

THREE FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS AND WHY THEY MATTER

For decades some have opposed the teaching of the ministry in the Lord's recovery over three vital categories of truth—the Triune God, God's salvation in life, and the ground of the church. Much has been written to correct misrepresentations and to present the truth from the Bible concerning these three matters. For the accomplishment of God's eternal economy to have the Body of Christ as His enlargement and expression, His people need to know and enter into these truths. Moreover, we all need to be equipped to defend them (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15).

The Triune God

The Bible shows that God is one (1 Cor. 8:4; Isa. 45:5) and that He also has the aspect of three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19). All three are God, the complete God (1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 1:8; Acts 5:3-4), and all three are eternal (Isa. 9:6; Heb. 1:8; 9:14). Moreover, all three coexist, that is, exist simultaneously, from eternity to eternity (Matt. 3:16-17; John 14:16-17; Eph. 3:14-17; 2 Cor. 13:14), and all three coinhere, that is, mutually indwell one another, eternally (John 10:38; 14:10-11, 20; 17:21). Thus, the three are distinct in their coexistence but inseparable in their coinherence.

One key principle of interpreting the Bible is to accept what it says in clear words as true. For example, the Bible says, "The last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving Spirit" and "The Lord [again Christ] is the Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17a, cf. 4:5). The Bible also says that the Son and the Father are one (John 10:30; 17:22; Isa. 9:6). We affirm these plain indications that the three are one and inseparable, but some, because they believe the three of the Godhead are not only distinct but also separate, cannot accept the clear weight of the biblical teaching. Imposing their theology on the Bible, they try to explain away the words of the Bible. To say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are separate is contrary not only to the Scriptures but also to the experience of the believers. The Scriptures indicate clearly that all three of the Trinity are in the believers (Eph. 4:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:16). To say that the three are separate contradicts the believers' experience, which tells them that only one—the Triune God embodied in Christ and realized as the Spirit—is in them. If the three are separate and each is God, we cannot escape the heresy that there are three Gods. The error of teaching that the three are separate also causes us to lose the true nature of the oneness of the believers as the Body of Christ. The Lord Jesus told His disciples that He and the Father coinhere (John 14:10-11), and He also said that His disciples coinhere with Him (v. 20; 15:4). This is the oneness the Lord prayed for in John 17, a oneness that is nothing less than the believers' coinhering with the coinhering Triune God (vv. 21-23).

God's Organic Salvation

According to the Bible, God's complete salvation has two aspects. We were redeemed through the death of Christ, through which we have been justified by God and reconciled to Him (Rom. 3:24; 5:1; 10a). This wonderful, accomplished, and eternal fact we call judicial redemption. Through our believing in Christ and His redemptive work, we received the eternal life, which is Christ Himself (John 3:36; 11:25; 14:6). Now, as reconciled ones, we are being saved in the life of the Son of God (Rom. 5:10b). We call this salvation in life organic salvation. The judicial aspect of God's salvation is based on Christ's completed work of redemption and is largely objective. The organic aspect of God's salvation is based on Christ's operation within us as the indwelling Spirit and, while based on objective truths, is very experientially subjective. The fact that God's organic salvation involves subjective experience troubles those Christians whose view of salvation is entirely doctrinal and objective.

Critics have attacked two particular terms—*mingling* and *deification*—that are used to describe God's work in the believers in His organic salvation. *Mingling* is the biblical term used to describe the two basic elements of the meal offering—fine flour and oil (Lev. 2:4-5). As with all the other primary offerings in Leviticus, the meal offering typifies Christ. The mingling of fine flour and oil in the meal offering typifies the relationship of the divine and human natures in Christ. Critics of the term *mingling* have claimed that mingling produces a third nature that is neither human nor divine. However, they neglect Brother Lee's careful use of the term as defined in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*: "Mingling or mingle is to bring or combine together with something else so that the components remain distinguishable, in the combination." Through incarnation, divinity was mingled with humanity, yet the two natures of Christ remained distinguishable in the combination; no third nature was produced. The same is true of the mingling of God and man in the believers through God's organic salvation. Though we are now men mingled with God, we do not cease to be men and God does not cease to be God.

Our teaching on deification is encapsulated in the statement, “God became man to make man God in life and nature but not in the Godhead.” Our understanding of deification is based on the scriptural truth that believers have the eternal life, which is the life of God Himself (1 John 5:11; Eph. 4:18), and the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This life of God with the divine nature operates in the believers to sanctify, renew, and transform them, ultimately conforming them to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God and glorifying them (Rom. 8:29-30). God will always have certain attributes in which human beings cannot share, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Nevertheless, the Bible shows that not only did God choose to enter into His creation through incarnation to be a genuine man with the human life and nature, but He also chose to pass through death and resurrection in order to share His divine life and nature with His believers (John 1:14; 2 Cor. 5:19; John 3:36; 2 Pet. 1:4). This did not compromise His standing as the unique self-existing and ever-existing God and Creator of all things, who is the unique object of our worship (cf. Acts 10:25-26).

Some also falsely claim that our emphasis on the need for the subjective experience of Christ undermines the authority of the Bible. Actually, we teach that any experience that is of the Spirit will always be in harmony with the teaching and principles found in the Word of God, that we should accept only those experiences that accord with the Bible, and that we should reject any that are not. By making the gospel entirely objective, our critics’ views rob the gospel of its vitality and nullify God’s “much more” salvation in the life of His Son (Rom. 5:10b). Without God’s work to save us in the life of His Son, that is, His operation in us to deify us through mingling Himself with us, it would be impossible for us to have the proper growth in life unto maturity personally and for the church to arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, corporately (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:13).

Our Standing on the Ground of Oneness

In the Bible and in the universe, there is one Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4a). Due to limitations of time and space, this one Body of Christ is expressed practically in different cities as local churches (Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:11). In each city there is only one church with one administration that encompasses all believers in that city (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Each genuine local church bears the testimony of oneness locally and also universally through its common fellowship with all other local churches in the Body of Christ (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 1:3).

We love all believers, whether they meet with us or not. However, we must faithfully say that the system of Christianity has deviated from what is revealed in the Bible. It is full of substitutes that distract the believers from knowing Christ as their life (Col. 3:4). The clergy-laity system nullifies the organic function of the members of Christ’s Body (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). The denominational system cuts the Body of Christ into pieces (1 Cor. 1:10). We affirm the biblical condemnations of this degraded system (Matt. 13:31-33; Rev. 2:12—3:6; 3:14-22; 17:1-18).

Our opposers cast this condemnation of organized Christendom as an attack on fellow Christians. Some even call it an attack on the faith. Both accusations are false. We love our fellow believers, with whom we share the common faith (Jude 3). Nevertheless, we are bound by conscience to follow the New Testament pattern of one church in one city, though we do not insist that others do the same. The alternative is to add to today’s confusion and division and to lose the commanded blessing of life that we have enjoyed for many years (Psa. 133:1, 3). We believe that there is a need for a group of people to testify that the cross of Christ has nullified all differences and preferences that divide believers (Eph. 2:14-16; Col 2:14; 1 Cor. 1:12-13), that the resurrected Christ as the Spirit is the very element of the believers’ oneness (Eph. 4:3-4a), and that the issue of Christ’s accomplished work must be manifested in a practical oneness before the world (John 17:21, 23). Moreover, according to our understanding of the Bible, keeping this oneness is a prerequisite for the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:3, 12, 16).

Conclusion

These three categories of truth share one characteristic—they are all vital to the accomplishment of God’s eternal economy. Without Christ being the Spirit, there would be no way for us to experience the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8) and no way for Him to make His home in our hearts (v. 17). Without the organic aspect of God’s salvation, we would have no way to grow unto maturity, and God would have no way to conform us to the image of His Son. Without the ground of the church, there would be no way to manifest the oneness of Christ’s Body or to practically build up the Body. May the Lord grant all the saints in His recovery a spirit of wisdom and revelation to see and an absoluteness to endeavor to be constituted with the truth concerning these matters, not only for their own sake but also to uphold and testify to the truth for the sake of all of God’s children.