

# Contend Earnestly For the Faith Which Was Once For All Handed Down to the Saints

## An Expository Study of the **Epistle of Jude**

### Chapter 6- The History of Heresy **Jude 4**

#### 46. The History of Heresy Part 16

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WOSM Wednesday 01/09/08

Welcome again my beloved in Jesus Christ. We're continuing our verse by verse Journey through the Epistle of **Jude** and today I want to continue our examination of "The History of Heresy" by looking again at the fourth verse of Jude- so let's read verse 4 again together:

**For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**

Now we are continuing to study about who these "certain persons" that Jude talks about here in verse 4 really were by studying the seven major groups of heresy. And we have already covered the Antinomians, the Judaizers, and the Gnostics. And today we need to look at the fourth main branch of heresy- a departure from Biblical Christianity that rose up in the third century called "Modalism".

According to pages 784 and 785 of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell, Modalism is listed as a serious departure from Biblical Christianity by denying the existence of the Trinity.

Modalism rose up in the Church in the late third century and was promoted by a man named Sabellius and is sometimes called Sabellianism. Modalism rejected the Doctrine of the Trinity and espoused an unbiblical view of God that taught that God operated in "modes" throughout history. In their view- God was "Father" in the Old Testament; He was "Son" during the time of Jesus' Ministry; and today God is "Spirit".

As Father- God was revealed in Modalism as Creator and Lawgiver; as Son- God was revealed as Redeemer and as Spirit- God is revealed as the giver of Grace. The problem with Modalism is that it taught that God was only revealed in these “modes” one at a time. So, for example, when Modalism says that God is revealed as Father- that means that He *cannot* be revealed as Son or Spirit at the same time. This error reduces God to only being able to operate in the context of the limited human understanding of time and space and is a departure from what the Bible clearly teaches about God’s uniqueness and distinction from humanity.

The error of Modalism rejects the Biblical teaching about God being a Triune Being- That God is one in His Essence, but is eternally manifested in three distinct Persons of God the Father; God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit.

Jude tells us in verse 4 that ungodly persons were going to creep into the Church and bring in false teachings about Grace and the Person of Jesus Christ and God the Father. And that is exactly what Modalism did. It brought into the Church a confusing and unbiblical approach to understanding God based upon human logic and reason- but not based upon the Scriptures.

We must understand that God is not like us- and we must not go down the road of trying to reduce God to being Someone Who simply fits *our* mold of what we want God to be. And that is why we must accept that which God reveals about Himself in Scripture and not try to *minimize* God based upon human logic or by taking a few Scriptures out of context.

Like all heresy- Modalism changes our view of Who God is from what He declared Himself to be in Scripture to only being what we *imagine* Him to be. And not only is this dangerous, because it alters how we view God- but it is also morally wrong to do this. It is blasphemy. We must remember that God made Man in His Image and in His Likeness and we must not attempt to create a “god” who is made in *our* image and who is after *our* likeness. So even though the Doctrine of the Trinity may be complex and difficult for us to grasp- we are obligated to do just that- because it matters how we view God, and it matters that we comprehend all that God Himself revealed that He is. And the only safe and proven and trustworthy method of doing this is by the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone. Modalism seeks to

short cut or to go around the difficult passages of Scripture that describes God and arrive at a view of God that is not Biblical and is not true.

Because Modalism is not Scriptural, it leads to either dehumanizing Jesus or making God less than Who He really is. For example- if Modalists exalt Jesus Christ- they can only do so at the expense of their understanding of the Father and vice versa. Modalism does great damage to a proper and full explanation of God as the Bible reveals Him to be.

The Doctrine of the Trinity embraces the Biblical fact of the “triunity” of God. And like everything else about God- this Doctrine is difficult to comprehend and sometimes very awkward for us to discuss- but it is necessary that we try to embrace it. There is probably more misunderstanding about this Doctrine than there is genuine knowledge. More people say more incorrect things about this Doctrine (most of the time unaware) than almost everything else in theology, which gives rise to many of the heresies and false doctrines that exist today in the minds and hearts of God’s people like Modalism.

The Doctrine of the Trinity describes a *relationship*- not of three gods- but of a single Almighty God- Who is “one” in Essence, yet Who is eternally manifested three distinct Persons at the same time without contradiction or conflict.

The word, “Trinity” is used by the orthodox Christian Church to summarize what the entirety of Scripture teaches about the fullness of the Godhead in two distinct ways- in His **unity** and in His **diversity**.

The Bible clearly details accounts of God operating in various and sundry ways and manners which seem to us at times to be in perfect unity and yet at other times, to be in total diversity. This creates the problem of how to comprehend various concepts of God into one theology concerning the Nature of God. The result of this effort is the ancient Doctrine of the Trinity.

The historic and orthodox Church gathered the entire declaration of what the Bible records about God and put all of these inspired Scriptures together. They then formulated the only summary statement that exists that does not in any way contradict a single verse or passage and the result is this 1800 year old statement that

the one true living God Who is revealed in both Nature and the Holy Scriptures is:

**... one in His Essence and is eternally manifested in three distinct Persons of God the Father; God the Son; and God the Holy Spirit**

So while this statement is not specifically recorded in the Bible- it is the very best summary of all that the Holy Bible does in fact teach about the one true living God. The third Century preacher- John Chrysostom said,

“If one tries to understand the Doctrine of the Trinity with his human intellect- he will lose his mind but if he denies it- he will lose his soul.”

And even though this description of God is mysterious and difficult- it utterly defeated the Modalist heresy and has successfully weathered the storm of scrutiny, examination, analysis, criticism and attack from both inside and outside the Church for nearly 2,000 years. And it stands strong today- when properly taught and understood- without being in any provable contradiction or conflict with the Holy Scriptures in any way.

Therefore, it is taught in the Christian Church as one of the Foundational Doctrines of the Christian Faith. In this Doctrine, the *unity* of the Godhead is expressed in terms of God’s “Essence” or His “Being”, while the *diversity* of the Godhead is expressed in terms of His “Person”. Though the word, “Trinity” is not actually found in the Bible, the concept that God is one in Essence and three in Person is absolutely and clearly and repeatedly taught there.

So the dilemma that we face concerning our understanding of the Godhead, rests in the fact that, on the one hand, the Bible unequivocally teaches the singleness of the Essence of God (**Deuteronomy 6:4**), while at the same time, the Bible also unequivocally teaches the full Deity of each of the three Persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So these two clear teachings of Scripture *seem* to be in contradiction with each other with a shallow examination of Scripture. Yet God cannot be God, nor can the Bible be God’s Word and have any contradiction. So since it is true that God is one, and if at the same time- it is also true that all three

Persons of God are, in fact, Deity- then we are *forced* to arrive at another comprehension of the Biblical Godhead. The Doctrine of the Trinity settles this issue.

Now there have been many attempts by many people at trying to explain the great paradox or the mystery of the Godhead that have occurred throughout Church history. And it is important to note that without exception, **all** of these attempts throughout the life of the Church (some attempts have been noble and others quite evil) to explain the Godhead have been found to be woefully inadequate or have been found to be in contradiction with the Holy Scriptures except the Doctrine of the Trinity.

The reason that it is vital that the Christian Church possesses a single and correct understanding of the Godhead, is because some of the historical attempts to explain this mystery have brought forth damnable heresies that have done much harm. Some attempts either deny the full Deity of either Christ (Arianism/Jehovah's Witnesses), or the Holy Spirit (Gnosticism/ Christian Science), or they deny that God exists today in the same way in which He has always existed (Modalism/Oneness Pentecostalism), or they deny the oneness of God's Essence (polytheism/New Age). So literally millions of people have been led astray because of the misunderstanding or the twisting of this Doctrine.

Now if we are to understand the term, "Person" as used in this Doctrine, it is important to understand that this term does **not** mean a distinction in comprehending God's Essence- but rather the term, "Person" is used to explain a *subsistence* in the Godhead. A subsistence in the Godhead is a *real* difference- but not an *essential* difference. Each Person of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) collectively and individually subsists or exists *within* the one single pure Essence of the one God.

Another way of looking at this is that the subsistence of the Persons of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), is an *actual* difference, operating and functioning within the overall concept of the one true and living God and not a separate "god" in itself or by itself.

In other words, all the Persons of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) each have individually the full attributes of Deity and characteristics of Persons- but they have those full attributes and

characteristics within the framework of the one Essence of God- not apart from it.

There is also a distinction made in the Work done by each member or Person of the Trinity. For example, the gracious Work of Salvation is in one sense common to all three Persons of the Trinity. But there are different operations which are accomplished individually by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the saving of the soul of fallen Man. For example, it is true that God Himself saves the souls of men. But it is also true that each Person of the Godhead has a distinct Work in the saving of the human soul.

**The Father:** Initiates Creation and Redemption

**The Son:** Earned Righteousness/Redeems Creation

**The Holy Spirit:** Draws, regenerates, and sanctifies the soul

It is important to note here that the Doctrine of the Trinity does not refer to the Persons of God as “parts” of God nor does it refer to them as being merely “roles” that God takes on at certain times. It boldly and consistently affirms that God is one in Essence and three in Person.

Human attempts at explaining the Trinity cannot clarify this issue. Common examples, such as one man, who is both a father and a son at the same time, fall short of adequately capturing the grand mystery of the Nature of God and only add confusion to the Doctrine of the Trinity. The best way to comprehend this Doctrine is by understanding what Scripture says about God and leaving the mystery of it to be just that- a mystery- that we should meditate on; contemplate; stand in awe of; and rejoice in.

Part of the difficulty that we have in comprehending this Doctrine, and part of the reason that so much misunderstanding about this Doctrine abounds, lies in the fact that the Doctrine of the Trinity is rarely taught or applied correctly. The understanding of the triunity of God as articulated in the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity does not completely and fully explain to man the wondrous and mysterious Character of God. But that was never the purpose of this Doctrine.

The purpose of this Doctrine is **not** to define God. That is simply impossible to do in human terms. The purpose of the Doctrine

of the Trinity is to establish unmoveable boundaries that determine where we can or cannot go in our effort to understand and explain God's Nature. This glorious Doctrine defines the limits of how our finite minds should reflect upon the Godhead.

The Doctrine of the Trinity also makes demands upon us that while we are free to search for the knowledge of God- we may do so only in the context of the inspired Biblical Revelation of God- not using carnal, finite, or individual concepts that are birthed in the human heart and mind and are not God-breathed. In other words, all understanding of both the Essence and the Persons of God must be *Sola Scriptura* (From the Scriptures alone). We must rely upon God's inspired Revelation (the Bible) to define Who God is.

The absolute certainty of the Doctrine of the Trinity teaches that when anyone follows that Biblical path in defining and understanding the Godhead, they will inevitably arrive at the same conclusion taught in this Doctrine- that in one sense, God is one and in another sense, God is three.

It may be true that some aspects of Bible Study are hard and difficult, but beloved, we are commanded to love the Lord God with all our hearts and all our souls and all our minds and all our strength. So we must put forth the effort that is needed to understand God as the Bible declares Him to be so that we may give Him the Glory that He is entitled to receive. This is part of earnestly contending for the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints. Well, I'm out of time for today- but please join me on the next broadcast as we continue our Journey through the Epistle of **Jude**. May God help us all.

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