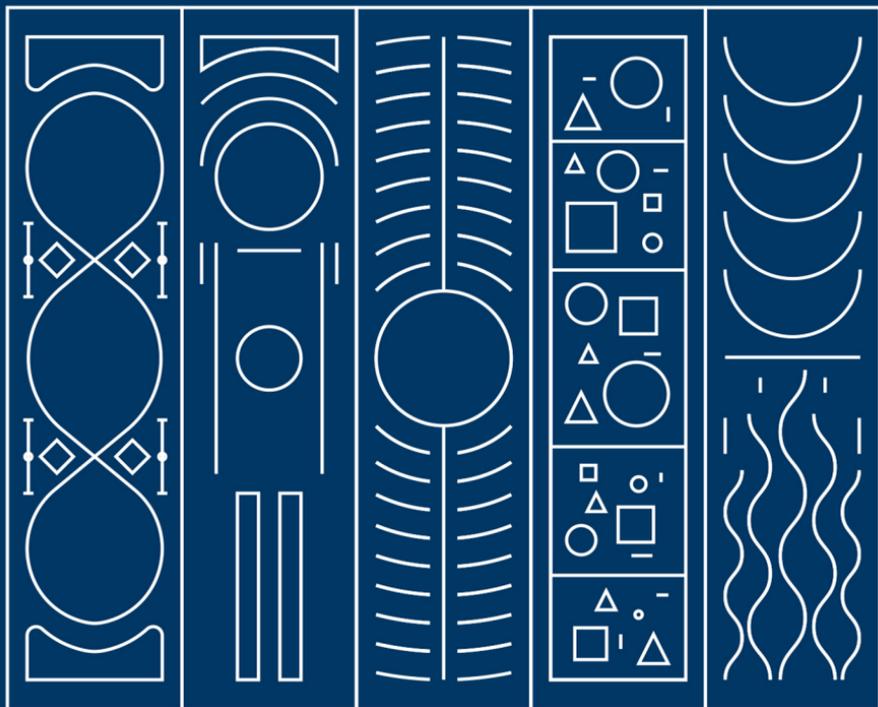


Living for God



A Short Introduction to the Christian Faith

MARK JONES

“Mark Jones’s helpful discussion of these major elements of the Christian faith demonstrates his point, shared with C. S. Lewis, that the best resources for devotion to Christ are found in substantial theological investigation conducted under the authority of Scripture.”

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Emily Van Dixhoorn, author, *Confessing the Faith Study Guide*

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A Short Introduction to
the Christian Faith

Mark Jones

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To all my Facebook friends, who have encouraged
me in my ministry with their “likes.”

I, as a believer that Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew, the Christ of the Greeks, was the Anointed One of God (born of the seed of David . . .), am grafted onto the true vine, and am one of the heirs of God's covenant with Israel. . . . I'm a Christian. . . . Don't put me in another box.

—Johnny Cash, *Man in White*

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As a pastor, I've wanted to be able to hand out a book on the basics of the Christian faith. The triune God has given me the privilege of writing such a book myself, something I count as a great blessing. All praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for whatever good may come from this volume.

Introduction

Living for God

From all this it follows that theology is most correctly defined as the doctrine of living for God through Christ.

—Petrus van Mastricht

Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God.

—William Ames

Living for God. True living is when we live for God: “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord” (1 Thess. 3:8). We either live for ourselves, with the many manifestations of that lifestyle, or we live for God, with the many manifestations of that lifestyle. Living for God in this life means living for God in the life to come. To enjoy the latter, we must engage in the former.

So how do we live for God? Christianity explains *how* in the best and only way possible.

Our approach to the Christian life must be grounded in the conviction that sound doctrine and godly living go hand in

hand, with the former providing the foundation for the latter. Paul understood this clearly when he exhorted his pastoral protégé Timothy in a context affected by false teaching and ungodly living: “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16). We could go on with other examples, but you may observe in the letters of Paul, especially Romans and Ephesians, that doctrine and life are inextricably linked (i.e., the indicatives lead to imperatives).

C. S. Lewis also understood the intimate relationship between theology and ethics. For example, in *Mere Christianity* he first sets forth teachings that are fundamental to Christianity and then moves on to discuss the morality that emerges from such theological principles. Elsewhere, Lewis makes this connection explicitly:

For my own part, I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await others. I believe that many who find that “nothing happens” when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand.¹

In other words, a truly devotional book will be doctrinal, but a doctrinal book should also inspire devotion. Doctrine and devotion are friends (Rom. 11:33–36).

With such a link in mind, the Puritan William Ames famously affirmed, “Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God.”² For Ames, theology, as conceptual as it will always be within the mind, must never be divorced from the practical response that

issues forth according to the will. The Dutch Reformed theologian Petrus van Mastricht built on Ames to claim, “Theology is most correctly defined as the doctrine of living for God through Christ.”³ The addition “through Christ” rightly emphasizes the fact that living for and to God remains impossible apart from our union with Christ. Like Ames, van Mastricht believed that theory and practice go together in theology, and so, “Nothing is offered in theology that does not incline to this point, namely, that a person’s life should be directed toward God. . . . Therefore theology is nothing other than the doctrine of living for God through Christ.”⁴ As a result, good theology (that which is well received) results in good living (that which is well delivered).

Mere Christianity

I hope these thoughts help explain why a book on the Christian life comes in such a doctrinal form. You may also note that I focus on only five teachings: the Trinity, Christ, the Spirit, the church, and life after death. I chose these as principal doctrines that define Christianity at its very foundation. In consideration of this choice, let’s come back to Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*. In speaking of “mere Christianity,” Lewis denotes an essential faith that unites all true believers, and he admits to borrowing the title and the understanding from the Puritan Richard Baxter.

Baxter spoke against the sectarian tendencies of denominations by referring to himself as “a Meer Christian” of the “Christian Church” of all ages and places. In line with mere Christianity, he called himself a “Catholic Christian,” not in the sense of the church of Rome but in the sense of being universally in line with the common affirmations of the Apostles’ Creed. It was to “that Party which is so against Parties” that he belonged rather than to “any dividing or contentious Sect.”⁵

We might conclude that Baxter unfairly maligns denominational convictions to view himself as a mere Christian. Likewise, we might not agree with how he fleshes out what constitutes a mere Christian. Still, his “Meer Christian[ity]” hits home as he longs for a common ground that unites all true believers. This must not be seen as a path of compromise or ease for Baxter but as a road that disdains unnecessary division. Regarding different Christian sects, he had earlier maintained,

It is easy to be of any one of these parties; but to be a Christian, which all pretend to, is not so easy. It is easy to have a burning zeal for any divided party or cause, but the common zeal for Christian Religion, is not so easy to be kindled, or kept alive, but requires as much diligence to maintain it, as dividing zeal requires to quench it. It is easy to love a party as a party; but to keep up Catholick charity to all Christians, and to live in that holy love and converse, which is requisite to a Christian communion of Saints, is not so easy.⁶

Within such a communion exist “all that be holy in the world,” claims Baxter, obviously with a view of living for God through Christ. It follows, then, that this communion should “live as those that believe that there is a life everlasting, where the Sanctified shall live in endless joy, and the unsanctified in endless punishment and woe; live but as men that verily believe a Heaven and a Hell, and a Day of Judgment.”⁷

Obviously, not all who would consider themselves “mere Christians” can rightly lay claim to the title. The seventeenth-century heretic John Biddle called himself a “mere Christian,” only to be refuted (as commissioned by Parliament) by John Owen, who observed, “And now, whether this man be a ‘mere Christian’ or a mere Lucian, let the reader judge.”⁸ Like Biddle,

many today would claim the title “mere Christians” but pay only lip service to or even openly deny truths foundational to the Christian faith, such as the eternality of Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity.

I must confess my dependence here on Baxter and Lewis and their focus on “mere Christianity.” With this in mind, this book has as its primary goal to set forth foundational or principal truths of the Christian faith and so explain what living for God and to God entails. To put it another way, this book represents what I, as a pastor, would like to offer my flock and other Christians as an “introduction to the Christian faith.”

This approach finds its historical friend in the Apostles’ Creed, which many have discoursed on throughout church history as they have set forth the basics of the Christian faith. Even in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*—a highly sophisticated and detailed systematic theology written in the seventeenth century—Francis Turretin speaks of the fundamental articles of the faith as

the doctrines concerning the sacred Scriptures as inspired . . . being the only and perfect rule of faith; concerning the unity of God and the Trinity; concerning Christ, the Redeemer, and his most perfect satisfaction; concerning sin and its penalty—death; concerning the law and its inability to save; concerning justification by faith; concerning the necessity of grace and good works, sanctification and the worship of God, the church, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment and eternal life and such as are connected with these. All these are so strictly joined together that they mutually depend on each other. One cannot be withdrawn without overthrowing all the rest.⁹

Besides Turretin, many authors have summarized principal doctrines of the Christian faith. Whether from the Reformation

and post-Reformation periods or in the last few hundred years, many of these works have much to commend to them. But emphases shift from writer to writer. I have my own thoughts on basic Christianity, which I claim stresses the following five foundational pillars. Put simply, the Christian faith is defined as that which is

1. Trinity oriented
2. Christ focused
3. Spirit energized
4. Church inhabited
5. Heaven anticipated

You may notice that I have deliberately chosen to set forth doctrines that we do not simply believe but that we respond to in faith. So, for example, to truly believe in the Trinity is to *orient* our lives around communion with the one God in three persons—hence, it is “Trinity oriented.” With this in mind, I can make use of the five pillars above to offer this expanded definition of theology:

Theology is the doctrine of living unto God, through Christ, by the Spirit, in the context of the church, and with a view to the glories of heaven.

Using these five pillars more explicitly, we could rightly affirm,

Theology is the doctrine of living unto God through a Trinity-oriented, Christ-focused, Spirit-energized, church-inhabited, and heaven-anticipated life.

This definition gives us a short summary of the five pillars highlighted above. If Christian theology does not lead us to the God who revealed it, then it is neither truly Christian nor

truly theological. So churches where the worship, teaching, and preaching fail to promote living for God through Christ by the Spirit are dangerous places, since many feel all is well when the opposite is true. Likewise, the emotions stirred up in some worship services do not necessarily constitute such life, which must find its expression (albeit imperfectly in this world) in all of life. This is strong language, but who wants to waste their time worshipping in a context where they are regressing spiritually, where falsehood displaces the truth, where God is created in the image of man, or where entertainment has replaced “reverence and awe” (Heb. 12:28)?

Scripture-Grounded Life

Some may argue—especially with the Turretin quote above, which starts theology with God’s word—that I have missed another pillar. Should we not speak of a Scripture-grounded life as well? Indeed, we agree that any discussion of the Trinity, Christ, the Spirit, the church, or heaven demands a foundational source revealed outside ourselves by God alone, who, by condescending to our limitations as humans, made himself as Creator known to us as creatures.

I write to set forth principal teachings unto life as revealed in the word of God alone. Without the Reformation conviction of *sola Scriptura*, this book would in vain seek to promote living for God.

We serve a God who in mercy has chosen to reveal himself as Creator to his creatures. He reveals himself clearly to all humanity in creation and in the heart of created man himself. Though God has made himself plain to all mankind, so that we are “without excuse,” men in their ungodliness “suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18–20). Thus, while this natural revelation is

enough to show God clearly, for fallen man it is no longer sufficient to give us life unto God.

We therefore need the special revelation permanently recorded in Scripture to overcome our sin and lead us back to God through Christ, who alone, as the God-man, can reconcile us to God. The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647) summarizes this thinking quite well in the answer to the second question:

Q: How does it appear that there is a God?

A: The very light of nature in man, and the works of God, declare plainly that there is a God; but his word and Spirit only do sufficiently and effectually reveal him unto men for their salvation.¹⁰

So while we can know God through the light of nature, we come to him through Christ only by the light of special revelation. As the Westminster Confession of Faith makes clear, the embrace of such revelation demands “the inward illumination of the Spirit of God” (1.6) for the “saving understanding” of what he reveals (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:5).

This word comes from God as that which “is breathed out” by him, the very inspired (and thus inerrant) word of God, and so it is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Did you notice that Paul says that the word is useful for teaching (doctrine) and training (life)? Indeed, van Mastricht defends his definition of theology as “living unto God through Christ” from Scripture, which denotes theology as the “words of eternal life” (John 6:68; cf. Acts 5:20) and identifies anyone who has “learned from the Father” as the same as the one who “comes” to Christ (John 6:45). “The entirety of this theology,” argues van Mastricht, “is

occupied in forming the life of a person and directing it toward God insofar as everything encountered in the Scriptures flows together and aims at this end.”¹¹

The Westminster Confession of Faith’s first chapter remains one of the best brief statements on Scripture ever written. For the sake of this book, I want to highlight a few of its teachings. First, the Scripture is sufficient as that which reveals “all things necessary for [God’s] own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life” (1.6). Second, the Scripture is “most necessary,” or essential, in written form, since the “former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people [have] ceased” (1.1). Third, the Scripture is the authoritative rule over faith and life and the “supreme judge” in all theological “controversies” (1.10). Such authority depends not on man or the church “but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (1.4). In summary, as we unpack these five pillars, we could say this: the word of God alone is sufficient to set forth these teachings unto life, is essential for such teachings, and alone gives them their authority in our lives.

As we examine these five pillars in detail, we begin with the *Trinity-oriented life* unto God. While Jesus is the focal point of our faith and life, we need to grasp the triunity of the Godhead to understand Christ in his person and work. We then consider such a *Christ-focused life*, one that cannot be sustained unless it is simultaneously a *Spirit-energized life*. We turn to reflect on the bride of Christ, the church, and the obligation for a *church-inhabited life* if indeed we do belong to him. Finally, we look at a *heaven-anticipated life* with the hope of our future resurrected existence in the presence of Christ forever, though there is also an eternal punishment for those who find themselves outside Christ at death.

Introduction

Summarizing the Christian faith in this way, I believe we have before us the basic building blocks for the Christian faith and thus for living for God. The building blocks can help, then, with the rest of the edifice, which has many layers and views from which to understand the truths that God has revealed to us, many of which lie outside the scope of this book but are important nonetheless.

PART 1

**THE
TRINITY-ORIENTED
LIFE**

The Triune God

If you are a Christian, you must love those who belong to Christ (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14). But do you love those who fought for the truth over the course of church history so that you could proclaim, know, and worship God in a clearer way based on the psychological, spiritual, and intellectual battles they fought? Many Christians have loved the doctrine of the Trinity; they have sometimes put their lives at risk for this doctrine. Shall we not love it both for God's sake and for the sake of all those who have offered their own blood, sweat, and tears for the cause of truth? I think we have a duty to God and our brothers and sisters in the Lord to love studying our triune God so that we may commune with each of the persons in the Godhead. We cannot commune with a God we do not know.

Christianity cannot exist or thrive without a robust understanding of the triune God. The principal distinguishing features of the Christian religion are its most glorious mysteries, namely, (1) the incarnation of the Son of God and (2) the triunity of God as one (essence) and yet three (persons). Whatever groans one

may utter when studying the Trinity, such do not compare to the joys of knowing God as he truly is.

Many theologians and conference speakers decry the apparent lack of desire among Christians to learn more about our great God. There may exist no statistics to back up such a claim, but it certainly leaves us asking an important question about a crucial truth. Does the Trinity occupy a prominent place in our thinking or even in our meditation on God? Does the church adequately instruct the flock in the knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

One God, Three Persons

The great distinctive of the Christian faith is the belief in the one, true, and living God (Deut. 6:4; 32:39; Isa. 44:8) in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Speaking of the one God, the Westminster Larger Catechism (q. 9) claims, “There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy [Spirit]; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties” (e.g., Matt. 28:19; John 1:1; 10:30; Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 13:14). In short, the doctrine of the Trinity implies unity in diversity.

Our monotheism must be regarded as Christian monotheism. We are neither polytheists, dismantling the Trinity with separated (not just distinct) gods, nor Monarchians, collapsing the Trinity into a single being with indistinguishable persons.¹ To be sure, we are limited in terms of how much we can discuss the Trinity, and saying more than God has revealed leads us astray and possibly into heresy. At the same time, denying this distinctive is done to the peril of our very soul. Someone, we do not know who, and not Augustine as some claim, has said,

“Try to explain the Trinity, and you will lose your mind; try to deny it, and you will lose your soul.”² We may have trouble fully explaining what God has revealed concerning his triunity, but we must not deny that he is the triune God.

This much we must affirm: The Father is God (Rom. 7:25), the Son is God (Acts 20:28; Titus 2:13), and the Holy Spirit is God (Ps. 95:3, 8, 9, compared with Heb. 3; Acts 5:3–4; 1 Cor. 3:16–17). Yet there is one God. Within the Godhead, they remain distinct persons, as the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit, and the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit, and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son (e.g., Matt. 3:16–17).

This reality, that God is both one (essence) and three (persons), shapes everything about the Christian religion. It is a truth that all Christians have agreed on and will continue to agree on both now and forever. It is a truth that will occupy our heart, soul, mind, and strength in glory. The Nicene Creed (325; rev. 381) and the Apostles’ Creed (ca. second–fourth centuries), two of the great truly ecumenical creeds of the Christian faith, both affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. But no early creed states so forcefully and clearly the central place the Christian faith gives to the doctrine of the Trinity like the Athanasian Creed (ca. fifth–seventh centuries). Notice how the first few sentences describe the truth of the Trinity:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith unless every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and

of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost.³

Mere Christianity, basic Christianity, core Christianity, or whatever one wishes to call the foundational Christian faith is, at bottom, Trinitarian Christianity. The catholic faith, to which we belong, insists that we hold to this stunning truth that God is both three and one. So we believe in one God who subsists (exists) in three persons, all of whom share in the same single, undivided essence.⁴ The three persons enjoy an interpenetration and yet remain perfectly together and eternally delight in themselves, owing to their infinite perfections. They exist in supreme and independent communion with each other as they co-indwell and co-inhere as three persons sharing the same undivided, infinitely pure essence. Theologians have historically used the terms *circumincession* (Latin-derived) or *perichoresis* (Greek-derived) to denote this intimate relationship among the persons of the Trinity.

If God were simply one person, he would have nobody but himself to love. If God were two persons, the love between them would not be shared with anyone else. But the glory of the Trinity is this: the love between the Father and the Son is also shared through the bond of the Spirit. “God is love” (1 John 4:8), but the love that characterizes God is a shared love between three persons.

The Triune God’s Order and Works⁵

Because God is three persons, his self-love, which is infinitely and eternally delightful, is by nature “giving.” God did not need to create the world, since he is in need of nothing outside himself, being eternally and infinitely independent. Still, he decided

to create the world and perform outward acts that are consistent with the perfections of his nature.

The pioneering work of Augustine on the Trinity led to a theological commonplace that the outward works of the Trinity are undivided. In the words of the great theologian,

For according to the Catholic faith, the Trinity is proposed to our belief and believed—and even understood by a few saints and holy persons—as so inseparable that whatever action is performed by it must be thought to be performed at the same time by the Father and by the Son and by the Holy Spirit.⁶

All three persons jointly concur in every work; they agree and cooperate in the works done by any one of them. For example, who raised Christ? The emphasis in the New Testament is clearly on the Father but not at the expense of the other two persons (John 2:19; 10:17–18; Rom. 4:24; 8:11; Col. 2:12–13). Because all three persons concur in every work, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all said to have raised Christ from the dead.

With that in mind, while the outward works of the Trinity belong as much to one person as to the other two persons, certain (internal) works among the persons differ: the Father begets, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Often the Father has been referred to as the “fountain of the deity,” as he is the begetter, not the begotten.

As such, the persons have different subsistences, and therefore the works of each person follow and resemble their distinct existences. The Father, as the fountain of the deity, “begins” the work; the Son carries on the work; and the Holy Spirit,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son, executes and consummates the works of the Father and the Son (1 Cor. 8:6). Consider Paul's opening Trinitarian emphasis in his letter to the Ephesians: the Father chooses us in the Son, "before the foundation of the world" (1:4); God the Father predestines through (and in) Jesus (1:4–5), in whom "we have redemption through his blood" (1:7); and the Holy Spirit perfects and consummates the works of the Father and the Son (1:13–14). Thus the outward works of God, while undivided, can be attributed particularly to one of the three persons.

While all three persons are coequal and coeternal, the Father is first in order, the Son is second in order, and the Spirit is third in order. Since the Spirit is last in order, he proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is the bond of the Trinity (i.e., between the Father and the Son), who proceeds by way of love. Just as the Spirit unites the Father and the Son, so the Spirit has the peculiar eminency of uniting sinners, saved by Christ's work, to Christ and thus also to the Father.

The Revealer of God

God does not hide his triunity from his people. As a personal God who shares of himself, he forces us to think of both his oneness and his threeness. Especially as the New Testament unfolds the further mystery of the Trinity, we ought to become enraptured by the Trinity, just as Gregory of Nazianzus was in his reflection on the oneness and threeness of God:

No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of any one of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me.

I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.⁷

The principal manner in which God reveals himself as triune is through the life and prophetic ministry of his Son. The Son reveals the Father: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Luke 10:22). The Son also reveals the Spirit, particularly in the Upper Room Discourse in John 14–16. For example, Christ speaks of the principal work of the Spirit in this way: “He [the Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

Our Lord is not shy with his disciples about who he is, how he reveals the Father, and what the Spirit will do when he comes as the revealer of the Son. Thus we might say that God’s interest in revealing himself to us is brought about by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The agent of revelation is actually Christ.

The mediator of God’s saving knowledge to us comes in the Son. Christ is the beam of light⁸ by which God’s glories, perfections, and purposes are revealed to his people. The intimate knowledge the Son had of the Father before his incarnation is one that is shared. The Son comes into the world for many reasons, not just one. But perhaps most significantly, his coming is to make God known: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18). Not only God’s triunity but also his invisible attributes are revealed most clearly in the person and work of the Son, who is the stage on which the attributes come into full view.

Practical Trinitarianism

The foundational Christian faith necessitates our embrace of the doctrine of the Trinity but not necessarily in all its details and complexities. The great Princeton theologian Charles Hodge offers what might be sort of the lowest bar for the professing Christian concerning one's affirmation of the Trinity, by way of an

unconscious or unformed faith, even of those of God's people who are unable to understand the term by which it is expressed. They all believe in God, the Creator and Preserver. . . . They . . . believe in a divine Redeemer and a divine Sanctifier. They have, as it were, the factors of the doctrine of the Trinity in their own religious convictions.⁹

The expectations of the Athanasian Creed above certainly seem to rise higher than the expectations of Hodge living in the nineteenth century—and one might say our expectations have dropped even lower well over one hundred years on. One could, I suppose, on Hodge's account have such a basic understanding of the Trinity to be practically a modalist (though not a philosophically committed modalist), that is, to hold that God—as one person—takes on the roles of Preserver, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, but I think most Christians would happily confess that the Father, as Creator and Preserver, sends the Son, as Redeemer. Additionally, the Spirit, as Sanctifier, is sent by the Father and the Son. In sum, Christians, educated in God's holy word, are privileged to know that there are three divine persons, who all play crucial roles in their lives and their salvation.

Yet in discoursing on the Trinity and other such wondrous doctrines, the “prince of the Puritans,” John Owen, makes the observation that the Trinity, for example, when first proposed

to God's people, "startles" us, since the truths of the Trinity are "too great and too excellent" for us to take in. But over time, with instruction, our nature "yields" and submits to that which God reveals. Owen asks, "What is there, in the whole book of God, that nature at first sight does more recoil at, than the doctrine of the Trinity? How many do yet stumble and fall at it!"¹⁰ He then argues that unless we embrace the doctrine of the Trinity, when it is proposed and explained to us, "all other things [e.g., communion with God] wherein it has to do with God will not be of value to the soul." Owen adds, "Take away, then, the doctrine of the Trinity, and . . . the foundation of all fruits of love and goodness is lost to the soul."¹¹

What Owen implies is that the doctrine of the Trinity may be misunderstood or unknown to a new Christian who is growing in and responding to the glorious teaching of Scripture on the Trinity. Once fleshed out to the understanding of the maturing believer, it must be embraced. It is one thing to lack understanding of the doctrine and quite another to deny it.

"Mere Trinitarianism," as in a minimalist affirmation, may indeed look a lot like what Hodge speaks of—and there is much good even in such a basic affirmation. But basic Trinitarianism brings the soul much further, to the point where Christian worship (public and private) and life (corporate and individual) become more and more Trinity oriented. Christianity demands the affirmation that God is one essence but also three coequal persons. But it is certainly more: the foundation of all our communion, delight, hope, and thanksgiving are dependent on our knowledge of the triune God and the ways in which he relates to us as distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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