

College Christian Study -Sunday, April 10th, 2005 -- **Mere Christianity – by C.S. Lewis**

Book IV: Beyond Personality: Or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity (\*chapters 1-4\*)

Book IV contains eleven chapters which consider questions “Beyond Personality”. These chapters are a discussion of the first steps in understanding the doctrine of the Trinity.

-Chapter 1 is about the difference between making and begetting.

-Chapter 2 is about the Trinity

-Chapter 3 treats the issue of God’s relation to what we experience as time.

-Chapter 4 is about being “infected” by Christ.

### **Chapter 1: Making and Begetting**

Theology is practical. As a sort of “map”, it has importance in two ways: (1) Theology is based on what others have discovered is real, fitting different experiences all together. (2) If a person wants to go anywhere, they need a map for direction. Certainly, doctrines are not God, but they help lead people, and thus in both senses theology is actually practical.

We are reminded that in one of the creeds Christ is said to be the “begotten, not created,” Son of God who existed before the material world. This is not referring to the virgin birth, but rather is the claim that Christ existed before nature, before time. He was not created, but “begotten.” The word *beget* means to be the father of, to bear something the same kind as yourself. Whereas, to create, is simply to make. SO, the only way to combat the misuse of education (theological, or for that matter in general) is to know (see John 8:32). Theology should help us avoid being taken in by uniformed or wrong popular ideas about Christianity.

### **Chapter 2: The Three-Person God**

God is beyond personality, but He is not impersonal. He is superpersonal. He is three persons in one being. This is why theology is practical. Theology helps us to begin to understand the complexity of truth. The word *Trinity* never appears in the Bible, though the doctrine clearly does. The Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) teaches that all three members of the Trinity share in the divine essence, making them God.

Lewis reminded us of the three dimensions of space: left or right, backward or forward, up or down -- and what this means. A straight line is one dimension; a drawn figure is two dimensions; and a cube uses all three. The point is that, as we progress to the “more real” and also “more complicated” levels, we do not leave behind the things we found on the simpler ones. Rather, we use them in new combined ways that we could not have imagined if we knew only straight lines.

The Christian concept of God involves the same principle. In God’s level we will find personalities related in new ways we cannot imagine if we do not live on that level. Thus, in God’s level, His “dimension,” we find a being who is three persons and yet one.

### **Chapter 3: Time and Beyond Time**

Time as we experience it and God’s relationship to time, can raise difficult questions in understanding to many people. Lewis suggested that God is not in time. This helps us understand problems which arise for some with regard to the Incarnation (how God can be in control of the universe and be a man at the same time), prayer (how He can respond to millions of people praying at the same moment), and foreknowledge (how He can know the future and we can still be free to choose whether to do something).

While our lives come to us instant by instant, it is not so for God. But time -- past, present, and future -- is not, as we take for granted that it is, the way things really exist. God is not *in* time at all. If millions of people pray to God at the same time, He need not listen to the “one little snippet” we call a particular moment in time. Every moment from the beginning of the world is always present for God. This is a difficult concept to understand because we seem to have no referent point except time. (think of Lewis’ example of writing a novel). Although we do not have a perfect understanding of the entire concept, we know the fact that God is not affected by the “Time-stream” of our physical universe. God does not live in a “Time-series” at all. For God Himself is life eternal. [For examples of the Incarnation concept, see John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7-8; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1; I John 4:2; and II John 7.

#### **Chapter 4: Good Infection**

The love of God is eternal because He is an eternal being who has always experienced love between persons. The role of the Holy Spirit is explained by Lewis in this chapter. In Christianity, God is not “static” but rather “a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama....The union between the Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person....What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the Three Persons who are God” (pg. 152). This third person of God is called the Holy Spirit, and may be less recognized because He is always acting through us (Matt. 28:19 and II Cor. 13:14). Therefore, the Father is in front of us (so to speak), the Son beside us, and the Holy Spirit within us.

Being near God, in God, or having God in us is the “Good Infection.” This comes as a result of letting God have control, and thus we come to share in the life of Christ. The Son came into this world so that He might infect humankind with the kind of life He is. The whole purpose of being a Christian is to become as He (Jesus Christ) is.

Emerson is credited with having said: “Our families are people who know us but love us anyway.” Well, whether this is true of our families, it is most certainly true of God.