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HERESY

**What It
Is and
Why to
Avoid It**



Introductory Session, Heresy No. 5 and No. 4

Review

How to get at our question...

- ⦿ Definition
 - Heresy simply meant “choice” → A choice that deviated from the norm
- ⦿ Magisterial pronouncement
 - Obstinate deviation
- ⦿ Historical analysis
 - Some cases deviation; some cases obstinate; some just unclear in Scripture (pushed to clarity)
- ⦿ Pathology and treatment
 - Identify a disease that will prove fatal
 - Remember: Not ALL diseases are fatal
 - Goal: To bring fulness of life!
- ⦿ “Top 5 Heresies”: Primary diseases that are fatal to Christians, preventing fulness of life

Number 5: Fatal teaching concerning the Holy Spirit

⦿ Diminishment

- Historical example: Macedonius and the Pneumatomachians
- Recurs throughout the church as the “forgotten person of the Trinity”

⦿ Over-emphasis

- Historical example: Montanus and the “New Prophecy”
- Recurs throughout Pentecostal and Charismatic movements

Why is it fatal?

⦿ Diminishment:

- The Spirit as a creature would be able to bring humans knowledge, comfort, etc. in our lives but not able to bring humans into a fully divine inheritance – making us fully *children of God* – now and in the world to come.

⦿ Over-emphasis:

- Allows mis-guided Christians to manipulate the Spirit's work to exalt themselves above others, rather than serving them in Christ-like fashion.

Treatment?

◎ (Initial) Treatment

- Scriptural witness
- The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets”

◎ Follow-up treatment?

- To ensure that all those who are children of God are able to practice the divine life now and are preparing for a fully divinely lived future as co-heirs.
- To discern the work of the Spirit and to check an over-emphasis that leads to “puffed up” Christians.

Number 4:

Fatal teaching concerning Jesus

- ◎ Jesus is the central pivot of our faith
 - Judaism couldn't understand him (not a "leader")
 - "Greeks" couldn't understand him (didn't seek his own honour)
 - He presents himself and is presented by his earliest followers as God, taking flesh, dying, rising, and then reigning.
- ◎ Fatal teaching is the inability to let Jesus be Jesus.

What kind of Christian thinking about Jesus is fatal?

- ⊙ Jesus only seems to be who he is
 - ‘Not really man’ (docetism) – like an apparition
 - ‘Not really God’ (adoptionism) – God takes a good man and “divinizes” him (for a time)
- ⊙ Jesus is the pinnacle of creation
 - ‘Before God did anything else, he made Jesus and made everything else through him’ (Arianism)
- ⊙ Jesus is really only God
 - ‘He could only be our saviour if he is more than just a man’ (Monophysites)

Why is it fatal?

- ⦿ If Jesus is not really God, we only have information about God and action for God, not God's own gift of Himself to us.
 - Full disclosure of Himself to the extent that humans can bear it!
 - Full action on God's part to rectify our situation.
- ⦿ If Jesus is not really man, God would not have raised humanity in Jesus to the point of reigning in heaven.
 - God would not know our sin first hand to free us from it (Hebrews 4:15)
 - We would not be being made even now into his likeness, from fallen manhood to divine heirs with Christ (Ephesians 2:5-6)

Initial Treatment?

- Start with the ALL the passages of Scripture that directly refer to Jesus
- Continue with a full and expanded creedal formula concerning Jesus: The Nicene Creed plus the theological expansion that happened at Chalcedon (the two natures: God and man)

Ongoing Treatment?

- Learn what it means that Jesus is reigning Lord of all.
- Learn what it means to be free: freed from sin (which brings death) and thus freed from the threat of judgment in the future.
- Learn what it means that we are adopted as full divine heirs (in Christ, with Christ) and that we are being shaped now into being full heirs (by the Spirit of Christ).

Fatal teaching concerning God

Heresy number 3

Full life vs. 'Sickness'

- Healthy teaching about the Holy Spirit and about Jesus rest on the solid foundation of healthy teaching about them as God
- Fatal teaching about God will undermine our health, when it comes to the Spirit, to Jesus, and a to a full understanding of God

Unbelief (“Incredulity”) regarding God

- ⦿ Atheism
- ⦿ Polytheism
 - Greek gods (also Hindu, and various native religions...)
 - Even if one is supreme (Zeus, Jupiter = *Zeus + pater*)

Primary examples of fatal teaching (“heresy”)

- ◎ Monarchian (“sole-power or authority”) approaches to God
 - Adoptionists (e.g., Paul of Samosata)
 - God is one and much too holy to take flesh
 - Modalists (e.g., Praxeas, Sabellius, Patripassionists)
 - God is one (Spirit and Son are just modes or operations of the one God)
- ◎ Immutability or impassivity of God
 - The “unmoved mover” (Aristotle)

Recurrence

◉ Monarchian

- Some strains of Christianity (Ebionites, Messianic Judaism) that are shaped exclusively by Judaism ("Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (Deut 6:4 NAS))
- Islam: "There is no God but Allah" (Qur'an 47:19)

◉ Immutability

- Some strains of Calvinism (Puritanism): God cannot and does not need to feel emotion because He knows all things in advance (predestination)

Why is it fatal?

- ◎ To answer this question, we need to ask another question:
 - What do we know about God?
 - We believe that we can know God through the Bible.
 - The Bible tells us that all humans know about God through the things that God has made.
 - But...

Fallen images of God

- ① The Bible also tells us that sin and death have actually kept us from a GOOD knowledge of God.
- ① Without a true knowledge of God, fallen man has created images of God that are a corruption of who God really is.
 - In other words, fallen man still talks about God but has less and less of an idea who God is.

The source of fallen images

- ◎ The images that fallen man makes of God are drawn from what fallen man knows, which is only the world around.
 - Atheists see no evidence of God.
 - Polytheists see evidence everywhere and call different things Gods.
 - But, Christians, too, can fall prey to this... leading to fatal teaching.

Monarchian theism's fatal flaw

- ◎ Fallen human society has organized itself on the basis of survival of the fittest
- ◎ This has usually led to one person or one group becoming leader
 - Where there are competing powers, there is disorder and chaos.
 - Accordingly, disorder in the world around (especially the political order) is brought into order through the rule of a single power (mon-arch: ruler, emperor, ...)
- ◎ Fallen humans begin to think of God in the same way
 - God must be a single power (mon-arch): creating, bringing order out of chaos, ruling over the disobedience (chaos) of people's lives

Treatment

- Starts with asking how God presents Himself to us.
- If God's Word – written and incarnate – is how He wants to be known, then
 - God is from all eternity a fellowship, not a mon-arch
 - “Us” (Genesis 1)
 - “Father” (Gospels)
 - “Another like me” (Spirit from John's Gospel)

Trinitarian treatment

- ◎ God's fellowship takes a particular form:
 - God is one in three (i.e., trinity)
 - It is puzzling; it is mysterious; it is enigmatic; it is like nothing in this world.
 - It doesn't fit anything else we know.
 - And that is exactly why it is healthy, and not fatal!
 - It is not shaped by how fallen man envisions the world around.
 - But it was intended to be the shape that everything in this world took, and it still is!

The expression of that treatment in the creed

- ⊙ We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
 - But then....
- ⊙ We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father
 - And also....
- ⊙ We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified

Implications of Healthy Teaching about God

- God is from eternity always in communion (never alone) through His Spirit and the begetting of His Son
 - God is always (from eternity) “other-directed”:
 - The Father to the Spirit and the Son
 - The Spirit to the Father and the Son
 - The Son to the Father and the Spirit
- From the beginning of time (creation), God is bringing about life through the creation of other beings who are created in communion with Him or brought into communion with Him.
 - What God created, He created with the sign of His Trinitarian communion with Himself

Specific implications for humans

- ◎ Specifically, God created humans in His own image
 - That means that God created us in the image of His own Trinitarian fellowship!
 - What does God's essence as Trinitarian fellowship say about how God looks at creation, including us?
 - What does God's essence as Trinitarian fellowship say about who I am, created in the image of that God (not a monarchian God)?
 - What does God's essence as Trinitarian fellowship say about who we are, created in the image of a God in fellowship from all eternity?

The Jacob Chen story

As we will see in our last two weeks, dealing with Heresies 2 and 1 the most serious fatal teaching that we have to deal with will concern our failure to grasp the implications FOR US of who God is, as revealed perfectly in His Word made known to us by the power of His Spirit, and how, because of fatal teaching, WE are keeping the rest of the world from sharing in that adoptive inheritance.