

# Meditations of the Heart - Reflections on the Scriptures

Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

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## Recognizing and Embracing The Trinity

*"If Christianity was something that we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete in simplicity with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with fact. Of course, anyone can be simple if he does not have any fact to bother about."*<sup>1</sup>

C. S. Lewis

Lewis actually spoke these words while explaining the subject of the Trinity – of God revealing Himself in three Persons. Contrast Lewis' words with the words of a famous American thinker - someone who (for the moment) will go unnamed, and yet someone who is held in high regard by almost every American. This famous American thinker, while not a contemporary of Lewis, had great difficulty appreciating the matters of which Lewis speaks:

*"When we shall have done away with the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three; when we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding reared to mask from view the simple structure of Jesus; when, in short, we shall have unlearned everything which has been taught since his day, and get back to the pure and simple doctrines he inculcated, we shall then be truly and worthily his disciples."*<sup>2</sup>

So, put simply, *if we can just focus on Jesus and what we can easily understand of his teachings, then we'll find the proper way of following him and his teachings*, or so says that American thinker named Thomas Jefferson.

Of course, the problem in Jefferson's thinking is that his convictions about Jesus were not even remotely the same as those of Jesus' closest disciples, the apostles, most of whom who gave their lives for the belief and proclamation of the resurrected Lord Jesus. [Conversely, Jefferson viewed Jesus as merely a great moral teacher. The idea that Jesus is God was, so Jefferson believed, something that was incorrectly imputed to Jesus by "the stupidity of some, and roguery of others of His disciples."

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity*, MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., New York, NY, 1979 (29<sup>th</sup> printing), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Jefferson, Thomas, "Letter to Timothy Pickering" quoted in Charles W. Lowry, *The Trinity and Christian Devotion*, (New York, Harper, 1946), p. 6, and in Johnson, Darrell W., *Experiencing The Trinity*, (Vancouver, British Columbia, Regent College Publishing, 2002), p. 13. [Darrell Johnson's book is an extremely helpful resource for this document.]

Indeed, while viewing Jesus as the greatest moral teacher who ever lived, Jefferson even disagreed with the heart of Jesus' teaching about redemption: "He preaches the efficacy of repentance towards forgiveness of sins. I (Jefferson) require a counterpoise of good works to redeem it (ourselves)."<sup>3</sup>

But for those disciples/apostles who proclaimed redemption through Christ and who wrote the letters and accounts that comprise the New Testament, they could not speak of Jesus without speaking left and right of the concept of the Trinity, that God has revealed Himself in three distinct persons, Father, Son and Spirit.

Interestingly enough, the actual word 'Trinity' is never found in the Bible. The word Trinity was put forth by a very influential early church father named Tertullian (ca. 155-220) who argued that God is "one substance consisting in three persons".

Tertullian was a man richly familiar with the Scriptures. Indeed, if one were to just read the New Testament with an eye toward finding mention of God revealed in three persons, seeing indications of the Trinity throughout will be unavoidable.

Lesslie Newbigin, who ministered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in India, spoke of preaching the Gospel in a pagan environment. "Presumably, the hearers have already heard the word 'god' in their vocabulary. How is the name Jesus to be related henceforth in their minds to that word?" "The truth is one cannot preach Jesus even in the simplest terms without preaching him as the Son [of God]. His revelation of God is the revelation of 'an only begotten from the Father', and you cannot preach him without speaking of the Father and the Son."

One problem within the Church today is that few people realize the significance of the Trinity or why an understanding of the Trinity even matters. Indeed, I would suggest that pastors and teachers of the Church in the western world have not done a good job of explaining the importance of God revealing Himself in three persons. Theologian Jeremy Begbie, in speaking of Newbigin's thoughts on the Trinity, noted that, "if you got rid of the doctrine of the Trinity, 90 percent of the English church would run right along much as before (without noticing)." Begbie goes on to note, with some degree of sympathy, that many Christians mistakenly speak and think of the Trinity in very un-Christian ways, "It is hard to visualize oneness and three-ness together." The problem, as Begbie goes on to explain, is that many Christians end up with a view of the Trinity that is not based in Christian orthodoxy but rather in what's known as Unitarianism. As Begbie notes, "In the west, [the thinking is that] God is basically one but unfortunately three!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jefferson, Thomas, *The Jefferson Bible – The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, Beacon Press: Boston, Massachusetts, 1989, pp. 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> Begbie, Jeremy, *Theology and the Arts*, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 2005, Lecture 8.

As we look at Paul's letter to the Ephesian church, we're going to encounter frequent references to God revealing Himself as Father, Son and Spirit. As your pastor, my goal in these upcoming Meditations of the Heart is to help you understand the significance of the Trinity and why it matters so much to the Church; Why it matters so much to you and me. Stay with me in these upcoming weeks. If you have questions, send them my way ([matt@faithpca.org](mailto:matt@faithpca.org)). I'll do my best to answer them in due time.

My most frequent prayer for you has always been that we, as a church, and you as members of this community of Faith, grow to know God and his love intimately. That prayer of mine is borrowed from the Apostle Paul (someone whom Thomas Jefferson, not surprisingly, did not like!). Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church (and my prayer for you) is as follows in Ephesians 3:14-21. Read it for yourself... and just try not to notice the references to God revealing Himself in three persons!

**14** *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*