

**GOD AS ETERNALLY RELATED WITHIN HIMSELF:  
THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY REVEALED IN CHRIST**  
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CONTINUED

**PART II. VITAL ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE  
TRINITY**

*“And Jesus said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona,  
because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.  
I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church;  
and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.’”*  
*(Matthew 16.17-18)*

In our study of the doctrine of the trinity, we are following the themes through which Jesus guided his disciples in Matt 16.13-20. The previous study took up Peter’s confession and explored the theme of the nature of God as a trinity developed in the NT. Now we will turn our attention to the way Jesus connects the truth of who he is to us. First Jesus points out what the confession means for Peter as an individual, and in this he is only the representative of the disciples (v 17). Second, Jesus points out what this confession means for the disciples as the new collective people of God—his church (v 18). Through these two subjects, the Lord outlines how we are involved in the revelation of God in Christ. This is about the vital issues involved in the doctrine of the trinity.

The two themes Jesus raised embrace our complete humanity. God created us with a twofold identity. On the one hand, we each are individuals who stand directly before our Maker, and, on the other, we are a race and have a collective identity and status before God. Sin involved and brought to ruin both sides of what we are. Christ came to bring full redemption and this involves both the individual and collective side of our human identity.

**A. CHRIST REVEALED TO THE INDIVIDUAL**

The doctrine of the deity of Christ and the trinity presses a spiritual crisis. The scriptures teach the truths of the deity of Christ and the triune nature of God, and we have laid out the evidence and biblical teaching, but this is not enough to make a person see the truth. This is not due to a deficiency in the teaching of the doctrine or to a lack of clarity in the Bible. Rather, it is due to the nature of God’s revelation in Christ, and this is rooted in the triune nature of God.

**1. The Father’s revelation**

Jesus drew out two answers to the question as to who he is. First he drew out the opinion of the masses (Matt 16.13-14) and then the confession of Peter as the answer of the disciples (vv 15-16). In his response to Peter’s confession he traces the two answers to two different sources of revelation. He said, “...flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (v 17).

**a. The dichotomy between flesh and blood and the Father**

Jesus set his Father in opposition to flesh and blood. The question here is: what identifies Jesus as the Son of God? There are two possible sources for disclosing to the human mind Jesus’ identity. To grasp this we must look more closely at the two sources.

i. *The dichotomy between flesh and blood and the Father in heaven*

First Jesus points to the type of nature. Man is defined in contrast to God by the designation “flesh and blood” which refers to man’s material nature. Flesh is the physical nature which man has in common with animals and in contrast to God who is Spirit (Ish 31.3). Man is flesh, and to make flesh one’s strength is to turn away from God (Jer 17.5). As flesh and blood man does not have a nature in common with God. Flesh and blood is the perishable nature in contrast to God, and it cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor 15.50). Paul knew that the input and opinion of flesh and blood (i.e., of man from his human point of view) contradicts the revelation of God so that when God revealed his Son to him he did not consult flesh and blood (Gal 1.16).

The contrast between God and man is not just one of nature but also of sphere. Jesus points to this by calling God “My Father *who is in heaven.*” Heaven is the polar opposite of earth so that what is of heaven is in contrast to what is of earth. As heaven is high above earth, what is of God in heaven cannot be reached by man on earth and cannot be comprehended by his own way of thinking (see Ish 55.8-9). The Father’s sphere is in contrast to and high above the earthly nature of flesh and blood.

We must also take in the force of Jesus’ use of the first person pronoun in saying “*my* Father.” If Jesus were only a prophet, he would stand in a class with other men; but as the Christ, the Son of God, he stands apart by himself. Jesus takes up this point of Peter’s confession. Since he is the only one who is the Son, God is related to him uniquely as his Father. This is important for the subject being discussed. God stands in relation to Jesus as his Son in a way that is different from the way he is related to mankind. God is not the Father of flesh and blood, and that means that flesh and blood is not a nature that knows God in the way he is the Father of Jesus. For Peter to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, he had to be given a view of God’s unique relationship with his own Son, and this could not arise from man’s native comprehension of God. The view was given by God as the Father of the Son.

ii. *The Father as the absolute source of all*

To comprehend the distance between the Father and flesh and blood, we must draw on what we have learned about the trinity. The Father only gives and never receives. He is the absolute source of all. As such, he stands in absolute contrast to man. Man is a creature who exists in a relationship in which he receives from God. Within the trinity, the Son is fully God, but he also exists in a relationship in which he receives all that is of the Father. In this receiving position, man was created as the image of God to stand in parallel to the Son. That is why it is the Son of God who became man. But, it would be impossible for the Father to become man, for the Father does not exist in a relationship in which he receives. The Son, though fully God, has the Father as his God, but the Father does not have any (the Son or the Spirit) as his God. In his relationships, he is ever and only God, and knows no other position. The Son and the Spirit are fully God in their being and nature, but relationally they exist and function also in a relationship in which they have their God as the source of all they receive. The Father is only God but not God alone.

In the Father, we have the divine nature as the absolute source of all and so in absolute contrast to man. This means that the Father is absolutely invisible. He exists outside of any common ground with the creature and so outside of the field of human vision. God the Father is absolutely transcendent, but he is not merely transcendent. If this were the case, we would have no relationship with him. God is also by his very nature related, but he is not related directly to creation. He is related eternally from within himself, for he exists in relationship with his Son, and only in the Son is he related to creation.

The Son became human and so stands within the human field of vision. Jesus is presented in the objective reality of his life and work on earth which is open to human perception. However, as the Son of God, he has his source and identity in the Father, and since the Father is outside of our horizon we cannot of ourselves see or define who Jesus really is. Whatever language is used to identify Jesus in relation to God, people naturally identify him by what God is to their consciousness, i.e., the creator and lawgiver. They begin with an idea of God, i.e., what God is to them, and then identify and define Jesus by this view of God. Really, they are not identifying Jesus by the truth of God but by how they perceive God in relation to

them. In this way, people miss the mark. It is the Father as uniquely related to Jesus who identifies and discloses who Jesus is, not flesh and blood.

*iii. The exclusive knowledge of the Father and the Son*

Since man has no natural conception of God the Father in the eternal Godhead, man cannot of himself know the Son. This means that man has no access to the knowledge of the Son. Jesus declared this in Matt 11.27 when he said to his Father in worship, "...no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

The Father and the Son know each other directly and each only has his identity in relation to the other. No creature exists by his nature within this divine relationship and that is why a creature cannot know God out of his own nature. The knowledge of the Father and the Son is exclusive to the Godhead. This exclusive knowledge means that the Father and the Son alone can reveal each other. A creature can declare that God is the Father and Jesus is the Son, but this is not a knowledge that he has in his own nature. Only the Father can show Jesus to be the Son for the Father defines him as the Son. Only the Son can show God to be Father for God is only Father in his relation to the Son. Jesus points out the two way revelation. In Matt 11.27 he says that the Son can reveal the Father, and in Matt 11.25 and 16.17 he points out the Father's revealing role.

**b. The dynamics of revelation in the relationship between the Father and the Son**

We must keep in mind the distinction between the Son's manifestation in the world and the Father's work of revealing the Son to the believer. The Son was manifested on the public stage of the world once and for all in history, and in this he objectively revealed God; but this manifestation did not complete the process of revelation. The manifestation of the Son opened up for the Father to reveal the Son to us. As in their eternal existence, so in the work of revelation the Father and the Son are inseparable. Their roles are to be distinguished but never separated. They only carry out their distinct roles in relation to each other. Let us look at how this happens in the Father's work of revealing the Son to us.

The Father did not give the revelation to Peter apart from Jesus. The Son of God was set before the disciples and apart from this manifestation no revelation from the Father would have occurred. The Father is in the Son and only works in the Son. This is important. There is an objective reference point for the Father's work. We are not to think of some mystical and inner revelation divorced from the historical reality of the manifestation of the Son. The first point we must be clear on is that the Father who is invisible and transcendent over all only works in the Son who is fully revealed in history. The Father will not make known to us anything that is not manifested in the Son. We cannot see more from the Father than what is objectively presented in the Son. The eye must be kept on the Son. If people turn from him to learn from God, they sink into subjective delusion.

The Son set before our eyes what we can see, but through him the reality is pressed on us that we do not and cannot know from ourselves what God is in relation to Christ and what he is to us through Christ. The Father works through what the Son sets before mankind to make known that the source of Jesus' identity is not in flesh and blood, i.e., what he has in common with us, but in the unique relationship with God that he holds in contrast to us.

**c. The Spirit's role in the revelation that the Father gives**

The focus on the Father and the Son in the work of revelation raises the question of the Spirit's role. We are accustomed to thinking of the Spirit as the one who makes the Son known to us, and this is correct. Jesus introduced the Spirit in Jn 14 to 16 as the divine person who would make the full reality of the Son known to the disciples. In his role as witness to the world, however, the Spirit's direct relation to the Father is stressed. Jesus identified the Spirit in this role as he "who proceeds from the Father" and witnesses in conjunction with the historical witness that the apostles give to Christ (Jn 15.26-27). The Spirit directly

proceeds from the Father and so gives the Father's witness to the Son. This is rooted in the trinity. God's relationship to the world is set between the Father and the Son, and the Spirit works within this relationship. A person comes to recognize the Son only as he is made aware of God as the Father of the Son. Since the Son takes his identity from his relation to the Father rather than the Spirit, the revelation is of the Father by the will of the Father.

When it comes to making the Son known in the world, the Spirit remains unknown. Jesus pointed out this in his introduction of the Spirit in Jn 14.17. He is the Spirit of truth "whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him." He is only known where the Son is known, and that means within the revelation of the Father-Son relationship. So, while he works in the world in bringing about faith, he does not focus attention on himself but on the Son in relation to God as the Father. Once a person comes to faith, he knows the Spirit, but only as identified by the Father and the Son. We must be clear on this point: the Spirit works to bring us into the knowledge of the order of the divine relationships.

If the Spirit focused attention on himself in the process of bringing people to faith, the truth would not be disclosed. He would not be the Spirit of truth. The human mind would be focused on God as imminent and on his presence and operations within creation. This would lead us to identify Christ solely by his work in us, and this would be a gross untruth. Christ is not identified by the way he is received by us. He has the source of his own identity in God as he is in absolute contrast to the world. Christ is not of this world, and he arrests the attention of people to focus the mind away from the world. The source from which he came and the goal to which he returned is his Father in heaven. He came to orient us toward the source and goal of life that is with the Father in his absolute contrast to the world. The world hates all that is not of the world and only loves its own (Jn 15.18-25), and this hatred was played out at the cross.

### Reflection

All the divine operations are from and to God as God stands in contrast to the world. The Godhead carries out the whole operation and we are taken up in this great work by the divine work of revelation. Through this our own life becomes one that is from and to the Father. We can put this truth in the language of reconciliation that Paul uses. God is never said to be reconciled to us. We are reconciled to God. It is never said that we reconcile ourselves to God. God reconciled us to himself through the work of Christ. The flesh is hostile to the very way God orients things. The flesh works from man up to God and seeks to adapt God to man. The movement here is the opposite of that which we see within the Godhead. The contradiction between God and the flesh works out at every level of the divine-human relationship. In the life of the believer, the conflict is experienced in the indwelling Spirit and the presence of the flesh. The flesh always wants to make its will and desires the starting point and take control of the divine for self. The Spirit works against this impulse and makes see and receive the work of God as coming from the Father through the Son. This conflict within ever brings us back to the fundamental dynamics of our relationship with God in which we must turn away from flesh and blood and so be opened up afresh to God who enables us to see all in light of the way God is related to us in Christ.

## **2. The divine revelation in human experience**

So far we have looked at the divine act of revealing. We are creatures in time, and this divine act must happen in human experience. The Gospel of Matthew opens up to us the human side in this.

### **a. The moment of revelation (Matt 14.22-36)**

Peter, in his confession, spoke for the disciples as a group. Where did they get the insight and assurance that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God? Matthew gives us the account of this in the story of the walking on the water.

The setting for the event is the separation of the disciples from the multitude which Jesus fed. Jesus sent the disciples away across the sea while he dismissed the crowd (Matt 14.22). Then he went up on the mountain by himself to pray to Father (v 23). It was in prayer that he received from the Father the event of revelation on the water. There is a significant difference in the miracle of him walking on the water and his miracles

among the Jews. In his public miracles, the power of God changed the people he healed, but now the transformation was in his own person. He himself transcended nature. More, he became the source of divine power for Peter to walk on the water. The Father gave it to Jesus not only to walk on the water but also to be the object of Peter's faith and the divine source for the disciple to participate in his transcendence over nature and chaos. When Jesus and Peter entered the boat, the wind stopped. The disciples' response was to worship him and confess, "You are certainly the Son of God" (v 33). The act of worship was an intuitive response to the sense of divine presence, and Jesus accepted it. This was the first time that the disciples as a group confessed Jesus to be the Son of God.

Peter's confession in Matt 16.16 ties in tightly with the appearance of Christ in his divine glory on the water. The people experienced the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, but the disciples were separated off to receive a special revelation in the person of Christ. This is answered in Matthew 16 in that the crowds had their own opinion of Jesus while the disciples knew him to be the Son of God (though Peter alone gave the confession, he did so as the spokesman for the twelve, hence all who had been in the boat confessed Jesus to be the Son). Furthermore, Peter was singled out on the high sea by stepping out of the boat and sharing in Jesus' transcendence over nature. For him the revelation had a special experiential significance, and this is reflected in the fact that he was the one who gave the immediate and decisive confession.

Common believers do not receive a revelation from the Father in such a dramatic experience as Peter and the disciples had on the stormy sea. But, the principle is true for all as Matt 11.27 points out: the fact that the knowledge of the Father and Son is exclusive to the Godhead means that a person can only come to know through revelation. The miracles that Jesus performed were signs that set forth in visual and dramatic ways the spiritual realities realized through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Here we must notice a connection within the Gospel of Matthew. The transformation in the body of Jesus was only passing during his ministry on earth. Such a transformation became permanently realized in his resurrection body, and the walking on the water was a sign of the state Christ received from the Father in his resurrection. The link between the walking on the water and the resurrection is strengthened in that the disciples, upon meeting the risen Christ, fell down and worshipped him (Matt 28.17) just as they had done in the boat. In both instances, they intuitively responded to the manifestation of deity in Jesus.

The miracle that happened on the water dramatized the revelation that the Father gives to true disciples. In the act of revelation the believer is made to see that Jesus in his own person (as a man and for mankind) has been given the divine transcendence over nature and the forces of chaos that threaten our life with destruction. This reality was historically and eternally realized in the resurrection of Jesus. The true believer sees more than the objective fact of Christ's resurrection. He has called out to the Lord to be given a share in Christ's achievement, and in sharing in Christ's power he has his salvation from the power of destruction. In this salvation, the believer does not relate to Jesus as to a prophet. Jesus is the object of faith, and he is the divine source of the power and salvation. When we respond by faith to the word of Christ given in the gospel, we begin to share in the divine salvation over the kingdom of darkness and from sin. We live in the reality of Jesus' deity, and our act of worship is the confession that he is the Son of God.

#### **b. The recipients of the revelation**

In Matt 11.25-30 Jesus points out the principles involved in the divine gift of revelation to the individual. Jesus is here responding to the fact that the cities in which most of his miracles were performed did not repent. He turns to his Father in praise and thanks him that he has hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants. The condition for receiving the Father's revelation of the Son's identity is that one not be wise and intelligent but be, in spiritual terms, an infant. The wise and intelligent were the Jews who rejected Christ, and the infants were the disciples. An infant has none of his own wisdom and ideas to contribute. He does not even claim to have the capacity to figure out the truth. An infant does not take control of knowledge and is innocently open to being shown the truth. The knowledge of the Father and the Son (and so of God as the trinity of persons) stands in opposition to human wisdom and cannot be arrived at by human thought. It is only revealed where people take the position of infants before the manifestation of God in Christ.

In Matt 11.25-26 Jesus outlines the principle of revelation from the Father in terms of the human recipients. Then at the close of v 27 he turns attention to the Son's work in revealing the Father. His role is to give the call of Matt 11.28-30. He does not call all to come to him in v 28 but only all who are weary and heavy-laden. What he has in mind is seen in v 29. Those who come to Jesus must take his yoke (answering to the wearying labour of v 28) and learn of him (answering to the burden of v 28 and v 30). To labour under the way of life as directed and dictated by human wisdom and intelligence is the crushing burden. In discipleship, Jesus takes this burden from us and leads us in the way of God.

### **3. Delineating our knowledge of God in Christ**

We are looking at the vital issues involved in the doctrine of the trinity, so it will be helpful to apply the truth we have been exploring to the human experience.

The doctrine of the trinity is commonly regarded from an intellectual point of view. When approached intellectually, it proves to be extremely difficult, and in its living truth it can't be known this way. The vital revelation of God in Christ turns us away from that type of knowledge that is our pride and that puts us in control of truth. Man first sinned by seeking to be wise and putting himself on a par with God in the area of knowledge. As a result, God as the absolute source of all truth stands in total contradiction to man in his wisdom, and this was presented fully in the revelation of God in Christ. When God revealed himself fully, man in his wisdom found himself in full contradiction with God. It is through this deep clash that we must come to know God.

Everyone who truly confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, is truly blessed. He has had the truth of Christ's identity revealed to him by the Son's Father who is in heaven. He has come to recognize in Jesus what God knows him to be. The Father has let him into the Father's knowledge of the Son, and that is the highest blessedness.

The blessedness does not consist in intellectual knowledge, though that is involved. To receive the revelation from the Father is to be delivered from the confines of flesh and blood. It is not just a matter that we are not controlled by flesh and blood in the way we see Jesus. No, we are totally reoriented. We see that God is not related in our flesh and blood, but that he relates from himself in his Son. Here we find the relationship of divine life. To see the truth of Christ is to see him as the one who has received from the Father and achieved in his manhood the full glory of God for mankind. We can only enter this truth at his call to come to him and join him in his divine transcendence and victory over death and ruin. To respond, we must take our eyes off of flesh and blood reality. We must leave our boat and step out over the abyss. We can only do so at his bidding and by looking to him in faith as he is presented to us in his achievement. He is the object of faith and the source of salvation to us. This is not an abstract salvation or simply about what will happen when we die. It is a matter of walking in the Lord and in the power of his might, by faith.

The imagery of walking on the water is translated into some basic principles. We must give up being wise in ourselves and become infants wholly open to God in Christ. This sounds simple, but for adults it amounts to a self-crucifixion. Adults find walking by faith truly contrary to what they are. It is very painful to switch from our adult way to walking by faith. What opens us up to hearing the call to come to Christ? It is the realization that our yoke and burden are crushing and wearying. Even this realization occurs through the Son's work. People come to it through their deep conflict with Christ and the sense of judgment that settles over them. What does it mean to know Jesus? It is to walk with him and discover that the gift of rest for the soul is given to us in his yoke and burden. The rest and salvation he offers is not a state of ease but a living relationship with him. He leads us in his way of life which has as its fruit true rest of the soul.

Think of it. We are given a fellowship with the Father in his appreciation of his Son, and we are given a fellowship with the Son in his divine victory over the destructive way of existence on earth. We are called to walk with him in way that yields rest for the soul. But, in all of this we are caught up between the absolute contrast and conflict between the Father and human nature as two opposed sources for defining who Jesus is and what life is. To yield to one is to die to the other.

## **B. THE TRUTH OF CHRIST AS THE BASIS OF THE CHURCH**

Jesus pronounced the blessing of v 17 upon Peter as an individual. The Father reveals the Sons' identity to us as individuals (see Matt 11.27 and John 6.44-46) and each must personally confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Rom 10.9 and 1Jn 2.23). But, there is a collective side to the confession, and Jesus opens this side up in Matt 16.18.

By nature, we share the common identity and way of the world. Through Christ's encounter with us, we are brought into conflict with what we are in the world, and the Father works to make us see the truth of Christ so we confess him. In this process, God isolates us as individuals. We are turned from the world in which we had our collective identity and joined directly to Christ. We are personally related to Christ first. In Christ we are joined with all other believers in a new collective people of God. This is an essential part of being in Christ in a complete way.

We should notice the order of divine operations in Matt 16.17-18. The Father's work of revealing is first. He sent the Son and reveals Christ to individuals in the world, and by this he brings them to the Son. The Father works where the Son is not known to make Jesus known as the Son. The Son takes up those that the Father gives to him and has his sphere of work in building the church. The church is the sphere in which all that is manifested in Christ is received and learned. Here the revelation in the Son takes its full effect.

### **1. Jesus' announcement of the church (Matt 16.18)**

To understand the connection between the revelation of God in Christ and the church, we must begin by determining the meaning of the terms of Jesus' announcement.

#### **a. The church**

The word used for church in the original text is *ecclesia*. This word means assembly and was the established Greek term in the OT expression, the *assembly* of the LORD. Israel as the people of God gathered before God was the *ecclesia* of YHWH. In response to Peter's confession, Jesus announces that he will build his *ecclesia*.

When we hear Jesus' announcement in the context of the OT, we notice a significant shift. The shift is signalled in several ways. Notice Jesus' use of the future tense, "I *will* build my church." The confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, brings into view a new assembly of God's people that Christ will build. It is thus set in contrast to the assembly of the LORD in the OT. The significance of this shift is brought out by the way Jesus led the disciples to the true confession. He began by asking the disciples how the Jewish people identified him (v 12). Having drawn out the opinion of the Jewish people who made up the OT assembly of the LORD (v 14), Jesus drew out the disciples' confession. By putting the question of v 15 to the disciples as a group, Jesus set the disciples' confession off from the Jewish nation. The crucifixion showed and sealed the fact that the Jewish nation in its formal capacity under the leadership of the priests and leaders could not tolerate the confession Peter made. Jesus brought out the fact that the Jewish people were governed by flesh and blood in its orientation against God the Father. This means that the Jewish people were excluded from being the assembly of the LORD in view of the full revelation of God in Christ. Rather, the disciples were now to become the assembly by virtue of their confession of Christ. Their corporate capacity as the new people of God is signalled by the number twelve. Jesus chose twelve disciples to answer to the twelve tribes of Israel. In this way he signalled that he came to bring about a new people of God.

#### **b. The rock**

Jesus makes a direct connection between his announcement of the building of the church and Peter's confession in his opening line: "And I also say to you that you are Peter (*petros*, a rock in the sense of a small rock), and upon this rock (*petra*, a bedrock or a large mass of rock) I will build My church." Jesus'

words answer directly to Peter's confession. Peter declared that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Jesus in turn declared Peter to be a rock and pointed out the significance of this by announcing that he will build his church on "this rock."

What is Jesus referring to by "this rock"? In the flow of the discussion, it does not naturally apply to Peter. Jesus is speaking directly to Peter in vv 17-19, and so it would be unnatural for him to refer to him with "this." The word *this* most naturally refers to the reference point of the discussion, and that is Peter's confession. This fits in with the whole movement of the discussion. Jesus led the discussion so that the confession would mark the disciples off from the Jewish people, and this makes it the foundation of his assembly as set off from the Jewish nation.

Christ's use of *petra* for the firm basis of a building is natural. In the parable of the wise man in Matt 7.24-25, Jesus uses *petra* for the bedrock on which a wise builder will build his house. This solid basis will enable the house to withstand the storm and the flood that beat against it. Jesus is working with the same idea in Matt 16.18. The church is built on the bedrock and this strengthens it against the assaults of Hades. In Matt 7.24, the bedrock is the words of Christ that are heard, and one builds on the rock by acting on his words. Similarly, in Matt 16.18 the bedrock is the truth of who Jesus is as revealed by the Father and as confessed by Peter.

The image of a rock as the safety of God's people is common in the OT. The LORD is often referred to as the rock that gives security against the flood of destruction for those who trust in him. This idea is taken up by Isaiah in Ish 28.16. Here the danger is the overwhelming flood that will sweep away all to Sheol, the Hebrew word translated with the Greek word *Hades* (v 15). In the midst of this danger, the LORD said he will lay a firm stone in Zion for people to believe and be secured (v 16). This stone is Immanuel, God with us, in whom the LORD becomes a sanctuary (Ish 8.13-14), but this stone will also be the stone of stumbling for those who do not believe (v 15). All of the ideas in Isaiah's prophecy of the rock come together in Christ's announcement in Matt 16.18. Jesus is presented as Immanuel in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 1.23) who is omnipresent with his disciples (18.20 and 28.20). That he is the Christ, the Son of the living God, both stumbled the Jews and became the basis for the disciples as his church. Jesus also sees the rock as giving security against the assault of Sheol or Hades.

Peter takes up the image of the church as a temple constructed on Christ as the stone in (1Pt 2.4-8). Christ is the stone on which God builds the church and which the world has rejected. The believers come to him to be living stones built on Christ as the living stone. Peter here makes the direct connection between Christ as the living stone on which we are built and the believer as a living stone built on Christ. We take our identity from Christ by confessing him. This points to the meaning of Jesus' play on the name he gave to Simon. He gave him the name *Petros* (Peter), and pointed out the meaning of that name from the role of Peter's confession. Peter was the first to make the formal confession of who Jesus is in contrast to the opinion of the Jews. This confession was taken up by Jesus as the foundation rock on which he would build his church, and Peter received his own distinctive honour and role from this. The man who lays the foundation is not the foundation of the house, but he is foundational. The principle here is that we receive our identity from our identification with Christ. Jesus gave Peter a name derived from the role he was to play in Christ's work of laying the foundation for the church.

Jesus built into his declaration the total change that the confession brought about in Peter. The Father revealed the Son to Simon Barjona, and this was the disciple's name as flesh and blood. But, having confessed, Christ gave him a new identity. He named the confessing disciple *Petros* and thus identified him by the significance of his confession.

Peter's association with the foundation of the church is true to the apostolic role. In Eph 2.20 the church is said to be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. They are not this foundation in their own persons but in their role in revealing the mystery of Christ (Eph 3.5). This highlights an important feature of the church. The foundation is not Christ in isolation, but Christ as revealed to Peter (Matt 16.17) and declared by Peter (Matt 16.17). It is the mystery of Christ revealed to and declared by the apostles and prophets. The foundation of the church is Christ in relation to his own through revelation. We saw earlier that the Father must reveal the Son to all who believe. This is true of the apostles in the first instance. They

are believers in the church, but they have a special role in that they had Christ first revealed to them so that their confession, proclamation and teaching is the means of imparting the truth to all others.

### **c. The building of the church**

The church is built in the world which is the territory over which Hades has its power. Hades claims all for death and takes all into its gates, but it cannot claim the church built on the basis of Christ as the Son of the *living* God. The very life of the living God is received in the Son. Since the church is the people joined to the Son, the divine life which cannot die is imparted to the church. This means that Hades will never be able to claim the church. The church does not have this strength in itself but it receives the life from the Son of God through the confession of faith. In a different setting, Jesus stated the same truth in Jn 6.37-40 and 17.1-3. The Father gives people to Christ, and Christ receives them and gives to them eternal life and will raise them up on the last day. This is not simply true of believers as individuals but of the believers as a collective whole—the church.

The church's participation in the life of God in the Son is integral to the truth of Peter's confession. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, not in isolation but in relationship. The relationship is first of all with the Father. The Father gives all that is his to the Son for the Son to give. This means that the Son's relationship with the Father is manifested and fully realized in his relationship with us, giving us the divine life and victory over death. We must have an appreciation of the intimate link between the divine Christ and the church. Christ is the source and basis of the church, but the church is the realization of all that it means for Jesus to be the Christ and the Son of God in the world.

The link between the church and the truth of God in Christ is historical. Christ was manifested once in history and the apostles laid the foundation of the truth. This work is historically complete, but the church's relationship with the foundation is not left in a past era. Each believer is built directly on Christ as the foundation rock. Also, since the church is being built in the territory claimed by Hades, the church must ever be built and sustained by the vital relationship between the Son of the living God and the church joined to him by true confession. In Matt 16.18, Jesus pointed to this as the conflict and the issue of the church's history.

## **2. The church's ongoing role in relation to the foundation**

Jesus' announcement in Matt 16.18 concerns the one universal church that is made up of all who confess him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, as that truth is revealed by the Father. At the level of the universal church, all is a divine work. The Father brings us to Christ the rock, and the Son builds his church. But, Christ also gave us a sphere in which we are responsibly engaged with the foundational issues. This sphere is the local church.

### **a. The local church (Matt 18.15-20)**

Jesus introduced the local church in Matt 18.15-20. The local church is parallel to the universal. It is made up of disciples who have been gathered unto the name of Jesus Christ (v 20). This is parallel to the image of Matt 16.18: disciples built on Christ as confessed by Peter. The church is the people brought to and joined to Jesus Christ in his name, and his name represents who he is and how he has made himself known to us. The authority that is given to human beings from the name of Christ is the same in each passage: it is the authority to bind and loose, which was given to Peter by virtue of the confession in Matt 18.19 and to the local church (18.18) by virtue of the name of Christ and his presence in the midst. What this authority involves is stated in 18.17: it is the authority to regard one to be in the church or outside of it as a Gentile (i.e., like one born outside of the assembly of the LORD) or a tax collector (i.e., like a Jew who was excluded from it). This means that in the local church, the disciples are engaged in delineating the church fellowship in a practical way. They cannot do this privately but only in the unity of the church that is defined by the name of Christ and has its spiritual authority and power on earth in Christ's presence in the midst. This practical exercise of faith cannot be carried out in the universal church which is beyond our

ability to meet with and work with since it covers the whole world and the whole church throughout its history. The local church is the sphere in which we engaged with the corporate reality of Christ and the church.

**b. Crisis over the foundation of the local church**

This is not a study on church doctrine, so we will not go further into opening up the truth of the church here. We have only brought Matthew 18 in to point out the practical sphere in which we are engaged with the foundational issues of the church. Believers have been given the name of Christ and are gathered to it. They must, therefore, maintain their identity as a church by holding to the name of Christ. As Paul puts it, local churches are “all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Cor 1.2). Believers in the capacity of the local church must also maintain the demarcation of the church by the relationship which Christ established with his disciples. What this means for the church in her historical experience is opened up for us in the writings of the apostles.

The apostles laid the one and only foundation, but others were beginning to introduce variations that marked a change in foundation. Paul alludes to this danger in 1Cor 3.10-11. Here he is speaking of the local church in Corinth where he laid the foundation by preaching the gospel. The foundation is Christ Jesus as preached in the apostolic gospel. The idea here is similar to what we found in Matt 16.18: the foundation is Christ revealed and declared by an apostle. Paul asserts that no one can lay another foundation than what was laid by his preaching of Jesus Christ. If another foundation is attempted, what is built on it is not the temple of God. In making this protest, Paul is pointing to our responsibility. The local church must ever be based on the one and only foundation, and those who minister in the church must build on it.

The danger of laying another foundation, alluded to in 1Cor 3.11, is openly identified in 2Cor 11.4: false apostles were preaching a Jesus and a gospel that were different than that which the apostle preached. Paul was ready to avenge this disobedience of thought against the knowledge of Christ, but he would only do it when the obedience of the Corinthians was complete (2Cor 10.5-6). Here Paul is pointing to the church’s responsibility. The believers as a body must be complete in their obedience to the truth of Christ, and this is the basis for the exercise of authority against those who are in disobedience against the faith. The believers have the duty to build on the foundation of Christ, to be united in their obedience to the gospel and to avenge all disobedience to the gospel. The apostle taught and guided the church through this process, but it was the responsibility of the church to maintain itself in unity on the apostolic gospel of Christ as its only foundation.

At the close of the apostolic period, we see that the problem has grown to final proportions. John begins his first letter by outlining the way the fellowship is formed (1Jn 1.1-4). Christ was manifested to the apostles who declared what they heard, saw and handled. This was declared so that the believers could have fellowship with the apostles, and the apostles’ fellowship was with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. The apostles were the first members of the fellowship, and they gave the word through which others joined in. We should notice that John is not referring to past evangelism in the world by which the people first came to faith. He is speaking of declaring continuously to the believers. This stress is due to the crisis that the church was facing. People who were once with the believers had left the fellowship in the truth of the Son as witnessed by the apostles. Here John draws the line sharply. To deny the Son is to show that one was never really of the family of God. Those who deny the Son are antichrists and so are wholly outside of the fellowship in Christ. The truth of the deity and humanity of Christ marks off the fellowship. Those who have the Spirit know the truth and will not depart from it. Their faith does not originate with themselves but has its basis in the apostolic word from the beginning (1Jn 2.18-24). The crisis shows up the need to declare within the fellowship the word that marks of the family of God and defines and fosters faith.

We must see the issue of demarcating the family of God from two ends. The first is that of the apostolic role. The apostolic witness marks the objective identity of the church, but the apostolic witness is only one end. The other is the work of the Anointing who is the Spirit dwelling in the children of God and teaching them the truth of the Son in relation to the Father. This work is continuous and is carried on in the face of the growing crisis of the spirit of antichrist. The apostolic witness that provides the foundation of the

church is complete, but the church is a living reality and the children of God must be continuously engaged in identifying themselves as the family of God by their confession of faith. Though the foundational revelation is complete, we must ever demarcate it for ourselves against all the attempts to shift and change the foundation of the church. The church is a confessing church, and the children of God must ever maintain the definition of the family of God by asserting their confession against the denials of the truth of Christ. This is the ongoing work of the Spirit in the church and continues through the church's history.

### c. The historical conflict of the church

John wrote his letters at the close of the apostolic era. By his time, the conflict within the church had reached its full blown character. The spirit of error had developed to generate the type of the antichrist, which is the final form of apostasy, and in the rest of the history of the church unbelief only matures this type. There is also the positive side. Through apostolic teaching, the Holy Spirit affirmed the true confession in the face of the denial and gave the church the assurance that he would teach the true children the truth of God in Christ imparted by the apostolic witness. We should take this one step further. The apostle John affirmed that the work of the Spirit would ever identify the true family of God by maintaining the true confession of faith. The history of the church that followed the apostolic era has confirmed this development. The churches had to battle with a succession of denials of the truth of Christ, and the true church has only survived in the affirmation of the apostolic confession of the full deity of Christ within the trinity and of his true humanity. True believers based their confession on the writings of the apostles, but for them it was not as simple as merely reciting verses from the NT.

In 1 John, the true believers are marked by confession whereas the others were marked by denial. John says, "Who is a liar but the one who *denies* that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who *denies* the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also" (1Jn 2.22-23). The Spirit of God is the spirit of the confession of the truth presented in the person of Christ (4.2) and the spirit of error does not confess (4.3). We are not just dealing here with the questioning of certain ideas. The opposition to the true confession is a spirit of error that works in denial, and this is seen in church history. The church has not been confronted with a mere inquiry into the truth. Rather, it has battled with a spirit of denial that has denied every aspect of the truth of Christ.

The history of heresies is at bottom a history of denial. The positive confession of the true church is always the backdrop and point of departure for every heresy. The human mind takes off by denying what is confessed. The theologies that are spun out by heretics are all based on the denial. When a particular denial has been successfully answered and its theology refuted, the spirit of denial will reassert itself in a new way. The true believers have ever stood in their faith by affirming the original confession in the area of the denial. This has led the church through a development of its declaration of the true confession. In the first part of our study on the trinity, we noticed the development beginning in the NT. The earliest confession in the Gentile churches was simply, "Jesus is Lord." When the denial focused on denying specific aspects of truth, such as the Son's relationship with the Father and the reality of his incarnation, the confession was expanded to confessing the Son and that Jesus had come in the flesh. Though the apostolic era closed, the spirit of denial grew. Denials based on the fact that God is one pressed the confessing believers to assert that there were three persons in one God. There is a theological development here. The Christians are comprehending what is given in the facts of revelation. But, the development is made only to affirm and hold the one apostolic confession. In this the true church is only carrying the burden of the confession of Christ. The church must ever demarcate the family of God by the confession of Christ against the denials, and in this process the church grows in its comprehension.

The dynamics that we saw in Matt 16.13-20 are ever operative. The confession of Christ is a perennial critical issue and marks the church off from the religious world. The world ever wants to define Jesus by flesh and blood in its shifting opinions, and this ever means denial of aspects of the true confession. Against this trend, the true children of God will ever show themselves by their confession. In the confusion caused by religious opinion, the truth of Christ will ever be declared in a fresh way in any given age. The heresies confuse the meaning of scripture in people's minds so that the truth of Christ will only be vitally declared by the living confessors. More, in each generation, these confessors will by their confession

delineate what the true church is. This process will always become a matter of church fellowship and discipline at the level of the local church. The local church is defined by Christ, and in his presence the church has the resources and authority to delineate and maintain its true identity. But, in this the local church does not assert a confession simply for itself. It is asserting the one foundation which the universal church has and which the local church must lay hold of for its very being as a church.

We saw that flesh and blood cannot see the truth of Christ even when the full objective manifestation of Christ is set before its very eyes. This ensures that each generation of believers has to go through the conflict and answer the questions: Who do people say the Jesus is? And, who do you say that he is? Each generation will have to give that answer as the confession against the denials of the age. In this the believers have a vital role in making the truth of Christ known, and in this the necessary role of the Spirit in teaching true believers and demarcating the church is ongoing. Each successive generation receives the doctrinal gains of the earlier ones, but the Spirit will place each generation in the arena of conflict in which it must experience the vital issues of faith in conflict. To this end God lets flesh and blood ever arise with its opinion and press the question as to who Jesus is afresh for the disciples. The church is not allowed to continue in doctrinal slumber.

When we look at the struggle of church history, we can take note of how the promise of Christ has been fulfilled. The church as defined by the confession of Christ and the doctrine of the trinity has survived through the ages. All ancient heresies that departed from this doctrine have passed off the scene. The heresies have been reincarnated over and over again, but they have no continuity through history. In their revived forms, they are fresh denials of the true confession. After 2000 years it is exactly as Christ said. The church defined by the true apostolic confession alone has a continuous history from Christ to the present and has not succumbed to the gates of Hades. But, we also know that history teaches another lesson. Large parts of Christendom have accepted the confessions that affirm the biblical truth of Christ and the trinity as orthodoxy but have departed from the truth of the gospel. What are we to make of this?

### **3. Orthodoxy and orthophroneis**

The pressure put on believers by the denial of the truth of Christ has focused the church on formulating the correct statement of the truth on the issues raised by those who deny. Here the mind is focused narrowly on the point that defines the truth off from error. As the Christians engaged in this battle over the person of Christ and the trinity, the notion of orthodoxy was formed. Orthodoxy is a compound word that means to have the right (*orthos* meaning straight, upright or right) opinion (*doxa* meaning notion, opinion or estimation). This term puts the focus on what is thought and believed, and when it comes to the truth of God this is important. To have an opinion of God and Christ other than the truth of the trinity is wrong. It is unorthodox. But, as important as orthodoxy is, it suffers from a defect. In itself it consists in the mere correct notion. As soon as the correct statement of the truth is secured, it becomes painfully evident that orthodoxy is no measure of spiritual life. It has commonly been the case that people profess orthodoxy in that they accept the right notion of God as handed down through the Christian tradition but they do not live and think in the reality of the truth of God. Once orthodoxy is established, the real struggle is with the danger of dead and formal orthodoxy. It seems that orthodoxy has generated its own problem. There is more to holding the truth than having the right opinion, and once we lay hold of orthodox doctrine we must strive to lay hold of that which is more than orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is essential. In our first study we saw that the Christian faith is essentially doctrinal. The truth of God has a fixed and definite shape. Biblical revelation does not present the concept of the divine as some cosmic moulding clay that people can shape according to their own thoughts or liking. Such a notion is idolatrous. God makes himself known and defines his character. This revelation is historical and is given to all generations and all the people of God through scripture. When it comes to what we believe, doctrine is objective, and this makes for orthodoxy. But, still something is lacking in orthodoxy by itself. What is it? If we go into the term, we can isolate the area where the defect lies. The first concept in orthodoxy is given in the term, *orthos*, i.e., what is right. We must be committed to what is right. The second concept points to the defect, and that is expressed in the word *doxa*, notion. While having the right notion is necessary, it is not enough. Jesus pointed out that Peter's confession was not a human opinion. It was a vital truth revealed

to him by the Father. The gospel also speaks against mere orthodoxy. We are not saved by having a correct opinion. We are saved by faith. Faith has a definite conceptual content defined by the gospel message, but it is more than the intellectual consent to the content of the gospel. Even the demons believe that there is one God. In a sense, they are orthodox. Their orthodoxy even extends to the person of Christ. When confronted by Jesus, they cried out and said that they knew who he was, that he was the holy one of God, the one who would judge them in the end. The demons' orthodoxy went beyond intellectual knowledge. They believed and trembled. In a sense they confessed and obeyed. They cried out before Jesus and obeyed his command to be silent and leave. Yet, for it all they remained demons. The belief that there is one God in three persons is important, but it is not enough.

What is the necessary step beyond *doxa* or opinion? To indicate it, I will draw on another Greek word—*phronesis*. This word comes from the verb *phroneo* which refers to the way we think. It means *to mind*. This word is used by Paul for the way the Christians are to think. The noun *phronesis* is only used twice in the NT in Lk 1.17 and Eph 1.8. It is linked with wisdom in Eph 1.8 and refers to the practical side of wisdom in carrying out the course of action. *Phronesis* is wisdom in practical affairs. It is minding how wisdom is to be carried out in concrete action. *Doxa* refers to opinion, i.e., what we think, but *phronesis* focuses on how we think. Orthodoxy as holding the right opinion must be tied to *orthophronesis*, i.e., the right way of thinking. Here is where the demons came short. They knew the fact of who Jesus is, but they did not change. They remained wicked enemies of God wholly out of line with the truth known to them. It must be different with us. The gospel brings about faith in us (Rom 10.17), and by this faith we give ourselves over to the truth. Paul speaks of it this way, "...you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching (i.e., of the gospel) to which you were committed..." (Rom 6.17). The teaching through faith forms and moulds us.

On our subject, orthodoxy states the points of doctrine that define in our minds that God is a trinity. But, these doctrinal points only provide for us the reference points for the way we are to relate to God, think about all areas of doctrine and live and move in the church and the world. This is a matter of maturing spiritually. The church must contend for true orthodoxy against the spirit of error, but after the orthodoxy is settled the church's need is to grow and mature in the truth.

Maturity has two sides to it. The NT teaches the need for individual maturity which happens as believers feed on the word (1Pt 2.1-3) and become "...accustomed to the word of righteousness...who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb 5.13). The doctrine of the trinity is also the word of righteousness establishing what is right against error at the highest spiritual level. Using this doctrine does train our senses to discern good and evil at very subtle and profound levels. This doctrine disciplines us in the area of the deepest foundation of doctrine and spiritual life. In this discipline, we are engaged with *orthopraxis*.

The truth of God in Christ also has the divine design to mature the church. Paul said that the ascended Lord gave the gifts of the ministry of the word of Christ to the church, "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son for God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4.12-13). We engage practically with the needs of the one church in the local church, but what we build that is of God is being built into the one temple of God, which will be the dwelling place of God among people for eternity.

## **APPENDIX: Reflections on the doctrine of the trinity for witness, prayer and worship.**

The doctrine of the trinity is about how our relationship with God is structured, and we enter the truth that we learn by letting it shape the way we relate to God and to people. We will add to our study on *The vital issues involved in the doctrine of the trinity* some reflection on practical applications. These are exercises in *orthopraxis*.

### **1. Our role as witnesses**

What we saw in our study on the theme of revelation from the Father has profound implications for the way we are to carry out our witness for Christ. When we present Christ, we are setting before people “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence” (1Pt 2.8). People will find the truth of God in Christ incomprehensible and even scandalous (1Cor 1.23). When we see them reacting to what we are saying and protesting that it cannot be true for it is foolishness and offensive to human sensibility and reason, we must not lose confidence in the truth. The reaction is according to the design of the truth of Christ. We dare not adjust the truth to smooth things out. When we do this, we make the cross of Christ void (1Cor 1.17). This raises the question, How do we witness and serve within the revelational dynamics that happen from within the Godhead?

What we have seen from the scriptures clarifies our role. We cannot do the work of drawing people to Christ. This is the Father’s work. Our role is to present in the gospel what has been manifested in the Son and to set before the people’s view the demonstration of the Spirit as we exemplify the reality of the power of the cross (1Thess 1.5; 1Cor 2.4; 2Cor 4.2; Matt 5.16; 1Pt 3.15-16). This is an extension of the Son’s role: the word given and the visible demonstration in the imitation of Christ. But, there is a side to the process of conversion that has not been given into our hands. That is the Father’s side. The Son does not have his source in himself but in his Father, and the manifestation of the Son only opens up the way for the Father to do his exclusive work in making the Son known to the heart. Here we must let God the Father do his work which in its operations is (like the Father himself) hidden from view. In fact, we should act in such a way that we do not try and bring about faith by the human means of persuasion. We should be careful to present the gospel in a way that the divine basis of faith in contrast to any human basis is established (1Cor 2.3-5).

We cannot see *how* the Father as the absolute source of all divine operations works out of himself, for this is above all time and space, but we can see *that* he works through the Son and *what* he has willed in what he brings about through the Son. If we think of the Father’s and Son’s positions as two ends of a relationship, we have our knowledge and share in the Son’s end, ever the receiving one, and not in the Father’s where all things originate above time. This means that the full knowledge of God and salvation has been revealed to us in the Son and given into our hands so that we can work with the truth, but this knowledge does not empower us to do God’s work according to our purpose and will. Rather, it aligns us to the Father so that his sovereign role becomes evident. Jesus exemplified this in Matt 11.25. Facing the fact that his miracles did not bring people to repentance, he did not complain but turned to the Father in worship. The failure of flesh and blood to comprehend and respond to what was presented publicly showed up sphere of the Father’s work. Human failure cleared the stage for God the Father to act in his glory as the sovereign cause of all. This caused Jesus to rejoice, for his delight was in glorifying his Father. The Son did his work to opening up for the Father to do his work. In our witness for Christ in the world, we must act in accordance with how God works and respond to God in the outcome. Our true blessing in the work of Christ is our participation in God’s work.

### **2. Prayer**

In his teaching on discipleship, the Lord taught how his followers are to relate to God as our Father. We have stressed that God is the Father of the Son, and this is the first truth. However, Jesus called his disciples

to follow him and so to know the Father as their Father, and that means to know him as the source of the way we are to live in following Jesus the Son. We will reflect on one aspect of this relationship—prayer.

The so called Lord's prayer in Matt 6.9-12 is really the model for the disciple's prayer. In this prayer, the Lord teaches us how to pray to God as our Father, and we will consider how what we have learned about the Father's relation to us is reflected in this prayer.

The Lord lays down the conditions for proper prayer in Matt 6.5-6. We must pray in a manner that agrees with the character of the Father. He is ever invisible and so we must relate to him in a manner that is wholly apart from human view and opinion. When we withdraw from human view and pray in secret, we are meeting with God in that reality of him—he is in secret. Man sees the body and what it does, but God alone sees the secret things of the heart, and when we approach him in a manner that is true to his character we must cut off all consciousness of what appears to man and commune with him where he sees and relates to us.

God as our Father is not only in secret, but he also knows all of our needs before we even ask, and this is to determine the way we pray. We do not inform him or cause him to give. The Father ever relates and acts out of himself. In prayer we position ourselves to consciously receive that which he knows we need and is ready to give according to his promise.

The two conditions for praying according to the character of the Father are set in direct contrast to the way the religious world prays: the Jews who have the scriptures and the Gentiles who do not know the creator. We see here what the Lord pointed out in Matt 16.17: flesh and blood is contrary in its thoughts to the Father. Prayer must correspond to the Father and not be governed by flesh and blood.

The model prayer lays out six petitions. The first three are for God's interests in the world and the last concern ours. The Father is ever the source, and all moves out from him. As his sons, we are to take our character from him (Matt 5.48), and we are to take up the concerns in his order. The principle is stated in Matt 6.33: we are to seek first the kingdom and righteous of the Father, and then all provisions for our needs will be added to us.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus stresses that the Father is in heaven, and we see this emphasis in the opening address: "Our Father who is in heaven." Notice how this determines the structure of the first part of the prayer. It begins with acknowledging the Father in heaven (v 9) and ends with the phrase, "as in heaven also on earth." We should point out that this is the order in the Greek text. "On earth as it is in heaven" makes for better poetry in English, but the order is not that of the Father. The order is ever from heaven to earth, and the disciple must learn to think and pray in this order. We take our starting point with the Father and not with flesh and blood.

The three Godward petitions in vv 9-10 trace the movement from heaven to earth. The first need is that the Father's name be hallowed or made holy. Holiness is the distance between God and the creature. The first issue in God's relationship with man is that God be known by man as holy, i.e., as apart from man. Mankind's great and persistent sin is regarding God as common to flesh and blood. Without being established as holy, God cannot give to man a relationship of life and blessing. God is presented as absolutely holy and apart from flesh and blood in his Son. We have dealt at length on this. Now we have to apply this in our prayer life. In any given situation where we need to see God work, the first need is always that the holy integrity of God's relationship with people is established. Apart from this, God is not known as the Father, and if this is so the Son is not known.

The first petition requests that God be made known in a way that sets him apart from the world. The second prays for the manner in which the link between God and the world is realized: the Father's kingdom comes. The kingdom is the reign which God gave to the Son of Man. This reign does not arise from earth but is given to the Son of Man in heaven and it comes down from the Father (Daniel 7). The disciples of Christ enter that kingdom and all that is happening today has one end: that the work of the Son of Man on earth will reach that ripeness and completeness that he can come and bring God's kingdom into the world. We

must see all the details of God's work in our time and space within this great purpose and receive God's power and work within God's purpose.

The movement from the Father in heaven to earth is consummated in one thing: the Father's will is done, as in heaven so also on earth. As Daniel said to the great king on earth, "Heaven rules" (Dan 4.26). Heaven does not implement the will of man on earth but the will of God as it is carried out in heaven. It is not the will that is governed by human nature on earth but as it is determined by the sphere that is above earth. The revelation of God in Christ has opened up to us the eternal will of the Father in heaven, and the disciple comes to know the heavenly will and lives to be the recipient of it on earth. The world has its source and will in flesh and blood. The movement is ever that of rising up to secure divine power to implement the will and accomplish the desires and designs from below. In the saints, the Most High is preparing a people on earth who are the recipients of the will done in heaven. This will be manifested at the second coming of Christ. In the antichrist, flesh and blood inspired and empowered by Satan will make its final push to raise the kingdom up from below in a total assault on heaven and God. But, Christ will bring the kingdom down from heaven, and the saints will be joined to him in this. The closing vision of the Bible is not of the church going up but the church coming down out of heaven to earth.

The three petitions in God's interests embrace the Father's purpose in Christ, and in this sense they are larger than our individual life and our personal needs on earth. These petitions will only be fully answered in the consummation of the ages. But, they apply to our specific situation and needs as the sons of God. They give the way God is aligned to earth, and we learn to fit our thoughts and desires into this alignment. What we have learned about the trinity enables us to chart this alignment. The Father is ever and only the absolute source of all the operations of God, and in this he is in absolute contrast to flesh and blood. We must learn to ever think from the Father. Only in the Son is the Father related to us. The reign of God is brought into this world only in Son, and we must seek our participation in him. This is ever the movement from heaven to earth. The Spirit indwells us and works in creation. He only receive what is from the Father through the Son to put into effect in us the Father's purpose as realized in the Son. The Spirit is set against our natural desires and passions right from within us. Let us learn to think, pray and live within these relational dynamics.

When we take our starting point from the Father and move in his way to his end, we will entrust ourselves wholly to him to be sustained in the needs of our life in the body (v 11), to be spiritually restored in our conflict with sin (v 12) and to be preserved in the face of evil that would overtake us (v 13).

The prayer that the Lord taught is for our private exercise of prayer. Here we are before God alone. But, in view of this notice a feature. The Lord did not tells us to pray, "My Father...give me, forgive me and deliver me." He taught us to pray in the first person plural: our and us. What God is to me he is to all the saints, and I am to lay hold of the Father in his relationship with the whole family of God. This balance between the individual relationship with God and the incorporation of ourselves with the whole people of God we saw in Matt 16.17-18. The Father reveals the identity of the Son to the individual and brings him to the Son, but in the Son we are built into one church. If we pray according to the character and work of God, this will shape our petitions.

## For worship

Paul wrote in Col 3.16: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” I will make one contribution for our meditation on the truth we have been learning.

### View to Praise

Praise be to God in heaven above;  
On earth below to him be praise.  
Your glory fills the universe;  
We long to see you fill our days.

Around your throne the Seraphim,  
Concealing self, give endless praise;  
But at the sight on earth we melt  
And see at once our sinful ways.

When mortal flesh caught sight of God,  
All strength was gone, it cried to die;  
But by your gracious word, “Let live,”  
We rise to see with opened eye.

Holy, Holy, Holy LORD;  
To Almighty God be praise.  
You forgive our sinful ways  
And from dust your children raise.

To think that God would become flesh,  
Exalted on a cross that we  
Might have eternal life to know  
God in his Son; now you we see.

Born of the Spirit now we see  
Your reign and enter what we view;  
Sharing God’s nature we can praise  
God as our Father—worship true.

Father, our hope is Christ’s own prayer,  
That we like him with you might be;  
His glory see, his glory share,  
Unto your praise eternally.

Give all glory to our God.  
All the work of grace is done  
From the Father, through the Son  
By the Spirit, Three in One—Hallelujah!