

## Approaching the Godhead

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

For the past few weeks, we have been taking something of a “back to basics” approach to our studies. Of course, there is always room for new insights, for further light, but it is also true that even the most fundamental doctrines will always reveal new light to those who are seeking the face of Yahweh.

I have heard the example given that what man makes becomes coarser, more unrefined, upon closer inspection. What Yahweh makes, on the other hand, becomes more complex, more beautiful, when seen under a microscope. Much of our joy in Heaven will be the examination of things that, while here on earth, seemed perfectly “ordinary,” when seen from the perspective of eternity will be revealed as an intricate and beautiful pattern. We may experience a small portion of that by finding delight in things already understood, but always ready to be understood more fully.

This week, I would like to briefly go over the CSDA understanding of the Godhead. Although this is only one subject, it may also be considered a part of a larger discussion of what a “test of fellowship” is. For Creation Seventh Day Adventists, an individual’s understanding of Yahweh’s nature is not – on its own – what determines whether or not that individual is a genuine Christian, or suitable to be a Church member. We believe that a person’s experience of Yah’s presence is, to a certain extent, personal.

This does not mean that we are without standards when it comes to understanding our Father’s character. Our goal, after all, is perfect spiritual unity, the character of Christ reproduced in His people, and so naturally we must have a shared vision of this goal. Our guideline comes in part from this verse:

“The secret things belong unto Yahweh our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deu 29:29)

Much of the nature of our Creator has not been revealed to us. In an attempt to “control” his environment, mankind has often resorted to inventing details in order to pad out a partially filled pattern. This is something of a natural inclination, but it tends to be less than productive when it comes to spiritual matters. This is one of the reasons, for example, that our Father has forbidden idols – images crafted from human intellect that are intended to represent the divine.

In our commitment to obeying this element of the Law, CSDAs have come to consider the traditional view of the Godhead, the “Trinity,” to be an inadequate concept to describe the Father, Son and their Holy Spirit. To be clear, as I have mentioned, it is not considered “sinful” to accept this model, however we believe that to do so may actually result in greater challenges in maintaining the victorious life, for reasons that I will outline shortly.

Even in matters that are not tests of fellowship, our members are encouraged to share their common understanding of matters. The Godhead issue is an excellent example, but we have had other recent ones as well. We recently attended the Feast of Tabernacles. It was mostly held online, so there was little actual, physical gathering – nevertheless, from the testimonies that were shared, this time of refreshing proved to be a blessing to many, and perhaps they received some light, some insight, that will assist them in overcoming some temptation, or understanding some vital concept for their sanctification.

It is wise, after all, to accept all the gifts that our Father has to offer, and in determining what the “right” thing to do is, what the “correct” doctrine to accept is, we need only look at the principles we have learned, and ask questions such as, “Does this correspond with what the Bible teaches?” “Will this help with sanctification, and the putting away of sin and improper habits?”

When seen in this simple light, many matters that are considered complicated by even the worldly educated actually become very clear. Consider the feast days again... in Christianity, and in Adventism in particular, there is something of a debate going on with regard to whether or not the New Testament believers are required to keep the annual Feast days. As it turns out, they are asking the wrong question. Rather than asking whether or not the feasts are “required,” the question should be, “Are they spiritually beneficial?” If we ask this, and discover that the answer is, “Yes,” then we may well say, as Paul did, “I must by all means keep [the] feast,” and determine that, if at all possible, we will hold those days in regard. In doing so, we bypass all the back-and-forth about legalism, or the accusations to which some feast-keepers are subjected, that by obeying these instructions we are somehow rejecting Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

True doctrine is about building character, about lining our actions up with the law that is written on our spiritual hearts. It should be no surprise that proper Biblical doctrine and common sense are close companions.

Now, the Trinity is an even more sensitive area in some company, because it has been considered Biblical truth for a VERY long time, to the point that some Christians would (and do) defend this with a much higher degree of zeal than some doctrines that ARE actually spelled-out in the Bible, such as the difference between clean and unclean meats, or the observance of the 10 Commandments.

Originally, Seventh-day Adventists were not Trinitarian. This often comes as quite a surprise to most of the General Conference organization’s members, who have been steadily becoming more like the world in their teachings and practices over the past century. Our pioneers utterly rejected this belief, so uniformly held by Catholics and Protestants alike, because they did not find such a doctrine taught in the Bible.

Furthermore, they found significant evidence that there was something decidedly incorrect about it, and we as Christians, as Protestants, may find an example in this – regardless of how popular a belief is, or how long it has been considered true, it is the Bible that must guide our faith. All Adventists understand this to a degree, for most who consider themselves Christians are not Sabbath-keepers, but because they stopped there, the practice of keeping the Sabbath has simply become another tradition in many groups. Although held by fewer people, Sabbath keeping has simply become, “Something that Adventists and a few other people do,” and not a living, breathing Word from Yahweh, carrying with it blessings and the authority of Heaven.

The Trinity is perhaps the best example of a human idea that has become confused with, and then integrated into, and then used to replace, Biblical doctrine.

The traditional story is that at the Council of Nicea, the great thinkers of the Church (and at that time this meant the Roman Catholic Church) got together to consider a number of matters, among them the nature of the Godhead. The idea was to solidify the Church’s teachings on the Father, the Son, and the Holy

Spirit, and the relationship that They had One to Another. After some discussion, it was determined by these scholars that the Father, Son and Spirit were co-equal, each having the same degree of authority. They were co-eternal, meaning that they have each always existed, with none preceding the other. They were Three Persons in a complete sense, each with His own will, individuality and independent existence, and yet they were also somehow “One” in the sense of being One God and not Three Gods. From that time, Christians all over the world have accepted this, calling it the Trinity Doctrine, indicating elements of three (Tri) and one (Unity).

The actual history is a bit more complicated than that. Many of the bishops of the Church at that time rejected the doctrine as being contrary to Scripture and offensive to sensible reasoning – resulting in the inevitable threats, excommunications, property seizures, etc. As with most matters handled by the Roman Catholic Church, the ultimate resolution came about (at a later date) due to the decidedly un-Christian application of force.

Of course, even this shameful history is not sufficient to render the theory incorrect. Unfortunately, there have been many times when the right thing was taught for the wrong reasons, or in the wrong way, and so again we must fall back on the Scriptures for our ultimate answers.

It is certainly true that, as our Pioneers have said, and as many of those early Catholic bishops have said, the Trinity is not found in the Bible. The word itself is not there, although that is perhaps the weakest evidence that may be advanced, since the Bible contains NO English words at all, or Spanish words, but our current beliefs are expressed and understood in these more recent languages.

What we need to do is examine the concepts, which may be expressed in any language, to see if they are present.

As defined in tradition and history, the Trinity advances the idea that the Three Persons of the Godhead are co-equal. This is not an idea found in the Bible. The word we use for God in Hebrew, Elohim, is certainly plural. We accept that there is a Father and a Son, for these are Persons named in the Bible as being “Elohim.” The Father, Yahweh, is called Elohim in verses such as the one I quoted above: “The secret things belong unto Yahweh our Elohim...” (Deu 29:29) There are quite a lot of other verses that use similar language.

The Son, Yahshua, is called Elohim – or the Greek New Testament equivalent – in such verses as: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) and “Thomas answered and said unto [Yahshua], ‘My Lord and my God.’” (John 20:28)

But what about the Holy Spirit? Creation Seventh Day Adventists believe, of course, that there is a Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, while the Bible is very clear about the individuality, personality and separate will of the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit appears to be precisely what the words themselves actually mean. That is, a Holy “Spirit,” a divine presence, a sacred character that becomes personality IN a living being, but that is not, itself, separate or possessing its own personality and will. Interestingly enough, the Bible actually does call the Spirit an “it,” a term never once used for the Father and Son, except (I believe) once for Christ when He was being insulted by the Pharisees.

Now, pointing out that the Bible does not ascribe these characteristics of Person-hood to the Holy Spirit is sometimes taken very hard by the traditional Christians, to the point where those who doubt the originally

Roman Catholic paradigm are considered to be less than Protestants (ironically enough), and perhaps members of some dangerous cult. The fact that Christians got along for decades without such councils and doctrines is never considered.

It might be pointed out that the Holy Spirit is never called God, and never acts without the vessel of a living agent (either a human being or an angel). When it does appear in some visible form, it is as a symbol, such as a dove or a tongue of flame, and never with the qualities of a human being that the Father and Son are always eager to utilize in order to emphasize the closeness that exists between the Creator and the created.

So far, these are mostly “passive” reasons; in that, we do not accept the doctrine because there is a lack of evidence in the Bible to support it. But, without going into the details too deeply, there are some active reasons why we reject the Trinity as well.

For example, it can be demonstrated that the Spirit is neither co-eternal with nor independent of the Father and Son.

Of the Son it is written, “Yahshua said unto them, ‘If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from Elohim; neither came I of myself, but He sent me.’” (John 8:42)

The Son, while equal with the Father in Glory, (John 17:5) subjected Himself in role to the Father for the sake of His work on behalf of humanity. (Phil 2:8) It might cause some concern for a moment because Christ said He “proceeded forth and came from Elohim,” which some have taken to mean that there was a point in time at which the Father called Him into existence, and before which He did not exist.

However, the Bible also specifies that this took place “in eternity.” As it is written regarding the birthplace of the Son, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Mic 5:2)

Now, if we look at the statement regarding the origins of the Holy Spirit, we instead find this: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me.” (John 15:26) The word “he” there is one of the many places where this pronoun (which is a general one that means he, she or it) is used of the Spirit. But the key point is that the Spirit “proceedeth” from the Father. It did not proceed forth, resulting in a separate individual. One human being may “proceed forth” from another through the process of birth, and the result is two human beings.

In eternity, the Son and the Father expressed themselves as Two, as Elohim (plural) because one “proceeded forth” from the other. The Spirit, however, is described as a continuous coming-forth from the Father, with no individual existence outside of this Source. This alone is sufficient to render the Trinity paradigm inaccurate.

One of the most visually significant reasons, at least for me, is found in verses that explain that, “Elohim created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” (Gen 1:27)

The fullness of the Godhead was expressed in human form through the creation of Adam and Eve, two individual beings who both represent “humanity,” and who were originally one, for after all other works of creation were completed, we know that Eve “proceeded forth and came from” Adam. In addition, Adam and Eve both originally shared a single name, as it is written, “Male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.” (Gen 5:2)

In the day that Elohim (plural) created them (humanity, plural) He called them Adam. It was only later that Eve came forth and was given an individual name, because she was a separate person, but in the duality of the human being we see the perfection of the Godhead. There is no third gender, no third principle to express Yahweh’s fullness in human creation – but this does not mean that the Spirit is excluded. On the contrary, the Spirit is the thing that ties humanity and divinity together. The Spirit is what Yahweh shares with us to create and maintain within us His image, and that indeed gives us life, for we are told that, “Yahweh Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Gen 2:7)

This “breath of life” is one of the expressions of the Holy Spirit, that “rain” that falls (for now) on both the good and the wicked. What it is not, however, is a third aspect of the Godhead that is the same as, or similar to, or of the same nature, as the Father and Son. Human beings, formed in the image of Elohim, have no third aspect that is of equal moral or intellectual stature under the Creator – but we each have a spirit, and we all share that common “breath of life” from Yahweh who created us.

A proper understanding of the Godhead also explains a number of other doctrines that Christians hold as a matter of mere “tradition,” but that Creation Seventh Day Adventists hold because they are living truths about our Father. For example, conservative Christianity (and CSDAs are no exception) consider homosexuality to be contrary to our Father’s desires and will for His creation. A common criticism of conservative Christians is that they are nosy – because what happens in the privacy of one home does not affect anyone else, or that they are superstitious – fearing the “wrath of God” falling on any country that endorses these practices.

While it is certainly true that the judgment of Yahweh has fallen on places where homosexuality was famously practiced in the past, as we have been speaking about last week and a few before, any action, belief, and characteristic found in a Christian must be based upon pure, divine love, or it is not properly held, and not properly understood.

So, what does the Biblical position on homosexuality have to do with love?

It is simply this – the union between a man and a woman is the only proper representation in all of creation of the union between the Father and Son. Those who reject this representation, through their desires and practices actually make it impossible to clearly “see” in their spiritual eyes the character of the Creator, which they MUST see, and MUST attain, if they are to inherit everlasting life.

Although less obviously destructive, and less politically correct, than (for example) drug addiction, homosexuality actively cuts an individual off from receiving the blessings intended by Yahweh for His children. Essentially, then, the Christian has a duty to promote a biologically normal approach to human sexuality for exactly the same reasons it promotes the keeping of the Sabbath. Rejecting these things does not cause instantaneous judgment, but it does remove individuals from necessary blessings for salvation.

There is nothing arbitrary about Yah's instructions. Even in matters such as this, we seek always the best good of those around us, even if it is not the popular choice, and we are willing to be vocal about our convictions.

Finally, on a more individual level, accepting the Trinity causes a host of "little problems" with other accepted doctrines that must be consistently overlooked, leading to Yahweh appearing more distant, more inhuman, than is necessary, or healthy, for our spiritual growth.

For example, Christ – being conceived "of the Holy Ghost" (Mat 1:20) makes Him actually the Son of the Spirit rather than the Son of the Father, if the Spirit is seen as a third, independent being. Similarly, if we, being converted, are "born of the Spirit," (John 3:6) then how shall we call the Father our adoptive "Father?" The only way to justify these contradictory beliefs is to accept the idea that the Godhead is fundamentally different from humanity in the very ways that Yah has attempted to reveal Himself to us in human terms.

It causes a problem directly for the Victory message, in that one who is "filled with the Spirit" lives a victorious life; however, if the Spirit is a spiritual "being" like an angel or demon, then being filled with the Spirit would be a kind of possession that leaves us without true will or intent. (Mark 9:17-27) While it is true that the Father and Son "abide" within us, this is a spiritual truth, indicating that we have come to accept Their heart, their purpose, their characteristics, as our own. The Father in His fullness is in Heaven upon a Throne, and the Son – "cumbered with humanity" – is in the Most Holy Place, preparing to bring His people home. The Spirit, However, which is Their shared power, presence and essential nature, dwells within each individual who accepts Them, and binds us together in an everlasting tie.

This is an overview of the CSDA understanding of the Godhead. It is not the traditional view, but it is the Biblical view, and one that, we testify, has the greatest potential for blessing, and for the understanding of Gospel truth.

Are there any questions or comments on tonight's study?

Next Week: Layers of Good. World loves the "middle ground."