believe and celebrate and defend that there is “one God- comprised of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- three distinct Persons, Who are completely equal in Their Divine Essence and Glory”. And the Father has, from all Eternity, begotten the Son, meaning that the Father has known Himself- from all Eternity- with such Fullness that the “Self” which He knows- is fully God: God the only begotten Son.

And the Father and the Son have, from all Eternity (there are no Beginnings in the eternal Godhead) *loved* each Other; *delighted* in and *enjoyed* each Other; with such a Fullness that this infinite Delight carries all the Deity and stands forth as a *third* “Person”- God the Holy Spirit. So, I conclude:

- The Son is NOT an impersonal Image (Idea)
- The Spirit is NOT an impersonal Emotion
- The Son and Spirit are “Persons”, in the truest sense of that word
- All the fullness of Deity dwells in God’s Image (Idea) of Himself
- All the fullness of Deity dwells in God’s Delight, or Love, for Himself

Edwards saw that this view of the Trinity helps illuminate:

“many things that have been wont to be said by orthodox divines about the Trinity”¹⁸.

For example,

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis; *Beyond Personality*, page 21

¹⁸ *Writings*, 134–5

“Hereby we see how the Father is the Fountain of the Godhead, and why when he is spoken of in Scripture he is so often, without any addition or distinction, called God”¹⁹.

...and...

“Hereby we see how that it is possible for the Son to be begotten by the Father, and the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and Son, and yet that all the persons should be co-eternal”²⁰.

Now I want to try to tie all this Truth about the Trinity- with my *own* Effort to understand and promote the crucial place that Joy has- in the Christian life. What Edwards shows is that “Joy” has the massive place it does in Scripture- *ultimately*- because it belongs to the very Nature of God. So, while God *is* Love- He *is also* Joy.

In other words, God the Holy Spirit is the Divine Person, Who “originates” (eternally) from the Father and the Son- in their *loving* and *enjoying* each Other. But this *enjoying* Love is NOT a “gracious” Love- because the Persons of the Trinity don’t need Grace. And this *enjoying* Love is NOT a “merciful” Love- because They don’t need Pity either. So, the Love between the Father and Son is an *admiring, delighting, and exulting* Love! It is truly- “Joy”- in its *highest* measure.

And so, the Holy Spirit is God’s Joy- in Himself! To be sure, God the Holy Spirit is fully all that the Father and Son are. He is a fully Divine Person in His Own right. But that means that while He may be *more*- He is certainly NOT *less*- than the Joy of God.

And that means that “Joy” is at the very Heart of the absolute Reality of God. So, the infallible phrase, “**God is Love**” (1John 4:8&16), means, most deeply, that God is “Joy”- in God! As Edwards put it,

“The honor of the Father and the Son is, they are infinitely happy and are the original and fountain of happiness; and the honor of the Holy Ghost is equal, for he is infinite happiness and joy itself”²¹

So, to be “indwelt by the Holy Spirit” then, is to be indwelt by the Joy of God- *that He has in Himself*. And to be “full of the Holy Spirit” is to be overflowing with God’s Joy- *that He has in Himself*! And this means at least two things:

¹⁹ *Writings*, 135

²⁰ *Writings*, 135

²¹ *Writings*, 135

1) We are NOT left to our own limited personalities. We are given Divine Assistance to enjoy what is *infinitely* enjoyable. And so, God the Spirit is our indwelling Ability- to enjoy God.

And this Experience will reach its Fullness when we see the Son of God as He truly is- at His Coming. And even though most will never even talk about this- this is so important to God- that Jesus prayed for this climactic Joy/Love, when He said to the Father and to His disciples,

John 17:24

I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

John 15:11

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

2) Our Love for Jesus will, for all Eternity, NOT be a “sacrificial Love”, but an all-satisfying Love. God will be in us, and we will love His Son- with His *Own* Love- which is God the Holy Spirit.

And this Joy will be so manifestly resulting from the Sight of God and the Presence of God, that God will be *supremely* glorified in our Joy. And when that happens- Jesus will, at last, be **“all and in all!” (Ephesians 4:6)**

Amen. Let's pray.

© 2021 by The Covenant of Peace Church. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America

The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729 www.covenantofpeace.net
Scripture quotations, except those noted otherwise, are from The New American Standard Bible © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

This is a single transcript in a larger series of teachings taken from a Study on **“The Danger of Heresies”**. You are free to reproduce it and distribute it as the Lord leads you- without cost or reimbursement to us with the stipulation that you may not add anything or take anything away from this transcript without the express written permission of The Covenant of Peace Church and that this complete copyright statement be at the end of all copies.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

