

# *The Trinity and the Cults*

An Introduction to the Doctrine of the Trinity  
and  
the Challenge presented to it by the Cults

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# THE TRINITY AND THE TEACHING OF THE CULTS

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## PREFACE

This writer has believed most of his life that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the basic doctrines of the Bible. It is basic because it helps us understand who God is. It also helps us understand the gospel of Christ and the Christian life. This writer is convinced that every biblical teaching concerning God is affected by our understanding of the Trinity.

Since the Trinity is so important, all students of the Bible should be able to understand it. We do not try to understand it because we imagine that this will let us fully comprehend God. Rather, our purpose is to understand what God has revealed to us concerning Himself. We want to understand with clarity who God is.

The cults aggressively deny the doctrine of the Trinity. Though sin will always tempt us to deny God's truth, the cults encourage us to yield to this temptation by providing their reasons for denial. They have convinced many to deny the true God and to follow their ideologies.

But, how convincing should the teaching of the cults be for Christians? Do those who succumb to their religions know from the beginning how little the Bible shapes the thinking of the cults? Do Christians understand the views which deny the Trinity?

Since the cults can be found in almost every country of the world, it will be helpful for Christians everywhere to look at their teaching carefully. This writer believes that a careful study of the Bible alongside a careful look at cultic teaching will convince Christians of the truthfulness of the Trinity. Error will convince us of the truth.

This course on The Trinity and the Cults is designed to give students basic information. The first four lessons will present an outline of the doctrine of the Trinity. The last four lessons will treat the cults in general and two world-wide cults in particular. These two cults are the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. We believe our presentation of the Trinity is faithful to the Bible. We also believe the presentation of the cults is accurate.

We pray that this course will equip students to present the gospel of Christ biblically and will help equip the Christian church to resist error which opposes the good news of salvation in Christ.

Let every thought be made captive to Him (2 Corinthians 10:5)!

## COURSE INTRODUCTION

### JUSTIFICATION

An introduction to the biblical doctrine of the Trinity set in contrast to the teachings of the cults concerning Christ will help students understand more clearly the gospel of Christ and equip them to discern forms of falsehood which frequently tempt Christ's church.

### OBJECTIVES

1. Students will learn the basic elements of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.
2. Students will learn how the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity.
3. Students will learn what the cults believe concerning Christ.
4. Students will be encouraged to study influential cults in their own culture and give a biblical evaluation.

### REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance** (15%)  
Students will attend class.
2. **Class Homework** (15%)  
Students will complete the home work of each lesson.
3. **Reading** (30%)  
Students will read 300 pages for BA or 500 pages for MA studies and write a review of the reading. The first reading is required; students will choose to read 270 pages from the additional books which are listed. A written report of one page per 100 pages read will be presented to the class.
  - a. Required Reading: The Gospel of John. Observe what is said about the relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (30 pages)
  - b. Required Reading: 270 pages from the following:
    - 1) Edward Henry Bickersteth. *The Trinity*. Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications. (176 pages). Originally published under the title, *The Rock of Ages*. Available at Google Books: <http://books.google.com>. Type in the author's name.
    - 2) R. C. Sproul: *Chosen by God*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986,(213 pages)
    - 3) R. C. Sproul: *The Holiness of God*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1985. (277 pages)
    - 4) Allen Vander Pol. *God in Three Persons*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001. (54 pages)
4. **Project** (20%). The project provides the student an opportunity to use the knowledge received in this course in some form of ministry. Students may, as examples, decide to teach members of the church, to witness to non-Christians concerning the divinity of Christ, or to show how the opinions of society (or of a cult in the student's society) about God do not conform to the biblical teaching of the Trinity. Students should conduct enough research necessary to complete the project and complete the project with a ten-page paper.
  - 1) Study the topic with sufficient research. Research may include reading, conducting surveys or interviews, or other methods approved by the teacher
  - 2) Student must demonstrate understanding of at least part of this course with some form of practical ministry that helps others understand it too. You may





## LESSON ONE

### BIBLICAL BASIS (1): THE ONE TRUE GOD, WHO EXISTS IN THREE PERSONS

#### INTRODUCTON

The most important questions a person must answer in his lifetime concern God. A person must know who God is, what God is like, and what God requires. You must know if there are many gods or if there is one. We must find answers to basic questions such as these, because God is more important than we are, and life is misguided and wasted if we do not know God as He really is.

This lesson begins our study concerning what God is like. We will not explore all that we can know about God, however; that effort would take more than a lifetime. Rather, we will take the first steps necessary to learn from the Bible what Christian mean when they say that God is triune.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of this topic. This truth about God--that He is triune--is basic, so that we cannot gain much knowledge of Him without some understanding of this teaching. A person's knowledge of Jesus Christ, of the Gospel of Christ, and of the Christian life is shaped by the teaching of the Trinity. This teaching also helps us to know how to respond to the cults. We will not be wasting our time when we study the doctrine of the Trinity.

Gerald Gray states the importance of this subject.

The belief that God is a personal being is one which is shared with other monotheistic religions, especially Judaism and Islam, but Christianity is fundamentally different from them in that it claims that the *one* God in whom we all believe is known to us not as one, but as three distinct persons. To a Jew or to a Muslim, this appears to be a denial of monotheism, and it must be admitted that many Christians also find it difficult to hold the Trinity of persons together in the unity of a single divine being. Yet without the Trinity there would be no Christianity. Our belief in the saving work of Christ the Son of God, and in the indwelling presence of God and the Holy Spirit demands that we worship God in that way.<sup>1</sup>

Yet we must admit immediately that the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible. Tertullian (d. 200 AD) was the first author to use the term. He made use of the word sometime after the last book of the Bible was written. However, if we compare Scripture with Scripture, using sound judgment, we may say that the conclusions we reach are Biblical; in this way we may call the Trinity a Biblical doctrine. "The doctrine of the Trinity lies in Scripture in solution; when it is crystallized from its solvent it does not cease to be Scriptural, but only comes into clearer view. Or, to speak without figure, the doctrine of the Trinity is given in Scripture, not in formulated definition, but in

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 111.

fragmentary allusions.”<sup>2</sup> This means that the Bible does not give us name of the teaching, it is, nevertheless, the source of this teaching.

In contrast to the teaching of the Trinity, the teachings of the cults present a god who not triune. Though there are many ways to identify a cult, a group’s acceptance or denial of this Biblical truth is one of the litmus tests which can be used to ascertain whether or not it is a Christian group. Even a religious group which has its origins in the Christian church and claims the Bible as its authority, if it does not embrace the teaching of the Trinity, should most probably be designated a cult. The history of the Christian church has shown that groups which deny the Trinity will change the gospel of Christ as well. The apostle Paul was very emphatic that a different gospel will destroy those who follow it (Galatians 1:6-9). So a study of the teaching of the Trinity along with the teaching of the cults is vitally important to the church of Christ throughout the world.

The opening lessons of this course will explore the Bible’s teaching concerning the Trinity. The second half of the course will investigate the cults themselves. Lessons One and Two reduce the teaching of the Trinity to three essential statements. This first Lesson will show how the Bible teaches the first two ideas: that there is only one true God, and that He exists in three distinct persons.

## A. THERE IS ONE TRUE GOD

### 1. Mankind’s Attraction to Polytheism

Before we look at the biblical teaching of the Trinity, we should notice how contrary it is to beliefs which come naturally to the sinful human mind. When we read the Bible, we discover that mankind’s natural tendency is to imagine that there are many gods.

The first chapters of the Bible do not say much about how many gods the first people worshipped after sin entered the human race. Joshua, however, reminded Israel how polytheism (the worship of more than one god) was widespread in the time of Abraham and in his own day:

. . . Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. Joshua 24:14,15

The gods served “beyond the River” were the gods worshipped beyond the Euphrates River, where Abraham’s family lived before God called him away from Ur of Chaldea (see Joshua 24:2). These verses show that the Chaldeans in Abraham’s day and the Egyptians and Amorites in Joshua’s day were all polytheists.

The temptation to reject the true God and serve the multitude of gods which others worship is never-ending in the Bible. The Baal which Ahab and Jezebel introduced to Israel was one of the gods of Phoenicia, Jezebel’s homeland, just north of Israel. The human tendency to follow many gods is apparent in 2 Kings 17, which shows that a reason God sent His people into captivity was their sin of worshipping many false

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929) 133.

gods: “They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them (2 Kings 17:7,8).” Even in the New Testament Paul noticed that Athens was “full of idols” (Acts 17:16).

Though we live in the modern age, we should not be surprised by the human tendency to worship a host of gods. The modern perspective often denies the existence of spiritual beings; therefore people with a modern mindset say that they have no religion. At the same time modern life is characterized by a lack of focus, a restlessness as people cannot seem to get enough material goods. People want money, entertainment, personal comfort, and status. Modern people may not think of these all-consuming goals as gods; yet they devote their lives to acquire these multiple goals. This is polytheism in a modern form.

We should learn from all this that trusting only in one true God does not come naturally for sinful mankind. We need the Bible to correct our natural way of thinking.

## 2. The Bible’s Teaching of Monotheism

### a. There is One God

Though mankind looks to many gods to be secure and happy, the Bible declares that there is only one true God. “There is no doubt that the great monotheistic religions, including Islam, owe their theological understanding primarily to the witness of the biblical texts.”<sup>3</sup> Monotheism is taught when the Bible repeatedly says that God is one. Here are some of those passages.

Deuteronomy 6:4,5. “Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Romans 3:30. “...there is only one God, who will justify...”

1 Corinthians 8:4,6. “. . .there is no God but one. . .for us there is but one God. . .”

Galatians 3:20. “God is one.”

1 Timothy 1:17. “. . .the only God. . .”

1 Timothy 2:5. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

James 2:19. “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”

Some reader may conclude that these verses do not really teach that there is only one God. For example, Deuteronomy 6:4 says “the LORD is one.” It may seem that this

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<sup>3</sup> Bray 112.

is a claim about only one of a great number of alternatives that we can worship. Some may conclude that the verse teaches only that the particular deity being considered, called the LORD, is “one” or unified. However, when we remember that Moses said this to Israel living in a context where every other nation was polytheistic, the verse shows that it teaches a very unique concept of the divine. Divinity belongs only to the LORD. We may not give our lives to a host of gods, each having some power over us. Rather, we must offer our lives to the service of one God, the only true God. We must “Love the Lord. . .with all” our being (Deuteronomy 6:5). We must worship and serve only the LORD because He alone is God.

b. God has no equals

The Bible reinforces the truth of God’s uniqueness by telling us that God has no equals. Here are some verses where this is said:

Deuteronomy 4:35,39. “You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other....Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.”

1 Kings 8:60. “. . .the LORD is God and. . .there is none else.”

Isaiah 42:8. “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”

Jeremiah 10:10. “. . .the LORD is the true God.”

1 Thessalonians 1:9. (The Thessalonians) “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

By saying, “there is none else,” 1 Kings insists that there is only one God. By calling God the “true God” 1 Thessalonians also assumes that there is only one true God.

c. Other gods are powerless

Besides saying that there is only one God, The Bible shows that every other god is powerless and unable to perform what people hope it will do. For example, Psalm 115 contrasts the true God with the gods of the pagans. Idol worshippers have made their gods, but the true God is in heaven (:3,4). Their idols cannot speak, see, hear, smell, feel, or walk (:5-7), but the true God does what He pleases (:3). The contrasts could not be greater. The true God lives and has all power, but false gods are lifeless and powerless. These contrasts echo the declaration of Exodus 15:11: “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” The Bible’s consistent message says that the true God is the only One with divine power.

The apostle Paul utilized this contrast between God’s power and the weakness of the idols when he preached to the people in Athens. After he acknowledged the many

altars in Athens, each devoted to its own god, Paul mentioned that he also saw an altar devoted to the unknown god. He proceeded to tell the Athenians about Him in terms of what He has done and continues to do.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. “For in him we live and move and have our being.” As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.” Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:24-31).

When Paul was finished, his claims concerning the true God could not have been enlarged further. He had stated that God made the world, gives life and breath to all men, has determined the times and places of each nation, continues to uphold the being of each person, commands all people to repent, and has set a day when He will judge. In other words, the true God has all power over everything. This leaves no room for other gods or other supposedly divine powers.

The Bible corrects the ideas of the sinful mind concerning what God should be like or might be like. To gain enough security, the fallen mind tends to look for a great number of gods. But the Bible teaches that there is only one true God. He is one; He has no equals; and He alone has all power.

## B. HE EXISTS IN THREE DISTINCT PERSONS

Besides insisting that there is only one true God, the Bible also indicates that He consists of more than one Person. The one true God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--three distinct Persons. At first the Old Testament gives hints which begin to lead us to this conclusion. But as the Bible continues, and especially as the New Testament reveals Jesus Christ, the truth of God existing in three Persons becomes more apparent. We will study how the Bible expresses this teaching.

### 1. Old Testament Hints of Plurality

#### a. “Us”

Already in the opening chapters of the Bible God refers to Himself as more than one Person. For example in Genesis 1:26 God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” God spoke similarly when He decided to disrupt the construction of the Tower

of Babel. God said, “Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other” (Genesis 11:7). These two chapters refer to God as a single being, yet He refers to Himself as “us”. Some interpret these statements of God as royal expressions, similar to the way a king or queen might say, “We are pleased to meet you.” Yet there are very few instances where the Hebrew plural is used in this way.<sup>4</sup> When we consider the whole context of the Bible, such as what follows, we may take these words of God as hints of His own plurality.

b. “Angel of the Lord”

On other occasions the Old Testament shows that God is more than one Person. For example, it tells stories about the angel of the LORD. The phrase, “the angel of the LORD,” implies a distinction between the LORD and His angel. Yet often “the angel of the LORD” is used as another name for God. We see this in Exodus 3 where the angel of the LORD appeared to Moses (:2). Two verses later it is clear that this “angel of the LORD” is the LORD Himself, who is God (:4, 6, 7). The Old Testament mentions “the LORD” as the personal name of the true God, the God of the covenant. Here, however, “the Angel of the LORD,” is also His name.

The same name for God, the Angel of the LORD, is used in other stories, such as when God visited Hagar in the wilderness (Genesis 16:7-16) and when God commanded Abraham to offer up his son, Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19).

Mal 3:1 refers to the same plurality when God says “‘See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the LORD Almighty.” There are two “messengers” in this verse. The first one mentioned prepared the way for the second. When the second comes, Malachi says, He will purify and judge (:3,5). This word, “messenger,” is a translation of the word which is sometimes translated “angel.” When God sent His messenger, or angel, the Lord Himself came to His temple. Malachi refers to the coming of God’s messenger (a person distinguished from God) as the coming of God (:5). These passages, where God is distinguished from the divine angel of the LORD, hint that God consists of more than one Person.

2. Clear Revelation of Three Persons

a. Christ’s Coming

The Bible shows us that the one true God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The coming of Christ was the time when God made this clear.

The revelation of the Trinity, as opposed to the implied unitarianism of Judaism, can be explained only by the transformation of perspective brought about by Jesus. The Trinity belongs to the inner life of God, and can be known only by those who share in that life. As long as we look at God on the outside, we shall never see beyond his unity; for, as the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine realized, the external works of the

<sup>4</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2004) 20.

Trinity are undivided. . . . This means that an outside observer will never detect the inner reality of God, and will never enter the communion with him which is promised to us in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Christ revealed the three Persons of God most clearly when He commanded His disciples to disciple the nations. Jesus told them to baptize “in the name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). What is amazing about this command is that He refers both to God’s being one and to His being three. Baptism must be in the “name” of God; this is one name. Yet, when the name is given, there are three. The one God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the three names are mentioned as equals.

#### b. Less direct passages

Other passages express the Trinity less directly. The blessing at the end of 2 Corinthians refers to three divine Persons as equals. It says, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14). When Jesus was baptized, His heavenly Father called Him “my Son” as the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the visible form of a dove (Matthew 3:16-17); we cannot miss the presence of the three Persons there. 1 Peter 4:14 says “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

Isaiah also shows that God is three. For example, in Isaiah 48:16 the One speaking has just been called “the first and . . . the last” (Isaiah 48:12); this means He is eternal and He is God (cf. Isaiah 44:16). This eternal Person says in verse 16, “And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, and his Spirit.” This Old Testament passage mentions the three divine Persons. It foretells coming of the divine Christ, Who was sent by His Father and empowered by the Spirit of God. Isaiah 61:1 also refers to three: an anointed Person, the LORD God, and the Spirit.

When we read these less clear passages in the light of the very clear command to baptize in the triune name of God, we can see that God’s word teaches the plurality of one God in various places.

#### c. The Structure of biblical books

We can also see evidence of God’s three persons when we analyze the structure of Paul’s writings. Millard J. Erickson says that when Paul wrote about one of the three Persons of God, he introduced the other Persons as well. In Romans, for example, Paul presents God the Father’s judgment on Gentiles and Jews (Romans 1:18-3:20). Next Romans 3:21-8:1 teach justification through faith in Jesus Christ. This is followed by Romans 8:2-30 where Paul discusses life in the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians reflects this pattern by paying tribute to the wisdom of God (the Father) (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:9), explaining the instruction given by the Spirit (2:10-16) and then returning to Christ, the foundation of mankind’s work (3:10-15). We can find similar patterns in other writings of Paul.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bray 119-20.

<sup>6</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 37-8.

<sup>7</sup> Erickson 38-9.

The apostle John is also emphatic that God exists in three Persons. Throughout his gospel and first letter John “deals more directly than any other New Testament writer with the relationship of the members of the Trinity.”<sup>8</sup> Especially in John 14-16 Jesus promised His disciples that He would ask the Father to send the Spirit, and the Spirit would testify concerning Christ. John’s gospel could be called the Trinitarian Gospel. Evidence for the Trinity, therefore comes from specific biblical verses as well as the structures of some of the Bible’s books.

### 3. Indications that the Persons are Distinct

#### a. The Teaching

Certain groups believe most of what has been written so far, but they still do not believe the teaching of the Trinity. Instead they believe that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different appearances of the same divine Person. They claim that God appears in the Bible sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. He is similar to an actor in a play who appears at different times in different sets of clothes. The same actor plays different parts in the same play, but, apart from these different appearances, the actor continues to be only one person. In other words, some believe that God has three basic appearances but that He exists as only one Person. They believe that God’s appearance in any given moment is determined by the need of the situation. We will explain this view more fully in chapter four.

In contrast to the idea that God exists as one Person Who appears in different ways, the Bible teaches that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine Persons. The Father is not the Son; neither the Father nor the Son is the Holy Spirit. Though they are one God, they are distinct Persons. As Persons they relate to each other. The Father sent the Son; the Son prays to the Father. The Son asked the Father to send the Spirit. The Father did not send Himself when He sent the Spirit. The Son does not pray to Himself when He prays to the Father. These interactions reflect interrelationships between Persons; they rule out the possibility that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are only different appearances of one Person.

#### b. The Biblical evidence

The Bible demonstrates the uniqueness of each of the three Persons in specific passages. Here are some of the places where the Bible makes this clear:

Ephesians 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 1 will continue to teach that God the Father is the author of the salvation which Christ, the Son, accomplished on the cross. Both Father and Son were involved in the salvation of sinners, but they were not involved in exactly the same way. There is a distinction in work due partly to the fact that they are distinct persons. The Father is called the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ also in 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:3, expressing the distinction between Father and Son which Ephesians 1:3 mentions.

Romans 15:5, 6 say, “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart

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<sup>8</sup> Erickson 39.

and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” These verses do not indicate any competition between the Father and Christ; there is no tension between them as though each tries to pull us from the other. God is one, yet these verses express a distinction between Father and Son.

Luke 3:22 is part of the story when Jesus was baptized by John. It says, “. . . and the Holy Spirit descended on him [Jesus] in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

In John 15:26 Jesus said, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” Though the three Persons work in harmony, each is individually active; the Spirit “comes” and “testifies,” and the Son “sends.”

Titus 3:4-7 reveal that the three Persons are each active in the Christian’s salvation:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

God the Father is the main actor in these verses; He gives salvation. His gift of salvation includes the “washing of rebirth” performed by the Holy Spirit and justification by His grace made possible through Jesus Christ. As God is one God Who exists in three Persons so the one salvation which God offers reflects the work of the three Persons. This is what Bray meant when he wrote, “The Trinity belongs to the inner life of God, and can be known only by those who share in that life.”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, 1 Peter 1:1, 2 sends greetings “To God’s elect . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood . . .” Peter addressed Christians in terms of the Father’s choice, the Spirit’s sanctifying work and Christ’s sprinkled blood. The Trinity accomplished the Christian’s salvation. The distinct work of each Person demonstrates the distinction of each Person.

By comparing Scripture with Scripture, we have noticed repeatedly the presence and uniqueness of Father, Son and Spirit in the Bible’s teaching of salvation in Christ. What we want to notice here is that Scripture does not permit us to imagine that these are three different names for the same Person. In a way that human minds cannot comprehend, the one and only true God exists in three Persons, and these Persons are distinct from each other.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen how the Bible uses a variety of approaches to teach that there is only one true God. It says that God is one and that He has no equals. He alone created and upholds the universe. This challenges the sinful human tendency to worship a variety of deities. We have also seen how the Bible teaches that God exists in three distinct

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<sup>9</sup> See note 4.

Persons. There are hints of His plurality in the Old Testament, but the New Testament clearly shows this when it presents the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

### QUESTIONS

1. Before you read this lesson, how important did you think the teaching of the Trinity is?
2. How much do activities in your church, including worship services, attempt to teach people what God is like?
3. What do you think people in your community or church think about the idea of God being Three in One? For example, do most of them think it is a foolish idea or do they believe it is true?
4. If the Bible does not use the word "Trinity," may we use the word to name a major doctrine which we say comes from the Bible?
5. Besides passages given in this lesson, in what other places does the Bible express disapproval of polytheism?
6. Why is it important to believe that there is only one true God?
7. Why is it important to believe that God exists in three distinct Persons?
8. Besides the passages given in this lesson, what other passages of the Bible demonstrate that God exists in three Persons?
9. What points made in the lesson seemed controversial to you?
10. What points made in the lesson do you think are necessary for someone to believe for that person to be called a Christian?

## LESSON TWO

### BIBLICAL BASIS (2): THE DIVINITY OF EACH PERSON

#### INTRODUCTION

In Lesson One we examined evidence in the Bible which teaches that there is one true God. We also saw how the Bible teaches that God exists in three persons. It is important, now, to understand the three divine Persons more clearly.

When the Son and Spirit are called divine, some will ask: In what way are the Son and Holy Spirit God? Are the Son and Spirit divine in their own right or are they somehow appointed by the Father to have the title? Do we say they are God because they really are or because we merely want to honor them?

Our purpose in this lesson is to see how the Bible teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “God in the fullest sense of the word.”<sup>10</sup> But before we go to the Bible to study this teaching, we must take note of several important features of Biblical teaching which may clarify the topic of this lesson when we look at it.

#### A. PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS

1. The Names of the Father
  - a. Sometimes “Father” refers to the Triune God

Sometimes the word “father” in the Bible refers to God the Father. For example, Ephesians 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It gives praise to the first Person of the Trinity, to God the Father. We believe the reference is clear because the word “of” shows us that this is a different Person from Jesus Christ. The paragraph where the verse is found also shows that only God the Father is meant. After referring to the work of the Father in the Christian’s salvation (:3-6), Ephesians 1 continues by describing the work of God the Son in the Christian’s salvation (:7-12). The section concludes with a reference to the Spirit’s work in salvation (:13-14). Each of these three thoughts concludes with praise to God’s glory (:6,12,14), indicating that a distinct teaching is concluded by each verse. When the various Persons are mentioned, and just one is called the Father, it is usually clear that “Father” refers to God the Father. Other instances of this include John 14:16; Romans 1:7; and 2 Corinthians 13:14.

But there are occasions when “Father” clearly refers to another Person as well. This is most evident in Isaiah 9:6 where the prophet foretells the future birth of a ruler. We know the Ruler will be a man because He will begin life on this earth as a child who is born. But we also know that He will be God because of His names: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” One name, “Mighty God,” indicates that the Ruler is powerful, a characteristic of many rulers; He is also “God,” which can be said only of the true God. The next name, “Everlasting Father,” says that

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 201.

the Ruler is eternal and “Father.” Isaiah’s prophecy predicted to Old Testament Israel the birth of Jesus Christ, who is God the Son. Isaiah calls Christ “Everlasting Father.”

Some passages seem to call the Triune God “Father,” but this is not as immediately obvious. For example God is called “Father” because He created the world (Hebrews 12:9; James 1:17), because He is the Father of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16) and because He is the Father of New Testament believers (2 Corinthians 6:18). There is no reason to rule out the possibility that they mean the Triune God.

#### b. Sometimes “God” refers to God the Father

Sometimes only the Father is called God. For example, 1 Corinthians 8:6 says, “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” 1 Corinthians 11:3 says that “the head of Christ is God.” 2 Corinthians 13:14 says, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Many understand these verses to teach that Christ is not God. However, they may reflect the truth that, when Christ came to earth, He submitted Himself to the Father’s will and authority. In a similar way God told Moses that he, Moses, would be God to Aaron. This means that Moses would receive God’s word and would tell Aaron what God wanted said to the people. Though the brothers were equal in their humanity, Moses would exercise God’s authority over Aaron. Similarly, the Father exercised authority over Christ and was God to Him.

We learn a very important lesson in what we have seen so far. It will not help us to form all of our conclusions about God because of one verse. Sometimes “Father” refers to the Triune God; sometimes it refers to God the Father. Sometimes “God” indicates the triune God; sometimes it indicates the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must read all the parts of the Bible before we form our conclusions.

## 2. The Incarnation of the Son

“Incarnation” refers to the event when something receives a human body. We can see that it includes the idea of a body or *flesh* when we remember that “carnivorous” refers to a *flesh*-eating animal and “carnal” mean *fleshly*. Christ’s incarnation was the event when God the Son became human and added to Himself our complete humanity, including a human body. This means that, since the time He was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, He was completely divine and fully human. This teaching includes both His eternal divinity and His present humanity.

#### a. Christ’s Eternal Divinity

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is eternal God. This is a point we will return to later in this lesson, but it must be brought up here as well. We will not honor Him as we should or understand the Gospel of Christ if we do not believe His divinity. John 1:1 teaches Christ’s divinity when it says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1 continues and teaches that “the Word” is Christ. John, the gospel writer, says very directly that He is God. Paul taught the same in

Romans 9:5 where He wrote that Christ “is God over all, forever praised!” We remember how Isaiah foretold that the child to be born would be called “Mighty God.”

#### b. Christ’s Assumed Humanity

The Bible also teaches that there was a time when God the Son “assumed,” or took to Himself, our complete humanity without taking on our sin. This began when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Hebrews stresses that the sinless Christ was human like we are.

He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is also able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:7,18.

Christ’s complete identification with our humanity enabled Him to bear our sin, and His humanity enables Him to help us when we are tempted (Hebrews 4:15,16). Peter, in his sermon on Pentecost included this thought: “Jesus of Nazareth was a man” (Acts 2:22). In 1 Corinthians 15:21 Paul shows how Christ’s resurrection with His humanity gives Christians the hope of being raised from the dead. The humanity of Christ is part of the Gospel of Christ.

Yet, when Christ became man, He did not abandon His divinity. Once He became man, He was both God and man in one Person. Colossians 2:9 says that in Christ “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” Now Christ is a divine Person with two natures—one divine and one human. He will possess these two natures forever.

### 3. The Person of the Holy Spirit

Many who deny the teaching of the Trinity say that the Holy Spirit is not a Person. They say the Holy Spirit is what the Hebrew and Greek words of the Bible mean. “Spirit” means wind or breath. So many say the Holy Spirit is God’s mighty power or influence. Their view seems supported by the Greek word the Bible uses; “spirit” is not a masculine or feminine word. It has a neuter gender. Therefore, we would say the Spirit is an “it,” not a Person.

#### a. Personal references

But there are biblical reasons to see the Holy Spirit as a Person, the third Person of the Trinity.

The first reason is that Christ referred to the Holy Spirit as “He.” Jesus said to His disciples, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he [the Holy Spirit] will testify about me” (John 15:26). Concerning the Spirit Jesus also said, “The world cannot accept him [The Holy Spirit], because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). If the Holy Spirit were not a Person, the rules of Greek grammar would prompt Jesus to refer to the Spirit as “it,” but Jesus said “He.”

b. Personal work

Another reason we believe that the Spirit is a divine Person is because the work of the Spirit is personal work. Jesus said, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). Acts 13:2 says “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the world to which I have called them.’” This is a remarkable statement because it is unusual in the Bible; it shows the Spirit speaking and calling people. In Acts 21:11 the prophet Agabus warned Paul about going to Jerusalem when he took Paul’s belt and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” This prophecy refers to the speaking of the Spirit. In another place the author of these lessons has summarized the conclusion of the Christian church:

We see further evidence that the Spirit is a person by noticing what Jesus says the Spirit does. He gives the help of a “counselor” and testifies about Jesus; he teaches, reminds, convicts the world of guilt, guides, and tells what is yet to come (John 14:26; 16:8, 13-14). Impersonal forces do not give this kind of personal attention.<sup>11</sup>

Both, the references of Christ to the Holy Spirit and Bible’s teaching concerning what the Spirit does, convince us that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, the third Person of the Trinity.

These clarifications concerning each Person may answer basic questions some people have concerning the Trinity. We are better able now to look at the evidence the Bible gives to support the main point of this lesson.

B. BIBLICAL EVIDENCE OF EACH PERSON’S DIVINITY

We are ready to pursue directly the question which this lesson addresses: how does the Bible teach that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each God in the fullest sense of the word? We will answer this question first by analyzing the method which the church has used to reason from the Scriptures throughout the centuries. Then we will see how the church’s use of the Scriptures helped Christians conclude that both the Son and Holy Spirit are “God in the fullest sense of the word.”

1. The Church’s Use of the Scriptures

a. The general approach

The church, and individual Christians within Christ’s church, did not look only for isolated verses in the Bible to learn what God is like. Students of the Bible did not find evidence of the Trinity only in those verses which mentioned all three Persons in one place. Rather, they compared some verses with others and some chapters with others. This practice is called “comparing Scripture with Scripture.” Christians also studied what the statements of Scripture implied in order to understand them more fully. When

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<sup>11</sup> Allen Vander Pol, *God in Three Persons: Biblical Testimony to the Trinity* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2001) 22.

this practice of analyzing Scripture more deeply is done carefully, it helps us understand more of what the Scriptures teach.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* summarizes this truth, that we may work with Scripture to see if we can reach more conclusions than we noticed at first. It says, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.”<sup>12</sup> This statement openly expresses full confidence in all that the Bible says as God’s word, but it also says that conclusions we reach, when the Bible is interpreted carefully, also have the authority of God’s word. This means, if we conclude after carefully studying God’s word that God is triune, we may say the Trinity is a biblical teaching, a teaching which God Himself gives.

But how did the Christian church conclude that the Bible teaches all the elements of the trinity--for example, the full divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit? The *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Question and Answer 11) expresses how that conclusion was reached:

- Q.     *How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father?*
- A.     The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only.<sup>13</sup>

According to this answer, if we study in Scripture the names given to the Son and Holy Spirit, the attributes (or characteristics) which Scripture says they possess, the works which Scripture says they do, and the worship which Scripture says they deserve, we will see that the Bible describes them as divine. The general way the Bible refers to the Son and Holy Spirit demonstrates that they are “God equal with the Father.”

We can be even more specific. In Lesson Six we will study some of the teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. One teaching is that Jehovah is the personal name of the true God in the Old Testament. We intend to show from the Bible that the Son and Holy Spirit have the names and attributes which Jehovah has, that they performed the works which Jehovah performed, and that they deserve the worship which Jehovah deserves. As Persons they are distinct from the Father, but in terms of all the qualities of divinity they are equal with the Father.

b.     One example: the name “Jehovah”

Since we will compare the Son and Spirit to “Jehovah”, we need to understand how to find the name for God in your English bible which corresponds to the name Jehovah. There is a name for God in the Old Testament which the Jehovah’s Witnesses translate “Jehovah.” We will explain this in Lesson Six. Except for the translation which the Jehovah’s Witnesses publish, almost all English Bibles today translate this name of God as “the LORD.” Though the last three letters of the name are smaller than the first letter, “L,” they have the shape of upper case letters. “LORD” translates a Hebrew name for God, but “Lord” is the translation of another word. In a few instances these two words appear

<sup>12</sup>     “Westminster Confession of Faith,” I.VI. *The Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1973) 22.

<sup>13</sup>     “Westminster Larger Catechism,” Q. & A. 11. *The Confession of Faith*. 133.

almost side by side. For example, we see both words in Psalm 110:1: “The LORD says to my Lord.” The first name “LORD” translates the name which Jehovah’s Witnesses insist must be translated “Jehovah,” and the second name “Lord” translates a different word which can also be translated “master.” From now on, these lessons will spell “LORD” with all upper case letters: LORD. We intend to show that the names, attributes, works, and worship of the LORD also belong to Son and Holy Spirit. This will give us firm confidence that “the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father.”

## 2. The Divinity of the Son

### a. The Son’s Divine Names

#### (1) God

There are places in the Bible where Christ, the Son, is directly called God. For example, Romans 9:5 refers to Him this way: “Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!” This is a direct claim that Christ is God. We have also noticed this teaching in Isaiah 9:6: “And he will be called...Mighty God, Everlasting Father.” Perhaps the most well-known passage is John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Though Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that this says Christ is only a god, the grammar of the Greek does not permit this claim.<sup>14</sup>

#### (2) The First and the Last

The Old Testament refers to the LORD as the first and the last. Isaiah 44:6 says, “This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.” Isaiah 48:12,13 also teach that the creator of the earth is the first and the last. Christ claimed this title when He appeared to the apostle John: “I am the First and the Last...I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever” (Revelation 1:17,18)!

#### (3) Redeemer

In Isaiah 44:6 (just quoted) the LORD calls Himself Israel’s Redeemer. Isaiah 47:4 also names God as His people’s Redeemer: “Our Redeemer--the LORD Almighty is his name—is the Holy One of Israel.” The New Testament shows us that Christ is the Redeemer. He obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12). Ephesians 1:7 says that in Jesus Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” 1 Peter 1:18,19 say, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” As the Bible calls God the Redeemer it also demonstrates that Christ is the Redeemer.

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce Metzger, “The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Jesus Christ,” *Theology Today* (April 1953): 75-6.

## (4) I Am

When God gave his name to Moses, to help Moses explain to the people of Israel concerning Who sent Moses, God said,

“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your Fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” (Exodus 3:14,15).

Those words, “I AM” are probably the basis for the name, The LORD. The name was given when God told Moses that, like the burning bush which did not burn up, God endures forever and His promises will not be destroyed until God fulfills them. What we notice for our study are three names which God calls Himself: “I AM WHO I AM,” “I AM,” and “The LORD.” In the gospel of John Jesus gives this name to Himself. He repeatedly says, “I am:” the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, and the true vine (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:11; 11:25; 15:1). Though these claims of Christ are probably all based on Exodus 3:14,15, Jesus’ claim is most emphatic in John 8:58: “I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” Like “I AM” in Exodus 3, this name for Christ teaches that He is greater than Abraham and He is eternal God.

## b. The Son’s Divine Attributes

## (1) God’s Presence

The Son of God is everywhere-present as the Bible says God is. The Bible teaches that we cannot escape the presence of God. Psalm 139:7 asks, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” The verses which follow in the Psalm show that we cannot flee from God’s presence. Christ’s presence is also present everywhere. Jesus said, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” Matthew 18:20. Ephesians 1:23 says that Christ “fills everything in every way.” The fact that Christ has authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:19) also shows us the divine infinite presence of Christ.

## (2) God’s Knowledge

One of the privileges God has is that He knows the thoughts of man. Psalm 94:11 says, “the LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.” In Jeremiah 17:10 God also says, “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind.” The gospels teach that Jesus also knows the thoughts of man. While people were saying that Jesus belonged to the devil, the Bible says “Jesus knew their thoughts” (Matthew 12:25). This idea, that Jesus knew the thoughts of men, is pointed out repeatedly (Matthew 9:4; 22:18; Luke 6:8; John 1:48; 4:16-19; 6:64). Jesus knew what a person’s background was before He was told, and He knew who would believe on Him before people spoke. His knowledge was divine.

c. The Son's Divine Works

(1) Creation

The Bible teaches that God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Since the skies proclaim the work of His hands, the Psalm is teaching that the skies declare that God is Creator (see also Psalm 33:6). Exodus 20:11 says the LORD made the heavens and the earth. But the Bible also says that all things were created "by" or "through" Christ. John 1:3 says, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Colossians 1:16 adds to this by saying, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Hebrews 1:2 says it was through His Son that God "made the universe." Just as the Bible teaches that God is our Creator, it also teaches that the Son is our Creator.

(2) Providence

When we speak of God's providence, we refer to His work each moment by which He upholds, governs, and guides His creation. "God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions."<sup>15</sup> The Bible teaches that providence is the work of God. Psalm 36:6 says, "O LORD, you preserve both man and beast." Psalm 135:6,7 say "The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses." Yet the Bible also teaches that this activity of caring for everything is the work the work of the Son. In Christ all things hold together (Colossians 1:17).

(3) Judgment

The Bible declares that God is the Judge of everyone. Psalm 98:9 calls all creation and peoples to sing before the Lord. "Let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity." Hebrews 12:23 says that God is "the judge of all men;" 1 Peter 1:17 says that we "call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially." Yet the Bible also says that Christ is the judge. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

(4) Gives Life

The Bible teaches in various ways that God gives life to the dead and that He raises the dead. Ephesians 2:4,5 say that, though we were dead in sin, God made us alive. Notice how Jesus also claimed this power: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (John 5:21). This act of giving life to the spiritually dead provides yet more evidence that Christ performs the

<sup>15</sup> "The Shorter Catechism," A. 11. *The Confession of Faith*. 289.

work which God does. Therefore, it shows that Christ is equal with the Father in divine glory.

#### d. The Son's Divine Worship

The Bible says that man may worship only God. This is the meaning of the first commandment, which says "You shall have no other gods before [or besides] me" (Exodus 20:3). When He was tempted, Jesus also insisted on this: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10). Therefore godly men in the Bible refused to be worshipped. When Cornelius fell on his feet in reverence for Peter, Peter told Cornelius not to bow down because Peter was only a man (Acts 10:25, 26). When the people of Lystra attempted to worship Paul and Barnabas, these missionaries put an end to it because they were only men (Acts 14:13-15). So the Bible shows us that only God may be worshipped.

Yet Christ must be praised and does receive our worship. Consider these two passages. In Isaiah 45:22-24 God says, "I am God, and there is no other . . . Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.'" This worship, given to God, is also given to Christ. Philippians 2:10,11 says, "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The worship given to God in Isaiah 45 is also given to our Lord Jesus Christ in Philippians 2. This is also the meaning of Revelation 5:13: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" Hebrews 1:6 says about Christ, "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" This worship of Christ is appropriate and necessary because as John's gospel says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Since Christ revealed His own divine glory, He is worthy of divine praise.

This study of Christ's divine names, attributes, works, and worship stands next to our study of specific verses which say that The LORD is God. When we combine these Bibles verses, the person who accepts the Bible as God's word should be fully confident that the Son is God equal with the Father.

### 3. The Divinity of the Holy Spirit

The divinity of the Holy Spirit can be demonstrated in the same way that the Son's divinity has been shown. We have seen already in Lesson One how the Bible sometimes refers to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as equal, divine Persons. We have seen in this lesson how the Bible shows that the names, attributes, work and worship of the Son each prove that He is divine. Now we will see how the Bible shows from the names, attributes, and works of the Spirit that He is also divine. We will show how some proofs of the Son's divinity also apply to the Spirit, but there will be differences in some of the names, attributes and works which we will highlight concerning the Holy Spirit.

a. The Spirit's Divine Name

We remember how Christ commanded His disciples to baptize the nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19); this shows that the three Persons share one divine name. Peter also named the Holy Spirit as God. When he questioned Ananias about his lies, Peter said, "How is it that . . . you have lied to the Holy Spirit . . . ?" "You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3, 4). Peter equates lying to the Holy Spirit to lying to God. This demonstrates that the Spirit is divine.

We can also see that the Spirit is God in a comparison of verses. In 1 Peter 3:20 Peter describes God's patience in the days of Noah before the great flood. He wrote, "God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built." But Genesis 6 refers to God's response to mankind's increasing sin: Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever" (Genesis 6:3). Though these two verses do not describe God at the same time, they describe God responding to man in that era. One mentioned how God responded; the other says how the Spirit responded. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is mentioned interchangeably with God.

b. The Spirit's Divine Attributes

(1) God's Power

One quality of the Holy Spirit, mentioned in the Bible, is His power. Note, for example, when the angel announced to Mary, a virgin, that she would be the mother of our Lord. The angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). In this announcement the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High are the same. We believe "the Most High" refers to God. This shows the Spirit's power is divine power; the Holy Spirit is divine.

(2) God's Presence

The Bible says that Holy Spirit's presence is God's presence. Psalm 139 is a prayer written to the LORD (Psalm 139:1). As the Psalm praises God for his presence everywhere, it asks two questions: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence" (Psalm 139:7)? The two questions belong to Hebrew poetry in which different lines can mean the same thing though different words are used. Therefore, the two questions make the same point. They both teach that God is present everywhere. They imply that the Spirit's presence is divine presence.

(3) God's Knowledge

Just as the Bible tells us about the divine knowledge of the Son, it shows us that the Spirit also possesses divine knowledge. In one place the apostle Paul compares the way a man knows himself with the way the Holy Spirit knows the mind of God: "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of

God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10b, 11). There is only one human being who knows thoroughly a man’s thoughts, and that is the person himself. Similarly, only the Spirit knows the thoughts of God thoroughly. We cannot comprehend God’s thoughts or ways because God is vastly greater than we are (Isaiah 55:7,8). Yet the Spirit knows and thoroughly understands the mind of God because the Spirit Himself is divine.

c. The Spirit’s Divine Works

(1) Creation

The Bible begins by saying, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). This tells us from the beginning that God is the source of all that exists, except for God Himself. Soon afterwards the Bible says, “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2). This shows that the Holy Spirit was both present and active during the creating activity of God. The Bible teaches that the Spirit was the creating spirit: “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:30). Psalm 33:6 says, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.” The “breath” of God is the Spirit of God; “spirit” means breath. So the Psalm teaches that God’s Spirit was the power by which God created everything.

(2) Inspiration of Scripture

The Bible says that it came from God. Though holy men wrote it, God moved them to write what God wanted written. The result is that the Bible is God’s word. Yet the Bible also teaches that its inspiration was the work of the Holy Spirit. Compare the two passages which follow. First, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The saving power and effects of the Bible come from the fact that God breathed out what men wrote; God inspired the Scriptures. Second, 2 Peter 1:21 says, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Whereas one verse says that Scripture was God-breathed, the other says that its human authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit. We conclude that Scripture was inspired by God the Holy Spirit.

We can see this identity between the Spirit’s work and God’s work in moving men to write Scripture when David begins his last words. He wrote: “The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me” (2 Samuel 23:2,3). As the Spirit spoke through David, God, the Rock of Israel spoke to David. The divinity of the Spirit is revealed as the Bible tells us of its own origins

(3) Gives Life

We have already seen how God claims to be the source of our new life in Christ (see Ephesians 2:4,5; John 5:21). The Bible also teaches that the Spirit gives new life. In 2

Corinthians 3:6b Paul wrote, "...the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Jesus told Nicodemus, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5); He was saying that the Spirit's miraculous gift of new birth is necessary for a person to trust in Christ and to understand Christ. This life which we need comes from the Spirit. Divinely given life is the gift of the Holy Spirit

Ezekiel 37 teaches this truth with a vision that the prophet saw. He saw a valley of dead man's bones. He was asked if the bones could still live, and Ezekiel said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know" (Ezekiel 37:3). Though no power on earth could make the bones live, God could make them live. Then, Ezekiel saw what happened when the Spirit of God moved on men who were dead. The bones came together; flesh was given to them; and they came to life. Ezekiel was told what the vision means:

"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'" Ezekiel 37:12-14

God combines several blessings in one promise. He will cause His Old Testament people to return from captivity; He will raise them from their graves; and He will give them new life. God gave His people hope by promising new life. As God says He will do it, He also promises that His Spirit will do it. This is yet further verification that Spirit's work is God's word and that the Spirit is divine.

This study of the Holy Spirit's name, attributes and works shows us that He possesses divine names and attributes and that His works are the works of God.

Before providing evidence which shows that the Holy Spirit is divine, Edward Bickersteth wrote:

The reader will not fail to observe what strong collateral evidence of the possible plurality in unity, and therefore the possible coequal Deity of the Father and of the Son, we shall obtain, if another be revealed in Scripture;  
 as one who is to be distinguished from the Father and the Son;  
 as one to whom such personal properties and actions are assigned  
 as prove independent and intelligent personality;  
 as one to whom Divine attributes are ascribed, and by whom  
 Divine offices are exercised;  
 as one worshipped in parity with the Father and the Son;  
 as one declared to be Jehovah and God.<sup>16</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Lesson One demonstrated two points of the teaching of the Trinity: that there is one God and that He exists in three distinct Persons. This lesson demonstrated a third point: that each Person is "God in the fullest sense of the word."

<sup>16</sup> Edward Henry Bickersteth, *The Trinity: The Classic Study of Biblical Trinitarianism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications) 119.

Before we proved this third point from Scripture, we clarified certain points concerning each of the divine Persons of the Trinity: 1) that “Father” and “God” sometimes refer to the triune God and sometimes to the first Person of the trinity; 2) that God the Son is eternal God but that He has added to Himself our human nature; and 3) that the Spirit, despite the impression given by the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” or “breath,” is a Person.

Then we showed how the Bible teaches that the Son and Spirit are God, equal with the Father. The names, attributes, works, and worship which the Bible attributes to them can, in most cases, be attributed to the LORD, the undoubted name of the true God.

## QUESTIONS

1. What difficulties do we face when we read names for the Father in the Bible?
2. What do we mean when we say the Son of God is incarnate?
3. What reasons do we have for saying the Holy Spirit is a divine Person?
4. Explain the main reason given in this chapter to prove that the Son and Spirit are God equal with the Father.
5. How does the name “first and last” prove that Christ is God?
6. How does worship given to the Son in Philippians 2:10,11 prove that He is God?
7. How were the Son and Spirit involved in the creation of the universe?
8. How does the Bible’s teaching about the inspiration of Scripture prove that the Spirit is God?
9. How does the Bible teach that all Persons of the Trinity give new life?
10. What, if anything, did you learn in the lesson which you believe was most important for you to know?



## LESSON THREE

### BIBLICAL BASIS (3): THE ECONOMIC TRINITY

#### INTRODUCTION

So far we have discussed the Trinity from one perspective. Sometimes this perspective is called the “ontological Trinity.” By ontological Trinity we mean the existence of each of three Persons as God. Each is divine “in the fullest sense of the word.” The first two lessons have attempted to demonstrate from Scripture that there is one God and that He exists in three distinct, divine Persons.

But there is another way to study what the Triune God is like. Theologians call this the “economical Trinity.”<sup>17</sup> This includes the study of what theologians sometimes call the “subsistence” of the Persons. By “subsistence” they mean that each divine Person has a unique relationship with the other two Persons and that each fulfills a unique role in the acts of the Triune God. Whereas the ontological Trinity stresses that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are similar in together being God over all, the economical Trinity stresses that they are dissimilar in some ways, occupying unique places in the Godhead and fulfilling unique roles in God’s work.

It is important for us both to know about the ontological Trinity and to understand the economic Trinity. In the history of the church both perspectives have shown that they are necessary. Many errors which have been taught about God have arisen because teachers in the church ignored either one or the other perspective of the Trinity. We do not know the full Biblical presentation of the Trinity until we add this lesson to what we have learned in Lessons One and Two.

In this lesson we will approach the uniqueness of each Divine Person by studying the roles of each of the divine Persons separately. This approach should help us in many ways. Hopefully it will help us understand the contribution each Person make to God’s works of creation, providence, and salvation. We will also learn how the economic Trinity affects the Christian’s faith. It may seem to us that the three Persons require us to place faith in each one separately, since each is God, but this is a misunderstanding which gives the confusing impression that the Christian must have three faiths. Despite the truth that God exists in three distinct Persons, God demands one unified faith in Him. The economic Trinity provides the perspective which shows how one faith in the Triune God is possible. Frequently, when the ontological Trinity and economic Trinity are understood together, the understanding Christians have of the entire Bible is greatly expanded.

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<sup>17</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941) 88-89.

## A. THE ROLES OF THE THREE DIVINE PERSONS

### 1. The Son's Role

Perhaps it is easiest to begin with the role of God the Son within the works of God, especially His role in God's accomplishment of salvation.

One of the most important things to know about the Trinity's work of salvation is that the Son was sent by the Father. This truth is found especially in the writings of the apostle John. His gospel and first letter, 1 John, mention at least forty-four times that the Father sent the Son. This truth is clearly a foundational truth; John did not want us to miss it.

Here are some examples from the gospel of John. All of them tell us what Jesus said about Himself and His heavenly Father, and they all include the truth that the Father sent the Son.

John 4:35. "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

John 5:23. ". . . He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."

John 5:24. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

John 5:30. "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

John 5:36. "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me."

John 5:37. "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form."

We could continue to find more places in John's gospel where it says the Son was sent, but perhaps these give an adequate impression.

John's first letter also includes verses which insist that the Father sent the Son. He also insists that believing that the Father sent the Son belongs to true faith in Christ:

1 John 4:9. "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."

1 John 4:10. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

1 John 4:14, 15. “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.”

Since the Father sent the Son, we believe that the Father sent to Son to complete a specific mission. Christians living during the time of the apostles believed this. In Acts 4 some of them prayed, “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4:27,28). The death of Jesus Christ was part of the mission the Father gave Him to do; the Son was sent to endure God’s punishment on behalf of sinners. At least from age 12 on Jesus was aware that he came to do His Father’s business (Luke 2:29). Years later, as he healed the blind man Jesus said, “We must do the work of him who sent me” (John 9:4). He also said, “My food. . . is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34). He said, “The very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36). “I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). Christ was constantly aware that He was sent to the world to do what the Father had decided must be accomplished. Near the end of His life He prayed, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). In the Gethsemane he prayed, “My Father if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). So, Hebrews 10:7 says that the thoughts of Psalm 40 describe the determination of Christ: “I have come to do your will, O God.”

Salvation, then, is the work of God the Father and the Son. Indeed, the Son came and took the place of sinners. But the Son came to fulfill the plan of salvation which the Father sent Him to achieve. We could say that the Father saved us through the work of the Son.

We see a similar relationship between the work of the Father and of the Son in what the Bible teaches concerning creation. The Father created all things through the work of the Son. John 1 tells us how everything was created. When it tells us about the “Word,” it says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). This is also the teaching of Colossians 1. It says, “For by [through] him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and one earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15, 16). Hebrews 1:2 says “through whom [the Son] he [God] made the universe.” Possibly this truth about creation is best summarized by 1 Corinthians 8:6: “for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” Even in the divine works of creation and providence the Son is the agent; through Him all things are done.

## 2. The Father’s Role

The Son’s role already tells us what the Father’s role is. The Father is the source, the designer, the One whose will the Son completed. James says, “Every good and perfect

gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). Even our lives are from God; so we should call Him our Father.

Besides the passages we have noted already which show that the Father is the source of God’s works, Ephesians 1:3-6 provides extra insight. It says,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

This portion of Ephesians shows us again that the Father is the source of redemption and that what the Father chose to do was fulfilled “through” the Son. The very next verse shows in more detail how we have this redemption in Christ. But we stress here what these quoted verses say: that redemption in Christ is from the Father. The Father “chose” and “predestined us to be adopted.” What Christ achieved was first decided by the Father. Christ is the instrument, but the Father is the source. The Father is like an architect; as a result, the Son is similar to a builder.

As originator the Father is called the “first” Person of the Trinity. He represents the Trinity so that sometimes He is called the “God” of Christ.<sup>18</sup> This is similar to the relationship between Moses and Aaron in Exodus 4:16 where God said that Moses would be “God” to Aaron. God was not saying that Moses was divine. Rather, God would give Moses God’s words for Moses to give his brother, and Aaron must say those words to the people. On the human level Moses was the source of God’s word and God’s authority to Aaron. Moses and Aaron were mere men, but God decided that Moses would be given divine authority over his brother. This relationship between Moses and Aaron resembled the Father’s relationship with and Son. They are equal in their divinity, but the Father has authority over the Son Whom He sent. The Son voluntarily yielded to His Father.

This Biblical view of the relationship between the Father and the Son is not the same as the one taught by “subordinationists.” Subordinationism is “a teaching that the Son and the Holy Spirit are of lesser being or status than the Father.”<sup>19</sup> Subordinationism is frequently upheld by people who deny the Trinity; it seems to them that the relationship of the Father in sending the Son demands that we see the Son as a lesser being, but this is not necessarily true. Though the Father is the source and though the Son submitted to the Father’s plan, this does not mean that the Son is subordinate in being. Just as some human beings obey others without giving up their own full humanity, so the Son obeyed His Father without giving up His full divinity. While the Son obeyed His Father, we continued to be equal with the Father in divinity.

We have seen as we looked at the Father’s role that the Father and the Son are distinct divine Persons, and that they have distinct tasks. The Father originates and plans. The Son fulfills the Father’s plans and obeys the Father commands.

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<sup>18</sup> Herman Bavinck

<sup>19</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillippsburg: P & R Publishing) 502.

### 3. The Spirit's Role

The Holy Spirit is still another Person of the Trinity. He possesses divinity which is equal with the Father's and the Son's. This is true because each is fully divine. Yet the Spirit plays another role in the work of the Triune God. The Father plans; the Son accomplishes; and the Spirit provides God's personal power by which all God's words are accomplished.

#### a. In Jesus' life

We can see the Spirit's power in the life and ministry of Christ. Before the Son was conceived of the virgin Mary, God's angel told her that the Holy Spirit would come on her so that her Son would be the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Though the Father sent the Son into the world, the power of the Spirit made this miracle possible.

The Spirit also empowered the Son when Jesus was baptized. The baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. As Jesus was baptized, the Father announced that this was the One whom the Father had sent. As others listened, the Father said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). At the same time the same verse says that the Holy Spirit descended on him.

Afterwards the Son was tempted. It was necessary for Him to be tempted like Adam was and for Jesus to resist Satan's temptation as Adam did not resist him. The Bible says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" as He was led in the desert to be tempted (Luke 4:1, 2). This shows that Christ resisted Satan's temptations with the power of the Spirit on Him. Later Christ rose from the dead, and the Bible says His resurrection was enabled by the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:11). As we look at the broad outline of Jesus' ministry, we can see that in all things He was doing the will of the Father and in all things He accomplished His work in the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### b. In creation

The Spirit's power can also be seen in the Bible's description of the creation. Though the creation is the work of the Father's command, and though all things were created through the Son, the Spirit's power was present to achieve the creation of the universe. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit was present "hovering over the waters." Psalm 104:30 says to God, "when you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth."

#### c. In supplying divine power

Before we conclude our discussion of the Spirit's role, we should ask, for a moment, Who directs the Spirit to accompany God's works with God's personal power. We have seen how the Son performs His work because the Father sends Him. Who gives the Spirit so that His power is present?

The answer is that the Father and Son both send the Spirit. Jesus once told His disciples, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16, 17). This shows us that the Spirit comes from the Father, the Source, as the Son was sent by the Father. But Jesus also said, "When the

Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me” (John 15:26). This shows us that the Father and the Son are both involved in the giving of the Holy Spirit. At another time, when the resurrected Christ appeared to His disciples, Scripture says, “He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). Jesus’ “breathing” was His giving the Holy Spirit to His disciples. The Spirit’s work is closely connected with the work of the Father and the Son. In fact, Romans 8:9 calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of God” and “the Spirit of Christ.” We conclude from these Scriptures that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son.

This shows us that we should not imagine that the Holy Spirit’s ministry is independent of what the Father and Son do. Each Person fulfills a role in the mighty works of God. The Spirit provides the personal power of God to all that God does.

#### 4. The Roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit seen Together

We have seen in the economic Trinity that each Person in the Trinity fulfills a distinct role or task in the works of God. We should still summarize these roles so that we get a complete picture. There is a consistent pattern which appears as we look at the unique part each divine Person plays in the works of God. We believe that this pattern, seen in God’s revealed works, also indicates how the divine Persons relate in God’s works which are not revealed to us.

##### a. The Father Generates

We will let Louis Berkhof summarize for us the roles of each of the divine Persons. He presents conclusions of the church which may seem highly technical to us today. But it is important for us to read them.

Strictly speaking, the only work that is peculiar to the Father exclusively is that of active generation.

. . . All the . . . [works towards things outside of God] are works of the triune God, but in some of these works the Father is evidently in the foreground, such as: (1) Designing the work of redemption, including election, of which the Son was Himself an object Ps 2:7-9; 40:6-9; Isa 53:10; Matt. 12:32; Eph 1:3-6. (2) The works of creation and providence, especially in their initial stages, I Cor 8:6; Eph 2:9. (3) The work of representing the Trinity in the Counsel of Redemption [the Triune God’s agreement concerning how man’s redemption would be accomplished], as the holy and righteous Being, whose right was violated, Ps 2:7-9; 40:6-9; John 6:37,38; 17:4-7.<sup>20</sup>

##### b. The Son is begotten

Berkhof continues:

The personal property of the Son is that He is eternally begotten of the Father. . . , and shares with the Father in the spiration of the Spirit. The

<sup>20</sup>

Berkhof, 91.

doctrine of the generation of the Son is suggested by the Biblical representation of the first and second persons of the Trinity as standing in the relation of Father and Son to each other. Not only do the names “Father” and “Son” suggest the generation of the latter by the former, but the Son is also repeatedly called “the only-begotten,” John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; Heb 11:17; I John 4:9.<sup>21</sup>

When Berkhof says that the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, he refers to the Son’s subsistence, not the divine essence of the Son.<sup>22</sup> This means the Son willingly assumes the role of being sent by the Father, yet the Son does not, in the process, abandon any aspect of His full divinity. The Son is God in the fullest sense of the word, yet He receives from His Father His appointment, His role that He fulfills in the overall work of God.

c. The Spirit proceeds

The Western church professed in the Constantinopolitan Creed, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.” Berkhof adds:

This procession of the Holy Spirit. . . is his personal property. Much of what was said respecting the generation of the Son also applies to the spiration of the Holy Spirit. . . .The following points of distinction between the two may be noted, however: (1) Generation is the work of the Father only; spiration is the work of both the Father and the Son. (2) By generation the Son is enabled to take part in the work of spiration, but the Holy Spirit acquires no such power. (3) In logical order generation precedes spiration. It should be remembered, however, that all of this implies no essential subordination of the Holy Spirit to the Son. In spiration as well as in generation there is a communication of the whole of the divine essence, so that the Holy Spirit is on an equality with the Father and the Son. . . . Spiration may be defined as *that eternal and necessary act of the first and second persons in the Trinity whereby they, within the divine Being, become the ground of the personal subsistence of the Holy Spirit, and put the third person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation or change.*<sup>23</sup>

d. The Triune acts of God

The Nicene Creed says it this way: that the Son is “begotten of the Father before all worlds. . . begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father” and the Spirit “proceeds from the Father [and the Son]”<sup>24</sup>

Bavink described these relationships in terms of God’s works when he wrote, “The Father works *of Himself, through the Son, in the Spirit.*”<sup>25</sup> We can also say it this way: “The Father does all things through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Berkhof 93.

<sup>22</sup> Berkhof 93.

<sup>23</sup> Berkhof 97.

<sup>24</sup> 8 May 2007 <<http://www.ccel.org/creeds/nicene.creed.html>.

The economic Trinity gives us a perspective on the Persons of the Trinity. Though they possess equal divinity, they complete unique tasks in the work of God without abandoning or minimizing their divine glory and being. How this can be is a mystery to us, but that is because God's being and works are vastly greater than we can understand.

## B. THE THREE PERSONS AND THE CHRISTIAN'S FAITH

In the introduction to this lesson we promised to deal with the question of how the doctrine of the Trinity affects our faith. We raised the question whether the teaching of three divine Persons requires of us three faiths, even three religions. We said that the doctrine of the economic Trinity would help answer that question. We are ready, now, to give an answer.

The Bible tells us that we must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. John 3:16 is perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible where God teaches this. If a person believes in Christ, he will not perish but have everlasting life. Paul told the jailor in Philippi that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved (Acts 16:31). The entire gospel of John was written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing we might have life in His name (John 20:31). The Bible is clear concerning where it tells us to place our faith. We must entrust ourselves to the care of Jesus' grace.

The reason we must believe in Christ is because God accomplished salvation in Him. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19). All God's promises to save sinners were fulfilled in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). To trust in what God has done for sinners we must trust in Christ, through Whom God the Father did it.

This may seem obvious to us when we remember that the Father sent the Son and that the Son came to do His Father's will. Since the Son is the Father's gift, we trust the Father when we trust the Son. We trust that what the Father provided is adequate for our salvation. The Father did not provide a Savior who left the work of salvation unfinished. He sent the only One who could pay for all our sins and give us eternal life. So faith in the Son is faith in the Father as well.

Also, faith in the Son is faith in the Spirit. Jesus told His disciples what the Spirit would do when He descended on them. In one place Jesus said, He "will testify about me" (John 14:26). Jesus also promised that the Spirit would "remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9), and the teaching He imparts explains and reveals Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the divine Person who inspired the Bible (2 Peter 1:21). Scripture is God's book written especially to present the Lord Jesus Christ to us (John 5:39). When we trust in Christ according to Scripture, we are trusting in Christ Whom the Spirit is revealing to us. Faith in Christ trusts in the Son who saves sinners, in the Father who sent the Savior, and in the Spirit who empowered and reveals the Savior. As Scripture commands us to believe in Christ, it calls us to one faith in the triune God.

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<sup>25</sup> Bavink 318

<sup>26</sup> Allen Vander Pol, *God in Three Persons: Biblical Testimony to the Trinity* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2001) 32.

This is also what the Bible specifically says. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:5). The Bible says, “whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23).

Since the Father came to us through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, our faith approaches God through the same pathway: “For through him [the Son] we have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18).

## CONCLUSION

During this lesson we have studied the economic Trinity. This has been a study of how the three Persons of the Trinity interact with each other and what role each fulfills in the works of God.

We learned that the Father sent the Son and that the Father and Son send the Spirit. We learned that our approach to the Father is through the Son and our approach to the Spirit is to receive the Son whom the Spirit reveals to us.

This teaches us that faith in the Son is faith in the triune God. When we go to the Son we approach the Father Who sent Christ and we believe the Spirit who reveals Christ. Therefore we trust in one Triune God with one faith.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between the perspectives of looking at ontological Trinity and economic Trinity?
2. What was the Son’s role in the salvation of sinners?
3. What false understanding of Christ does subordinationism teach?
4. What was the Father’s role in the salvation of sinners?
5. How can we understand the Bible when it says that the Father is the “God” of Christ?
6. What did the Holy Spirit do throughout Christ’s life on earth?
7. How do Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together?
8. How is faith in Christ faith in the triune God?
9. What did you learn in this lesson that you had never thought of before?
10. Who is greater: the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?



## LESSON FOUR

### CONTROVERSIES AND TRINITARIAN CREEDS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

#### INTRODUCTION

##### 1. New Needs

In its first 500 years the early church did not understand the doctrine of the Trinity as clearly as we have presented it. This situation continued because “Scripture does not offer us an elaborate, fully formulated Trinitarian doctrine but it contains the essential elements out of which this doctrine has been constructed.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore in the first years of the church theologians merely quoted Scripture and did not chose words to describe God which the Bible does not use.

But the church was forced to expand its vocabulary to describe what God is like. The need arose because new errors emerged in the church. People were teaching ideas about God which were not biblical. Sometimes church leaders could only sense that something in these new teachings was wrong. At other times errors were immediately obvious to those who believed the gospel of Christ. As church leaders were forced to oppose new errors, they began to use words which had not been used before in the discussion of what God is like. As it expanded its vocabulary, the church gained tools which helped to protect Christians from errors and to explain Scripture’s teaching concerning God. This lesson will refer to some of the errors and to some of the answers which the church gave to oppose them.

“The history of the doctrine of the trinity is most significant in the three phases called Monarchian, Arian, and Macedonian.”<sup>28</sup> After describing a heresy which attacked the church near its beginning, we will review these three main phases in which the early church struggled with error concerning the Trinity. We will also list similar errors which have arisen in later church history. We will see how the church, through its leaders and councils, responded to these errors in their own day by writing creeds.

##### 2. New Creeds

Many Christians feel uncomfortable using terminology about God which is not found in the Bible, but we should not be afraid of it. Our goal is to express to the best of our ability, and in contrast to errors, what Scripture says concerning God Who is Triune.

Many Christians also do not like creeds which have been written in the past by the church. To be biblical, it seems to them, we should say only what the Bible says. However, sometimes the whole church was attacked by errors which required it to respond. Often the church responded by writing creeds. These statements of belief faithfully summarized the Bible’s teaching and utilized the vocabulary necessary to apply biblical truth to the errors which the Church answered.

<sup>27</sup> Herman Bavink, *The Doctrine of God*, tran. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1951), 274.

<sup>28</sup> Fred Klooster, “Theology Proper” (Unpublished Syllabus) V-16.

The lesson will conclude with some of the creeds which the early church wrote concerning the trinity.

## A. AN EARLY HERESY: GNOSTICISM

### 1. The original heresy

Gnosticism was a teaching which threatened the church in the second century (the 100s). Historians do not agree which philosophies and religions were blended together to form the basic ideas of Gnosticism, but they agree that Greek philosophy is one of its sources. We will draw attention briefly to the ideas of Gnosticism which are important to our treatment of the Trinity.

Gnosticism shares with ancient Greek philosophy the idea that physical matter is evil and spiritual reality is good. The two principles which govern these realms are gods which are opposed to each other. To remain free from evil associations, the good spiritual god relates to physical creatures only through a long chain of middle beings, called aeons, which are mediators between physical creatures and the spiritual. The good spiritual god did not create the physical world. One of the aeons probably became hostile to the good god and created the material world. This aeon is called the Demiurge and is the god of the Old Testament. He is an “inferior, limited, passionate, and vengeful being.”<sup>29</sup>

Though the world of matter is evil, something from the good spiritual world is trapped within it; this is the soul of man. The goal of the human spirit is to be liberated from the physical world. So the good god, the God of the New Testament, sent a representative who either appeared to have a body or else associated with a physical body for a short time. He did not make the physical body his own because the physical body is evil. This representative is Christ. Gnosticism teaches that He makes it possible for human souls to be freed from their bodies.

What is important for us to remember about Gnosticism is that it believed that the good God, the God of the New Testament, did not create the world. Gnosticism also taught that Christ was not divine; He was only God’s representative.

As church leaders responded to Gnosticism, they expressed opinions which formed the beginning of Trinitarian discussions. Three leaders stand out. Irenaeus defended the truth that the Father, Son, and Spirit are essentially one. Tertullian added the biblical emphasis that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons. Though Origin’s views were unbiblical in significant ways, he stressed that the interpersonal relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternal.<sup>30</sup> These authors opposed Gnosticism by stressing that there is one God who created the world and redeemed sinners. Students may choose to study further the views of these church leaders in greater detail.

Gnosticism was a stimulus which prompted early Christian thought and discussion concerning the Trinity.

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<sup>29</sup> Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1937) 48.

<sup>30</sup> Bavink 278.

## 2. Modern forms of Gnosticism

One form of Gnosticism is called Theosophy. As Gnosticism taught that the spirit was trapped within the physical world, Theosophy teaches that everything is divine because everything contains the divine. Life throughout the universe originates from the same divine source.<sup>31</sup> Modern Theosophists greatly admire the ancient Gnostics.

The New Age movement is also Gnostic in its teaching. It says that the divine is trapped within all physical objects and that the human soul can find liberation when this insight is understood.

Gnosticism in its various forms, including Theosophy and New Age thought, denies that God is personal or that He created the physical universe. It denies also that Christ is uniquely divine. Rather it teaches that Jesus Christ possesses the divine, as we all do.

### B. THE MONARCHIAN PHASE

“While the great heresy of the second century was Gnosticism, the outstanding heresy of the third century was Monarchianism.”<sup>32</sup> Monarchianism reflects the word monarch, which means “one ruler.” Monarchianism taught both that there is one God and that He is one Person. There were two basic forms of Monarchianism.

#### 1. Adoptionism (or Dynamic Monarchianism)

Dynamic Monarchianism was an early effort to explain the divine and human natures in Christ. The movement said that God the Father is divine, and Jesus was a good man. There were many variations of this view, but we will let the view of Theodotus the leather-merchant represent this view. Theodotus believed in the virgin birth of Jesus. After Jesus’ holy life had been tested, he received the Holy Spirit at His baptism. At this point He became the Christ and received power to fulfill the ministry God gave Him to do; this ministry included performing miracles. Jesus was not naturally divine, but He was in some way adopted by God the Father and was therefore called the Son of God. Therefore, His title, “Son of God” does not refer to His nature but is used to give Him honor. Adoptionism, then, taught that only the Father is God, and it insists that the Son is not. The Son was “adopted;” this means that God rewarded Christ with honor due of His good life, not because Christ’s nature deserved it.

There were others who taught adoptionism. Paul of Samosata, bishop of (260-272) advocated it, but a church synod in Antioch excommunicated him.<sup>33</sup> Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) also promoted this view of Christ. He “denied the preexistence of Jesus as the Son of God.” He “affirmed that he [Christ] was a perfect, deified man who was appointed mediator and who was to be adored.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Gen. Ed. Ravi Zacharias. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003) 281-2.

<sup>32</sup> Berkhof 77.

<sup>33</sup> G. T. Burke, “Paul of Samosate.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 1984.

<sup>34</sup> Brian Lee, “Trinitarian Heresies Timeline,” *Modern Reformation* November/December 2003:14-17.

2. Modalism (or Modalistic Monarchianism)
  - a. The original teaching

Modalistic monarchianism also taught that there is one divine Person, but it understood God in a way from the adoptionists. According to modalism, the true God reveals Himself in three ways: as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is like an actor who appeared in three costumes. God first appeared as Father in the creation and the giving of the law. He appeared as the Son in the incarnation and crucifixion. He appears as the Holy Spirit in the personal gift of new life. Modalists believed that any view which said that the Son is distinct from the Father really taught that there are two Gods and attacked the biblical truth that God is one. The basic error of modalism is that it fails to see how the Bible teaches that three Persons of the trinity are distinct.

Modalism was opposed both in the east and the west of the early church. In the west the movement was given the insulting name *Patripassianism*, which means modalism taught that the Father suffered and died on the cross.<sup>35</sup> This is the logical conclusion when people insist that the Father and the Son are the same divine Person. Modalism was called *Sabellianism* in the east because it was taught by Sabellius in Rome. He denied the eternal distinction of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- b. Modern forms

Modalism has had a long history. Its influence has continued throughout church history. Today there are churches and pastors who are modalists without knowing it. Sometimes modalism is promoted by analogies which people give to make the doctrine of the trinity easier to accept and understand. For example, the analogy which says God's persons are like ice, water, and steam—the same substance with different appearances—is essentially modalistic.<sup>36</sup> Another way modalism is promoted is when churches say that the three appearances of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have each had an appropriate time to appear and that the New Testament church lives in the age of the Spirit. A great danger of this view is that urges the church to focus only on the presence of the Holy Spirit and not on the Gospel of Christ.

We must avoid the error of modalism because it denies the Biblical teaching that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine Persons, and it diminishes God.

## C. THE ARIAN PHASE

1. Arianism

The African bishop, Arius, is the father of Arianism, one of the most troublesome issues in church history. Arius was not a significant writer. He did not have a personal following. His most significant contribution to the history of theology is that his name was given to the views he held; many others who held the same views were called

<sup>35</sup> C. B. Blaising, "Monarchianism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 1984.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Horton, "'God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity': Scriptural Confession or Human Invention?" *Modern Reformation* November/December 2003:13-21.

Arians.<sup>37</sup> His views were formed more by human reason than by the revelation of God in Scripture. Arius believed that if his reason could not accept a teaching the teaching is not true. When anyone emphasizes human reason more the Bible, his teaching will cause trouble.

Arius believed that there is one God and that the Son and Spirit are not God. There was a time when the Father was all alone, the only being Who existed. The first being God created was His only begotten Son. The Son was created out of nothing before the physical world was made. The Son has a beginning; He is God's first-born Who always chose to do right. Since God the Father is too exalted to come in contact with the material world (something the Gnostics also taught), He created the Son to be the creator of the material world.<sup>38</sup> The Holy Spirit, according to Arius, is a divine power, not a divine Person. We can see that the views of Arius were similar in many ways to Monarchianism.

At this time in the church the burning issue concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit was not discussed nearly as much. So, when we read a summary of the teaching of the Arians, we can expect that usually only the Father and Son will be mentioned.

Those who were Arians held to the following views, which were virtually the same as Arius' views:

1. God was not always Father, for there was not always a Son. Prior to the Son, God was simply God. . . .
2. The Son or Logos is a creature, made out of nonexistence....
3. The Son is variable—changeable—by nature, and is stable by the gift of God.
4. The Son's knowledge of God and of himself is imperfect.
5. The Son was created by God as an instrument by which he created the world.
6. The Trinity, such as it is, is of unlike *hypostases*. Any unity is purely moral, not ontological, dependent on will, not essence.<sup>39</sup>

The most famous modern advocates of Arianism are the Jehovah's witnesses. The basic teachings of Arianism concerning Christ do not differ from the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses concerning Christ. What the church concluded from Scripture when it discussed the teachings of Arius are important to us today whenever we present our faith to Jehovah's Witnesses.

## 2. Athanasius

Though many disagreed with the teachings of Arianism, the most able opponent was Athanasius. He taught a view of the Trinity which did not threaten God's unity. Athanasius taught that the Father and Son are the same in divine *ousia* (Greek for essence or substance); there is no separation in the essential being of God. But there are three

<sup>37</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2004) 110.

<sup>38</sup> Fred Klooster, V-19.

<sup>39</sup> Letham 113.

distinct *hypostases* (Greek for persons) in God. The Father and Son are of the same substance, but they differ in personal subsistence.<sup>40</sup> Athanasius tried to express the two Biblical truths that there is one God and that He exists in three distinct Persons.

As Athanasius saw it, this view of the Trinity was necessary for the Gospel of Christ. No mere creature can save sinners; only God can. Athanasius argued that only if Christ is God in the flesh can we have forgiveness of our sins and fellowship with God. The doctrine of the Trinity was, for Athanasius, necessary for the Christian religion.

### 3 The Council of Nicea (325)

Certain Greek words became the technical terms over which the issues at the Council of Nicea were debated. The technical words used had already appeared in the writings of various church leaders for almost a century before the Council met. The issues which the vocabulary expressed were important.

The first two words needing mention can be translated *hypostasis* (person) and *ousia* (substance or being). These words were crucial in defining the Bible's teaching concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son. One question which needs an answer is whether the Father and Son were distinct in some way—as divine Persons—or whether they were one Person Who adopted different appearances. Another urgent question concerned the being of the Father and Son. Are they *homoousia* (of the same substance), both being God to the fullest extent of the word, or are they each of a different *ousia* (of similar substances), one being a greater being than the other?<sup>41</sup>

Other sets of words dealt with the origins of the Father and Son. There is a word which can be translated “begotten” and another which means “unbegotten.” Another set of words means “created” and “not created” (eternal).<sup>42</sup>

The Council of Nicea was called to meet in the year 325 by Constantine, the emperor of Rome. He was interested both in the welfare of the church and in the unity of his empire. The Council was called to define what the Bible teaches concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Council did not meet to discuss whether or not God is one. Rather, it met to discuss whether the Son is divine, equal with the Father in divinity.

The council condemned Arianism. It said that the Son was begotten but not created. This means the Son has an eternal relationship with the Father; the Son is begotten eternally by the Father, but the Son is not a creature. Like the Father, the Son is eternal. They are different Persons who partake of the same substance (*ousia*) so that they both form one God. They are distinct Persons (*hypostasis*) but equally divine. The Council also said that the Son is “from the substance of the Father.” This made clear the unity of God and the equal divinity of the Father and Son. There were very few opinions of the Arians which the Council approved as biblical.

### 4. The Controversies which followed

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<sup>40</sup> Berkhof 85.

<sup>41</sup> Letham 119-20.

<sup>42</sup> Letham 121.

Although the Council of Nicea was convened to give unity and peace to the church, the result was different. Many church leaders who attended the council did not agree with its conclusions. The emperor had, in fact, forced the Council to say that the Father and Son are (*homoousia*) of the same substance. His involvement angered those who disagreed with him. As a consequence the debate over the relationship between the Father and the Son intensified.

In the years that followed the council, a small part of the church continued to hold to Arian convictions which said that the Father and the Son were of different substances. However, for a while, the majority of church leaders held a view point which was called semi-Arian. Semi Arians said that the Father and Son had like substances. They were *homoiousia*. What they were trying to express is that they believed Christ was god-like, but He was not God. His being was like God's, but He did not possess the divine nature of God. Semi-Arianism was strong especially in the eastern part of the church.

As years went by, however, the view which the Council of Nicea has expressed became the major view again. There were several reasons for this. First, the western part of the church remained loyal to the council's statement of faith; it was convinced by the biblical teaching of Athanasius on this issue. Second, those who opposed the decision of the council couldn't agree with each other. Some insisted that the Father and the Son possessed different substances, and others said they possessed like substances. Third, after Athanasius died, the view of the Nicene Council was defended by a younger generation of theologians who promoted his view more skillfully. The three most prominent, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa (who were brothers), and Gregory of Nazianzus, were called the Cappadocians. Though they agreed that there is one true God, they stressed that there are three Persons in the divine being. Due to these influences, Trinitarian theology gained dominance again.<sup>43</sup>

#### D. THE MACEDONIAN PHASE

By writing about the three divine Persons, the Cappadocians introduced the topic of the Holy Spirit into the discussion about the Trinity. They insisted that the Holy Spirit was also from the substance of the Father and the Son. The true God consisted of three distinct divine Persons. But others disagreed. Macedonius, a church bishop, and his followers, who were given the nickname "Pneumatomachians" (Spirit-slanderers), said the Holy Spirit was a creature subordinate to the Son. This view was generally considered to be heretical.<sup>44</sup> Another church council was needed to bring the church to agreement concerning the Bible's teaching concerning the Trinity.

##### 1. The Council of Constantinople (381)

The council on Constantinople was assembled by Emperor Theodosius I to deal with the festering Arian controversy and the new issues presented by the Macedonians. The Council of Constantinople endorsed the stand of Nicea, that the Father and Son are of the same substance, both being equally divine. It also confessed that the Holy Spirit is divine. It said, "And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Life-giving, who

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<sup>43</sup> Berkhof 87-90.

<sup>44</sup> Berkhof 90.

proceeds from the Father, who is to be glorified with the Father and the Son, and who speaks through the prophets.”<sup>45</sup>

The statements of the Council of Constantinople declared that the teachings of the Arians and the Pneumatomachians were contrary to Scripture. But it also taught, without using the word, that the Spirit was *homoousia*, possessing the same substance and being which the Father and Son possess. This was expressed when the council affirmed that the Holy Spirit “with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified.” As we saw in Lesson Two, the Council of Constantinople was citing evidence which leads us to conclude that the Holy Spirit is God in the fullest sense of the word. Therefore the contribution of the Council of Constantinople is that, after years of lingering controversy, it reaffirmed the position taken by the Council of Nicea, and it declared that directed the church of declaring the Holy Spirit is also one with the Father and Son.

## 2. Later Issues

After the Council of Constantinople, it seemed that two important questions had not been fully answered. First, since the Council did not explicitly declare that the Spirit is (*homoousia*) of the same substance with the Father and Son, the Spirit’s full divinity, equal to the Father and Son’s, was not unquestionably expressed. Second, the Spirit’s relationship to the Son was not stated. Though the Council said the Spirit proceeds from the Father, it did not say whether or not the Spirit also proceeds from the Son.

In the years that followed the consensus emerged especially in the western church that Scripture teaches that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. At the Synod of Toledo the famous “filioque”, Latin for “and the Son,” was added to what the Council of Constantinople had said. Now the church confessed that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.<sup>46</sup>

The divinity and unique characteristics which the church understood the Bible to teach were summarized at various times. The Athanasian Creed, which follows, summarizes well what the church concluded.

## 3. Summarizing Chart

The following chart may help summarize the list of heresies which threatened the early church concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. When a student consults this chart, it should be remembered that different people promoted these views, and, therefore, a heresy may have a variety of names. Also, since different people put forth a heresy, specific opinions concerning details will differed from one church leader to another.

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<sup>45</sup> Berkhof 90-1.

<sup>46</sup> Berkhof 91.

**Ancient Church Trinitarian Heresies<sup>47</sup>**

HERESY	MAJOR PROPONENTS	SUMMARY
MONARCHIANISM (Adoptionism)	Theodotus of Byzantium Paul of Samosata	Jesus became Christ as His baptism, was adopted by the Father after His death.
SABELLIANISM (Modalism, Patripassionism)	Sabellius Praxeus	One God reveals Himself in three ways.
ARIANISM	Arius Eusebius of Nicomedia Eudoxius Eunomius	Christ is the first created being.
SEMI-ARIANISM (Eusebianism)	Basil of Ancyra Gregory of Leodicea	Christ is of similar essence with the Father but is subordinate to Him.
MACEDONIANISM (Pneumatism)	Macedonius	The Holy Spirit is a created being.

**E. EARLY CHURCH TRINITARIAN CREEDS**

This lesson has mentioned the Council of Nicea and the Council of Constantinople. They were called together because the church was threatened by significant errors concerning the Trinity. Church leaders met at these assemblies (councils) to discuss whether teachings being taught in some congregations were biblical; the councils responded by writing confessions or creeds.

“Creed” comes from a Latin word which means “I believe.” A creed expresses what the church believes from Scripture and what it chooses to confess as one church to the world. Most errors in church history are repeated again years later. By learning and understanding the biblical creeds written in the past, we can learn how the church in the present should answer the errors which contradict the Bible today. Creeds which are faithful to Scripture play an important role in keeping the church pure.

<sup>47</sup> Robert C. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986).

## 1. Apostles' Creed

The Apostle's Creed was not written by Christ's original apostles. It is probably the product of a long historical development. But its teachings are rooted in the New Testament.<sup>48</sup> What follows is one translation of this creed.<sup>49</sup>

1. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:
2. And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:
4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell:
5. The third day he rose again from the dead:
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:
7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:
8. I believe in the Holy Ghost:
9. I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints:
10. The forgiveness of sins:
11. The resurrection of the body:
12. And the life everlasting. Amen.

## 2. The Nicene Creed

The Apostles' Creed was not accepted in the Eastern church. This was due to the influence of Arius.<sup>50</sup> One will notice that the Nicene Creed uses many of the phrases of the Apostles' Creed as it adds its own contribution of declaring the complete divinity of the Son. Here is one translation of the Nicene Creed.<sup>51</sup>

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come

<sup>48</sup> Klass Runia, *I believe in God: Current Questions and the Creeds*, (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1963) 16,17.

<sup>49</sup> 8 May 2007 <<http://ccel.org/creeds/apostles.creed.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Runia 22.

<sup>51</sup> 8 May 2007 <<http://www.ccel.org.creeds/nicene.creed.html>.

again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.  
And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### 3. The Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed was not written by Athanasius. This is clear from the fact that this creed addresses heresies which did not exist in the time of Athanasius. Possibly it was written in southern France.<sup>52</sup>

This is a complex creed consisting of two parts. The first part presents the doctrine of the Trinity and stresses the divine equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second half stresses presents the doctrine of the Son, that Christ possesses both full divine nature and a complete human nature united in one divine Person. One translation of the Athanasian Creed follows.<sup>53</sup>

1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;
2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.
5. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.
9. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.
10. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.
13. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty.
14. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.
15. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;

<sup>52</sup> Runia 24.

<sup>53</sup> 8 May 2007 <<http://www.cel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html>.

16. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord;
18. And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
20. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.
23. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.
25. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another.
26. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.
29. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
30. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.
31. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world.
32. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.
33. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.
34. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.
35. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God.
36. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ;
38. Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead;
39. He ascended into heaven, He sits on the right hand of the Father, God, Almighty;
40. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
41. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;
42. and shall give account of their own works.
43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.
44. This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.

## CONCLUSION

In this lesson we have studied various responses to the Biblical teaching of the Trinity. The church at large found it necessary to respond because unbiblical views were taught and forcefully promoted in various congregations. Gnosticism taught that God did not create the world; adoptionism taught that “Son of God” is merely a title of honor for Christ and not a true description of Him; and modalism said the Father and Son were the same Person. The church sought unity especially when the teaching of Arianism surfaced, teaching that Christ was God’s first creature and when the Person and divinity of the Holy Spirit were questioned. Gradually, and with increasing clarity, the church agreed on the basics of the doctrine of the Trinity, that the Bible proclaims one God who exists in three distinct divine Persons, each being God in the fullest sense of the word. It expressed its unified biblical conviction with its creeds.

## QUESTIONS

1. What are creeds?
2. How did the teachings of Gnosticism deny the teaching of the Trinity?
3. What did Monarchianism teach?
4. What does Modalism teach?
5. Summarize what Arianism teaches concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
6. What did the Council of Nicea say about the teachings of Arianism?
7. What did the Cappadocians contribute to the church’s discussion of the Trinity?
8. What did the Council of Constantinople conclude from the Bible which Pneumatomachists would not accept?
9. What was the most important thing you learned from this lesson?
10. What errors, if any, mentioned in this chapter do you know are being promoted in churches near you?



## LESSON FIVE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE CULTS

#### INTRODUCTON

We have reached the point where we can begin the second half of this course. We have explored the basic Biblical teaching which outlines the doctrine of the Trinity. Now we must turn to the cults and evaluate them in terms of the Biblical teaching which has been presented so far.

The study of the cults is a great challenge because cults come in great varieties. Each cult proclaims some teaching which it alone promotes. Cults exist in virtually every nation where Christ's church can be found, and they usually reflect some of the non-Christian teachings of the place where they originated. Satan seeks to destroy Christ's church wherever the church has been established and in whatever way error seems attractive. Though we can make general remarks about what cults are like, each cult is significantly unlike the others.

Admittedly much of the material on the cults in these lessons is written from a North American perspective. There are a few reasons for this. First, the author knows that perspective best and has more resources from this perspective available to him. Second, the two cults we will explore in a little detail—Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormonism—are present around the world. The errors which they promote in North America they also promote in virtually every country. Finally, what students read here about these cults is designed to encourage them to explore the cults in their own cultures. Students will be able to see parallels between the cults featured here and the cults which may be unique to their own countries. Students will also notice differences. These lessons attempt to motivate students to gain information for themselves about cults which they most need to understand.

Though the cults can be evaluated in many ways, we will look at them primarily in terms of their treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. We will find that they do not teach the Bible's presentation of Jesus Christ. This lack of conformity to Scripture on the Trinity is a primary reason we call these groups cults.

In this brief lesson, we will seek to answer three questions: first, what is the difference between a sect and a cult? second, what is a cult? and third, how can one find out if a religious group is a cult?

#### A. Sects and Cults

The words sect and cult indicate immediately that they are religious groups. When we read about "sectarian violence" in the news, we understand that one group set off violence against another group; the reason for the conflict between them is that they have different understandings of who God is. We may also read about "cultic" activities, and they usually refer to activities which involve worship. So, both "sect" and "cult" refer to the part of human life in which people seek to relate directly to God.

Some writers have used “sect” and “cult” interchangeably. For example, one author wrote a book called, *The Theology of the Major Sects*.<sup>54</sup> The book presents the same information which a book on the cults would offer. In recent years, however, the words “sect” and “cult” refer to different kinds of religious movements. This lesson will use these words assuming that they have slightly different meanings.

The word “sect” refers to separation. A “sect” is usually a religious group which has separated from the majority group because it believes the larger body has become unfaithful to its original teachings or way of life. This pattern of smaller groups separating from the original group takes place in many religions. For example, the Pharisees of the New Testament were considered a sect of Judaism. Islam is also fractured into separated groups or sects. Within Mormonism there are a couple sects which claim that the organization headquartered in Salt Lake City has become unfaithful to the Book of Mormon. Sects can also be found within Christianity. A sect believes that “While the church has compromised and accommodated its doctrines and practices to the secular society, the sect rejects all such accommodations or compromises and sets itself against both church and secular society to defend a purer doctrine and practice.”<sup>55</sup> Often a sect isolates itself from the rest of society in order to stay true to its beliefs. The sect claims that it has returned to Scripture and the original teaching of the church from which it came. In the North American context Snake Handlers and the Hutterites are examples of groups which people consider to be Christian sects.

The word “cult” refers to more than a group which separates in order to return to the original beliefs. Whereas the sects were formed to purify the group from which they came, the cults were formed to replace the religion from which they came. As we will see, cults usually follow books or authoritative people in addition to Scripture. The cult claims that its additional books or traditions possess authority equal to the Bible’s. Trusting in such human opinions will lead people away from Christ; so Christians should not accept the cults as Christian groups. Though the cults which we will investigate have Christian roots, the teachings these groups promote directly contradict the gospel of Christ because their extra authorities deny the gospel. The cults also deny the teaching of the Trinity.

## B. Characteristics of Cults

1 John 2:18, 19 mentions people who had left the church of Christ. John wrote, “Dear children, this is the last hour . . . . Even now many antichrists have come . . . . They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us, but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” John refers to a pattern which has reappeared throughout the history of the church. Individuals and groups who we thought were brothers and sisters in Christ eventually proved not to be.

This is what it is like in the ‘last hour,’ or last days, phrases which often refer to the New Testament age (e.g. Acts 2:7). During this time antichrists, opponents of the gospel, rise up from within the church of Christ. They promote another gospel, and by doing so they show that they do not really belong to Christ. It should not surprise us,

<sup>54</sup> John H. Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960).

<sup>55</sup> H. K. Gallatin, “Sect, Sectarianism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 1984.

then, that the cults arise from within the church itself. Not only do the cults leave the body of Christ, they also abandon the message of Christ.

But, we may ask, what kind groups arise from within the Christian church and prove by their teachings that that do not belong to Christ?

Studies have been made concerning common characteristics which the cults share. Anthony Hoekema has studied the cults, especially the major cults which originated in North America, and has concluded what some general characteristics of cults are. Concerning the four major cults which his book covers, he writes the following:

We may . . . observe that there is in all cults *an abrupt break with historic Christianity, and with its confessions*. Because the cult believes that the entire Christian church has become apostate and that God has given to the members of the cult new light on saving truth, it has severed itself from the church and has become completely independent of it . . . . One could further observe that the difference between a cult and a Christian denomination which has separated from a parent body is that the denomination regrets the fragmented condition of the body of Christ, whereas the cult is happy about its separation and perfectly content to remain separated . . . .

We may further note that the cults have a *tendency to major in minors*. That is to say, cults tend to take certain peripheral truths (or teachings which are held to be truths) and to elevate them to a prominence far greater than they deserve, whereas matters of major importance are played down. The result is that the theology of the cult becomes lopsided and distorted. So, for example, . . . Jehovah's Witnesses have so exalted the duty of door-to-door witnessing that this—rather than a living faith in Jesus Christ—has become for them virtually the way to salvation. . . .

Another trait which may be ascribed to the cults is a *tendency to perfectionism*. There is among the members of a cult a feeling of superior holiness to those in other groups, particularly to the members of the established churches. The sense of sin is not prominent in the cult: the conviction that we daily fall short of doing what God requires of us. Instead, we hear Jehovah's Witnesses claim that they are more obedient to God than ordinary church members since they do far more door-to-door witnessing than the latter. We hear a prominent Mormon author say that in order to receive the highest grace of celestial exaltation one must keep the commandments of the Lord in all things—implying that this can be done, and is done by many Mormons.<sup>56</sup>

As he explains these general characteristics, Hoekema explains that genuinely Christian bodies can also be guilty of possessing them. But there is a difference. Whereas Christian churches may stumble into these characteristics, the cults display them more extremely and deliberately.

But Hoekema is not finished with his observations. Besides telling us his own conclusions based on what he has noticed, he presents five "Distinctive Traits of the

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<sup>56</sup> Anthony a. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1963) 374-6.

Cult” which German theologian Kurt Hutten has listed. These traits are important. Hoekema writes,

If we are honest with ourselves, we shall find vestiges of these characteristics in the churches too. I venture to affirm, however, that the traits which will now be described are so uniquely characteristic of the cult that any group in which they play a leading role can no longer be recognized as belonging to the true church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup>

So what are those traits? We will list them as Hoekema translates his original source<sup>58</sup> and gives an explanation with each one.

The first trait is *An Extra-Scriptural Source of Authority*. The Church of Latter Day Saints has *The Book of Mormon* and two other works; Christian Scientists follow *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy; and Jehovah’s Witnesses follow the writings of the Watchtower Society. Though the cults claim to follow the Bible, Hutten stresses that these extra writings actually surpass the Bible in influence within the cult. In order to defend their usual doctrines the cults “must either correct Scripture, reinterpret Scripture, or add other sources of authority to Scripture.”<sup>59</sup> Inevitably the cults follow their extra sources more closely, and what Scripture says must fit within the teachings of their own holy books.

This is a serious error. The Bible teaches that it is our only inspired authority from God. All other authorities are secondary. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 teach that the purpose of Scripture is to make the man of God “thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The point is that the Holy Spirit has inspired Scripture to be sufficient; He will use Scripture to equip the Christian thoroughly. Revelation 22:18, 19 echo the prophets who taught that we may not add to Scripture nor take from it. Christ says,

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Being faithful to Christ includes basing our faith and life on Scripture and no other book supposedly from God.

A second trait of the cults is *The Denial of Justification by Grace Alone*. This teaching, that we are justified by grace alone, is the heart of the Christian faith. Yet the cults believe that eternal life is a reward at least partially earned by the faithful keeping of their cult’s distinctive practices. Mormons believe that this teaching of justification by faith is evil and that one can be eligible for the highest degree of salvation only by keeping the commandments of the Lord.<sup>60</sup> Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to believe in grace, but their stress on witnessing goes contrary to this claim. They believe that most Jehovah’s Witnesses will be judged and rewarded based on what they have done.

A third trait is *The devaluation of Christ*. Since cults believe that salvation is available only through their group, they tend to minimize Christ and what He has done on the cross. Mormons say that Christ was a man as we are and that He became divine as

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<sup>57</sup> Hoekema 377-8.

<sup>58</sup> Hoekema 378-88.

<sup>59</sup> Hoekema 378.

<sup>60</sup> Hoekema 380.

we can become. Jehovah's Witnesses say that Christ is God's first creature and that Christ is not God. Both cults say that Christ rescues us from death, but they do not teach that Christ gives those who trust in Him the righteousness that comes from God. The "righteousness" they trust in is their own. Without Christ's righteousness the person is left with his own best efforts to please God, but those efforts are imperfect at best (Isaiah 64:6).

A fourth trait of the cults is: *The group is the Exclusive Community of the Saved*. Each cult believes that it alone is the regathered people of God. They do not claim that Protestant churches, for example, are wrong concerning only some doctrines. Each cult says that no other group can show the way of salvation. Though they sprang up from the church, they view themselves as superior to all other religious bodies concerning all things. God has reconstituted His people by forming their group.

The final trait is *The Group's Central Role in Eschatology*. Eschatology is the study of the last times. Each cult believes that it rediscovered an important truth which ordinary churches lost. As the cult regained the truth that was missing, God prepared the world for the end of the age. The cults see themselves as preparers appointed by God for the return of Christ. Without them the end will not come. Those who are saved will belong to their group when Christ returns. "Eschatology thus plays a determinative role in the theology of the cult: it becomes the arena in which the glorification of the cults will complete itself."<sup>61</sup>

We can see from these traits that the cults claim to be the only people of God and the only group with God's truth.

There is perhaps one more feature of the cults which we should add to the characteristics and traits which have been listed so far. Possibly it is the most serious error of the cults, the most urgent reason we must object to them. The alarming feature is this: The cults give an unbiblical reply when they answer the question, "Who is God?" We have shown in earlier lessons how the Bible teaches that Christ is "God over all" (Romans 9:5) and how the Bible teaches that that Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3, 4). The Bible also includes the Son and Holy Spirit with the Father when it gives the one name in which Christians must be baptized. The teachings of the cults contradict all this. So the cults hold very different views of God from the views of historic Christianity and of Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity helps us identify which groups may say they are Christian and which should not.

We admit that some churches exhibit some traits the cults. For example, the Roman Catholic Church has added Tradition to Scripture and claims that the authority of Tradition is as great as the authority of Scripture. Also, Seventh Adventists believe that, when Christ returns, the saved will observe the Sabbath as they do;<sup>62</sup> the fifth trait of a cult is true of Seventh Adventism. Furthermore, the movement sees itself as central to God's plan for the end of the age. Nevertheless these two groups agree with Scripture concerning who God is. Though we may strongly disagree with them on many of their teachings, and though many of the traits of a cult may describe them, we choose not to call them cults because they believe God is Triune. Their basic view of who God is is biblical.

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<sup>61</sup> Hoekema 386.

<sup>62</sup> Hoekema 398.

Now, suppose, for a moment, that a church which presently holds to Scripture's teaching concerning who God is begins to teach, for example, that the Holy Spirit is not divine or that persons in addition to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are also divine. If a body which we presently call a Christian church decides to deviate from true teaching concerning who God is, then we will have to conclude that it has joined the cults and become a religious body which cannot tell the world who God is.

### C. Identifying Cults

The Apostle John wrote, "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies that Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:22-23). These verses make clear that the way we regard the Son will tell whether we know the true God.

Jesus said something similar in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus was saying that the only way to the Father is through faith in the Son. Since the Father gave His only begotten Son, we deal with the Father by receiving the Father's gift, by placing our faith in the Son and His saving work.

Jesus raised a issue when He asked His disciples who people said He was. Jesus got a variety of answers. Then He asked, "But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am" (Matthew 16:15)?

Each of these parts of Scripture teaches that Christ is the issue. God has so arranged His dealings with mankind that our relationship to Christ defines our relationship with God. In some significant way our understanding of Christ defines our understanding of God. Our comprehension of Christ's work on the cross determines whether we comprehend the saving grace of God. Christ is the issue, and understanding what a religious movement believes concerning Christ is the key to understanding that movement's opinion about God and its message of salvation.

This is true of churches which no longer preach the gospel of Christ. Some churches, under the influence of classic liberalism, began to deny that Christ rose from the dead or that Christ is God over all. As they forfeited the divinity of Christ, they also began to deny that Christ saves His followers from sin. The increasingly human Jesus increasingly became a human example of love, of faith, or of prophetic justice. When Christ was reduced to a man, His worth and influence were seen as being only human.

The cults show the same relationship between their view of Christ and the way they say Christ saves us. One of the features of the cults is their teaching that Christ is not the eternal Son of God. Their denial that He is eternal God shapes the message of salvation which they offer. We will see this in the lessons which follow. The cults would not be so dangerous if the Jesus of the cults were almighty God. All of this is written to emphasize that a cult can be identified by its teachings concerning Christ.

With this concern in mind, with the whole lesson under consideration, and with all the previous lessons also helping us, we propose that a religious group be evaluated by asking the following questions of it.

1. What does the group teach about Jesus Christ? Is He the eternal Son of God? Is He personally distinct from the Father while remaining divine—in the fullest

sense of the word—along with the Father? Did He take on Himself our complete human nature so that now He is one divine Person with two natures?

2. What does the group teach about salvation in Christ? Does it teach that Christ is really our savior? Is His death enough to pay for all our sin? Is His perfect life enough to make us right with God?

3. What does the group say is our authoritative guide to know Christ? Is the Bible God's only book for us? Is the Bible inspired in all that it says? Does it have more authority than human reason or tradition?

4. What does the group say we need to do to be saved in Christ? Is faith in Christ enough? Or are we supposed to earn more than Christ gives to be saved? Could the group imagine salvation being available to mankind if their own group died out? Would Christ still be enough?

All of the characteristics and traits which have been mentioned in this lesson should be used to evaluate whether we should call a group a cult. But the traits should also be used with Christ as our central concern. The question Jesus asked His disciples remains urgent today: "Who do you say I am?" True theology is Trinitarian and Christ-centered. We should evaluate the cults and churches in that light.

## CONCLUSION

We have introduced the topic of the cults by exploring a few elementary subjects. We have seen how a cult differs from a sect. A Christian sect will say that Christ is God and may still preach the gospel of Christ; some of a sect's distinctive teachings are overly stressed. A cult, on the other hand, denies the Trinity and Christ's eternal divinity; the result is that the cult cannot proclaim the Biblical message of salvation. We have devoted most of this lesson to the distinctive characteristics and traits which we might expect when we come face to face with a cult or one of its followers. We have seen how these characteristics all involve a misunderstanding or denial to Scripture's teaching concerning who Christ is and what Christ has done. Finally, we have seen how we can evaluate a group to see whether it teaches truly Christian theology by studying its view of Christ and ascertaining whether the Christ of Scripture is the Christ it preaches.

## QUESTIONS

1. Where in the world do the cults exist?
2. Look up "sect" and "cult" in the dictionary. How do the definitions there compare with the explanations given in this lesson?
3. Name a Christian sect in your country and explain why you believe it is not a cult.
4. Where did cults with Christian roots arise?
5. What general characteristics of the cults did Hoekema list?
6. List and explain the traits of the cults which Hutten found.

7. Why do you think an extra-Scriptural source of authority is dangerous for the church?
8. Why do you think a religious group which denies Christ's divinity will also deny that salvation is by grace alone?
9. Pick a group which you believe is a cult. What reasons do you have for believing that it is a cult?
10. What important lesson or insight did you learn in this lesson?

## LESSON SIX

### THE TEACHING OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ON THE TRINITY

#### INTRODUCTION

We have looked at general characteristics which are typical of cults with Christian roots. It is time to keep our promise and evaluate two cults as illustrations of the characteristics we have found. We will look at the Jehovah's Witnesses in this lesson and the Mormons in the next lesson.

These two cults have developed complex systems of belief. One reason for this complexity is that they are based on human thought and not God's word. As a result, these groups have changed their views in important ways over the years in order to accommodate either to prevailing opinions in society or to adjust to the fact that their predictions did not come true. This means the cults have ended up contradicting themselves. This complexity in their teaching makes it impossible for us to expose all that they teach in these short lessons.

We have chosen to highlight important features of each cult. First, we will summarize very briefly a few events in the history of each cult.

Second, we will summarize three parts of its teaching. We have chosen these three topics based on a shortened definition of a cult: "*a religious group which claims a new or restored revelation from God which teaches an unbiblical basis for salvation and rejects the deity of Christ*" (italics not added).<sup>63</sup> Therefore we will study these three features of their teaching: 1) the authorities each cult uses as the basis of its teachings; 2) its doctrine of Christ; and 3) its message of salvation. These three features have been chosen because they reveal the heart of a cult's errors.

Third, we will seek to give biblical arguments which disprove the teachings of these cults.

#### A. A Brief History of the Jehovah's Witnesses

##### 1. Charles Russell

Charles Russell was born in 1852 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. He grew up in a time and place where "Second Adventism" was popular. Preachers of Second Adventism stressed the belief that Jesus would return physically in the near future and reign on a restored earth for 1000 years.<sup>64</sup> Though he had rejected his parents' Presbyterian church as well as their Christian faith, Russell found himself in a church one evening listening to an Adventist preacher. He was fascinated by the preacher's claims that precise details of biblical prophecy were being fulfilled in their own day. This attracted Charles to study the Bible again, and by age 20 he was leading his own Bible studies.<sup>65</sup>

Though Adventism brought Russell back to the Bible, he did not agree with that movement concerning the return of Christ. Adventists looked for a physical return of

<sup>63</sup> Earl Schipper. "Cults in North America," Trial Edition, (Grand Rapids: CSI Publications, 1980) 8.

<sup>64</sup> Schipper 10.

<sup>65</sup> Schipper 11.

Christ, but Russell believed Christ's return would be spiritual. His Bible studies reflected his opinions concerning Christ's return.

Russell was very effective as a developer of Bible studies, but his work was not limited to them. By the end of the 1870s he was publishing a periodical, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. This magazine helped expand the Russell's movement. Due to the influence of his publication Zion's Watch Tower Society was established in 1881, and by 1886 Russell's first book was published. As he wrote, Charles Russell was organizing a system of beliefs which Jehovah's Witnesses still hold today. Future teachings of the organization remained faithful to what he wrote during those years. In Russell's lifetime the movement expanded both in the United States and Europe. Russell was on a speaking tour when he died in 1916.<sup>66</sup>

## 2. Joseph Rutherford and His Successors

Russell's successor was a lawyer. Joseph Rutherford's contribution to the society was his ability to organize it more rigidly. He stressed His desire that society members witness. Rutherford developed training methods by which the members were trained to conduct weekly witnessing visits and to fill out reports concerning the work they accomplished. In his time the society was renamed, "Jehovah's Witnesses."<sup>67</sup> The leadership of Rutherford helped make the Jehovah's Witness movement the powerful force that it is today.

Both Charles Russell and Joseph Rutherford got in trouble with the law. Russell was accused of perjury, and Rutherford was accused of inspiring civil disobedience.<sup>68</sup> These legal difficulties exposed the characters of these early leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

During the tenures of the leaders who followed Rutherford the organization came increasingly under the influence of its central committee. The committee has published the organization's official literature and its own translation of the Bible. The Watchtower Society has expanded around the world and continues to train and send its people to witness weekly.

## B. Sources of Authority used by Jehovah's Witnesses

### 1. The Role of Human Reason

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that their only authority is the Bible. The truth, however, is that their authority is the Bible—as they choose to interpret it. They subject the Bible to what they believe human reason will allow and what their central committee says is true.

Jehovah's Witnesses demonstrate by their statements that human reason is an authority in their religion. J. K. Van Baalen, who studied the cults, summarized Rutherford's approach to doctrine.

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<sup>66</sup> Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963) 228.

<sup>67</sup> Hoekema 230.

<sup>68</sup> Hoekema 228-9.

In a pamphlet by J. F. Rutherford the doctrine of eternal torment is said to be impossible because (1) it is unreasonable, (2) it is repugnant to justice, (3) it is contrary to the principle of love, (4) it is wholly unscriptural. This means, of course, that the author's sense of justice and conception of love are determined by his reason, and that the Scriptures are made to coincide with the pre-established findings of his reason.<sup>69</sup>

Rutherford himself wrote:

Since skepticism is rife, the very foundation of true religion, and the foundation of truth is questioned often, even by the sincere. We have endeavored to uncover enough of the foundation upon which all faith should be built—the Word of God—to give confidence and assurance in its testimony, even to the unbeliever. And we have endeavored to do this in a manner that will appear to and can be accepted by reason as a foundation. Then we have endeavored to build upon that foundation the teachings of Scripture in such a manner that, so far as possible, purely human judgment may try its squares and angles by the most exacting rules of justice which it can command.<sup>70</sup>

J. H. Burrige, who appears to have been a loyal follower of Rutherford, explained what Rutherford meant. Rutherford was trying to make his teachings believable “*even to the unbeliever.*”<sup>71</sup>

How can a man get ‘confidence and assurance’ from what he does not believe? But one thing is clear in the passage, namely, the writer [Rutherford] builds his teachings of Scripture on the foundation of reason, and endeavors to make it possible for ‘*purely* human judgment’ to try its squares and angles. Human reason is his guide, not the Spirit of God. He sets out with the intention of making Scripture square with human reason.<sup>72</sup>

This loyalty to human reason explains why Jehovah's Witnesses are not as committed to the very words of Scripture as they might want us to think.

From Russell's . . . words we may learn why translations are arbitrarily changed, why words are put into our Lord's mouth that are glaringly contradictory to anything ever spoken by Him; why Russell, after stating that the Bible is the revelation from God, says, “let us examine the character of the writings claimed as inspired, to see whether their teachings correspond with the character *we have reasonably imputed to God.*”<sup>73</sup>

This shows us where Rutherford's method begins to fail. The Bible teaches that even the human mind has fallen into sin. The mind which is not changed by Christ's grace will always “suppress the truth” in wickedness (Romans 1:18). Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” When

<sup>69</sup> J. K. Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults* (Grand Rapids: Wm B.; Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956) 236.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted by Van Baalen 236-7.

<sup>71</sup> Van Baalen 237 (italics in the original).

<sup>72</sup> Quoted by Van Baalen 237.

<sup>73</sup> Van Baalen 237.

Rutherford wanted to construct a system of teaching that the unbeliever's reason would accept, he allowed the sinful mind to help determine what he would believe.

## 2. The Jehovah's Witness Bible

Since Jehovah's Witnesses are loyal to their view of human reason, the Bible which they have produced is faulty. Their *New World Translation*<sup>74</sup> "is by no means an objective rendering of the sacred text into modern *English*, but is a *biased translation in which many of their peculiar teachings of the Watchtower Society are smuggled into the text of the Bible itself.*"<sup>75</sup>

We can see this, for example, in the way the Holy Spirit is treated by their *New World Translation*. Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Holy Spirit is a power of God. Since they do not believe the Holy Spirit is a Person, their Bible does not treat the Spirit as a Person. The pronouns used to refer to the Spirit convey the idea that the Spirit is an impersonal power. For example, Romans 8:16 says in their Bible, "The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children."<sup>76</sup> "Itself" implies that the Holy Spirit is not personal. The *New World Translation* shows its bias in Ephesians 4:30 as well where it says, "Also, do not be grieving God's holy Spirit, with which YOU have been sealed. . ."<sup>77</sup> "Which" sounds more impersonal than "whom," a better translation of the original.

The *New World Translation* also shows its bias in its treatment of Jesus Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Christ is God. So, John 1:1 in their Bible says "the Word was a god."<sup>78</sup> This goes against the best scholarship concerning how the Greek grammar must be understood in that verse.<sup>79</sup> The particular words John uses must be understood to read, "The Word was God." Titus 2:13 should read "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" but the *New World Translation* reads, "We wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of our Savior Christ Jesus."<sup>80</sup> The same mistranslation is performed on 2 Peter 1:1.<sup>81</sup> The *New World Translation* is unfaithful to the Greek again when it translates Colossians 1:15-17 which say that all things were made through Christ. This translation says, "All [other] things have been created through and for him. Also he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist"<sup>82</sup> This handling of Colossians is motivated by the Jehovah's Witness teaching that Christ is God's first creature. Therefore, "other" is added three times where it does not exist in the Greek. These are only a few of the many examples which show how the cult's false view of Christ is imported into the translation of the Bible. Though Jehovah's Witnesses say the Bible is

<sup>74</sup> *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1961).

<sup>75</sup> Hoekema 238-9.

<sup>76</sup> *New World Translation* 1226.

<sup>77</sup> *New World Translation* 1268.

<sup>78</sup> *New World Translation* 1151.

<sup>79</sup> Bruce Metzger, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ," *Theology Today* (April 1953): 75-6.

<sup>80</sup> *New World Translation* 1291.

<sup>81</sup> Metzger 79.

<sup>82</sup> *New World Translation* 1274. (Square brackets included in *Translation*)

their authority when rationally understood, it should be clear that the only Bible which is their authority is their own which is a mishandling of the original languages of the Bible.

We should add that the committee which produced the *New World Translation* was anonymous. Since we do not know the names of the people who translated it, we cannot approach them and ask them to defend their translation of a particular verse. We also cannot ask them whether they know Hebrew or Greek. By its own translation of the Bible the Jehovah's Witness movement shows that it has appointed itself to be "the infallible interpreter of the infallible word."<sup>83</sup>

### 3. The Authority of Jehovah's Witness Literature

Jehovah's Witnesses claim to have no creeds or confessions; their only authority is the Bible. We should not readily accept this claim, however. Their organization publishes literature which is seen to be the movement's authoritative doctrinal guide. Since 1942, when Rutherford's successor began to head up the organization, the Jehovah's Witness organization has defined its teaching with anonymously written books and booklets. As authorities these publications have replaced even the writings of Russell and Rutherford.<sup>84</sup> The writers' names are not given, and we have seen that the organization states how human reason must dictate how the Bible should be understood. This keeps the authorities of the movement from being accountable for their handling of God's word. Theirs is an authority structure which cannot be trusted to be faithful to God's word.

#### C. The Jehovah's Witness Doctrine of Christ

No movement has been as responsible for the modern rise of Arianism (see Lesson Four) as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Every group which adopts a past error as its own teaching will add to that error its own unique variations. Jehovah's Witnesses follow their own form of Arianism as well, but it is remarkably similar to what original Arianism taught.

One basic belief of Jehovah's Witnesses is that God is not triune. Only God the Father is God, and His proper name is Jehovah. Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that any part of Scripture referring to Jehovah refers to Jesus Christ. According to Jehovah's Witnesses Jesus Christ is "a god". This means he has much power and authority but not the power and authority of Jehovah God. One Jehovah's Witness publication says that Christ "is *a mighty one* but not *almighty* as Jehovah God is."<sup>85</sup> Christ is God's first creature, and all other creatures were created through Him. Being true to Arianism, Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the Holy Spirit is not a Person but only a divine power or force. In denying the Trinity, they deny the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit and even the personality of the Spirit.

To understand more fully how the Son is viewed, we should investigate what Jehovah's Witnesses teach concerning the being of Christ. According to them when Christ was created, He was created as the great angel Michael. This was his prehuman state. As God's Logos, the Son was God's spokesman; the angel Michael made some

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<sup>83</sup> John Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960) 34.

<sup>84</sup> Hoekema 237-8.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted by Hoekema 257.

important visits to give human beings a message from God.<sup>86</sup> The Son remained an angel during that time; He was not immortal just as other angels did not possess that quality.<sup>87</sup>

However when it was time for the Son of God to become man, God put the life that was in the angel Michael and placed it in the virgin Mary. That life caused Mary to conceive, and the Son of God became a man.

The Witnesses do not deny the virgin birth of Christ. . . . What is said to have been transferred from heaven to Mary's womb was the "life," the "personality," or the "life pattern" of the Son of God, who, it will be recalled, as never equal to Jehovah but was only a created angel. What happened when Jesus was born, therefore, was not the incarnation of God.<sup>88</sup>

The life of Michael the angel became the life of Jesus the man.

The man Jesus was only a man. Jehovah's Witnesses deny what Christians profess, that after He was conceived Jesus Christ is one divine Person with two natures: one divine and the other human. The Witnesses say only that Jesus was a perfect man.

After Jesus died, Jehovah's Witnesses say, God the Son was raised as a "spirit Son, no longer flesh."<sup>89</sup> The body of Jesus decomposed. The life, once in Michael then in Jesus the perfect man, was once again in Michael the angel. At last Michael was awarded with immortality.

Anthony Hoekema summarizes what our conclusions of this teaching should be:

I conclude that what the three states of Christ's existence in Watchtower theology really amount to is this: angel—man—angel, with no real continuity between the three. A little reflection will reveal how devastating this view is of the Christology of the Scriptures. The individual who laid down his life at Calvary was not the individual who existed previously in heaven and was God's agent in creation; the individual who is now ruling over his heavenly Kingdom is not the individual who died on the cross for us. Really, Jehovah's Witnesses have three Christs, none of whom is equal to Jehovah and none of whom is the Christ of the Scriptures.<sup>90</sup>

#### D. The Jehovah's Witness Message of Salvation

Remembering that a cult claims new infallible revelation from God besides the Bible and that it rejects the divinity of Christ, we come to a third major problem with a cult's teaching. The Jehovah's message of salvation is unbiblical. To understand this message of salvation, we must learn what, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, Christ did to save and how they say a person can be saved.

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<sup>86</sup> Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9.

<sup>87</sup> Hoekema 270-1.

<sup>88</sup> Hoekema 271.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted by Hoekema 274.

<sup>90</sup> Hoekema 275-6.

## 1. Christ's Achievement of Salvation

Earl Schipper has summarized various writings of the Jehovah's witnesses to outline what they believe Christ accomplished when He came to earth. Here is that outline:

1. Jehovah created the heavens first, then Michael, then together with Michael, he created the angels.
2. Then Jehovah created the earth, assigning a task force of angels to assure that all worship and praise on earth would be directed only to Jehovah.
3. Disguising himself as a serpent, the leader of the task force seduced Adam and Eve to worship him because he became jealous as he listened every day to the praise given to Jehovah.
4. With other rebellious angels, the fallen angel Satan gained total control of the earth. The penalty of death hung over all creation.
5. Jehovah issued this challenge to Satan: "I'll give you 6000 years to seduce the whole earth into worshipping you. If you fail, you and all fallen angels (demons) will be annihilated and I will have proved that I alone am Supreme."
6. Knowing Satan would fail, Jehovah initiated His plan to save the world. Most important, Jehovah wanted to give eternal life to some persons now condemned to eternal death. Satan agreed to release his grip of death on a certain number, but demanded a ransom payment—to have a chance to destroy Michael, after which Satan would remove the penalty of death for some of the condemned. In response, Jehovah sent Michael to earth in human form as a ransom paid to Satan. After the death of Jesus, the man, Jehovah raised him from the dead as His Chief Son.<sup>91</sup>

This ransom view of Christ's achievement on the cross greatly diminishes His work. According to this view it was only a man, Jesus, who died on the cross. Also he needed to satisfy only the devil. The theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses makes Satan the judge, deciding what is necessary for people to be released from death. It says that salvation must be performed by a creature to satisfy an envious creature. The Bible teaches, on the other hand, that Christ died to satisfy the wrath of God against sinners. Salvation must be accomplished by God who satisfies holy God. The story of salvation presented by the Jehovah's Witnesses is not salvation accomplished by God.

## 2. Mankind's Reception of Salvation

Essentially Jehovah's Witnesses say that to be saved from death, a person must leave the church and follow Christ. As they see it, it necessary to leave the church because many beliefs of the church—the Trinity, the existence of hell, and the eternal existence of man after death--are pagan beliefs and do not come from the Bible when it is rationally interpreted. By telling people to follow Christ they mean one must follow Christ's

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<sup>91</sup> Schipper 15-6.

example and obey God.<sup>92</sup> The main way for most people to obey God today is by witnessing.<sup>93</sup> This way of receiving salvation is the way of works.

But the Bible states most clearly that true salvation is God's gift given by grace. By God's grace, a person is made alive; by God's grace a person comes to faith; by God's grace the person who believes in Christ is forgiven and saved. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again . . . no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3,5).

Paul wrote the Ephesian Christians that it was God who made them live because of His great love and abundance of mercy (Ephesians 2:4,5). He also told them that every part of their salvation, including their good works, was due to God's grace. He said,

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-10

This message of salvation commands each of us to repent of our sins and to believe in Christ. Faith earns nothing. It does not merit salvation; it cannot. Faith looks to Someone else, to Jesus Christ, who has achieved the righteousness we need to stand before God and has paid the penalty our sins deserve from God's holy justice. Since Christ is both God and man, we have confidence that He could suffer for human sins and that the extent of His suffering was enough to endure the full penalty which our sins deserve. This is the Bible's message of genuine salvation from God through His divine Son. It proclaims a different gospel and offers a different means to receive it from what the Jehovah's Witnesses teach.

## E. Biblical Arguments Against Jehovah's Witness Teaching

### 1. The Name Jehovah

In Lesson Two we promised to explain the origin of the word "Jehovah". It is important for us to give the explanation at the beginning of this section because it will help us explain some of the ways the Bible shows us that Jesus Christ is God.

The name Jehovah is based on a misunderstanding. It represents the personal Hebrew name for God; today we would write out the sound of that name in English as Yahweh. God called Himself Yahweh in Exodus 3, when Moses asked God what name to use to tell the people who had sent him to deliver them. God said that His name was "I am Who I am" (Exodus 3:14). The name probably means God is completely faithful to Himself, to His purposes, and to His promises. The name Yahweh is probably a shortened form of "I am Who I am." It was used as the personal and unique name of the true God, the God of Israel. Most English translations of the Bible translate the name as "The LORD" with the last three letters written in the upper case form but with the lower case size. Whenever your English Bible refers to "The LORD" (printed as LORD in other

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<sup>92</sup> Schipper 16-7.z

<sup>93</sup> Hoekema 285.

chapters), it is giving a translation of the name Yahweh. This was mentioned already in lesson two.

We find an interesting occurrence of Yahweh in Psalm 110:1, which says, “The LORD says to my Lord.” The first “LORD” is spelled with all upper case letters and is a translation of Yahweh. The second “Lord” is the common word that means “master.” The verse means, Yahweh says to my master. It is helpful to look at this verse because it shows how the English word “Lord” can reflect two very different Hebrew words –one being God’s personal name--and how their spellings in our English Bibles help us understand which word is in the Hebrew.

This explanation of the word “The LORD” is important, as we shall now see. In later years Jews did not use the name “Yahweh.” Exodus 20:7 says, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD [Yahweh] your God.” Since God insisted that this was a very important command, the Jews decided that the safest thing to do would be to avoid using the name “LORD” altogether. So, when they read their Hebrew Bibles and came to the name Yahweh, they developed the habit of saying “the Lord” instead. Eventually the sound of the name “Yahweh” was never heard amongst those who wanted to be faithful to God’s commands.

But our story concerning this word continues. Hebrew letters did not represent vowel sounds; the consonants were written, and people knew which word was meant. But Jews eventually became thoroughly assimilated into Greek-speaking societies, and they lost the ability to read their Hebrew Bibles. To remedy the situation Jewish scribes devised a system of dots and dashes which they wrote below, above, and even inside the Hebrew letters. These added marks informed readers how to pronounce the vowel sounds of the words they were reading.

But how should the scribes mark the personal name for God? Should they add markings for the vowels of “Yahweh” or should they provide markings for the vowels of the Hebrew name for “Lord,” the word readers actually said when they came across God’s personal name in the Bible? The scribes decided to mark the consonants for “Yahweh” with the vowel sounds for “Lord.” They never intended to instruct readers to say Yahweh; they assumed the reader would say, “The Lord.” But centuries later that was forgotten by many. The consonants for “Yahweh” with the vowels for “Lord” give us the word “Jehovah.” Whereas Jehovah’s Witnesses believe they are being faithful to God’s word by insisting that His name is Jehovah, in fact they are basing their practice on a misunderstanding.

This information is helpful for us when we give biblical arguments against the teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. We hope to show that Jesus is “Jehovah” or “the LORD.” God the Father is also “the LORD;” the Holy Spirit is also. Yahweh, the LORD is the personal name of the triune God. We hope to show that what the Bible says concerning “the LORD” it also teaches concerning Jesus Christ.

## 2. The Name Applied to Christ

Lesson Two has already provided the argumentation which shows that Jesus is Yahweh, the LORD. We conclude this when we learn in the Bible that traits which God alone has also belong to Christ and that work which only God does is done by Christ. We are

interested especially with Jehovah's Witnesses to show that what the Bible says about "the LORD" it says about Christ.

There are many ways to demonstrate that Jesus is Yahweh. We saw this in Lesson Two, for example, when we read who the LORD and who Christ is. The LORD is "the first and the last" (Isaiah 44:6) and Christ is the "first and the last" (Revelation 1:17,18). The LORD is "I am" (Exodus 3:14,15) and Jesus called Himself "I am" (John 8:58). Psalm 139:1 shows that the Psalm is written to the LORD; it asks in verse 7, "Where can I flee from your presence?" But Christ is also present everywhere (Ephesians 1:23). These descriptions of Christ demonstrate that He is the LORD.

We also saw in Lesson Two that Christ's deeds demonstrate that he is the LORD. The LORD made the earth and the heavens (Genesis 2: 4); all things were made through Christ (John 1:3; Colossians 16). The LORD preserves man and beast (Psalm 36:6); in Christ all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). We may worship only the LORD (Isaiah 45:22-24); every knee will bow before Christ (Philippians 2:10,11). The LORD is Redeemer (Isaiah 44:6); Christ is redeemer (1 Peter 1:18,19). The LORD will judge (Psalm 98:8) and Christ will judge (2 Corinthians 5:10). The list which compares the deeds of the LORD with the deeds of Christ the Son could continue because it is extensive, but the conclusion reached would be the same. The personal qualities and the works of the Son demonstrate His divinity.

It is important to respond to Jehovah's Witnesses by showing them these things about Christ. One reason is that this is an area of Biblical truth where they need to be confronted. Another reason is that, as Lesson Five makes clear, Christ is the issue. What we do with Christ we do with God. He is the Father's provision and the heart of the Spirit's revelation to us. If we refuse to accept salvation from Christ by faith in Him, we refuse God's only offer of eternal hope, redemption, and eternal life.

## CONCLUSION

We have reviewed the origins of the Jehovah's Witness movement. We have evaluated especially their sources of authority and found that the basis for their teachings includes human reason, which affects how they read the Bible. They accept the official pronouncements of their organization as infallible truth. This combined basis of teaching will surely fail to provide God's truth. We evaluated certain teachings of the Witness movement. We looked at their teaching concerning who Christ is and at their view of salvation. They present a human Christ who satisfied the devil. In both cases their teachings failed to present the biblical Christ and divine salvation. We looked, finally, at a way to respond to the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. We presented the need to present the biblical Christ, Who is every much as divine as the Father and the Spirit. All three Persons are presented to us when the Bible presents us with the LORD.

## QUESTIONS

1. What important teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses did you learn from this lesson?

2. What facts about the original leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses did you find interesting?
3. What three features of the cults did we evaluate when we looked at the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses?
4. What basis do Jehovah's Witnesses have for their teachings?
5. What is wrong with the Jehovah's Witness translation of the Bible?
6. What is Arianism?
7. What do Jehovah's Witness say about who Christ is?
8. What do Jehovah's Witness mean when they say that Christ's saving work was to ransom?
9. What is our reason for saying that Christ is the LORD, Jehovah?
10. What advice did this Lesson give concerning answering the Jehovah's Witnesses?



## LESSON SEVEN

### THE TEACHING OF MORMONS ON THE TRINITY

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson briefly covers the religious movement we call Mormonism. After its founder Joseph Smith died, his followers split into many different groups. The two larger groups both believe they have the exclusive right to be called Mormons. One calls itself the Community of Christ (formerly called The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and is headquartered in Independence, Missouri; the other calls itself The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah.<sup>94</sup> The second group is by far the larger and more influential. We will study the beliefs of this second group.

In general Mormons are highly respected today, especially by many North American Christians. They are respected because they seem to show a high regard for the family and marriage. They do not condone drunkenness, and they appear to value work. They seem so committed to their religion that their young men serve their organization by giving two years of their lives to missionary service. These are some of the reasons why Christians have a high opinion of Mormons

However, the teaching of Mormonism surprises many admirers when they learn what it actually says. In significant ways Mormonism is closer to the paganism of Old Testament Israel's neighbors than it is to the gospel of Christ. As we summarize some of the teachings of Mormonism, we hope that the reader will come to this same conclusion.

The topics in Mormonism that we cover are parallel to the topics we covered when we evaluated the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

#### A. A Brief History of the Beginning of Mormonism

Mormonism began with Joseph Smith. He grew up in a society where the Christian church was in disorder. Joseph was born in 1805 and grew up in the states of Vermont and New York. Though most members of his family became Presbyterians, Joseph was confused by the conflicting claims of churches in his area. When he was growing up, both the Baptist and Methodist churches broke up into many splinter groups. Each claimed to be the pure church which restored Christianity to what it was supposed to be. Furthermore, many traveling preachers came to cities and villages, holding revival meetings and seeking to frighten guilt-ridden sinners into being saved. Often these evangelistic meetings became very emotional. One group, the "Shakers," regarded uncontrolled shaking to be a mark of true conversion. In the area where Smith lived Ann Lee, the founder of the Shakers, claimed to be the reincarnated Christ. Also nearby, Jemima Wilkinson claimed to be a female Christ. And Isaac Bullard wore bearskin and boasted that he had not changed his clothing for seven years; he advocated communal life with common ownership of property and free love. Later writers have written that the

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<sup>94</sup> Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, ed, Ravi Zacharias (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003) 193.

area was the “burnt-over district of New York.”<sup>95</sup> This spiritual restlessness of his surroundings shaped Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism.

There was another feature of community discussion which affected Smith’s later teachings. Near his home there were several ancient burial grounds, called tumuli. The question was often asked, “Who was buried in them?” Many believed that native Americans (“Indians”) had been buried there. But others, including prominent Christians, said that the ten lost tribes of Israel had been buried there. As a boy Joseph Smith spent much time exploring these burial mounds.<sup>96</sup>

Smith claimed that when he was seventeen years old he received a vision from Moroni, the son of Mormon. Mormon, he said, was a prophet living in North America during the times of Biblical history. Moroni told Smith about a book, written on golden plates. Alongside the golden plates Smith would find the Urim and Thummim, the two stones which had previously been in the high priest’s ephod, they would help him translate the golden plates. Smith explained later that the plates were written in a language which he called the Reformed Egyptian language.<sup>97</sup>

When he finally felt permitted to translate the golden plates, Smith said he discovered the origins of Native Americans. The *Book of Mormon*, which he says he translated, tells the story of an extended Jewish family which migrated to the American hemisphere near the year 600 B.C. The two older brothers (Their descendents were eventually called Lamanites because one of them was named Laman.) were wicked, and they constantly harassed the four younger brothers (Their descendants were called Nephites because one of them was named Nephi.). Therefore God punished the Lamanites by making their skin red. Native Americans, according to this story, are descendants of these punished Jews, the Lamanites. God also blessed the Nephites when the resurrected Christ visited them. This explains why crosses were often found in the burial grounds near Smith’s boyhood home; the people buried there were descendants of the Nephites who had had this experience with Christ. As the story goes, the Lamanites and the Nephites were two races who grew up side by side in the Americas. Throughout the years these two races fought each other; eventually the Lamanites defeated the Nephites. But, before the final defeat of the Nephites, one of their prophets, the prophet Mormon, wrote the history of the conflicts on the golden plates. The plates remained buried until Smith followed the instruction of Moroni and found them. Smith claimed that this solved the riddle of the origin of Native Americans and of the burial mounds that he had come to know when he was growing up.<sup>98</sup>

In later years Joseph Smith claimed to receive further revelations.

One revelation claimed that races of people lived on the moon . . . .

Another revelation claimed that . . . [black people] were cursed by God with black skin, and must submit to God-ordained servitude, a revelation which was replaced by a new one in 1978 . . . . He also claimed a

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<sup>95</sup> Earl Schipper. “Cults in North America,” Trial Edition, (Grand Rapids: CSI Publications, 1980) 26-7.

<sup>96</sup> Schipper 28.

<sup>97</sup> Schipper 29-30.

<sup>98</sup> Schipper 30-31.

revelation that Indians would turn white after conversion to the restored gospel.<sup>99</sup>

The revelations he received became the basis of Mormonism.

Many basic tenets of modern Mormonism came directly from Smith's revelations, which revealed to him that God is a physical being, that men can become gods, that there are many gods, that polygamy is God-intended, that three distinct heavens exist, that all people exist in a pre-earth life, and that Jesus was a spirit-child of God.<sup>100</sup>

Perhaps these claims are sufficient to demonstrate to Christians that the movement we are studying belongs to the cults and not the Christian church.

## B. Sources of Authority used by Mormons

There are various sources which Mormons claim as the basis of their religion. First, they claim to follow the Bible when it is translated correctly. However, Joseph Smith did not merely translate the original Scriptures correctly. He rewrote portions of the Bible so that they conformed to the supposed revelations which he received. In only the opening chapters of Genesis one can find many changes to the Bible. Examples include:

Completely new material is inserted into Genesis 3: the story of Satan's coming before God and offering to be sent into the world to redeem mankind, if only he can receive God's honor. When this offer is refused by God, Satan rebels against God (Gen. 3:1-5, Inspired Version). An entirely new section is added which describes Adam's baptism by immersion (Gen. 6:67, Inspired Version). A long new section is added, giving the prophecy of Enoch (Gen. 6:26-7-7:78), Inspired Version), and telling that not only Enoch but an entire group of saints, the people of Zion, were taken up into heaven.<sup>101</sup>

It is clear from these changes that it will very difficult to talk with Mormons and to come to an agreement concerning what the Bible says. Even the authority which they claim to share with Christians has been altered by their founder.

A second sacred writing of the Mormons is the *Book of Mormon*. We have seen already from some of its contents that this book includes many imaginary stories.

Other authorities for Mormons are *Pearl of Great Price* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. *Pearl of Great Price* is a short work which includes an assortment of Smith's rewriting of the early chapters of the Bible and some of his distinctive doctrines. One of these doctrines is polytheism. This can be found in the book's rendition of Genesis 1, which is rewritten in a polytheistic fashion.<sup>102</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants* contains mostly revelations that supposedly were given to Smith. It also includes a revelation supposedly received by Brigham Young, Smith's successor. Recent editions also include a revelation supposedly given to President Wilford Woodruff in 1890 which prohibits polygamy.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Schipper 32.

<sup>100</sup> Schipper 33.

<sup>101</sup> Hoekema 20.

<sup>102</sup> Hoekema 29.

<sup>103</sup> Hoekema 28.

As we may have noticed already, another source of Mormonism consists of the official pronouncements of its president. He is regarded to be the prophet foretold by Deuteronomy 18:18; he receives continuing revelation today.<sup>104</sup>

Summing up, we have observed that Mormons do not at all accept the Bible as their final authority for doctrine and life; they relegate the Bible to an inferior place of authority. Their own emendations of the Bible and their own sacred scriptures are considered to be superior in value to the Bible. In fact, even their president is believed to possess the power of receiving further revelations which could conceivably alter the doctrines accepted by the Mormon Church.<sup>105</sup>

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints clearly shows one of the marks of a cult, a reliance on extra-scriptural authority for infallible teaching. It holds to the thoughts of man and shapes Scripture to fit inside that mold. Without a question we can expect their doctrines concerning Christ and salvation also to be man-made.

### C. The Mormon Doctrine of Christ

We cannot understand Mormon teaching concerning Christ until we understand its teaching concerning God. One of the basic beliefs of Mormonism is that there are many gods. The God of the Bible is merely one of them; he has made more progress than the rest. As Mormons present this teaching, there was a time when God was merely one of many eternal heavenly spirits. At some point in time the spirits came to earth to receive bodies. One Mormon author wrote, there “are males and females in heaven. Since we have a Father, who is our god, we must also have a mother, who possesses the attributes of Godhood.”<sup>106</sup> While living on earth in their bodies, the gods endured a time of testing. After they passed the test, they were exalted into the heavenly realm again with their bodies.<sup>107</sup> This exaltation of God is an ongoing process for Him even today.

The difference between angels and gods is . . . one of degree, and that between God the Father and the others gods is likewise one of degree. He is simply the god who has progressed the farthest and is therefore superior to the others gods—the other gods will never be able to catch up with him.<sup>108</sup>

According to Mormonism we can become gods too. Each one’s life in the eternity before the present “was an infinitely long period of ‘probation, progression, and schooling.’”<sup>109</sup> But God placed His spirit-children “on earth and gives us bodies as a probation to test us. He withdraws from us any memory of our pre-earth life.”<sup>110</sup> If we perfectly obey during the probation, we will ascend to higher levels. Since we can become what God already is, “Man is a god in embryo.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Schipper 40.

<sup>105</sup> Hoekema 30.

<sup>106</sup> John A. Widstoe, quoted by Hoekema 36.

<sup>107</sup> Hoekema 38-9.

<sup>108</sup> Hoekema 38

<sup>109</sup> Hoekema 48

<sup>110</sup> Schipper 35.

<sup>111</sup> *A Rational Theology* quoted by Hoekema 39.

The history of Jesus Christ fits this pattern. In fact, if we understand what happened to Christ, we will understand what must happen to every man and what happened to God the Father. Mormons call God “Elohim,” and they call His firstborn spirit child “Jehovah,” who is Jesus Christ. Christ received His physical body as the result of a physical union between God the Father and the virgin Mary. Since Jesus had to marry in order to become divine, He married several women.<sup>112</sup> Jesus, therefore, followed the process which God the Father had taken long before. Jesus received his physical body to be tested and to progress towards higher exaltation.

We can tell from this that the Father and Son do not belong to the Trinity. They are separate beings, distinct gods. Mormons say they are one only in will. Furthermore, Mormons say the Holy Spirit is God’s impersonal energy.

The death and resurrection of Christ also are important to Mormon teaching. It is helpful to understand that Mormonism teaches that Jesus saves people from death, not from sin.<sup>113</sup> According to their beliefs the sin of Adam created two problems: physical death and spiritual death. By physical death Mormons mean annihilation; they teach that sin, if not reversed, would completely end every person’s existence at death. The problem with spiritual death is that it keeps people from entering heaven. According to Mormonism the death of Jesus gives all people salvation from physical death; His death gives immortality, victory over the threat of annihilation. But Jesus also gives us the possibility of being exalted after we die; He gives us the potential to enjoy victory over spiritual death. Whether a person is exalted or not depends on his life during this time of testing.<sup>114</sup> The Mormon view of Christ’s work, then, is that He has made it possible for us to reach the exaltation He has reached.

But this promise is little comfort for those who know the seriousness of their sins. For those who know the gospel of Christ the Mormon view of Jesus’ being and work is very disappointing. Mormons present a Jesus who is only just like us except for the fact He is ahead of us. They present a “salvation” in Christ which offers nothing that is complete. Jesus only makes it possible for us to work out our own way into exaltation. In their view Christ leaves it up to us to do enough now to be exalted after death.

#### D. The Mormon Message of Salvation

Mormonism teaches that Christ will rule on the earth for one thousand years. It will be a time of peace. During that time the spirits of the wicked will be in the prison-house of the spirit world where they will be given opportunity to repent and cleanse themselves through the things they suffer.<sup>115</sup> Others will be resurrected to live on earth; they include many non-Mormons who lived good lives. These mortal people will live side by side with the Mormons who are immortal already. During this time the gospel will be preached so that mortal people who believe it will become immortal and those who reject it will pass away.<sup>116</sup> Mormons teach many more things about the thousand years, but we

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<sup>112</sup> Hoekema 56.

<sup>113</sup> Bill Evenhouse, *Reasons II: Sects and Cults with Christian Roots* (Grand Rapids: The Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1981) 54.

<sup>114</sup> Schipper 37.

<sup>115</sup> Hoekema 70.

<sup>116</sup> Hoekema 70.

want to notice their reliance of good works. Most who have not been given immortality already will be given another chance, either in the prison house of the spirit world or on earth, to do what is necessary to advance to exaltation. Christ's death on the cross did not save from sin, but only rescued people from death so they can do the work necessary to reach exaltation.

After the thousand years the earth will become a celestialized dwelling for the exalted, death will be banished, and Christ will execute the judgment. As a result of the judgment, people will be sent to four different final states.

First, the devil and his angels along with a small number of human beings, like--Hitler and Charles Manson--whose lives placed them beyond salvation, will be banished to hell forever.<sup>117</sup> Due to their early rebellion against God, the devil and his angels will never have bodies. This condition in banishment will be painful, irreversible, and eternal.

But there awaits for everyone else some kind of exaltation. The lowest of state of exaltation, Mormons say, will be the Telestial Kingdom. The people destined for this place will be those who lived unclean lives, broke their covenants, and did not receive the gospel. They will be those who had been in the prison house of the spirit world but did not repent.<sup>118</sup>

The middle realm of exaltation will be the Terrestrial Kingdom. Those who live there will be people who did not have God's law while living on the earth, who reversed themselves while they were in the prison house of the spirit world, and who were honorable people. Nevertheless, they were under the influence of deceitful men, or were lukewarm Mormons.<sup>119</sup>

The highest state of exaltation will be the Celestial Kingdom. Only the people sent to this glory will have the privilege to live with their spouses and to have more children. They will be those who lived the good Mormon life and observed all the ordinances required by the Mormon church. These ordinances include being married in a Mormon temple. Those living in the Celestial Kingdom become eternal gods.<sup>120</sup>

A person's life on earth determines his future state. This religion, therefore, is not a faith in God's grace but a faith in man's deeds. As we have summarized some of the highlights of the Mormon faith, the Lord Jesus Christ has scarcely been mentioned because He is not central to the Mormon faith or hope. Having replaced God's word with Joseph Smith's word about his visions, Mormons end up replacing the work of Jesus Christ with their own works.

#### E. Biblical Arguments Against Mormon Teaching

Whenever we speak to non-Christians, we must remember that what they most need to hear is how to be saved from their sins through faith in Christ. There are many related questions that we may need to answer, but our goal should be always to bring them to Christ Who is eternal God and saves those who trust in Him from their sins. With that in mind we can consider presenting arguments such as these from Scripture.

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<sup>117</sup> Schipper 38.

<sup>118</sup> Hoekema 73-4.

<sup>119</sup> Hoekema 73.

<sup>120</sup> Hoekema 60-1.

1. There is only one God.

This is an important point to show Mormons from the Bible. As we have learned, they teach that there are many gods and that many more persons are on the way to becoming divine. We can stress the Bible's teaching of monotheism with some of the following passages from Scripture:

Romans 3:30. "... there is only one God, who will justify . . ."

1 Corinthians 8:4,6. "... there is no God but one . . . for us there is but one God . . ."

Galatians 3:20. "God is one."

1 Timothy 1:17. "... the only God . . ."

James 2:19. "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."

All these passages are from the New Testament. The reason Old Testament passages are not suggested here is because Mormons will agree, for example, that the LORD our God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4); however, they will merely say, that there are other gods besides him. Whenever we use a passage from the Bible, we must make sure it addresses the point Mormons need to hear: that there is only one God.

2. He will not share his honor with another.

We learned in Lesson One that God is jealous to claim His own honor only for Himself. There are passages in the Bible which teach this very specifically:

Deuteronomy 4:35,39. "You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other . . . . Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other."

1 Kings 8:60. "... the LORD is God and . . . there is none else."

Isaiah 42:8. "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."

Jeremiah 10:10. "... the LORD is the true God."

1 Thessalonians 1:9. (The Thessalonians) "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

Though some of these passages can be used to support the first point, they also help to show that God tolerates no equals.

When we use these passages from the Old Testament, we can remember that Mormons claim that the LORD (Jehovah) is Christ. Mormons do not believe He is equal to the Father. The Father, in their view, is more advanced in being increasingly exalted. Yet these passages say there is none greater than the LORD, they contradict what Mormonism teaches.

These first two points merely utilize truths we learned when we reviewed the Biblical basics of the Trinity in the first three lessons. But there is at least a final point which we should remember to show Mormons from the Bible.

3. He has provided salvation from our sins only through Christ.

Mormons need to hear this because they are not convinced that they need to be forgiven of their sins and washed from their sin. The Bible teaches that we are threatened with eternal destruction, not mere human death, due to human sin. Sin is exceedingly dreadful because it is rebellion against God, and we need Christ because only God the Son is capable of saving us from sin. These truths can be found in passages such as those which follow:

Jeremiah 17:9. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

Romans 3:21-24. "Now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Acts 4:10, 12. ". . . It is by the name of Jesus Christ . . . that this man stands before you healed. . . . Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we can be saved."

Romans 5:10. "If, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

Romans 6:23. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"

1 John 1:8, 9. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Possibly the reader can recall passages which speak even more directly of our need for Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. Whatever Scripture we use to show the dreadful

state of our sin and the relief God the Son provides those who believe in Him will be good news for the Mormon to hear.

## CONCLUSION

We have given a brief survey of Mormon teaching which relate to the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Mormons begin wrongly because they are unwilling to listen only to Scripture as God's word. Since they believe in many gods, they deny the first teaching we listed when we learned the basic doctrines of the Trinity. Also, by believing that Jesus is not eternal God, Mormons have diminished Him and the work He accomplished for sinners. They leave it up to themselves to do the works necessary to earn eternal exaltation. They are not trusting in the righteousness of Christ.

The Christian must demonstrate from Scripture that Christ is eternal God and that He alone can offer all that we need for eternal life. We must also urge them to repent of their sins and trust in Christ to receive relief from their sins which they so desperately need.

## QUESTIONS

1. What did you learn about Mormonism that you did not know before?
2. What experiences in Joseph Smith's boyhood seemed to affect his theology when he was adult?
3. What are the sources of authority for Mormonism?
4. What is wrong with the Mormons' Bible?
5. Who is Christ according to the Mormons?
6. According to Mormons, what are the names of the different Kingdoms where people will go after the judgment?
7. Which people will go to each kingdom?
8. What arguments would you use to show a Mormon that he has a wrong understanding of who God is?
9. List three teachings of Mormonism with which you disagree?
10. What questions about Mormonism do you have which this lesson has not answered?



## LESSON EIGHT

### OUR ANSWER TO THE CULTS

#### INTRODUCTON

All of the lessons so far have been designed to prepare us for this final lesson. It is true that the two general subjects of this course are each worth our study. All Christians ought to understand the doctrine of the Trinity, and it would be very helpful if every Christian knew how to defend the teaching, basing it on specific verses of the Bible. Similarly, it helps us in our Christian witness to know what various cults teach; when we understand the teachings they promote, we are more able to present the Gospel to one of their members. Nevertheless, though the two subjects could be studied profitably by themselves, we are better equipped in our witness when we know both.

The Bible tells use frequently that Christian's are Christ's witnesses. For example, Jesus told His disciples that they were His witnesses and that their witness would be given to all the nations (Acts 1:8). Jesus also told them that making disciples of the nations would involve teaching whatever Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20). He said that the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations will continue until the end of the age (Matthew 24:14). So, the church has been appointed by Christ to proclaim the Gospel.

The apostle Paul provides a wonderful example of the fact that that Christians are Christ's witnesses. He was appointed to proclaim the name of Christ to Gentiles and their rulers as well as to Jews (Acts 9:15). Paul fulfilled his assignment with much enthusiasm. He preached the Gospel wherever he went: Asia, Macedonia, Greece, Crete, Rome, and Jerusalem. He defended the Gospel before great rulers (Acts 24, 25; 27:24). Besides preaching the gospel to common people, he also preached to philosophers (Acts 17:18) with the hope that every thought would be made captive to Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). There was no place where Paul was unwilling to go, no social class to whom he was unwilling to speak, and no part of culture to which he would not apply the gospel. Paul's determination to proclaim the Gospel to all men everywhere should always encourage us to preach the Gospel to everyone everywhere, including those who belong to the cults.

Yet, beside the fact that Christians are Christ's witnesses, we must also remember the way Christ wants us to witness. We do not adopt the message of the world; we do not adopt the conduct of the world. When we represent Christ, we also represent Him both in what we say and in how we say it. So Christ's apostle Peter tells us

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1 Peter 3:15,16)

Peter is teaching us that a most important truth to remember and demonstrate is that Christ is our Lord. The Christian must give Christ's answers to the questions raised by unbelief with the attitude which exhibits Christ's love. We want to speak to non-Christians in a way that keeps our conscience before God clear. We should always be

conscious of the fact that we will give account to Christ concerning how we speak to the world. When we speak to members of the cults, though they can be very hateful and obnoxious, we must demonstrate that we have received the saving love of Christ. Concerning all the virtues included in the Christian life, the Bible says that love binds them all together (Colossians 3:14). So love must be evident when we give our witness.

Assuming that we will each seek this part of personal holiness, we will now proceed to offer specific points we can make when we give our answer to the cults. We must understand immediately that no conversation with one cultist will proceed exactly the way another discussion will. Each conversation reflects the circumstances around it. Also, different Christians who have had experience in witnessing to cultists will offer different advice concerning what points to make. So we do not claim that this lesson offers the only answers or all of the best answers. Nevertheless, we can offer answers which have proven over the centuries to be biblical and relevant to the issues raised by the cults. We will utilize the so-called “solos” of the Protestant Reformation and apply them to the teachings which the cults promote.

The four main “solos” were teachings put forth by the great leaders of the Reformation. “Sola” is a Latin word which means “alone.” The English names of these teachings are “Scripture alone,” “Grace alone,” “Christ alone,” and “Faith alone.” The reformers insisted on each of these teachings because the church in their day was hiding the gospel of Christ from the people by teaching the opposites of these teachings. These teachings were important to the reformers also because they insisted on another “sola:” “Glory to God alone.” Since the issues which the “solos” raised during the Reformation are still relevant as we answer the cults, we will explain each of the four teachings and suggest how each might be used in our answer to the cults. Our summary of the doctrine of the Trinity will be incorporated in our answer.

#### A. SCRIPTURE ALONE

The teaching of Scripture Alone was offered by the Protestant reformers because the Roman Catholic Church had so elevated church tradition that tradition was given the same obedience which Scripture was. Official church declarations said that it is an error to claim Scripture alone as the basis of our faith and life. The Protestant reformers responded by saying that tradition is merely human and that it had greatly misled the church. Whenever human tradition is given attention equal to the attention we give the Bible, the Bible will always be reinterpreted to fit into what tradition says. We believe this is also the fundamental error of the cults.

Before we review the cults on this matter, let us remember what the Bible teaches. It claims to be the only inspired book, the only inerrant work, which God has given us. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” This tells us that Scripture, what is written, is from the mouth of God and is thoroughly useful as it scolds, corrects, and trains. It is used by God to give new life and to train us for every good work. This does not mean that we do not need people to teach us God’s word. But it does mean that, when teachers teach us how to be disciples of Christ, they must teach us from Scripture. There is no other authority, or word, from God.

As we have seen, both cults which we studied base their teachings on extra sources in addition to the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses follow the official publications of their central committee. Mormons follow writings of Joseph Smith. In fact, one of the basic characteristics of any cult is that it follows some authority in addition to the Bible.

One area where we can give answer to the cults, then, concerns their views of these other authorities. What gives them confidence in these authorities? One characteristic of God's word is that it will never fail. Deuteronomy 18:22 says, "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him." But predictions of the cults' writings have failed to come true. Why, then, do the cults still trust these human authorities?

Consider, for example, how the Jehovah's Witness official organization changed its teaching concerning when the Battle of Armageddon will take place. For example, Walter Martin's book, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, shows how the date of the Battle of Armageddon has been changed to later dates as time unfolds. Charles Russell once wrote, "The 'battle of the great day of God Almighty' (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914 with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." Later, in 1950, *The Watchtower* (November 1, 1950, p. 419) said, "The thirty-six intervening years since 1914, instead of postponing Armageddon, have only made it nearer than most people think. Do not forget: 'This generation shall not pass, till all things be fulfilled'" (Matt. 24:34). In 1984 *The Watchtower* (May 14, 1984, p. 5) said that at least some alive in 1914 would live to see Armageddon. Yet in 1995 *The Watchtower* (November 1, 1995, p. 17-20) refused to speculate anymore about the year of the Battle of Armageddon.<sup>121</sup> Predictions shifted from saying that the Battle would end in 1914, to saying the generation born in 1914 would live to see it, to saying that there is no definite date. These predictions came from the authority which the Jehovah's Witnesses say is from God. Why should they not apply Deuteronomy 18:22 to their own cult and conclude that the cult's authorities are false prophets?

*The Book of Mormon* has proven itself to be unstable. In new editions the Mormon church has changed some parts of *The Book of Mormon*. In the 1981 edition of *The Book of Mormon* over 100 changes were made without consulting the missing golden plates! The introduction to this edition says, "This edition contains corrections that seem appropriate to bring the material into conformity with prepublication manuscripts and early editions edited by the prophet Joseph Smith." But Walter Martin says, "Our access to the handwritten copies of the original *Book of Mormon* deny [sic] such a claim."<sup>122</sup> In other words, though *The Book of Mormon* was changed to make it more respectable, there is no basis in the original writings of Joseph Smith for these changes.

When people ask questions about God and personal salvation, they desire certainty.<sup>123</sup> The extra authorities which these cults hold to beside the Bible have proven to be unreliable. Therefore we may challenge cult members to answer why we should believe these when they deny the Trinity.

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<sup>121</sup> Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, ed, Ravi Zacharias (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003) 104-6.

<sup>122</sup> Martin 217.

<sup>123</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr. *Every Thought Captive* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979) 47.

## B. GRACE ALONE

The Protestant Reformers felt compelled to emphasize the biblical teaching that a person is saved by Grace Alone because the official church in their day denied this. It is typical of false religions and of religions which present a distorted view of Christ to offer salvation which is based on works. When the reformers saw this in their day, they preached the truth that salvation is by God's grace alone.

The Bible teaches that salvation is only by grace. We can see this, for example, in Romans 3:23, 24 which says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Grace refers to God's gift of salvation which we have not earned by any good works. Since all are sinners, all need God's grace to be saved. Ephesians reinforces this when it says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). This shows that God's grace excludes our works as the basis of salvation. If a person is not trusting in God's grace, he is not trusting in God for salvation from his sins.

Though the cults may claim to trust in grace, they do not trust in grace in a way that excludes trusting in good works. We have seen that both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus died to let us escape annihilation at death. According to their teachings, if Christ had not died and risen again, we would cease to exist when we die. But, since he died and rose again, there is life for us after death. Both say that this helps followers of their teachings. Since there is life after death, they can be rewarded in the next life for the things they do in this life. Mormons say that Christ's death makes it possible for a man's good deeds in this life to have the result that he will become a god in eternity. Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus' death makes it possible to be rewarded in the next life for one's obedience in this life. For them, Jesus' "grace" only gives their good lives the opportunity of being rewarded. Ultimately, what earns their reward are their good deeds. These religions are not trusting in God's grace. We should urge them to be honest about this as we present passages such as Ephesians 2:8 to them.

The reason we can trust in the works which Christ performed for us in our behalf is that He is God the Son. The doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that Christ is divine, is the reason we can place complete confidence for all salvation in Him. Since His saving work is divine, it is sufficient to save completely all who trust in Him. Since the cults believe that Christ is a creature of God, they do not suppose that His work can save without the addition of their own good works. The doctrine of the Trinity is basic to the gospel of grace.

## C. CHRIST ALONE

Christ Alone is the teaching that Christ is the only Person who can earn our salvation. In many ways this teaching is close to the teaching of Grace Alone. The Protestant Reformers confronted a church hierarchy which claimed to distribute God's grace through the sacraments. As a result people were more prone to look to the church than to Christ for the grace they needed. But the reformers preached that we must look to Christ alone for the saving grace that we need.

The Bible teaches that Christ is the One to Whom we must go to receive saving grace. For example, Peter preached in Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Again Romans 3:23,24 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” The Bible consistently teaches us to go to Christ for the salvation we need.

Though members of cults may say that they go to Christ, in fact, they do not. We can see this in their exclusive loyalty to their cult. They usually accept only their own translation of the Bible. They do not believe people outside their cult can be saved. They see their cult as central in God’s plan for the end of the present age. In other words, their cult is all-important, and they cannot see Christ working outside their group to give salvation. This emphasis on their cult contradicts what Peter preached: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” We should encourage members of cults to see that they are trusting in their group more than in Christ.

We can believe that Christ alone achieved all the work necessary for salvation because He alone was sent by the Father to save. Salvation is found in no one else because the Father appointed only the Son to be our savior. This part of Trinitarian teaching, that the Father sent the Son alone, is truth we must use to challenge those who trust in the cults. We should ask, “Did the Father send your group like He sent the Son?” Since the Father sent the Son, the Son is the exclusive source of salvation to all who call on Him in faith. Once again the doctrine of the Trinity shapes the gospel which we believe.

#### D. FAITH ALONE

Faith Alone teaches that a person receives Christ and His grace through faith alone in Christ. The Protestant reformers saw that this needed to be emphasized when the church in their day stressed the performance of sacraments in the church as the way to receive grace. God’s word was not even preached in the peoples’ languages. They did not need to understand the Bible, the church said, to be saved. All they needed to do was receive the church’s sacraments and then follow the commands the church gave them.

But the Bible teaches that we receive Christ and His by faith alone. Romans says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” This verse quotes Habbakkuk 2:4 which the apostle Paul relies on repeatedly to teach the essence of the Gospel (See Romans 3:21, 18; Galatians 2:16; 3:11). When it comes to earning something, faith is nothing. It looks to Someone else for help. Earning nothing, it is an appropriate means by which we receive grace from Christ.

The cults also miss the mark concerning this great truth of the gospel. As we have mentioned, they rely on Christ to spare them beyond death so that their works in this life can earn blessing in the next life. They trust that their works will earn real merit, and that God will reward their works. Certainly we should deal with members of the cults to let them see that they are not trying to receive salvation through faith alone. Rather, they are seeking it through obedience to their cult.

The reason we can trust that the Gospel is true and adequate for us to believe for salvation is because the gospel is the inspired word of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit faithfully taught the church, through Christ's apostles, that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (cf. John 14:6). Since the Spirit is God, we can trust that His revelation of the Son which is in the Bible is completely reliable. We can trust the gospel because it comes from God.

## CONCLUSION

We began this lesson with general reminders that the Bible says Christians are witnesses of Christ and that they must give their witness with humility and love which demonstrates love for Christ. Then we briefly considered the great "solas" rediscovered at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Since the issues which the reformers faced are similar to the issues we face when we deal with the cults, we summarized briefly what each "sola" means, how Scripture teaches each one, how each sola is important when we try to correct members of the cults, and how the doctrine of the Trinity is relevant to each "sola". Salvation is presented authoritative by Scripture alone, is the work of God's grace alone, is received in Christ alone, and is received by faith alone in Christ. Each of these seeks to eliminate the wisdom and merits of man.

Since Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are divine and they together are one God, the gospel presents one message of salvation which comes completely from God. Is salvation even partially from man or completely of God? The answer which the Triune God gives is the only answer which can make us secure for eternity.

## QUESTIONS

1. What does 1 Peter 3 teach about how Christians should explain the hope they have?
2. Why did the Protestant reformers come up with the four "solas"?
3. How does "Scripture Alone" disagree with the teaching of the cults?
4. What do the cults teach which disagrees with "grace alone"?
5. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity important in the emphasis of "Christ Alone"?
6. How does the doctrine of the Trinity help us believe that salvation is by "Faith Alone"?
7. What did you learn from this lesson that you did not know before?

## CONCLUSION

We have surveyed both the Bible's teaching of the Trinity and the teaching of the cults who deny this basic Christian doctrine.

When we reviewed essential biblical teaching, we saw that the Bible teaches that there is one true God, that He exists in three distinct Persons, and that each Person is God in the fullest sense of the word. We also learned of the economic Trinity, that the Father does all things through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. This understanding of the economic Trinity is especially helpful for us to understand the gospel of Christ. He was sent by the Father to save sinners; He was empowered by the Spirit to save sinners. Furthermore, by drawing us to Christ, the Spirit also draws us to the Father, Whom we know in Christ. We reviewed, also some of the errors in early church history which prompted the Christian church to delve deeply into Scripture to summarize the doctrine of the Trinity which is found there.

When we reviewed the cults, we began by summarizing various tendencies of all cults. They have broken away from the Christian church to proclaim a message which is not the gospel of Christ. Then, we explored two cults: Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. We learned that their reliance on human writings has misled them to deny the divinity of Christ and to formulate another gospel, which is no gospel at all. Finally, we considered how Christians might respond to the teaching of the cults with the Gospel. We suggested that the four "solae" of the Protestant Reformation might provide the direction which is sorely needed.

May the Lord be glorified by this modest course and by those who study it.



# COORDINATOR'S MANUAL

## 1. WELCOME

We have written this brief manual to assist coordinators; they play a significant role in the teaching of a MINTS course. If you are planning to work as coordinator of this course, we welcome and thank you. You will have a crucial part in training students who want to learn God's word. This task of coordinator is important, and we hope that you appreciate how the Lord can use your service to build up the kingdom of God in the lives of students who come to learn more about the Lord.

This manual will inform you briefly what you need to know to assist students in taking this MINTS course. Since you plan to be a coordinator, we assume you are highly responsible and capable of working independently. However, since this is a course which MINTS provides, we also must ask you to meet certain expectations so that students can fulfill the course requirements.

The topic of the course makes the work of the coordinator extremely important. This course is called "The Trinity and the Cults." It is an exceedingly important topic. The Trinity is the name of one of the most vital Biblical teachings concerning God. Without this teaching the church struggled to understand who Jesus Christ is. It also found it difficult to explain fully the gospel of Christ. On the other hand, the cults deny the Trinity. One result is that they deny that Christ is the unique Son of God. When they diminish, they preach a "gospel" which relies more on the works of man than on God the Son. So the topic of this course treats the same topic from two perspectives. First, it presents the basic Biblical teaching of the Trinity; second, it challenges us to look at groups which deny this Biblical teaching. The goal is to help students be perceptive and discerning. Therefore, we hope that instructors will consider their task to be highly worthwhile to the students and to the church of Christ.

### RESPONSIBILITIES

The task of coordinator begins long before the course is taught. The coordinator makes sure that students are recruited and registered. Students must understand that they need access to the internet. They should come knowing in general what to expect.

Also, before the course begins, the coordinator should arrange for a place where the course will be held. We ask coordinators to arrange a place where the teacher will stay and eat. From the time the teacher arrives at the airport to the time he leaves, the teacher is the guest of the study center.

The course progresses in two phases. The teacher leads eight hours of *sessions* in the first phase, and the coordinator leads eight hours of *classes* in the second phase. The time which the teacher and the coordinator take up is somewhat flexible, but the requirement is that sessions and classes combined will last a total of 15 hours. The coordinator is present during the first phase. In the sessions which the he leads, the teacher will introduce the students to the topic of the course, present the main ideas of the course, invite discussion, make sure the students understand their assignments and requirements, and assign a project topic for each student to pursue. During the second

phase, the coordinator supervises the classes. The work of the coordinator during these classes will be defined under “Plan for the Four Classes.”

Once the course begins, the work of the coordinator consists primarily of the following activities:

- a. Keep record of names and attendance for sessions and classes.
- b. Receive homework when it must be completed. Give points according to Requirement 2 in the course Introduction.
- c. Lead the group in discussing the questions and answers of the lessons.
- d. Listen to oral reading reports. Give points according to Requirement 3 in the course Introduction.
- e. Lead group in listening to oral project reports. Give points according to Requirement 4 in the course Introduction
- f. Hand out the exam and grade them according to answers given in this manual. Give points according to Requirement 5 in the course Introduction
- g. Hand out evaluations for students to fill and return them to the teacher.

After the course is finished, the coordinator will complete the necessary record keeping and report grades to the teacher.

#### PLAN FOR THE FOUR CLASSES

We suggest that the classes which the coordinator leads follow the following plan.

##### **Class Number 1 (2 hours)**

1. Welcome and open with prayer (5 min.).
2. Take attendance. One point for every class hour attended. If missed or late, lose one point (5 min.).
3. Check homework for Lessons 1-2. Two points for completed Lessons. Lose one point for late work (10 min.).
4. Discuss the questions and answers for Lessons 1-2 (30 min.).
5. Listen to the oral reports of extra readings of 33% of the class. 5 minutes each (30 min.).
6. Work on special projects in groups (30 min.) and facilitator gives suggestions.
7. Prepare for next class: remind what lessons to be done and who has oral reports (5 min.).
8. Close with prayer (5 min.).

##### **Class Number 2 (2 hours)**

1. Welcome and open with prayer (5 min.).
2. Take attendance (5 min.).
3. Check homework for Lessons 3-4. Two points for lessons complete. Lose one point for late work (10 min.).
4. Discuss the questions and answers for Lessons 3-4 (30 min.).

5. Listen to the oral reports of extra readings of 33% of the class. 5 minutes each (30-min.).
6. Work on special project in groups (30 min.).
7. Prepare for next class: remind what lessons to be done and who will present oral reports (5 min.).
8. Close with prayer (5 min.).

**Class Number 3 (2 hours)**

1. Welcome and open with prayer (5 min.).
2. Take attendance. One point for every class hour attended. If missed, a one-page report of missed hour to be submitted next class (5 min.).
3. Check homework for Lessons 5-6. Two points for completed lessons. Lose one point for late work (10 min.).
4. Discuss the questions and answers for Lessons 5-6 (30 min.).
5. Listen to the oral reports of extra readings of 33% of the class. 5 minutes each. (30 min.).
6. Review for the final exam (30 minutes).
7. Prepare for next class: remind what lessons to be done and who will present oral reports (5 min.).
8. Close with prayer (5 minutes).

**Class Number 4 (2 hours)**

1. Welcome and open with prayer (5 min.).
2. Take attendance. One point for every class hour attended. If missed, a one-page report of missed hour to be submitted next class (5 min.).
3. Check homework for Lessons 7-8. Two points for completed lessons. Lose one point for late work (10 min.).
4. Discuss the questions and answers for Lessons 7-8 (30 min.).
5. Final exam (one hour).
6. Close with prayer (5 minutes).

**FORMS TO GIVE TO STUDENTS**

We are providing several forms which you will need to guide students. They include the following:

1. Lesson Questions and Answers. The coordinator is appointed to lead group discussions of the lesson questions and answers. This document provides the answers which the teacher suggests; hopefully, this will help the coordinator guide the discussion so students will discover the answers they could not get on their own.
2. Student's Test. This is the test the coordinator will copy and give to the students for the final exam.
3. Coordinator's Test. This is the test with the correct answer highlighted. This will help the coordinator to correct the student's exams.

4. Course Evaluation by the Students. This form is handed to the students during the last class. Students are asked to fill it out and return it to the coordinator before they leave.
5. Pedagogical Evaluation of the Instructor. This is the form the teacher will fill out and send to the Academic Dean.
6. Class Record. The coordinator will complete this form and send to the teacher.





### 3. LESSON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#### Lesson One

1. Before you read this lesson, how important did you think the teaching of the Trinity is?  
*(Each student will give his own answer.)*
2. How much do activities in your church, including worship services, attempt to teach people what God is like?  
*(Each student will give his own analysis.)*
3. What do you think people in your community think about the idea of God being Three in One? For example, do most of them think it is a foolish idea or do they believe it is true?  
*(Each student will give his own opinion of the situation.)*
4. If the Bible does not use the word Trinity, may we use the word to name a major doctrine which we say comes from the Bible?  
*Yes, it is proper because the name refers to a teaching which comes from Scripture. )*
5. Besides passages given in this lesson, in what other places does the Bible express disapproval of polytheism?  
*(Possible answers can include Exodus 20:3; 1 Kings 11:5 ,6 , 9-11; 2 Kings 17:16-20. There are many other possibilities. The leader should make sure the verses cited refer to the practice of having more than one God.)*
6. Why is it important to believe that there is only one true God?  
*All false gods are unable to help us. The Bible teaches that there is only one God and only He is able to help and save us.*
7. Why is it important to believe that God exists in three distinct Persons?  
*This is the way the true God has revealed Himself to us.*
8. Besides the passages given in this lesson, what other passages of the Bible demonstrate that God exists in three Persons?  
*(Students could mention Psalm 110:1; Matthew 22:44; Ephesians 1:3-14. There are many other passages. The leader should make sure these verses teach in some way that the Father, Son, or Spirit is divine.)*
9. What points made in the lesson seemed controversial to you?  
*(Each student will give his own answer.)*
10. What points made in the lesson do you think are necessary for someone to believe for that person to be called a Christian?

*(Each student will point to the teachings he thinks are important.)*

## **Lesson Two**

1. What difficulties do we face when we read names for the Father in the Bible?  
*Sometimes "Father" refers to the Triune God and sometimes "God" refers only to God the Father.*
2. What do we mean when we say the Son of God is incarnate?  
*We mean that God the Son added to Himself our human nature which includes a human body.*
3. What reasons do we have for saying the Holy Spirit is a divine Person?  
*We say he is a divine Person because Jesus often refers to the Spirit with personal pronouns such as "he." Also, the Spirit does what only a person can do.*
4. Explain the main reason given in this chapter to prove that the Son and Spirit are God equal with the Father.  
*The Bible describes the Son and Spirit as having the glory the Father has and as doing the works which the Father does.)*
5. How does the name "first and last" prove that Christ is God?  
*This name is also given to the LORD, Who we know is divine.*
6. How does worship given to the Son in Philippians 2:10,11 prove that He is God?  
*This is the worship which Isaiah 45 says the LORD will receive.*
7. How were the Son and Spirit involved in the creation of the universe?  
*Everything was created through the Son and by power of the Holy Spirit*
8. How does the Bible's teaching about the inspiration of Scripture prove that the Spirit is God?  
*The Bible is God's word, and it is what the Spirit inspired.)*
9. How does the Bible teach that all Persons of the Trinity give new life?  
*John 5:21 says that the Father raises the dead and gives life so the Son also gives life. Jesus also said that He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25,26). Ephesians 2:4,5 says that the Father made us alive with Christ. The Bible also teaches that the Spirit gives life (for example, John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6).*
10. What, if anything, did you learn in the lesson which you believe was most important for you to know?  
*(Each student will point to the teachings he thinks are important.)*

### Lesson Three

1. What is the difference between the perspectives of looking at ontological Trinity and economic Trinity?  
*The ontological Trinity describes who the Persons of the Trinity are, and the economic Trinity describes what the Persons of the Trinity do when God performs His works.*
2. What was the Son's role in the salvation of sinners?  
*The Son's role was to be sent by the Father and to do the Father's will in saving sinners.*
3. What false understanding of Christ does subordinationism teach?  
*Subordinationism teaches that, since the Son obeyed the Father, the Son being must be subordinate to (less than) the divinity of the Father.*
4. What was the Father's role in the salvation of sinners?  
*The Father is the source, and One who designed all that our salvation would include.)*
5. How can we understand the Bible when it says that the Father is the "God" of Christ?  
*The Father has authority over Christ, and Christ voluntarily submitted to the Father.*
6. What did the Holy Spirit do throughout Christ's life on earth?  
*The Spirit enabled Christ to fulfill His work as Savior by giving Christ the power the power which He needed.*
7. How do Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together?  
*The Father does all things through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
8. How is faith in Christ faith in the triune God?  
*Faith in Christ trusts in the Father Who sent Christ and in the Spirit who revealed Christ.*
9. What did you learn in this lesson that you had never thought of before?  
*(Each student will point to a teaching he thought was new to him.)*
10. Who is greater: the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?  
*They are equal in divinity; however the Father is "greater" only when that means He has authority over the Son.*

### Lesson Four

1. What are creeds?  
*Creeds express what the church believes from Scripture and what it chooses to confess as one church to the world.*
2. How did the teachings of Gnosticism deny the teaching of the Trinity?  
*It taught that Christ is not divine. He is a representative of God.*
3. What did Monarchianism teach?  
*Monarchianism teaches that there is one true God and He is one person.*
4. What does Modalism teach?  
*Modalism says that one true God has only one Person and that He revealed Himself in three different ways: sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Spirit.*
5. Summarize what Arianism teaches concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?  
*Arianism teaches that the Father is the only true God, that the Son is the Father's first creature, and the Spirit is the impersonal power of God.*
6. What did the Council of Nicea say about the teachings of Arianism?  
It said that Arianism was seriously wrong and that the Son was begotten but not created.
7. What did the Cappadocians contribute to the church's discussion of the Trinity?  
They included the Holy Spirit in the discussions. They said that the Spirit was of the same substance of the Father and the Son and that the three Persons together were the true God.
8. What did the Council of Constantinople conclude from the Bible which Pneumatomachists would not accept?  
The Council said that the Holy Spirit was eternal and divine along with the Father and Son. The Pneumatomachists said the Spirit was a creature under the Son.
9. What was the most important thing you learned from this lesson?  
*(Each student will point to a teaching he thought was new to him.)*
10. What errors, if any, mentioned in this chapter do you know are being promoted in churches near you?  
*(Each student will give his own insight concerning churches which he knows.)*

### Lesson Five

1. Where in the world do the cults exist?  
*Cults exist in virtually every nation where Christ's church can be found.)*

2. Look up “sect” and “cult” in the dictionary. How do the definitions there compare to the explanations given in this lesson?  
*(Students may find that their dictionaries agree in saying that a “sect” is a group which has separated itself but which is still faithful to the basic beliefs of Christianity which a “cult” has removed itself beyond the boundaries of Christianity. Possibly the dictionary will define them differently).*
3. Name a Christian sect in your country and explain why you believe it is not a cult.  
*(Students will give their own answer and reason.)*
4. Where did cults with Christian roots arise?  
*They began in the Christian Church.)*
5. What general characteristics of the cults did Hoekema list?  
*They broke abruptly with historic Christianity; they tend to major on minors; and they tend to be perfectionistic.)*
6. List and explain the traits of the cults which Hutten found.  
*They trust in additional “revelation” besides the Bible; they deny the doctrine of justification alone; they devalue Who Christ is and what He did; they think their group has the only people who are saved; they think their group will be central in God’s activity during the last days.*
7. Why do you think an extra-Scriptural source of authority is dangerous for the church?  
*(Student should be given freedom to express his own opinion. Hopefully the person will understand that, if a group holds to an authority outside the Bible, then all kinds of merely human ideas will be followed instead of the ideas from God’s word.)*
8. Why do you think a religious group which denies Christ’s divinity will also deny that salvation is by grace alone?  
*(The lesson suggests that by denying Christ’s divinity as person will deny that salvation is the work of God. The student should agree with that or state why he does not agree.)*
9. Pick a group which you believe is a cult. What reasons do you have for believing that it is a cult?  
*(Each student should identify the group. The reasons given for believing the group is a cult should apply at least some of the points found in answers 5 and 6.)*
10. What important lesson or insight did you learn in this lesson?  
*(Each student will give what was the most important insight for him, but some insight from the lesson must be given.)*

## Lesson Six

1. What important teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses did you learn from this lesson?  
*(Each student will give a teaching which he did not know before he read this lesson.)*
2. What facts about the original leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses did you find interesting?  
*(Students will list at least two biographical facts from the lesson.)*
3. What three features of the cults did we evaluate when we looked at the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses?  
*The lesson presented the Jehovah's Witness' teachings concerning the basis of their teachings; their doctrine of Christ; and their understanding of salvation.*
4. What basis do Jehovah's Witnesses have for their teachings?  
*Jehovah's Witnesses base their teachings on human reason, their Bible, and the literature of their official organization. )*
5. What is wrong with the Jehovah's Witness translation of the Bible?  
*The Jehovah's Witness Bible is biased. This can be seen when words are changed to keep the Holy Spirit from appearing to be a Person and when words are changed to keep Christ from appearing to be divine.*
6. What is Arianism?  
*Arianism (see Lesson Four, p. 4) teaches that God is not triune, that Christ is God the Father first creature, and that the Spirit is an impersonal power of God.)*
7. What do Jehovah's Witness say about who Christ is?  
*Jehovah's Witnesses say that what the Bible says about Jehovah is never written about Christ. Instead, Christ is God's first creature; though he has much power and authority, he does not possess all power and authority.)*
8. What do Jehovah's Witness mean when they say that Christ's saving work was to ransom?  
*Jehovah's Witnesses teach that, while he was on earth, Jesus was a man who died to release people from the bondage of Satan.)*
9. What is our reason for saying that Christ is the LORD, Jehovah?  
*This lesson summarizes the material of Lesson Two, which shows that the Bible gives Jesus divine names, describes Him as having divine attributes, shows that He performs divine works, and receives divine worship (Lesson Two)*
10. What advice did this Lesson give concerning answering the Jehovah's Witnesses?

*The Lesson advised us to answer Jehovah's Witnesses by showing that what the Bible says concerning Jehovah is also says concerning Jesus Christ. For example both names are called the "First and the Last;" both are called "I am;" and both are present everywhere.*

### **Lesson Seven**

1. What did you learn about Mormonism that you did not know before?  
*(Each student will write at least one fact about Mormonism from the lesson.)*
2. What experiences in Joseph Smith's boyhood seemed to affect this theology when he was adult?  
*He witnessed many church splits and divisions. We grew up curious about who was buried in burial mounds near his home.*
3. What are the sources of authority for Mormonism?  
*Mormons claim to follow the Bible when it is translated their way; they also follow The Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants.*
4. What is wrong with the Mormons' Bible?  
*The Bible which the Mormons us was changed by Joseph Smith to make it conform to revelations which he supposedly received.*
5. Who is Christ according to the Mormons?  
*According to Mormons Christ was a spirit in heaven who received his physical body when God the Father and the virgin Mary were physically united. On earth he was tested and eventually married; all this was necessary for him to become a god.*
6. According to Mormons, what are the names of the different Kingdoms where people will go after the judgment?  
*Mormons believe the following kingdoms exist: the Telestial, Terrestrial, and Celestial kingdoms.*
7. Which people will go to each kingdom?  
*Bad people who did not repent will go to the Telestial Kingdom. Partially good people, such as those who lived honorable lives while they were still under the influence of deceitful men and lukewarm Mormons, will go to the Terrestrial Kingdom. Those who lived the good Mormon life and obeyed all ordinances of the Mormon Church will go to the Celestial Kingdom.*
8. What arguments would you use to show a Mormon that he has a wrong understanding of who God is?  
*The Bible teaches that there is only one true God and that He does not share his glory with anyone else. )*

9. List three teachings of Mormonism with which you disagree?  
*(Each student will list teachings of Mormonism which this lesson presents.)*
10. What questions about Mormonism do you have which this lesson has not answered?  
*(Each student will list at least one question which this lesson does not answer.)*

### **Lesson Eight**

1. What does 1 Peter 3 teach about how Christians should explain the hope they have?  
*It says Christians should give an answer with gentleness and respect. We do not want those who speak against us to be able to say we were rude when we spoke to them.)*
2. Why did the Protestant reformers come up with the four “solas”?  
*The church in their day was hiding the gospel from the people as it taught the opposite of these four “solas”.*
3. How does “Scripture Alone” disagree with the teaching of the cults?  
*The cults follow other authorities besides Scripture. Scripture Alone teaches that only the Bible was inspired of God to give us God’s word.*
4. What do the cults teach which disagrees with “grace alone”?  
*The cults teach that a person is saved based primarily on the good works he has done. They may see Jesus as helping us get the chance to earn our salvation, but the merits they trust in are their own.*
5. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity important in the emphasis of “Christ Alone”?  
*We must be saved by Christ alone because the Father sent Him to be our Savior and the Spirit empowered Him to be our Savior. Christ alone is the Savior Whom the triune God gives us so we might be saved.*
6. How does the doctrine of the Trinity help us believe that salvation is by “Faith Alone”?  
*We can trust the gospel of Christ because He is God and because the Bible, which reveals the gospel of Christ to us, is inspired by the Holy Spirit who is God.*
7. What did you learn from this lesson that you did not know before?  
*(Each student will state what he learned from this lesson.)*

#### 4. TEST – The Trinity and the Cults

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. If the Bible does not use the word “Trinity,” may we use the word to name a major doctrine which we say comes from the Bible?
- No, because teachings that come from Scripture must always use the words of Scripture.
  - Yes, because “Trinity” refers to a teaching which comes from Scripture.
  - No, because only unbelievers use the word “Trinity.”
  - Yes, because every religion believes in the Trinity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Why is it important to believe that God exists in three distinct Persons?
- This is the only logical understanding of God.
  - People who need to be saved will think this doctrine is easy to accept.
  - We have chosen to make this an important teaching.
  - This is the way the true God has revealed Himself to us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What do we mean when we say the Son of God is incarnate?
- We mean that God the Son added to Himself our human nature which includes a human body.
  - We mean that Christ came at the right time.
  - We mean that Jesus is in heaven today.
  - We mean that the Son of God became a person when He was born.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Explain the main reason given in this course to prove that the Son and Spirit are God equal with the Father.
- The Bible describes the Son and Spirit as having the glory the Father has and as doing the works which the Father does.
  - Most Christians simply agree that this is true.
  - The name “Holy Spirit” means He is more than an ordinary spirit.
  - The Bible does not teach this, but the church creeds do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. How does the name “first and last” prove that Christ is God?
- Christ is the first and last Person mentioned in the Bible.
  - The name, “first and last” sounds mysterious, and therefore is divine.
  - This name is also given to the LORD, Who we know is divine.
  - The Old Testament says that the person who is the “first and last” is also named Christ.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. How were the Son and Spirit involved in the creation of the universe?
- The Father, Son, and Spirit are the same Person, who created the universe.
  - The Spirit helped create, but the Son did not exist then.
  - The Son helped create, but the Spirit did not exist then.
  - Everything was created through the Son and by power of the Holy Spirit
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What false understanding of Christ does subordinationism teach?
- Subordinationism teaches that Christ was less than human.
  - Subordinationism teaches that the Son is subordinate to (less than) the divinity of the Father.
  - Subordinationism teaches that Jesus understood that Michael was the greatest angel in heaven.
  - Subordinationism teaches that Christ placed kings under the authority of Christians.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What was the Father's role in the salvation of sinners?
- The Father is the source, and One who designed all that our salvation would include.
  - The Father gave the Son the authority to do whatever the Son wanted to do.
  - Christ was conceived by the Father and born of the virgin Mary.
  - The Father died on the cross along with Christ.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. How can we understand the Bible when it says that the Father is the "God" of Christ?
- That the Father was ahead of the Son in becoming divine, so there was a time when the Father had become divine but the Son had not yet become divine.
  - The Father claimed to be God, but the Son did not.
  - The Father is God, and the Son is not.
  - The Father has authority over Christ, and Christ voluntarily submitted to the Father.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. How is faith in Christ faith in the triune God?
- Faith in Christ trusts in the Father Who sent Christ and in the Spirit who revealed Christ.
  - Faith believes that the Father and Spirit did exactly what Christ did.
  - Faith in Christ is so important that we do not have to believe in the Father or the Spirit.
  - Christ means the whole Trinity so faith in Christ is faith in the Trinity.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. What are creeds?
- Creeds are the unique beliefs a denomination has.
  - Creeds are the teachings which all cults believe together.
  - Creeds express what the church believes from Scripture and chooses to confess as one church to the world.
  - “Creeds” refers to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. What did Monarchianism teach?
- Monarchianism teaches that all religions teach the same say of salvation.
  - Monarchianism teaches that each nation has only one god.
  - Monarchianism teaches that there are many gods and that all of them rule the world together.
  - Monarchianism teaches that there is one true God and He is one person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. What does Modalism teach?
- Modalism says that one true God has only one Person and that He revealed Himself in three different ways or modes.
  - Modalism says that most religions teach something that is true.
  - Modalism says that Jehovah is the only name of the true God.
  - Modalism says that there is one true God who is the God of only the New Testament and the god of the Old Testament is false.
14. Summarize what Arianism teaches concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- Arianism teaches that the Father and Son are God, but the Spirit is not.
  - Arianism teaches that the Father is the only true God, that the Son is the Father’s first creature, and the Spirit is the impersonal power of God.
  - Arianism teaches that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same Person.
  - Arianism teaches that there is not true God and that only false religions believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. What did the Council of Nicea say about the teachings of Arianism?
- It said that Arianism is seriously wrong but that it was so confusing it was not misleading very many people.
  - It said that Arianism is correct.
  - It said that Arianism is mostly correct, but that its greatest problem was pride.
  - It said that Arianism was seriously wrong and that the Son was begotten but not created.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Where in the world do the cults exist?
- Nearly all cults come from the United States of America.
  - Cults exist in virtually every nation where Christ's church can be found.
  - Cults are false groups which exist mostly in Presbyterian and Baptist churches.
  - Cults can be found mostly in universities because students are taught to reject the teaching of the Trinity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Which of these is not in the general characteristics of the cults which Hoekema lists?
- They broke abruptly with historic Christianity;
  - They build large buildings for their worship.
  - They tend to major on minors.
  - They tend to be perfectionistic.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. What basis do Jehovah's Witnesses have for their teachings?
- Jehovah's Witnesses use only the Bible.
  - Jehovah's Witnesses have not official teachings because they rely on the visions they receive when they witness.
  - Jehovah's Witnesses base their teachings on human reason, their Bible, and the literature of their official organization.
  - Jehovah's Witnesses base their teachings only on human reason and the Bible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. What is wrong with the Jehovah's Witness translation of the Bible?
- The Jehovah's Witness Bible is biased.
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  - c. “Scripture Alone” means that God is triune.
  - d. “Scripture Alone” means only one of the cults have the right Scriptures.

## 5. TEST – Coordinator’s copy

Student’s Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. If the Bible does not use the word “Trinity,” may we use the word to name a major doctrine which we say comes from the Bible?
- No, because teachings that come from Scripture must always use the words of Scripture.
  - Yes, because “Trinity” refers to a teaching which comes from Scripture.**
  - No, because only unbelievers use the word “Trinity.”
  - Yes, because every religion believes in the Trinity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Why is it important to believe that God exists in three distinct Persons?
- This is the only logical understanding of God.
  - People who need to be saved will think this doctrine is easy to accept.
  - We have chosen to make this an important teaching.
  - This is the way the true God has revealed Himself to us.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What do we mean when we say the Son of God is incarnate?
- We mean that God the Son added to Himself our human nature which includes a human body.**
  - We mean that Christ came at the right time.
  - We mean that Jesus is in heaven today.
  - We mean that the Son of God became a person when He was born.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Explain the main reason given in this course to prove that the Son and Spirit are God equal with the Father.
- The Bible describes the Son and Spirit as having the glory the Father has and as doing the works which the Father does.**
  - Most Christians simply agree that this is true.
  - The name “Holy Spirit” means He is more than an ordinary spirit.
  - The Bible does not teach this, but the church creeds do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. How does the name “first and last” prove that Christ is God?
- Christ is the first and last Person mentioned in the Bible.
  - The name, “first and last” sounds mysterious, and therefore is divine.
  - This name is also given to the Lord, Who we know is divine.**
  - The Old Testament says that the person who is the “first and last” is also named Christ.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. How were the Son and Spirit involved in the creation of the universe?
- The Father, Son, and Spirit are the same Person, who created the universe.
  - The Spirit helped create, but the Son did not exist then.
  - The Son helped create, but the Spirit did not exist then.
  - Everything was created through the Son and by power of the Holy Spirit**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What false understanding of Christ does subordinationism teach?
- Subordinationism teaches that Christ was less than human.
  - Subordinationism teaches that the Son is subordinate to (less than) the divinity of the Father.**
  - Subordinationism teaches that Jesus understood that Michael was the greatest angel in heaven.
  - Subordinationism teaches that Christ placed kings under the authority of Christians.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What was the Father's role in the salvation of sinners?
- The Father is the source, and One who designed all that our salvation would include.**
  - The Father gave the Son the authority to do whatever the Son wanted to do.
  - Christ was conceived by the Father and born of the virgin Mary.
  - The Father died on the cross along with Christ.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. How can we understand the Bible when it says that the Father is the "God" of Christ?
- That the Father was ahead of the Son in becoming divine, so there was a time when the Father had become divine but the Son had not yet become divine.
  - The Father claimed to be God, but the Son did not.
  - The Father is God, and the Son is not.
  - The Father has authority over Christ, and Christ voluntarily submitted to the Father.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. How is faith in Christ faith in the triune God?
- Faith in Christ trusts in the Father Who sent Christ and in the Spirit who revealed Christ.**
  - Faith believes that the Father and Spirit did exactly what Christ did.
  - Faith in Christ is so important that we do not have to believe in the Father or the Spirit.
  - Christ means the whole Trinity so faith in Christ is faith in the Trinity.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. What are creeds?
- a. Creeds are the unique beliefs a denomination has.
  - b. Creeds are the teachings which all cults believe together.
  - c. **Creeds express what the church believes from Scripture and chooses to confess as one church to the world.**
  - d. “Creeds” refers to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. What did Monarchianism teach?
- a. Monarchianism teaches that all religions teach the same say of salvation.
  - b. Monarchianism teaches that each nation has only one god.
  - c. Monarchianism teaches that there are many gods and that all of them rule the world together.
  - d. **Monarchianism teaches that there is one true God and He is one person.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. What does Modalism teach?
- a. **Modalism says that one true God has only one Person and that He revealed Himself in three different ways or modes.**
  - b. Modalism says that most religions teach something that is true.
  - c. Modalism says that Jehovah is the only name of the true God.
  - d. Modalism says that there is one true God who is the God of only the New Testament and the god of the Old Testament is false.
14. Summarize what Arianism teaches concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- a. Arianism teaches that the Father and Son are God, but the Spirit is not.
  - b. **Arianism teaches that the Father is the only true God, that the Son is the Father’s first creature, and the Spirit is the impersonal power of God.**
  - c. Arianism teaches that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same Person.
  - d. Arianism teaches that there is not true God and that only false religions believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. What did the Council of Nicea say about the teachings of Arianism?
- a. It said that Arianism is seriously wrong but that it was so confusing it was not misleading very many people.
  - b. It said that Arianism is correct.
  - c. It said that Arianism is mostly correct, but that its greatest problem was pride.
  - d. **It said that Arianism was seriously wrong and that the Son was begotten but not created.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Where in the world do the cults exist?
- Nearly all cults come from the United States of America.
  - Cults exist in virtually every nation where Christ's church can be found.**
  - Cults are false groups which exist mostly in Presbyterian and Baptist churches.
  - Cults can be found mostly in universities because students are taught to reject the teaching of the Trinity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Which of these is **not** in the general characteristics of the cults which Hoekema lists?
- They broke abruptly with historic Christianity;
  - They build large buildings for their worship.**
  - They tend to major on minors.
  - They tend to be perfectionistic.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. What basis do Jehovah's Witnesses have for their teachings?
- Jehovah's Witnesses use only the Bible.
  - Jehovah's Witnesses have not official teachings because they rely on the visions they receive when they witness.
  - Jehovah's Witnesses base their teachings on human reason, their Bible, and the literature of their official organization.**
  - Jehovah's Witnesses base their teachings only on human reason and the Bible.
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## 6. COURSE EVALUATION BY THE STUDENTS

Name of the course \_\_\_\_\_ Course time/schedule \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Instructor being evaluated \_\_\_\_\_

Place where the course was given \_\_\_\_\_

Please evaluate according to the following criteria.

1. Was the Instructor prepared to teach the course?
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
2. The course requirements were explained:
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
3. How important is this course for your service to the Lord?
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
4. The Instructor's efforts to listen to your questions and seek to answer them were:
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
5. The availability of course materials was:
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
6. To what extent was this course taught from a Biblical and Christian perspective?
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
7. Was the course material relevant for your life's context?
  - Not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - in some ways \_\_\_\_\_
  - in many ways \_\_\_\_\_
  - very much so \_\_\_\_\_
8. What were the classroom conditions like?
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
9. The costs for the course are:
  - not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - regular \_\_\_\_\_
  - good \_\_\_\_\_
  - excellent \_\_\_\_\_
10. Is this course worth teaching to others?
  - Not good \_\_\_\_\_ Comments: \_\_\_\_\_
  - maybe \_\_\_\_\_
  - yes \_\_\_\_\_
  - definitely so \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. PEDAGOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE INSTRUCTOR

Name of the Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Course \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Were you able to observe that the Instructor, as well as the students, was learning?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know
2. In your opinion, what did the Instructor learn during the course?
3. Did the Instructor come to the class well prepared to teach this course? In what ways was he/she prepared or not prepared?
4. Did the Instructor adjust his/her teaching method to the learning style of the students?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know
5. Make a list of five things you have learned during this course
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.
6. Is the Instructor knowledgeable in the subject matter he/she is teaching about?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know
7. In what way has this course caused you to become more involved in the service of Christ?
8. Did the Instructor establish good communication with the students?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know
9. Identify these points of communication:
10. Has the Instructor shown that his/her teaching is not only "head knowledge" but that it has reached his/her heart?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know
11. How has the Instructor shown that his/her teachings come from the heart?
12. Were the teachings motivational?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know

13. What were you motivated to do as a result of taking this course?
14. Were both the Instructors and students prepared to take this course?  
 Yes  
 No  
 I do not know
15. How much time in class were spent in this course? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs.
16. How much time did it take you to do the homework? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs. (not counting special project or extra readings)
17. How much time did you spend completing the extra readings? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs. How many pages did you read? \_\_\_\_\_
18. How much time did it take to do the special project? \_\_\_\_\_ hrs.
19. At what educational level did you take the course?  
 Certificate  
 Bachelor  
 Master
20. What tuition did you pay for the course? \_\_\_\_\_ How much did books and materials cost?  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. Would you recommend this course to another student?  
 Yes  
 No  
 I do not know
22. Were you prepared to teach this course to others?  
 Yes  
 No  
 I do not know
23. Mention five ways in which you were prepared in this course to teach others.  
1.  
2.  
3.  
4.
24. What suggestions would you make to improve this course?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
25. If you were to teach this course, where and when would you do so?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you.



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