

**#0224 - March 12, 2009**

**Why We Believe What We Believe – Trinity Part 2**

[Easley:] No matter how clever, sharp or intelligent a person might be, the human mind will never be able to fully comprehend. If human wisdom were able to grasp this, then God wouldn't have need to reveal it from Heaven or announce it in His Holy Scripture.

[Lepine:] This is *inContext* with Michael Easley; I'm Bob Lepine. I heard someone say once, Michael, that one of the defenses, one of the reasons we can know the Scriptures are true is because they teach us things that we can't fully comprehend. If we were relying on human authorship, a good human author would try to tie everything together -

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Lepine:] - and leave nothing mysterious or complicated or beyond our comprehension. But the Doctrine of the Trinity is one of those things that, as you've said, we can't fully understand because it's God's doctrine.

[Easley:] It is attributed to Spurgeon that no one outgrows the Scriptures; it widens and deepens with our years. There is a breadth and depth and otherworldliness to this book; that the more you study it, the more questions you have and you pound your head against the wall. Again, faith requires that we trust God at His Word and then at the end of the day, I'd much rather line up my belief systems to what God has said than the way you or I might be able to piece it together

[Lepine:] When you were teaching this particular message to students at the Moody Bible Institute, one of the things you got into was the subject of baptism related to the Trinity because different churches -

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] - have quibbled over what words you use to describe the Trinity when you have a baptism. In fact, that's where we are picking up as we look at part two of your message on the Trinity. Here's Michael.

[Easley:] Sometimes people talk a lot about baptism and there are denominational splits over how many times and the form. I was at a church that held to a strict immersion doctrine for a while and I saw at least ten people in my tour, I didn't baptize them, who didn't get their head quite wet. And if we want to strain gnats I want to say, "Well are they really baptized if the top of their head didn't get wet?"

You can have all sorts of wonderful denominational dialogue about this. Is mode the issue? It can be an important issue. I find it fascinating that in Jesus Christ's baptism in Mark chapter one, for example:

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*

And as Dr. Dyer would say, "It is God's will for you to see the Jordan someday."

[Laughter] "It's drying up but you should see it anyway."

*Immediately coming up out of the water, [it sounds like He's under at some level] He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove [the text says] descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."*

Regardless of the mode, what's happening is that you have a Trinitarian expression, an identification of the Father with His Spirit that that's His Son. So no matter what your mode of baptism may be, the theology is identification. That God the Father has identified His Son with the confirmation of His very Spirit and so the believer is sealed, Paul tells us in Ephesians, *fragidzo*, you're sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption. So the Trinitarian action in identifying the Son as part of the Trinity and identifying the believer as a believer in Jesus Christ, I think identification is the key issue.

When I was a pastor we had Baptism classes. In a Bible Church you have Methodists who marry Catholics and Baptists who marry Unitarians and it's just real joyful. [Laughter] And they come to Christ and they can't get along in their former churches so they come to a Bible Church. It's just like, "Oh, let's just have all the conflict in one room." [Laughter] "Let's don't have immersion conflict; let's have every form of baptism conflict in the room."

And so we had this one hour spiel we gave on baptism and why we held to what we did and invariably there were the questions.

"Well, I was sprinkled as a child."

"I was immersed."

"I was three times."

"I was four times."

Whatever it was and on and on we went. It really is joyful. I say that tongue in cheek but it really was because these were adults and they don't know why they believe what they believe. The thought of getting in a tank in front of people scares them to death. And so we have to do some good spadework and teach them why, if you believe it's important and I do, they should be identified with Christ.

I remember this one school teacher had come to Christ at a very young age in a particular denomination and she wanted to be a member but in our church you have to be baptized to be a member (that's a different discussion again for another series). She said to me, "Michael, do you really think it's important that I get baptized in the mode of this church?"

And I said, "No, I don't think it's important."

I said, "I don't care what the mode is. Me, Michael Easley off record, I don't care what the mode is. I don't think that's the issue. I know people, good people, who think the mode *is* the issue. I don't think that's the issue."

I said, "When I peel all that I know about baptism back, and I know a lot, the one reason I got baptized was because Jesus said 'Baptize them.' And if Jesus asks me to do

something as simple as going underwater and saying, 'I've trusted in Christ and Christ alone for my salvation,' that's not a big thing for me to do. He didn't ask me to sell all that I own and go live in the desert. He said, 'Will you be identified as one of Mine?' You may have a different take on it. I'll pray for you to come to the light." [Laughter]

Regardless of mode, what's happening here is identification and so in this passage in our Doctrinal Statement, the Doctrinal Statement issues, there is a Trinitarian godhead expressed in the Great Commission; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There's a third passage. We have the Great Shema, the Great Commission and what I would suggest we call the Great Authority. Turn over to First Corinthians chapter 8. First Corinthians chapter eight verse six. By the way that phrase, "You're My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," it occurs one other time in the three Synoptics. Do you know when? It occurs at the Baptism and it occurs at the Transfiguration. That's a fascinating study on your own time, not now. First Corinthians eight verse six. Read with me:

[Congregation with Easley:] *Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.*

So here we have three persons equal in authority, is what were stressing from our Doctrinal Statement. Note that the Father is the source in this passage. All things, we exist for Him, so He is the source and our purpose and existence is for Him. The second parallel phrase where Jesus Christ, we exist through Him, we might say is the agent of creation.

So on the first point, God is the source; He created us in His image. We are image bearers. But when it comes to Christ's ministry, He's the agent of creation. We saw the same thing in Colossians chapter one if you remember that part of our series last year.

Now yes, there was a kenosis meaning in Philippians two Jesus empties Himself. He leaves Heaven's glory. He takes on humanity. He's born of a virgin. Galatians 4:4 says:

[At the proper time] *God sent forth His Son* [He interrupts linear time. He] *sent forth His Son, born of a [virgin], born under the Law* [there is a context].

So He's going to come incarnate to fulfill and complete the Law where no one else could have done; at a *time* He comes. Now Paul tells us He is the agent of creation; we exist through Him. So again our Doctrinal Statement uses these three sort of benchmark verses to talk about the Trinitarian doctrine.

Let me give you one more and I'm going to call it the Great Unity and Diversity. So we have the Great Shema, the Great Commission, the Great Authority and let me give you one, the Great Unity and Diversity and this is found in First Corinthians twelve verses four, five and six. Just turn over a couple of pages. First Corinthians twelve verses four, five and six. You follow and I'll read. On the section of gifts and the gifts given for the common good Paul says:

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.  
And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.  
There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things and all persons.*

Now, rarely will you see these three verses as a citation for the Doctrine of the Trinity and it's sort of confuses me why because it's a wonderful passage underscoring a Trinitarian Godhead. You have all three mentioned there. You have the Spirit, the Lord and God. You also have Paul saying it's the *same* Spirit, the *same* Lord and the *same* God. That to me is a very clear Trinitarian reference and even if that wasn't enough, Paul gives us a little nuance on the different persons.

Notice the variety of gift but the same Spirit. Who enables the believer with spiritual gifts? The Holy Spirit. The charismata, right? So the spiritual gifts come through the Holy Spirit's indwelling. We have varieties of ministries but the same Lord. Here were looking at service primarily, I think. Jesus Christ came to serve, right? So he effectually shows us that's how you live the Christian life.

And then, thirdly, the effects, which are ascribed to the same God who works all these things. So it's a beautiful three-legged picture of the Trinitarian Godhead; same Lord, same Spirit, same God but we have different ministries, different gifts and we have different effects. Now this passage, one writer, Jamison, Faucett and Brown says, "The terms gifts, administrations and operations respectively correspond to the Divine Three."

I like that. The Divine Three. I heard G.I. Packer speak a few months back over in the western suburbs at a church out there, and he stood up and he was talking about the Trinitarian Doctrine and he said, "I'd like for you to think about the Trinity as the Divine Team." And he said, "Think about that for a while."

So I've been thinking about it ever since, Dr. Packer. The Divine Team. That sounds pretty good. You know, any illustration about the Holy Spirit stands on three or four legs at best, right? But I would say Packer's wobbles less than most. That's a pretty good picture. The Divine Team; the Divine Three.

You have the same idea taught in Ephesians four verses four, five and six. Now think about these four points. The Great Shema: monotheism, one God. The Great Commission: you have the triune Godhead sending us to make disciples of all nations. So you have monotheism, you have identification and thirdly you have the Great Authority: and here we have the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God.

It's amazing how many people will resist the notion that Jesus is God. Jesus Christ is God. He's not a little god. He's not a chip off the old God. He is God. He's fully God and fully man. And oh, by the way, the Holy Spirit is also God. Fourth, we have this Unity and Diversity: what I would call the same God but diverse ministries.

Now we don't have the word "Trinity" in our Bible. That's a fact we have to acknowledge. There are many passages, scores of them, that will teach about a captured hearing Doctrine and how we got there. It is clear we don't have it.

An exceptional illustration I came across this last week was from Ravi Zacharias and if you've ever heard Ravi, you need a thesaurus and a dictionary when the man talks. His vocabulary makes mine sound like a third grader. It's amazing, but this illustration even I can understand. Listen to what he writes. This is from *Can a Man Live Without God?*

“You know that in space you can move three ways; to the left or to the right, backwards or forwards and up or Down. Every direction is one of these three or a compromise between them. We call them three dimensions. Now notice, if you are using only one dimension,” he writes, “you could draw a straight line. If you're using two dimensions you could draw say a square made up of four straight lines and if you add the third dimension you could have what we call a solid body, a cube or a box.

“Think of it like a lump of sugar and it would be made of six squares and three dimensions.” Then he writes, “Do you see the point? A world of one dimension would be a world of straight lines. A world of two dimensions you would still see straight lines, but it takes many lines to make one figure. In a three-dimensional world you still get the same lines but you get an advanced level of dimensions. They are more real and more complicated in their levels. You still have them. They're combined in many different ways and you couldn't imagine having them unless you knew the simpler dimensions.”

Now I don't know what those fractals are called on your Windows program when you set your window to go to those, you know, gyrating color schemes. Some of you use a media player or maybe iTunes (spits) [Laughter and clapping] -that's just to see if you're awake- and you have those little geometric things you can pull in with 256,000.6 million color iterations and they just, you know, almost make you dizzy, some of them, watching them, right? They're so fantastic and you just kind of, instead of reading theology you just watch those geo-whatsy things go on your computer.

Those require three dimensions essentially, correct? They CAD, but you have to have a straight line to get there. You have to have a box to get to the three dimensions. If you want to measure some place in space you've got to have three points and so there's a lot of traction to this type of philosophical thinking about this.

Well why is the Trinitarian Doctrine important? Number one I would say that God had a perfect community in the Father, Son and Spirit and He wants that community in the body of Christ. Secondly, God has incredible love for you and me and so to express that love it required His Son and His Spirit because apart from His Son there is no relationship and apart from His Spirit there is no connection.

Jesus had to leave to send the Holy Spirit who, this one will keep you awake at night, does a better job than Jesus in a way. Not that Jesus wasn't sufficient in every way; but it was to our benefit, He said, that He would leave and send His Spirit. And of course it fulfills the new covenant, oh by the way. We worship a God that has made a perfect way through His Son's obedience and through sending His Spirit.

Why we believe what we believe is not important. It's crucial. And we don't just believe the Bible because it's the Bible. We don't believe the Bible because it's true; we believe the Bible because God has revealed Himself in His Word. You are believing the God of the Word, not just words on paper that talk about God. The only reason this book is true is because of the author; not because we've proven it to be true. The Bible isn't reliable; the Bible is true. The Bible is true because God is true.

Here are three very practical implications. Number one, salvation and redemption require the Trinitarian Godhead. For you to be saved, for me to be saved and for us to be redeemed; it required the Father, Son and Spirit. You cannot be saved according to a New Testament or Old Testament Biblical theology, apart from the Father, the Son and

the Holy Spirit. The Son pays for your sin and mine but it's the Spirit who indwells us; who fulfills the new covenant, the other piece of this, to show that we are saved and redeemed.

The second practical implication is fellowship. We talk a lot about this. I go to a church and I don't think they can say five sentences without using the word community in their language. It's such a funny word to me. We all talk about community, community, community. I want to go,

"I don't see any community."

Where is the community? We talk about it a lot. Are we really in community with believers? You perhaps have more community in this context than you're ever going to have again in your life; unless you're a leader and you lead in community and you pull people together and you go out of your way and you get messy with some people that are just downright messy and you have a small group or a Bible study or you reach out to a friend who's not a believer.

Or, if you're going to have a community it takes someone who has a heart for community and I think there is a very serious parallel in John fourteen, fifteen and following, that the Father desires fellowship with His own. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. It's a community of believers. You have to believe that a community of believers are going to make you a better follower of Jesus Christ than not having a community of believers. That's where the body comes in. So we can talk a lot about it.

"Show it to me! Show it to me! Let's do it as a body of Christ."

Third and last, we have access to God through the Trinitarian Doctrine. Ephesians 2:18 is a passage to jot down. The only way I understand the Bible, the only way I have intercessory ability with God the Father is because His Holy Spirit indwells me and I don't understand that at all men and women. I don't get it. Maybe you can explain it to me, but the moment you trusted Jesus Christ, His Holy Spirit became your permanent roommate and His job is to make you more like Christ; to make me more like Christ than before.

So I have the permanent issuance of the Holy Spirit indwelling in you and indwelling in me to enable us to relate to Jesus Christ who lives to make constant intercession before the Father for you. So the way we understand the Trinitarian Doctrine is not just academic. It's our salvation and redemption. It's our fellowship one with another. It's the way I have access to God, is through a Trinitarian relationship; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

John Calvin has done us a favor taking much of Martin Luther's writings and putting them in different forms and devotions. With this issue from his December eleventh entry I close. Here is Calvin writing Luther in a lucid way for us to read:

"You must simply believe this. No matter how clever, sharp or intelligent a person might be, the human mind will never be able to fully comprehend it. If human wisdom were able to grasp this then God wouldn't need it to reveal it from heaven or announce it in His Holy Scripture. So you should say, 'Even though I cannot completely comprehend it, I believe it and I confess it. That there is one eternal God who is also three distinct

persons.' The Holy Scripture is God's Word and says that is the way it is. I will live by what it says."

Why you believe what you believe isn't important; it's crucial.

[Lepine:] Michael, I have to tell you a story. A number of years ago I was managing a local Christian radio station in a city here in the US and there was a local church pastor who wanted to buy time on my station. His church held a view of the Trinity that was not the orthodox view of the Trinity. It's one of the things you've talk about in this message, and I was wrestling as a manager. Do I sell time to this local church? It's a big church in town. Lots of folks who attended his church listen to my station. In the midst of wrestling with it I had the opportunity to be in a question and answer session with the late Dr. Walter Martin -

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Lepine:] - who wrote the book *Kingdom of the Cults*.

[Easley:] Great book.

[Lepine:] I raised my hand in that question and answer time with him and I explained my dilemma and I said, "This church doesn't hold an orthodox view of the Trinity. Should I sell them time?"

And he said, "Their god is not the God of the Bible."

[Easley:] Mmm.

[Lepine:] And I thought, "I guess that's the right answer."

[Easley:] [Laughs] Yeah.

[Lepine:] [Laughing] I went back and did not sell time to that pastor and did not make him happy and did not make the members of his church happy -

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] - but I realize the time to wrestle with those issues is not when someone wants to come by time under a decision. You have to know what you believe ahead of time so that you can stand firm in the moment, right?

[Easley:] You and I have talked about co-belligerence.

[Lepine:] Mmm hmm.

[Easley:] There are times when we fight an issue. I am unapologetically pro-life. I unapologetically believe that marriage is a heterosexual, monogamous, life-long relationship. If another group wants to party with me to fight those issues socially or to teach them accurately then great; but when we diverge theologically, we make that clear distinction. Again, the great power of this Bob is when we rest on the Word of God, the burden of proof is on what He says in His revealed Word and not merely what people

say about it. So to apply your decision and Walter Martin's council, err on the side of what we know of Biblical Theology and it doesn't matter what the polls will say.

[Lepine:] And this is why it is important for us to get our heads around some of these doctrines. We've put together a study on why we believe what would believe that takes your messages, your sermon notes and the *Moody Handbook of Theology* and puts them all together so that folks can have a better understanding of the Doctrine of the Trinity or the Doctrine of Inspiration or the Doctrine of Salvation.

Maybe we can't understand it fully, but we can understand more than perhaps we understand today. Information about the "Why We Believe What We Believe" Bible study is on our website [incontextradio.org](http://incontextradio.org). You can also find out more about the study by calling us at 1-877-3CONTEXT. 877-326-6839.

Now tomorrow on *inContext*, Lou Barbieri joins us. He is a professor of Theology at the Moody Bible Institute. We're going to talk about theology and why knowing who God is helps get us through hard times in life. I hope you can join us for tomorrow's edition of *inContext* with Michael Easley.