

funeral. I didn't mean to be offensive as I blurted out, "Mrs. Jones, don't blame me for that."

We all have responsibilities to carry out God's call to witness and serve. And we had better get on with responding to that call right away. Whether it be death or the sound of the trumpet that heralds His coming, there will be an end to the time that we have available to address these urgent concerns.

JUNE 1998

MORMON MATTERS (PART 5)

The Biblical Support for God in Three Persons

by Robert Sivulka

Introduction

In continuing with this series on Mormons and the Trinity, we have now come to the point where we can examine a particular case for why Christians believe their God to eternally exist as three persons. In the March issue, I said, "The Bible teaches that there are three simultaneously *distinct* persons who are coexistent, coequal, and coeternal. They have one divine nature and thus make up one being or thing." In the April and May issues, I made a case from Scripture that there is only one God for the entire universe, and that all other so-called "gods" are false gods. There is only one necessary Being that the entire universe (including its so-called gods) depends on for its very existence. With all this in mind, we are in a much better position for understanding what the Bible teaches about God eternally existing in three persons.

Biblical Data

The Bible teaches that the Father is God (cf. 2 Peter 1:17, this is rather uncontroversial among the cults). The Bible also teaches that the Son is God in various passages (e.g., Isaiah 9:6, John 1:1, 14, Colossians 2:9, Titus 2:13, and Revelation 1:8, 22:6, 12-16, 20). The Bible also teaches that the Holy Spirit is God (e.g., Acts 5:3-4, 1 Corinthians 6:19 with 2 Cor. 6:19, 2 Samuel 23:2-3).

So are there three Gods who rule over the world? Of course not. We have already seen how the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one personal Being who rules over the whole universe (e.g., Isaiah 43:10). So *prima facie* it would seem that somehow or another this one God must exist in these three persons.

If you have problems with this "somehow or another", may I suggest you go back and read the March issue on "The Logic of God in Three Persons". If this is not an option, then let me just say that there is nothing irrational about a very peculiar being existing in three persons. Why should this bother us any more than radically connected Siamese twins

existing? Here one person, in a certain sense, always shows up with the other. But with God, He is more like a Siamese triplet minus a body, since God is not a containable being (cf. 1 Kings 8:27).

Now an objection might be raised at this point by a modalist. A modalist is someone who teaches that God is one person who only *appears* as different persons. For the modalist, the terms "Father", "Son", and "Holy Spirit" are simply titles that all refer to the one same person, viz., God. This is similar to saying, "The evening star is the morning star." Here, even though the evening star means something different from the morning star (the evening star means the brightest star of the evening while the morning star means the brightest star of the morning), they both refer to the same star, viz., Venus. How would you answer this?

The Bible seems rather clear that the titles "Father", "Son", and "Holy Spirit" refer to different persons within the very being of God. This is critical with your evangelism to Mormons since they automatically assume that when you claim that Jesus is God, you must think that Jesus is identical to the person of the Father. Mormons quickly retort, "Well then, who was Jesus praying to throughout the New Testament?" or "was Jesus a master ventriloquist at His baptism when his voice was projected out of heaven—'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'?" You must make sure that Mormons understand you agree with them that the person of the Father is not identical to the person of the Son or to the person of the Holy Spirit. The problem is that simply because you think that the Father is a different person from the Son, it does not mean that the Father is a separate God from the Son. The Bible teaches both distinctness and unity, and as Christians, we must be faithful to both doctrines.

But how should we respond when Mormons stress the unity of the Godhead as that of purpose and not of being, since Jesus prayed that we might all be one even as He and the Father are one (John 17:21)? Certainly we are not, nor can we become one being. Jesus must here be referring to a oneness of purpose that He shares with His Father. I readily agree with Mormons that Jesus is one in purpose with the Father. But that is not all He is. He is also one in the being that He eternally shares with the Father, viz., that of God. John chapter 10 refers to this other kind of oneness that Jesus shares with the Father (vs. 30). Why is not this simply a oneness of purpose as well? Because the Jews told Jesus that "you, a mere man, claim to be God" (vs. 33). Jesus never said that they misunderstood Him, and that He was only claiming to be one in purpose with the Father. Rather, Jesus drilled the point home when He claimed that He was "the", not "a", Son of God (vs. 36). To claim to be "the" Son of God is to claim that He is God and that is why the Jews continued in their attempt to stone Jesus (vs. 39).

Conclusion

We have seen that the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one true God who simultaneously and eternally exists in three distinct persons— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Next time I will focus more specifically on the person of the Son, and demonstrate how radically different He is from the Jesus of the Mormon Church.

Theme Park

Here Comes the Groom

by Rachael Coonradt

"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." —Matthew 25:13

June is always the month of weddings and brides and grooms. A fitting month, then, to ponder the fact that our Groom is coming soon. In the Bible, there are many marital metaphors describing the relationship between God and His church. In Matthew 25, Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to this scenario: five wise and five foolish virgins are going out to meet the bridegroom—the wise bringing oil for their lamps, the foolish coming unprepared. When the groom is on his way, the foolish ones have to go out to buy oil, thus missing him and missing out on being allowed into the wedding banquet.

Like the Boy Scouts, apparently the message of the Kingdom of God is "be prepared." Are we? The Bible calls the church the Bride of Christ. Our Groom has promised to come to us soon, but are we getting ready? Or are we foolishly assuming we have plenty of time to do our hair and put on our dress? Well, this is a metaphor, folks. I'm not suggesting that we have to "dress up" for God—make ourselves presentable and acceptable. Rather, I'm thinking of the giddy excitement of the wedding day, anticipating seeing the one we love and being ready to go with him when the time comes.

Church, are we excited to see our Groom? Are we barely able to contain our excitement at seeing face to face the one we love and who loves us so much? Or are we stuck at the bachelor party, hoping for one last fun fling before a lifetime of commitment? ("I hope Jesus doesn't come back before I get married; have a child; see the world; have a great career...") How can such adulterous thoughts take our mind off of one who loves us so much?

I'd like to leave you with a thought from a favorite hymn of mine, "The Church's One Foundation." As you read this, remember the "Bride" is not just the church. It's you. Put your own

name where it says "the church" and then tell me you aren't excited to see your groom!

The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord.
She is His new creation
by water and the Word.
From Heaven He came and sought her
to be His holy bride.
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

July's theme is: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." If anyone is interested in sharing their thoughts in this column, or if you have a response to this month's editorial, the deadline is June 21st. The newsletter box is on the shelf above the coatrack at the back of the sanctuary. We look forward to hearing from you!

Being Jesus' Hands

Stephen Ministry in Our Church

Our Stephen Ministry trainees are just a few weeks away from completing their fifty hours of training. Are any of you wondering what they will do when they are done? Galatians 6:2 is the answer. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." At one time or another, most of us need someone to come alongside us for awhile and help us with the burdens of life. When you are struggling through a difficult time in your life, Cornerstone's Stephen Ministry is there to be that friend walking alongside. Stephen Ministers are not counselors or psychiatrists, but loving Christians who have been trained to confidentially listen, support, and encourage.

But the Stephen Ministers are not the whole picture of Stephen Ministry. YOU—the congregation are part of our Stephen Ministry. You are the eyes and ears who can see when a brother or sister needs a helping hand. You are the ones who talk about and talk up this Ministry of ours. You are the ones who are humble enough to ask help for yourselves when you are struggling. And just what is "struggling?" It could be a death in the family, an upcoming surgery, a new baby, or the same old blues. Someone may need a Stephen Minister to walk with them for a few weeks, some for much longer.

Please be in prayer for our Stephen Ministers. And be in prayer for how God will have you help or benefit from this Ministry.

(If you have questions about our Stephen Ministry, think you might be interested in being cared for by a Stephen Minister or know of someone else who might be interested, please contact Rachael Coonradt.)
