

# From the Mists of Time: The Trinity and Church History

History is a wonderful guide but a lousy taskmaster. As long as we use history as a light to illumine but not an authority to obey we can profit greatly from its study. In the same way, history can shed much light on the doctrine of the Trinity, but only insofar as it shows us how the people of God have struggled to safeguard and defend the truth of God revealed to them in Christ.

There are many volumes written about the history of the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the person of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> We will not even try to summarize the huge mountain of material that exists on the subject. Instead, let's answer one simple question: can we trace a belief in the fundamental doctrines we have examined in the Scriptures through the earliest writers of the Christian faith? That is, did they believe in only one true God? Did they believe in the deity of Christ? Did they differentiate between the Father, Son, and Spirit?

It would be nice if we could find a second-century "theology

book" from the early church, a series of creedal statements, or some document or artifact that would give us a clear, exhaustive view of the beliefs of the early Christians in the decades immediately after the ministry of the apostles. But it is highly doubtful that we will ever find such a treasure. The reason is very simple: when you are running for your life, in-depth theological reflection, study, and writing is not a high priority. Until the beginning of the fourth century, the church experienced intense persecution. Sometimes it was localized, sometimes it spanned the Roman empire. There were a couple of periods when the church enjoyed a decade or two of peace. But on the flip side, there were other periods in which they experienced a decade or two of horrific persecution resulting in great bloodshed.

Even when the church had peace her attention was not focused upon the finer points of theology. While we can find a deep witness to a belief in one God and in the deity of Christ, from the beginning, the specific relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit was not the first priority for those writers who put quill and ink to paper. A more basic defense of the validity of the Christian faith consumed those who wrote for "outsiders." As far as what was most important *within* the church, the issue of what to do about those who apostatized during periods of persecution but then desired admission back into the church was far more on the mind of people than anything else.

The end of persecution brought an almost immediate refocusing of the church's attention upon the issues of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Indeed, the first major council of the church, called by Emperor Constantine in Nicaea in A.D. 325, addressed the issue of the nature of Christ a scant dozen years after the persecutions ended. The next centuries were spent working through the fine details of these concepts.

## **CLEMENT OF ROME**

One of the earliest Christian writings outside of the New Testament is a lengthy letter written from the church at Rome to the church at Corinth regarding a rebellion that had taken place within the assembly

at Corinth. Some unruly people had risen up and rebelled against the elders of the church, removing them from their positions of leadership. The church at Rome wrote to the church at Corinth, remonstrating with them as equals regarding this action. There is no specific name attached to the letter. Tradition eventually credited it to Clement, bishop of Rome. However, at the time, there was no one bishop in either Rome or Corinth. Instead, the biblical pattern of a plurality of elders prevailed. Clement may have been one of those elders, or even a scribe for the group.

Clement is soaked in Scripture. That there is only one true God, and that the Father, Son, and Spirit are separate persons, are clearly truths fundamental to Clement's beliefs. God has all power and is the Creator of all things:

For by His infinitely great power He established the heavens, and by His incomprehensible understanding He set them in order. (33)<sup>2</sup>

There is only one true God:

Surely he knew; but so that there might be no rebellion in Israel he did this so that the name of the true and only God might be glorified; to whom be glory for ever and ever. (43)

Clement clearly differentiates between the Father and the Son:

Therefore, all these were glorified and magnified, not because of themselves, or through their own works, or for the righteous deeds they performed, but by His will. And we also, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by means of ourselves, nor by our own wisdom or understanding or godliness or works which we have done in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which the Almighty God has justified all *those believing* from the beginning. To whom be glory for ever and ever, amen. (32)

By love all the elect of God have been perfected; without love nothing is well-pleasing to God. In love has the Sovereign taken us to Himself. On account of the love He had for us, Jesus Christ

our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God—and His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls. (49)

This blessedness comes upon those who have been chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (50)

But most significant for our study is the appearance of the very same kind of Trinitarian passages in Clement that we have found in the New Testament. Two such passages stand out:

For Christ is of those who are humble-minded, and not of those who exalt themselves over His flock. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Scepter of the majesty of God, did not come in the pomp of pride or arrogance (though He could have!), but in a humble state, just as the Holy Spirit had spoken concerning Him. (16)

Even more specific is this passage, rich with theological meaning and content:

For as God lives, and the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit, who are the faith and hope of the chosen ones—the one who in humility of mind, with extended gentleness, without regret has done the ordinances and commandments given by God, this one will be enrolled and given a name among the number of the saved through Jesus Christ, through whom is the glory unto Him for ever and ever, amen. (58)

Just as in the New Testament, the intimate cooperation of the Father, Son, and Spirit (here using the common Trinitarian names used by Paul, God, Lord, and Spirit) in the work of salvation is prevalent in Clement's thinking. He describes the three persons as the "faith and hope of the chosen ones," a phrase that would make no sense outside of a belief in the full deity of all three. It would be blasphemous to speak of God, Michael, and some other lesser creature as the faith and hope of the elect.

## IGNATIUS

The first major Christian writer to produce multiple letters of theological interest is Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (d. 107). While on his way to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius wrote a series of letters to various churches. While it was not his intention to produce a systematic theology by so doing, he did give us some very clear statements regarding important doctrinal beliefs of the early church. Most important for our purposes is his crystalline testimony to the deity of Christ. While some have attempted to hide his words,<sup>3</sup> they speak with great clarity and force. He speaks easily of Christ as God, borrowing from the apostle John (1:1; 20:28). Tradition says Ignatius knew John, which might explain the similarity of language. Yet there is no hint of polytheism (a belief in more than one God), and the Father is clearly distinguished from the Son and the Spirit. Notice how Ignatius begins his letter to the Ephesians:

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to her who has been blessed in greatness through the fulness of God the Father, ordained before time to be always resulting in permanent glory, unchangeably united and chosen in true passion, by the will of the Father and of *Jesus Christ, our God*, to the church which is in Ephesus of Asia, worthy of felicitation: abundant greetings in Jesus Christ and in blameless joy. (Ephesians 1)<sup>4</sup>

Ignatius speaks of such items as the conception of Christ and His deity as "givens," not explaining these beliefs, but instead viewing them as the New Testament writers did: as common convictions of those to whom he was writing. In this citation from his epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius not only directly calls Jesus Christ "our God,"<sup>5</sup> but note the conjunction of the three persons:

My spirit is but an offscouring of the cross, which is a scandal to the unbelieving, but to us it is salvation and life eternal. Where is the wise man? Where is the disputer? Where is the boasting of those who are called understanding? *For our God, Jesus the Christ*, was conceived by Mary according to a dispensation of *God*, from

the seed of David, yes, but of the *Holy Spirit* as well. (Ephesians 18)

Lest someone think that for Ignatius "our God" is something less than "God" himself, note these words concerning the Incarnation:

... the ancient kingdom was utterly destroyed when *God appeared in the likeness of man* unto newness of everlasting life. (Ephesians 19)

Ignatius shows a true Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God when he can speak of the Father, the Son, and then of Jesus Christ as God. There is no confusion of the persons, just a clear recognition and repeated assertion of the deity of Christ:

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to her that has found mercy in the majesty of the Most High Father and of Jesus Christ His only Son; to the church that is beloved and enlightened through the will of Him who willed all things that exist, by faith and love toward *Jesus Christ our God*; even to her that has the presidency in the country of the region of the Romans. (Romans 1)

That the term "God" is not *merely* a synonym for the Father for Ignatius is seen in this passage:

*For our God Jesus Christ*, being in the Father, is more plainly seen. The work is not of persuasiveness, but Christianity is a thing of might, whenever it is hated by the world. (Romans 3)

Ignatius can call Jesus God, and then the Son of God, in the same context without any difficulty:

I glorify *Jesus Christ the God* who gave to you such wisdom, for I know that you are fully established in immovable faith, just as if you have been nailed to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, both in flesh and in spirit, firmly established in love in the blood of Christ, completely persuaded with reference to our Lord that He is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but the Son of God

according to God's will and power, truly born from a virgin, having been baptized by John in order to by Him fulfill all righteousness. (Smyrneans 1)

The *depth* of Ignatius' doctrine of Christ demonstrates that such high views did not develop over time but are very primitive. That is not to say that others did not have less developed views, but that high views of Christ in regard to His deity, His natures, etc., can be found as early in the record as any other belief. Note what he wrote to Polycarp:

Await the One who is above every season, the Eternal, the Invisible, the One who for our sake became visible, the Untouched, the Impassible, who for our sake suffered, who endured in every way for our sake. (Polycarp 3)

Here Ignatius describes the Son as eternal, invisible, impalpable, and impassible. One is reminded of Paul's words to Timothy (1:17):

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Surely Ignatius had no problem in describing the Son in this way. And the height of his Christology can be seen in this incredible description of Jesus Christ:

There is one physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Ephesians 7)

One could well say that even fifth-century Trinitarian thought does not represent any substantial advancement beyond the concepts expressed here. Incarnation, the two natures of Christ—all clearly a part of the theology of the bishop from Antioch, the "birthplace" of Christianity.

It is not overly surprising, then, to find Trinitarian passages, presenting all three persons associated together in the work of salvation,

in Ignatius as well. One example will suffice:

... you being stones of a temple, prepared before as a building of *God the Father*, being raised up to the heights through the mechanism of *Jesus Christ*, which is the cross, and using as a rope the *Holy Spirit*... (Ephesians 9)

There is certainly nothing in Ignatius that can offer much solace to those who wish to deny the deity of Christ or present some aberrant view of the doctrine of God. And the fundamental elements of the Trinity—the three pillars of monotheism, the existence of three persons, and the deity of Christ and the Spirit—can easily be traced through his writings, providing a vitally important link between the New Testament writings and the first post-apostolic writings of the church.

## MELITO OF SARDIS

Melito, bishop of Sardis, died around the year A.D. 180. Until recently, few students of church history paid much attention to him. One of the reasons might be that he ended up on the “wrong side” of the ancient debate over how to determine the date of Easter. Only recently a sermon on the Passover was found, penned by Melito. It provides us with a tremendous insight into the theology of the late second century. I reproduce here just one section, which requires no commentary, only a hearty “Amen!”:

And so he was lifted up upon a tree and an inscription was attached indicating who was being killed. Who was it? It is a grievous thing to tell, but a most fearful thing to refrain from telling. But listen, as you tremble before him on whose account the earth trembled!

He who hung the earth in place is hanged.  
 He who fixed the heavens in place is fixed in place.  
 He who made all things fast is made fast on a tree.  
 The Sovereign is insulted.  
 God is murdered.



The King of Israel is destroyed by an Israelite hand.

This is the One who made the heavens and the earth,  
and formed mankind in the beginning,

The One proclaimed by the Law and the Prophets,

The One enfleshed in a virgin,

The One hanged on a tree,

The One buried in the earth,

The One raised from the dead

and who went up into the heights of heaven,

The One sitting at the right hand of the Father,

The One having all authority to judge and save,

Through Whom the Father made the things which exist from  
the beginning of time.

This One is "the Alpha and the Omega,"

This One is "the beginning and the end"

... the beginning indescribable and the end  
incomprehensible.

This One is the Christ.

This One is the King.

This One is Jesus.

This One is the Leader.

This One is the Lord.

This One is the One who rose from the dead.

This One is the One sitting on the right hand of the Father.

He bears the Father and is borne by the Father.

"To him be the glory and the power forever. Amen."

The deity of Christ, His two natures, His virgin birth, His being the Creator, His distinction from the Father—all part and parcel of the preaching of the bishop of Sardis near the end of the second century.

## THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

It is repeated by believer and even nonbeliever alike around the world. The Nicene Creed stands either for truth or for error for many millions of people. Here is what it says:<sup>6</sup>

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, the maker of

all things visible and invisible.

And we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, the unique Son, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten<sup>7</sup> not made, of one substance<sup>8</sup> with the Father, by Whom all things were made, whether things in heaven and things in earth, Who for us men and for our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit.

But for those who say "There was a time when He was not,"<sup>9</sup> and "Before He was begotten He was not," and "He was made of things that were not,"<sup>10</sup> or who assert that He is of a different substance or essence [from the Father], or that He is created or subject to change or alterable—the Catholic Church anathematizes them.

These words were the result of the greatest church council ever convened—not in size, but in importance. Beginning on June 19, 325, around 300 bishops, almost all from the Eastern portion of the Roman empire, met and considered the issue of the deity of Christ. Many bore the scars of years of persecution that had only recently ended (A.D. 313). They had been willing to lay down their lives for the gospel of Christ, and now they were called upon to deal with a division in the church brought on by the teachings of a man named Arius.

A presbyter in a suburb of Alexandria, Egypt, Arius is said by historians to have been a good communicator—a slick speaker who could convince by his speech and personality. About seven years prior to Nicaea, Arius began to publicly disagree with his bishop, Alexander, because Alexander was teaching that the Son of God had eternally existed. Instead, Arius insisted, "There was a time when the Son was not." Christ, to Arius, was a highly exalted, yet created, being. Alexander attempted to deal with the issue locally, and Arius was condemned by a local synod in 321. But he simply moved elsewhere and continued to teach and preach.

Arianism, as it came to be known, disturbed the newly found

peace of the Christian church. Rather than persecution from outside, now strife from within occupied the energies of believers. The Roman Emperor Constantine learned of the battle. Seeking a unified empire, and fearing the results a split of the Christian church could bring, Constantine moved to encourage reconciliation and resolution. Failing this, he called a council<sup>11</sup> to meet at Nicaea in the summer of 325.

### WHO BELIEVED WHAT

Hindsight is always 20/20, as they say, and it allows us to conveniently divide up the participants in the council in a way that might well make it look a little more simple than it was. Basically, there were three groups: the "different substance" party (Arius and his followers), the "same substance" party (Alexander, Hosius), and the "similar substance" party (Eusebius). The debate centered around whether Jesus is of the *same* substance as the Father (fully divine), a *different* substance (a created being, a creature), or a *similar substance*. The last option might sound like those holding to it were trying to introduce a second God, but that would be a misunderstanding. Instead, the "of a similar substance" group should be seen as a subset of the "same substance" group. The reason they hesitated to speak of Christ being "of the same substance as the Father" was that they feared this could be understood to teach an even older heresy that they detested as much as Arianism: modalism, the idea that Jesus is the Father. That is, modalists said the Father, Son, and Spirit were just three *modes of being*, and they denied that there were three coequal and coeternal *persons*. Many in the East had fought long and hard against modalism, so they were hesitant to affirm anything in the council that could be used by the very people they had been struggling against for generations. It took time to convince the "similar substance" group that their position could not be used to expose the errors of Arius and his followers, and that they were not, by accepting the statement that the Son is of the same substance as the Father, endorsing or supporting modalism.

Group/Leader(s)	Viewpoint
Arian/Arius	of a different substance— <i>heteroousios</i>
Orthodox/Alexander, Hosius, Athanasius	of the same substance— <i>homoousios</i>
Eusebian/Eusebius of Caesarea	of a similar substance— <i>homoiousios</i>

### THE TERM "HOMOOUSION"

The key phrase that came out of the Council of Nicaea describes the relationship of the Son to the Father: "of one substance (*homoousion*) with the Father." This was the phrase that the Arians could not abide. By means of this assertion, the Council excluded them from the very fellowship of the church itself. The fact that it was precise in its meaning, specific and unambiguous, made it especially useful in clearly differentiating between the orthodox party and the Arians. The term had been used in other contexts before,<sup>12</sup> but this was the first time it was used to specifically assert the full, complete deity of Jesus Christ.

Many wonder about how appropriate it is to use a term that is not found in the Bible in the way the Council of Nicaea used it. Of course, the anti-Arian bishops would like to have used simple biblical terminology, but the duplicity of the Arians would not allow for such a conclusion to the matter. By redefining terms outside of their biblical context, the Arians were able to agree to pretty much any formulation placed on terms like "Son of God" or "Creator" or "God" or "Lord." But directly asserting that the Son and the Father share the same divine *being* forced the Arian's hand: they could not find a way of agreeing with such a statement. Surely the Bible taught the underlying truth—so the Council was maintaining the *essence* of biblical truth by using a more specific term. The other option involved the slavish use of biblical terminology *at the cost of the essence of biblical truth*. What good is it, though, to maintain the *language* of Scripture at the cost of the

meaning of Scripture?<sup>13</sup> So concluded the Nicene Fathers, and hence they used the term *homoousion*. They did not feel they were going beyond Scripture's teaching to do so. Years later, Athanasius defended their actions in speaking against the Arians:

Vainly they run about alleging that they have demanded councils for the sake of the faith. For indeed divine Scripture is sufficient above all things; but if a Council is needed concerning this, there are the acts of the Fathers. For the bishops who were at Nicaea did not neglect this issue, but also wrote so clearly, that the ones who legitimately consider their record are forced by them to remember the religion of Christ proclaimed in the divine Scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

## IT DIDN'T END THERE

While some might believe that the pronouncement of a Council would simply end the matter for all concerned, such would be a gross oversimplification. The Nicene definition had to fight for its life not on the basis that it was an "infallible church council" and therefore had some special authority in and of itself, but on the only meaningful and solid foundation: its faithfulness to the Scriptures.

That's not to say that the opponents of the deity of Christ fought on the same grounds. In fact, the "Arian Resurgency" that took place in the decades after Nicaea was due mainly to political factors and the maneuvering of particular leaders who were opposed to the Nicene definition. Arian bishops courted the favor first of Constantine, and upon his death, his son Constantius. During the reign of Constantius numerous councils met, producing Arian and semi-Arian creeds. Great champions of the Nicene faith were forced from their positions. Athanasius was forced to flee his church in Alexandria five different times. During the middle of the fourth century things were so bad that, looking only on outward things, it appeared that Nicaea had been defeated. Later Jerome would say of that time period, "The whole world groaned and was astonished to find itself Arian."<sup>15</sup>

But political power cannot overthrow scriptural truth. Once the Arians consolidated their power, they turned upon each other. Their

arguments were no more convincing then than they are today, and the simple believer, reading his or her Bible, could not help but see the truth of the full deity of Jesus Christ. The tide was turned, not by political power, but by the irresistible force of truth, and by the end of the century, Arianism was banished, at least from the mainstream of the church. It continues to exist today, in various forms, using the same arguments that were used many centuries ago.

Do Christians today believe in the Trinity and the deity of Christ just because the Council of Nicaea said so? Some might. I do not. I believe in the Trinity and the deity of Christ because it is the teaching of the Scriptures, as we have seen throughout this work. I accept the use of the term *homoousion* because it accurately reflects the teaching that there is one God, and that both the Father and the Son are described as being fully God, fully deity. Nicaea's authority, then, if we wish to use that term, is derived from its faithfulness to the scriptural testimony. It has validity today because what was true about Christ in A.D. 325 is true today, too. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

## THE ATHANASIAN CREED

The so-called "Athanasian Creed" was not, historically, the work of Athanasius himself. But since it bore such a resemblance to his teaching, his name was attached to it. It is an expansion of the Nicene Creed penned probably in the fifth century or so. A careful reading of the text is most useful in recognizing the elements of the doctrine that must be kept in balance with one another.

We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father infinite, the Son infinite, and the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. And

yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated, nor three infinites, but one uncreated, and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three Almightyies, but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the Catholic religion to say "There are three Gods, or three Lords." The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is before, or after, another. None is greater, or less, than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as was said before, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

# Does It Really Matter? Christian Devotion and the Trinity

The windshield wipers beat a regular rhythm as we drove along the Long Island Expressway. My friends Chris and Mike were driving me out to a motel way out in Patchogue, Long Island, where I would be speaking for the next few days. I had been on Long Island for almost a week, and I had another week left to go. Every little while I said the same thing. "You know, I really miss my wife." They would smile and nod. And a little while later, "Have I mentioned how much I really miss my wife?" They understood. All during my time away I was pulling out my wallet and showing off pictures of my wife to anyone who showed the slightest interest. I wanted everyone to know about my wife, how pretty she is, and how proud I am of her.

Everyone can understand my feelings. We have all had relationships where we so loved someone that we wanted everyone to know. And we wanted to tell others about that person, their accomplishments,



their skills—all those things that make us proud of that person.

That's why I've written this book. I love telling folks about my God. I tell everyone who will listen the truth about Him. And the truth about God is that He is triune. He exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I would not be happy if someone came along while I was showing off the pictures of my wife and said, "Oh, that's not your wife." Nor would I like it if someone said, "Oh, that's not your *only* wife!"

In the same way, I am tremendously bothered when someone comes along and says, "Jesus is not God." Or "There are other gods out there, too, you know." You see, such statements are untrue, and they dishonor the God who made me—and them. We are all naturally jealous that the *truth* about those we love be known. We are hurt when they are lied about, or misrepresented, or mistreated.

The same has to be true of our feelings about God. We *should*, if we truly love Him and His truth, be impacted by the denial of the truths He has revealed about himself. Impacted? How about upset? Even righteously angered? If we feel that way about loved ones who are our fellow creatures, how much more pure, holy, and intense should be our zealousness in defending the truth about the God we profess to worship and adore?

## THE TRINITY AND WORSHIP

Does it matter? Jesus said that the Father is seeking worshipers who will worship in spirit *and in truth*. God is not honored by the worship of false gods. And we are hardly benefited by worshiping something or someone that does not exist.

True Christian worship is founded upon Christian truth. We have to have knowledge of our God to worship Him correctly. If we have defective knowledge, or worse, if we have *wrong* information and have been deceived, our worship is either lessened (due to simple ignorance), or it is completely invalid, as the worship of idols and false gods. That is not to say that we have to have perfect knowledge to worship God—none of us do. But our desire must be to grow in the grace *and knowledge* of God, and we must always remember that Jesus taught that eternal life was the possession of those who *know* the one

true God. Knowledge does not save (that is the error of Gnosticism); but true worship does not exist without knowledge.

Almost every single imbalance in worship is due to a corresponding imbalance in our view of God. Some people become so enamored with the Spirit, for example, and their experience of Him that the Father and the Son are lost in the haze of emotions. Others are so focused upon the Father that they lose sight of the love of the Son and the joy and empowerment of the Spirit. One thing the doctrine of the Trinity does is always call us back to the balanced center point. We are never allowed to elevate one person to the expense of the others, since the fullness of deity dwells in each one completely.

Christian worship will be vital, consistent, and powerful when the proper attitude toward the triune God is maintained. When that truth is lost, Christian worship ends.

## **THE TRINITY AND THE GOSPEL**

The Gospel is the means by which the Father, in eternal love and mercy, saves men through the redeeming work of the Son, Jesus Christ, and draws them to himself by the power and regenerating work of the Spirit. The Gospel, as it is proclaimed in Scripture, is Trinitarian. Remove the Father and you have no Gospel. Remove the Son, and the Gospel ceases to exist. Remove the Spirit, and the Gospel has no existence. There is no separating the work of the triune God in salvation from the truth of the Trinity itself.

Look at the "gospel" message of every single group that denies the doctrine of the Trinity. You will find error and perversion in every group. Why? Because the true Gospel must be based upon the work of the one true and triune God. Without that basis, the Gospel cannot stand. Look at Mormonism, which denies the pillar of monotheism: the Gospel becomes the means to becoming a god. Look at the Witnesses: the Gospel is a mere appendage, a message of how we can live forever in a paradise earth. Such is what happens when the Redeemer becomes Michael the Archangel, and the Spirit becomes an impersonal active force. And in the Oneness groups the Gospel becomes legalism,

replete with "necessary" things one must "experience" to be *truly* saved.

Just as the Trinity requires us to be balanced and thorough in our reliance upon the Scriptures, so the Gospel demands the same care. The two go hand in hand, and it seems that those who lack clarity on the one inevitably end up in error on the other.

## THE TRINITY AND YOU

So does it really matter? Only you can answer that question for yourself. If you are a believer, it matters greatly. You know the longing in your heart to honor and glorify God, and you know instinctively that God is not honored by falsehood. You long for His Word so that you can grow in His grace and truth. And you want everyone else to know the truth about your God who has redeemed you.

I love the Trinity. I honor the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. I have been baptized in that one divine Name, and I gladly call myself a servant of the triune God. Do you love the Trinity? I hope and pray that our journey through the Scriptures has solidified your faith in this divine truth and given you great boldness and courage to share that faith with others. But most of all, I hope and pray it has helped you to fulfill the greatest commandment of all: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Truly I hope that you can join with me in singing,

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

Praise Him all creatures here below!

Praise Him above ye heavenly host!

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

Amen!