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READING ASSIGNMENT FOR STUDENTS TO BE READ BEFORE MEETING FOR LESSON 3

Doctrine #3: The God who is never alone

The doctrine of the Trinity

We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

We believe in one God who is at the same time three. Belief in one God is known as monotheism. Christians worship this one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the doctrine of the Trinity, which is essential to an understanding of God as revealed in the Bible, and is basic to the Christian faith.

Christian monotheism

Monotheism is the doctrine that there is only one God. This belief is not peculiar to Christianity. It is also the belief held by a large section of the world's population, including Jews, Muslims and Sikhs. However, Christian monotheism has its own particular meaning and content. It is important to know both what it means and what it does not mean. Christian monotheism means that the one God, eternal, supreme and personal, is revealed and known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.. God has always been, is and always will be Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Christian monotheism does not mean that God resides in passive isolation. He is a God related to his creation, he is not a static being, unrelated and unmoved. The great initiator, preserver and governor of all things interacts with his Creation. The way in which God makes himself known and meets with his people is central to the Bible story. Exodus 3:1-6, 13-14; 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 2 Kings 13:23; Jonah 3:10; Mark 12:29-31.

A God in fellowship

God is never alone. Within himself he enjoys perfect and full fellowship. Although he is always three, he is not three individuals who could be in competition or opposition. He is three persons, always united in being, attitude and action, a threefold God of love. These three persons commune with one another. God relates within himself. God is himself a communion. He is always Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each one always in fellowship with the others. Father, Son and Holy Spirit represent a dynamic circulation of life among equal persons without any authority or superiority of one over another. Any attempt to develop a false hierarchy of power and glory within the Trinity is to weaken the integrity of the Godhead and to undermine the complete unity of the persons.

The three-in-one definition attempts to describe a God who as Father creates, governs and sustains; as Son redeems, befriends and disciplines; and as Holy Spirit sanctifies, counsels and empowers. In persons and work he is three: in personality and love he is one. The three persons of the Trinity are continually revealing one another to us. The New Testament tells us that the Spirit bears witness to Jesus, Jesus Christ reveals the Father and testifies to the Spirit, the Father testifies to the Son. God created humanity because love expressed in community is the very essence of his nature, not because of any incompleteness within himself. As human beings, we are created in the image of God with a nature to relate to one another. We reach our fulfillment only in community with him and with one another. Without him and without each other, we lack wholeness and the possibility of maturity through developing relationships. God, then, is always in fellowship within himself and with us. The Bible witnesses to this truth, which is the foundation of the Christian doctrine of salvation and of Christian experience itself. An understanding of the Trinity helps us identify, and so avoid, many heresies.

When we speak of the triune God as one, it is in the sense of his wholeness and togetherness, and when we speak of God as three, it is in the sense of his threefold nature. Matthew 11:25-27; 28:19; John 14:8-26; 15:26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Jude 20-21

A God who makes himself known

God discloses his person and purposes as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the unfolding revelation of Scripture and in his saving encounters with us. Though God reveals himself in many ways, in the Bible he discloses

himself through relationships and critical events. He reveals himself in his relationships with Israel. He makes himself known through critical events, such as the Exodus, the rise and fall of the Hebrew kingdoms, the Exile and return, recorded in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, he makes himself known uniquely and supremely in the advent, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. This self-disclosure agrees with human experience in which person is disclosed to person as relationships are entered and honored and critical events shared. In the same way, God, who is personal and respects human personality, discloses his nature and his love for us.

We speak of God's self-disclosure because it is the nature of God to make himself known. God is love, and it is the characteristic of love to seek to be known to the loved one. Genesis 18:1-3; Psalm 19:1-6; Psalm 126; Psalm 136; Hosea 11:1-4; Luke 1:67-75; John 3:16; Romans 1:18-23; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Galatians 3:25-4:6; Philippians 2:5-11

A God involved with us

We believe that God is not far away, but is involved with us. This is seen in the Incarnation, the coming of God as a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. In the atonement for sin brought about by our Lord Jesus Christ in obedience to the Father, we see God crossing barriers to save the lost. This atonement makes possible the restoration of our relationship with God. God's involvement and initiative are further expressed in the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, which transforms our lives. God is not indifferent. He is involved in human experience and is concerned to nurture human life. Exodus 34:1-10; Nehemiah 9:9-17; Psalm 103:1-14; Jonah 4:1-11; Luke 1:30-33, 46-55; Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Titus 3: 4-7.

The danger of idolatry

Idolatry is worship offered or allegiance shown to false deities, demonic powers or material objects or values. In the Bible, idolatry is forbidden by the second commandment and is continually condemned in both the Old Testament and the New. It was the target both of Old Testament prophets, and of Christian preachers when they moved into the pagan world of the Roman Empire. Today idolatry is still an issue- though it takes different forms. It sometimes takes the form of traditional ways of worshiping objects and images and in the fear which they evoke. It is also seen in more subtle ways, in the worship of the state, of wealth, of status, race, other individuals, or other concepts.

It is an ever-present danger to the Christian who must never divert to religious movements or leaders the worship and adoration that is due to God alone. To guard against idolatry, we must focus on Jesus. By doing this we will be reminded of the glory of the Father who is revealed in the Son. The Holy Spirit will help us to resist all temptation to give to any other person or power that ultimate devotion which is due to God alone. n Exodus 20:4-6; Hosea 14:8-9; 1 Corinthians 10:14; Colossians 3:5; 1 John 5:21