

***WHAT IS THE TRINITY? - HERETICAL VIEWPOINTS***

In our previous paper on the Trinity (006A) we mentioned the three main heresies concerning this doctrine, namely, Tritheism, Arianism and Modalism. Here we will consider these heresies in the light of three modern cults that hold to them.

Tritheism - Mormonism:

Mormonism (The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints) is a typical esoteric cult in that it has one set of teachings for the general public and another set of teachings for the initiated members. This enables them to pretend to hold to orthodox Christian doctrine while in actual fact denying it. For example, in the book *Are Mormons Christians?* by Stephen E. Robinson (1991, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, UT), the author states "If by 'the doctrine of the Trinity' one means the New Testament teaching that there is a Father, a Son, and Holy Ghost, all three of whom are fully divine, the Latter-day Saints believe in the doctrine of the Trinity". In actual fact, however, Mormons do *not* believe in the Trinity because they believe in three separate gods connected with the planet earth (tritheism) and they also believe that there are many other gods on other planets in the universe (polytheism). In addition to this they believe that men may become gods and that the original gods were once men. The following quotations by Mormon authorities is typical of their confused thinking:

- a) "Gods exist, and we had better strive to prepare to be one with them." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, pg.351).
- b) "God himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man..." (*The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* by J. F. Smith, pg.345).
- c) "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become." (*The Gospel Through the Ages* by M. R. Hunter, pg.105, 106).
- d) "When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body and brought Eve, *one* of his celestial wives, with him...He is our father and our God and the only God with whom we have to do." (Brigham Young in *The Journal of Discourses*, Vol.1, pg.50).
- e) "Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are only one God! I say this is a strange God anyhow - three in one, and one in three! It is curious organization. All are to be crammed into one God according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God - he would be a giant or a monster." (*The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* by J. F. Smith, 1977, Deseret Book Co., Salt Lake City, UT).
- f) "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage

and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods." (*History of the Church* 6: 474, by Joseph Smith, Jr.)

It is no wonder that Walter R. Martin in *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1968, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, pg.198) states, "But it is the verdict of both history and Biblical theology that Joseph Smith's religion is a polytheistic nightmare of garbled doctrines draped with the garment of Christian terminology." And further, "To the unwary, however, they imply that they are monotheists, to the informed they defend their polytheism, and like the veritable chameleon they change color to accommodate the surface upon which they find themselves." (pg.181).

#### Arianism - Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses (The Watchtower Society) are classic modern day Arians. Their denial of the doctrine of the Trinity forces them to reduce Jesus Christ to the status of a lesser created god and the Holy Spirit to simply being a "force" or God's "power". They completely misunderstand the Christian doctrine of the Trinity by thinking that Christians believe in "three gods in one" or even worse, a "three-headed god" as can be shown in the following statements:

- a) "The doctrine, in brief, is that there are three gods in one: 'God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost,' all three equal in power, substance and eternity". (*Let God be True*, 1946, pg.100).
- b) "...sincere persons who want to know the true God and serve him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God." (*Let God be True*, 1946, pg.102).

The Witnesses really believe in two gods - the Almighty God Jehovah and a mighty god Jesus who was created by Jehovah (ditheism). It comes as a bit of a shock to them when they are told this as, strangely enough, they don't seem to realise it, but it can be seen from their following statements or interpretations of Scripture as given in their booklet *The Word: Who Is He? According to John* (1962):

- a) The JW's translate the latter part of Jhn.1: 1 as "*the Word was a god*" as against all other translations which render it correctly as "*the Word was God*". They then go on to argue that if *God* and *Trinity* mean the same thing then the Word was with the Trinity which means that we would end up with four Persons. They mistakenly think that the word *God* must always refer to the entire Trinity! They fail to see that the word *God* can refer to the entire Godhead or to only one or two Persons in the Godhead depending on the context in which it is used. It is like saying that the word "space" must always refer to three-dimensional space (volume) when, in fact, it can refer to one-dimensional space (distance), or two-dimensional space (area) as well. The JW understanding of John 1: 1 then is that the Word (Jesus) is a small god alongside the big God (Jehovah). In other words there are two Gods! This is flatly contradicted by Deut. 32: 39, "*See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides*

*me...*" and by Isa. 43: 10, "...before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me."

- b) They then go on to argue that if Jesus is not all of God but is only one of three Persons, then He must be only one-third of God. Again, they show a complete misunderstanding of the Trinity because this is tantamount to saying that length, breadth and height are each one-third of space! They are equal components of space but each is not a third of space. We can speak of them separately yet none of them can exist independently for each of them is essential to the one indivisible whole.
- c) On page 23 of their booklet the JW's state that the Bride of Rev.21: 9 is married to the Lamb and not to God Almighty (therefore implying that there are TWO separate Gods). If they read the book of Revelation properly they would note that in Rev.22: 1 & 3 that there is only ONE throne (of God and the Lamb) and that verse 4 says, "*They will see HIS face, and HIS name will be on their foreheads*". Also, Rev.21: 22 says that there is only ONE Temple and it is made up of "*the Lord God Almighty AND the Lamb*", while verse 23 says, "...for the glory of God gives it light, AND the Lamb is its lamp", thus stating that there is only ONE source of light. It is also interesting to note that in Rev.1: 8 and 21: 6 the Almighty is the Alpha and Omega, but in Rev.22 we have Jesus speaking and saying that He is coming quickly (v.7, 12, 16 & 20) and referring to Himself as the Alpha and Omega in verse 13.

Like all cultists, the Jehovah's Witnesses are muddled in their thinking and understanding of the Scriptures. In denying the deity of Jesus the JW's fall under the influence of the spirit of error and become liars and antichrists in the words of 1 John 2: 22 & 23, "*Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist - he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also*". Whereas the Mormons use a subtle chameleon approach to spread their doctrine, the Watchtower Society is more confrontational and relies upon the ignorance of the people they try to convert to their organisation.

#### Modalism- "Jesus Only" Oneness Pentecostals

Whereas the Jehovah's Witnesses emphasize the Father as God alone (Jehovah), the Jesus Only movement emphasizes the Son. Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Only churches believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is of the devil. And like the JW's, they display an alarming ignorance of church history, Bible doctrine and plain common sense, and base their theology on their interpretation of a few selected texts while ignoring the plain teaching of the rest of the Bible. Basically, their position is as follows, "The name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is *Jesus Christ!*" There is therefore only ONE Person in the Godhead - Jesus Christ! They attempt to elaborate on this as follows:

- a) "...when scripture speaks of 'one Lord', it so obviously means a mathematical one." (*The P.A.S.T.O.R.S. Course: Theology, Book Two of Five, pg. 99*).  
The following passages show that this statement cannot be true because they use the word ONE in a compound sense:  
Gen. 11: 6, "*And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one...*" (KJV).

Jhn.17: 22, "...that they may be one as we are one..."

Acts 4: 32, "All the believers were one in heart and mind..."

I Cor.3: 8, "The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose..."

- b) "The Bible certainly speaks of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but not as three distinct persons...the titles of Father, Son, and Spirit describe God's multiple roles and works." (*Meet the United Pentecostal Church International*, pg. 60-61). According to the Oneness movement, Jesus Christ IS the Father. The following scriptures show that the Persons in the Godhead are indeed distinct from each other and cannot be mere manifestations of one person only:

Mk.16: 19, "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God." There are eight other scriptures that say that Jesus is seated on the right hand of God (the Father), viz. Acts 2: 33; Rom.8: 34; Eph.1: 20; Col.3: 1; Heb.1: 3; 10: 12; 12: 2; I Pet.3: 22 and in Rev.3: 21 Jesus says, "...and sat down with my Father on his throne."

Rev. 5: 7, "He (the Lamb) came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne."

Jhn.8: 16, "...I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me."

Jhn.8: 17, "In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

Jhn.8: 29, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone..."

Jhn.14: 16, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth."

Jhn.14: 23, "Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'"

Jhn.15: 24, "...But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father."

- c) "The Oneness doctrine can be presented succinctly in two propositions: (1) there is one indivisible God with no distinction of persons; (2) Jesus Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead incarnate. All titles of the Deity can be applied to Him and all aspects of the divine personality are manifest in Him." (*Essentials of Oneness Theology*, pg.8).

While the second statement is absolutely true, the first statement is absolutely false as can be seen from the scriptures quoted above. However, to illustrate the muddled thinking of the Oneness Pentecostals, we attach another quote from one of their leading proponents, "The Son of God is the first and greatest created Being - only begotten of the Father, dwelling in Whom and through Whom as the Instrument, God - the Father - Performed the work of creation....The Lord Jesus Christ is called 'the Son of God' because He was the only Being begotten *directly* by God the Father, the first Being created...He was 'with God', and thus *not* God, and yet he 'was God'. The Word of *Logos* is not the divine alone, nor the created alone, but the twofold Person, God and the Son, the uncreated and the first-created, united." (C. H. Yadon, *Jehovah-Jesus*, pg. 44 & 45). Suddenly the Oneness movement has become a Twoness movement with the Father as God and the Son as a created being!

If anything, Oneness theology is a perfect example of how rejection of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity leads to a mass of confusion and contradiction. This is true of the

other cults as well and only serves to illustrate the words of I John 2: 18-28, "*Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 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. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth (all things). I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist - he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us - even eternal life. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him. And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*"

It becomes very apparent that the doctrine of the Trinity is the only safeguard between falling into the trap of either Tritheism or Unitarianism. The Trinitarian statement, "We believe in one God, existing in three Persons, distinguishable, but indivisible" is the only formula that does justice to the Scriptures. It provides an exegetical balance that checks any over-emphasis on the oneness or the threeness aspects of God's revelation of Himself to man.

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY  
(PAPER 006B)

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**Questions:**

1. What are the three main heresies concerning the Trinity?
2. Can you give an example of each heresy from the writings of modern cults?
3. What are the two extremes one could fall into by rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity?