



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Exodus 3:13-15; Genesis 1:26

“The Eternal Trinity”

TRANSCRIPT

[AUDIO BEGINS] ... The person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may become more real and more definite in our lives in a saving way. We commit each one to Thee and pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as we study together. And we make our prayer in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

[Message] Now tonight the subject is the eternal Trinity Father, Son and Spirit. In our class that we are undertaking we are coming to the study of the Bible with two presuppositions. You probably have already guessed them though I didn't mention them specifically last time. The first is this that God exists. Now the Bible says He that cometh to God must believe that he is. That is that he exists, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Consciously or unconsciously, this is a truth that is accepted by almost all men. Browning wrote of the reality of the unseen as “the feeling that there's God, he reigns and rules out of this low world.” Bacon who wrote an essay on atheism said in that essay that the Old Testament states “The fool has said in his heart there is no God.” But he went on to say that it is of course instructive that the fool did not say that he had thought in his heart that there was no god. Because this is a truth that is, I say consciously or unconsciously accepted by almost all men.

When I think of the existence of God and the efforts of some people to deny him, I think of a little child that loses patience and gets angry with its mother. And you've often seen this, you mothers particularly, your little child that's playing around on the floor gets mad at mommy for something and attempts to live without mommy. To carry on as if mother did not exist. And you know the child doesn't hear mother it doesn't see mother; it just tries to live as if mother did not exist. But that's one of the most difficult things in the world for a child to do, for the simple reason that everything that goes to make up that child's life is connected with mother. Mother is the one who feeds the child; mother is the one who clothes the child, mother is the one who cares for the child, mother is the one who holds the child's hand and rocks the baby to sleep. And it's very much like this when we really try to deny God, because he is everywhere about us and he is the person concerning whom it is practically impossible for us to rule him out of our existence.

Now the second presupposition that we are carrying into our study is simply this, that God has revealed himself. And last time we talked of a correlative of this and that is that this revelation of God which he has given of himself is therefore authoritative. If it is true that God exists, and if it is true that he has revealed himself, it is a correlative of those facts that the revelation that god has given of himself is therefore authoritative, because he is God.

Now remember last time we also saw that this revelation of God is, according to the word of God, a revelation that is given in a two volume work. Volume number one is God's revelation of himself in nature. Volume number two is God's revelation of himself in the word of God. Now this is, this revelation that he has given to us his word of God is his special revelation. His revelation of himself in nature is his general revelation.

By means of his revelation of himself in nature, we learn that God is almighty, that he is a supreme being. Now we can not know from nature that he is merciful, that he is just and above all, we can not know that he is a gracious God who forgives our sin. In

fact if we looked at nature, there is just as much of an argument for a God who is violent and who is angry as there is that there is a God of love. Now we are inclined to overlook those things in nature that reveal God as an angry God. And we think about the way in which he provides for us through nature. Through the seasons which come with monotonous regularity through the food that he gives, through the rain that he gives on the crops so that we can eat, the provisions that he makes in nature. But if you'll just think for a moment there are cataclysms in nature as well, there's lightning, and individuals are struck by lightning and die. There are storms and people drown. And there are many other things that go to make up the catastrophes which are natural catastrophes. And if we looked at this side of nature we would of course discover that God is a God who does execute judgment and who does apparently have within his nature a dark side. It is in the word of God that we learn that God is gracious; we can not know that from nature. And that is why God has given us this second volume of his book of revelation, his revelation of himself in nature.

Now we talked about three words. The word revelation, this of course is a word that refers to the content which God has given to men. That content of information about himself. That is the revelation of God, part of it is in nature, part is in the word of God. When we look at the Bible, we can look at what could be called the record of God's revelation of himself in his word. Now this is the record, his word. It is a revelation of himself in his mercy and in his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. So revelation has to do with the content of information about God.

Then we also discussed the word inspiration. Now inspiration is a word that refers to the means where by God conveyed to us this revelation of himself. He breathed it out. So that inspiration is a term that describes the means or the manner whereby this revelation has come to us. This is the special revelation of God, the Bible; it has come to us by means of the inspiration of God who moved holy men of God as we read last time

in 2 Peter, to write the information that is given us in holy Scripture. Inspiration is our second word; it has to do with the means whereby the revelation has come to us.

The third word which we discussed only briefly was the word illumination. Illumination as you can tell, you Latin students, comes from the Latin word lumen which means light, so that illumination is enlightenment. Now illumination is a word that refers to the activity of the Holy Spirit in causing our finite minds to understand God’s revelation which he has given in inspiration. So these three words are very important as we approach the Bible. Now it isn’t necessary that you understand everything about these words, these are words that people who have studied the Bible for years and years still ponder and learn something about constantly. But revelation has to do with the content, the word of God. Inspiration has to do with the activity of God in giving us an infallible and an authoritative and a dependable account of his activity in revelation. Illumination is the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives who causes us by his illuminating work to understand that which is given to us by revelation.

Now last time at the conclusion of the hour I tried to point out the fact that the Bible is a spiritual book. It is written by the Holy Spirit of God who used men to convey to us the mind of God. Therefore in order to understand God the Holy Spirit’s word, we need him as our teacher. I am your human teacher, I am a fallible teacher, I will probably make some mistake tonight. I hope I don’t, but probably ten years from now I’ll look back and say, “Well, I over stressed that point, I should have stressed this.” And then perhaps someone will come up tonight and point out an error in something that I say. Because you see, I am a fallible teacher of the word of God. The one infallible teacher is the one who wrote the word, the Holy Spirit of God, and so consequently while he has given you and me human teachers and has given gifts the Bible says to men to teach the word, they are fallible. He is infallible. And I am an agent whereby the word of God comes to you. So you should look at me as an agent. And you should of course look beyond me and test everything that I say by the words that in the word of God under the

direction of the teacher, the Holy Spirit. Now it isn't necessary that you have a ThD or a PhD or a ThM or a BD to understand the deep things of the word of God. There are certain things that you might learn by gaining those degrees, but it isn't necessary for you to have degrees in order to understand God's word. Oh there are lots of little facts that probably you would know only if you took a course in a theological seminary, but as far as the comprehension of the word of God is concerned, that is wholly dependent on your willingness to be subject to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. And you as a business man or you as a house wife may know fully as much about God's word as a man who has a BD degree, if you are willing to apply yourself to the study of the word of God and are willing to listen to the Holy Spirit as he teaches you, for the Bible is a spiritual book and it is addressed to all men, not just theological students and theological professors.

Now then I guess you have noticed so far that I have not said anything about God himself, who he is, what he is like. I think that it is startling the first time you discover it, to realize that in the Bible there is no definition of God. This seems to be a terrible lack, in fact this is one of the first things that we might do if we wrote a Bible. We would probably put a front page in it and say, glossary of terms: God, we would define God. We would define Jesus Christ, we would define the Bible. We would probably define these words ultimately that I've put on the board here. But surprisingly, the Bible does not give us any definition of God. And yet it begins, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." In other words, the existence of God is presupposed. I guess that probably part of the philosophy of that is the philosophy of the text in the Psalms that I referred to, "It is the fool who says in his heart that there is no God." Any man whose heart is open and whose mind is clear is sure to confess the existence of God. Now of course I know there are atheists, and there are agnostics, I think I can understand atheists better than I can understand agnostics. Agnostics are people who have

committed spiritual suicide but go on talking just the same. And I realize that there are atheists, and genuine atheists, some of them, but that surely is a rare commodity.

Now if you're looking for a definition of God, I'm going to suggest one for you and I think probably it is just about as good as any that you can find. And it is found in the Westminster Catechism, the shorter catechism, and it's the answer to question number four in case you are Presbyterian and you had to study the catechism as I did. You had to learn, “God is a spirit infinite eternal and unchangeable in his being wisdom power holiness justice goodness and truth.” Let me read it again, “God is a spirit, infinite eternal and unchangeable in his being wisdom power holiness justice goodness and truth.” Now Charles Hodge says that was the best definition of God that was ever penned by a man. But then Charles Hodge was a Presbyterian and you might expect that. It is however probably about as good as we can do and it itself is limited and incomplete. We can not define God. As a matter of fact if there is such a person as God, no one can define God. It's quite obvious that only God could define God to God, because only God could understand the definition. And so the fact that the Bible contains no definition of God is further testimony to the infinite character of the God who is presented in the book. And furthermore, it is exactly what we ought to have if we have a book about a person who is God, infinite and eternal. So don't rack your little mind about a definition for God, you can never have one that is fully satisfactory. Now he does give us a relational definition of himself. We can not have an absolute definition, but he does give us a relational definition. In other words, he defines himself with reference to some facts about his revealing work. And he does this very significantly.

Now I'm going to ask you first of all, if you will now to turn with me to a passage in the 3rd chapter in the Book of Exodus and it's a very important passage. I think in some ways it's unfortunate that it's in the Old Testament, but I don't want to be in the position of criticizing God. I say it's unfortunate that it's in the Old Testament because most of us think that the Old Testament is a book that is dead and inapplicable to us

today. But it is very much alive; it was the Bible of the apostles remember. Now in Exodus chapter 3, Moses is called by God through the appearance of God at the burning bush, you remember the story. And in the 13th verse after God has told him that he's going to use him to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, we read in the 13th verse,

“And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, what is his name? What shall I say unto them?”

In other words if they ask me, “Who is this God who has told me that I'm to lead you out of the land of Egypt” what shall I say to them? Now when they say of course “What is his name?” They don't mean what is his moniker? We might say, “What's his name? Lewis Johnson or Bob Smith.” When they say, “what is his name?” They mean, “What is his character?” For that's the meaning of the Hebrew word name in the context of the Old Testament. A man's name was that which represented his character. And so God answers Moses and he says, “Moses I am that I am. That's my name.” Now that I guess is the only definition of God that there is in the Bible. What is his name? Who is he like? “I am who I am.” That's all you can say about an absolute being who is infinite and eternal. How can you describe him? Because you see once you describe him by other standards, you have lowered him to those standards. So he simply says, “I am who I am, I am that I am.” That's all you can say.

And he said, “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you.” The Old Testament you know is written in Hebrew, but there was an ancient translation of the Hebrew into Greek called the Septuagint, made by seventy men traditionally, and so it is called the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, this “I am who I am” is translated, “I am the one who exists.” And that's all, “I am the one who exists.” The Latin

Vulgate, also an ancient translation says, “I am who I am.” If you remember your Latin, “sum qui sum” I am who I am. Well now, that is his absolute name. He’s the self existent one; he is the eternally existent one. He’s the one who is absolutely independent and who exists from the past on into the future of and through the powers that exist within himself. Not a single being in this room is like that. Not a person in this room could stand up and say, “I am who I am.” Even with a can of spinach like Popeye. But now he doesn’t stop there, he says in the 15th verse,

“And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

In other words, so far as an absolute name for God is concerned, there is no absolute name for God that you can comprehend. I’m just a self existent one. But Moses, I entered into relationship with the children of Israel by means of a covenant, a covenant that was made to Abraham, which was confirmed to Isaac and which was confirmed to Jacob, and so you tell them that I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and I’m going to be that God forever. In other words, that is his relational name. He’s the God who has made a covenant with men and has sealed it in blood. Now it is ultimately Jesus Christ who confirms that covenant.

But I’m saying all of this because I want you to understand as we now go in to discuss who God is and the Trinity that in one sense, we can not know God in the sense of in the sense of all of his perfection we shall never know God he is a person who is beyond us. In fact when we get to Heaven, I’m going to surprise you, but I don’t think it’ll surprise any thinking Bible student, when we get to Heaven, I doubt very seriously that we shall ever see the Father. I think that we shall see Jesus Christ and we shall be

very satisfied, that we see Jesus Christ who is just as much God as the Father is God. But we shall see the one through whom God has spoken to us, the second person of the Trinity.

Now tonight, I want to talk to you about the being of God, and I want to try to show you that he's a Trinity, that he exists as a Trinity. So I'll declare myself right in the beginning and say that I'm Trinitarian. As a matter of fact, every Christian is Trinitarian, and if were not Trinitarian, we're not Christian. We may be religious, we may be American, we may be members of western civilization, we may be human beings but were not Christians if were not Trinitarian. Now I want to talk also about the attributes of God. These are his properties that go to make up his nature. We'll just say properties. Now these words are really the same. And then finally I want to try to tell you briefly why God does exist as a Trinity that is I'm going to suggest some reasons why. I think when I get to Heaven I'll learn lots of things and I'll regret that I've said a lot of things in a Bible class like this. But most of the things I'm trying to base on the word.

Now I want you first of all to turn with me to Genesis chapter 1, Genesis chapter 1. By the way, if you want to read through the Bible one of the best places to begin is Genesis. [Laughter] You know it's surprising how many people begin to read the Bible and won't begin at Genesis. But Genesis is one of the best places to begin, because in Genesis we have the beginning of the revelation of God and a lot of the terms that are found in the Bible are defined for us right in the Book of Genesis. And in fact if we don't understand many of the things in the Book of Genesis, it is impossible for us to understand things throughout the rest of the Bible. I just told you that we can not define God, and now I'm going to diagram God so you'll understand that this is just purely something to try to focus the things that I'm going to say in your mind. Now have you found the Book of Genesis? Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 and verse 27, Now I want you to notice as we read and we're going to look at a number of texts now and some of them

I'm not going to comment on very much, but I want you to notice in this text the plural pronoun. Genesis 1 verse 26, the creation has been created and now Moses writes,

“And God said; Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Now I want to stress again, we can not comprehend God, for we are limited and we are limited by the infinity of God and we are limited by human sin. But we can know him as he is to us that is as he has revealed himself to us in the word. You know one of the sad things, I hope you won't misunderstand me when I say that, but one of the sad things about the civil rights movement is that it has eliminated about twenty-five percent of the illustrations that I have used about the Bible because I love to use stories that have to do with our colored people in the south. It is very hard for me to do it now but I'm going to tell a story nevertheless to illustrate the incomprehensibility of God.

I heard that in the last war, two colored boys were going across to Europe in order to fight and the soldiers were standing out on the deck and they were standing out on the deck and they were looking out at the water, and one of the colored boys said to the other, “Did you ever see so much water in all your life?” And the other boy said, “No I sure have never seen so much water in all my life and you know we ain't seen nothing yet, that's just the top of it!” [Laughter]

Now in Genesis 1 verse 26, we read, “And God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea.” Notice the plural. Now this text is not a proof of the Trinity. This text only states that there is a plurality in the Godhead. It does not say there are three, as far as Genesis 1:26 and 27 is

concerned there might be four gods there might be ten gods, there might be only two. But it does say, “Let us make man in our image.” In other words, this text indicates that there is plurality in the Godhead.

But now I want to just quickly set forth several propositions. Proposition number one, the Bible recognizes three as God. Now turn with me to John. John chapter 6 and verse 27. I want you to notice that the Bible recognizes the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit as God. And it does not recognize any other god. John chapter 6 and verse 27, remember we want you to try to find all of these texts if you can. The Lord Jesus in the discourse after the walking upon the water and the feeding of the five thousand says in verse 27, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.” God the Father sealed, the Father is called God.

Now will you turn back to John chapter 1, and verse 1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Now will you look at the 14th verse, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) (That is the son of the Father) full of grace and truth.” So since verse 15 tells us that it was the Son who was the Word, and verse one says the Word was God, it’s obvious that John believed that the Son was God. So we have the Father is God, the Son is God.

Will you now turn to the next book in the Bible, Acts chapter 5 and let’s read verses 3 and 4; this is in the incident of the death of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to God the Holy Spirit. Acts chapter 5 and well let’s read beginning with verse 1 just so you’ll have the context,

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to

the Holy Ghost, (To the Holy Spirit, now notice) why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”

In verse 3 he says he has lied to the Holy Ghost, in verse 4 he defines it further by saying he has lied to God. It's obvious he regards the Holy Spirit as God. Now I want you to notice here that in these texts we have the Father is God, the Son is God the Holy Spirit is God. This is why I said a minute ago that we may be Unitarians we may be Americans, but if we are not Trinitarians, we are not Christians, because one of the basic fundamental facts of the revelation in the word of God is that God exists or subsist, the theological word, in a Trinity. Three persons are called God in the Bible, three and no more, no less, three.

I was very gratified a few years back to hear that and from one who was involved in a court case in New Jersey, in the YWCA in the course of a period of time, some Unitarians came into the YW came somehow or another became involved in the management of one of the Y's. I forgot whether in was in Atlantic City or not but I think it was in Atlantic City. The people who were from Atlantic City were telling me of it and they had been involved in this. But somehow or another they relaxed the standards they allowed Unitarians to come into the management of it and finally the YWCA fell into the control of the Unitarians. And of course the testimony, the strictly Christian testimony upon which the Y was founded was lost. And so some Christians who felt very bad over this, decided the only way they could possibly regain control was to take it into the court, which they did. And finally the Supreme Court of the state of New Jersey ruled, and there was no appeal that regardless of what you might say about Christians, and what is a Christian, there was one thing that would be universally said of a Christian and that is that he was Trinitarian in his theology. And consequently the control of the Y was turned

back to the Christians, the Trinitarians, because they recognized that while Christians may have differences among themselves about the method of baptism and about many other minor points, one fundamental fact is that all Christians are Trinitarian. And you see why. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God. Three persons are called God in the Bible.

Now the second fact is this, that the Bible recognizes three persons as eternal. Let me read just a few texts. One in the Old Testament, the Book of Jeremiah chapter 10 verse 10. Use your index, nothing wrong with using the index. Jeremiah chapter 10 and verse 10. Isaiah, Jeremiah, there's probably a good chance if you just open up the Bible in the middle of it you might hit Jeremiah because it's very close to the center of the whole of the Bible. Now you'll notice in the 10th verse of the 10th chapter Jeremiah says, “But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting (or eternal) king.” In other words, and I think probably the word Lord should be equated with Father in this context. “The Lord is eternal.” So the Father is eternal. Remember John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” By the way in John 1:1 when we read “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” This little word, “was” in Greek is a word that refers to everlasting or what shall I, not everlasting, but it refers to continuous existence. In other words, it's a reference to his continuing existence. “In the beginning was the Word.” In other words, when the beginning came about he was already in existence, and existing. And so this text, and this is not the only one, but this text refers to the Lord Jesus as an eternal being.

Will you now turn to Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 14? Now there's a great deal of discussion in our commentaries over Hebrews 9:14, the truth that is referred to here however is clearly a truth of the word, and I want you just simply to read it with me, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit (The eternal Spirit) offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to

serve the living God?” There are good Bible teachers who believe the eternal Spirit here is our Lord’s own eternal Spirit. If so it is of course a text for the eternity of the Son, but as it is in your English text, it is a text for the eternity of the Spirit. If you wish another text, put in your notes Genesis chapter 1 and verse 2. So the Bible recognizes three as God, the Bible recognizes three as eternal.

Now thirdly, the Bible recognizes three as distinct persons. And I want you to see now how the Bible distinguishes between the Father and the Son and the Spirit. It recognizes the three as God, it recognizes the three as eternal, but yet it distinguishes between them. So let’s turn first of all to John chapter 3 and verse 16. Do you have to do that? You all know John 3:16 don’t you? John 3:16. Mr. Spurgeon used to like to say, “I preach on this text” and he did, he preached on this text every year, and he used to say when he preached on it, “I preach on this text at least once every year, because there is nothing new that I could possibly say about John 3:16, and when God is pleased to use this text to the spiritual profit of my listeners, I am reminded again that it is not Spurgeon that does the work, but it is God.” John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” I want you to notice that the Father is distinguished from the Son. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Father is God, the Son is God, yet the Father is distinguished from the Son. It is the Father who sends the Son. I think it’s easy to see from this text that they are two personalities.

Let’s turn on in John to the 14th chapter, the 14th chapter and verses 16 and 17. Now here we have all three of the persons of the Trinity distinguished, John 14 verses 16 and 17. Now Jesus is speaking in the upper room discourse and he says verse 16, “And I (Jesus) I will pray the Father, (The object of my prayer, two persons distinguished) I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, (That is another comforter like me) that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth;” So the Son prays to the Father that the Father may send the Spirit and here in this one text, 16 and 17, we have

the three persons distinguished. Now if you would like to just put down some passages to look up for yourself, notice Isaiah chapter 48 verses 12 through 16.

Now let's summarize where we are so far on the being of God. The Bible recognizes three as God. The Bible recognizes three as eternal. The Bible distinguishes between the three persons. Now fourthly, and finally under the being of God, the Bible reveals the three as one in essence, as one in essence. Now I want you to turn with me to an Old Testament text which any Jew could repeat without any difficulty at all, Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 4. Now this text, Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 4 is called the Shema Yisrael. The reason it is called the Shema Yisrael is because that is the transliteration of the first words of this text which begin, “Shema Yisrael.” That is hear Israel, so the Hebrew words transliterated are Shema Yisrael. Now notice this text, look at it. Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 4, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.” The Lord our God is one Lord. Now it is because of this text that the Jews are Unitarian. “Hear O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord.” That's why they're Unitarian, because of this text; it surely is a clear text that God is one. It is not however a clear text that God could not be a Trinity and I want to show you how. This text reads, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God” but you know the word for God in Hebrew is a word which, well let me just write it out for you, it's Elohim.

Now Elohim is a plural that little ending him is plural in Hebrew. As a matter of fact we read in the beginning God, Elohim created the heavens and the earth. Now this text reads, “The Lord, (that is Jehovah) our Elohim.” You'll notice the different rendering, “God” whenever you see capital G little o little d, that's Elohim, Jehovah our Elohim is Jehovah a unity. Now the word that is used for one is the word echad, recognize it? [Laughter] If you want to write it down; I'll transliterate it for you, E C H A D, echad. Now this word is a very interesting word, this word is a word that refers not to an absolute unity, but to a compound unity. For example, “For this cause shall a man cleave unto his wife and they two shall be one flesh.” Echad, compound unity, not absolute

unity, but a union of two husband and wife. I look at these two; I guess your husband and wife sitting on the front row here. [Laughter] Wouldn't be a very good illustration if you weren't, but you see you as husband and wife, actually in the sight of God, according to the Bible, one flesh, one flesh. And yet you are a compound unity, there's husband and there's wife. And yet they are one. Now really this text in the Hebrew reads like this, and I'm going to transliterate it. “Hear O Israel, Jehovah our Gods is Jehovah a compound unity.” In other words in the very text which has been the foundation of the Unitarianism of Judaism is to be found the plurality which ultimately is fully explained in the Trinitarian theology of the Bible. Very interesting.

This is one of the great stumbling to Israel's discovery of their God, for they can not conceive of how God could have a Son who is also God. Now of course the Old Testament does speak of God as Son in Psalm 2 and also in Proverbs that God does have a Son I should say. But the New Testament is the full revelation. Now in that Isaiah 48 passage, we have the three who make up the Trinity. But the thing I want you to get from this is that while there is a compound unity there is a compound unity in God. In other words, it is right to say, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our Gods is the Lord a unity.” There is just one God, not many gods, not polytheism, Christians are not polytheists, they are theists. Monotheists, they believe in one God, but the one God subsists in three persons. You find that difficult to understand? Come on be honest, one person said he found it two, three. There are three who are honest in this room. [Laughter] Well of course it's true, we all find this difficult to comprehend, we can not comprehend it. Do you know when we think of something like this, do you know what we think of? Well think of a mermaid, part fish and part woman a centaur, part horse, part man, a fawn. All of these things of course are grotesque absurdities. When man tries to comprehend and imagine something like the unity that exists in the Godhead, he blunders into these grotesque absurdities. The very fact that we can not comprehend this is to be expected in the revelation of the God of the Bible.

There have been all types of illustrations of the Trinity, and I'm going to suggest some to you. Before I do however I want to remind you that not a single one of them is ultimately accurate, because we can not illustrate the eternal God. But the Trinity is written very deep into all of our life and activity and it's written very deep in nature itself. For example, we have clouds rain and mist, a liquid that exists in three forms. But you see once we say that's an illustration of the Trinity, we blunder into the persons as forms of God's manifestation which was one of the heresies of the early church. Or we can say God is like the sunlight, the rainbow and the heat, all one solar radiant. As a rainbow is unraveled light so Jesus Christ is unraveled God someone has said. Or we can think of the oil, the wick, and the flame of fire, a unity in Trinity. But you see, personality is not found in a lamp, and consequently it's not a good illustration of God. It is however an illustration of Trinity in unity. Or Augustine's illustration was the trunk, the branch and the root of the tree. We have a Trinity in unity. All types of trinities in unities, but it's difficult to also have personality, in fact it's impossible. My theological professor used to define the Trinity as, “one God eternally subsisting in a plurality of persons, three, no less and no more.” Let me read it again, “One God eternally subsisting in a plurality of persons, three, no less, no more.” The Trinity.

Now I put this on the board as one God. He is one in essence. One in essence, he is a Trinity in personality. So we have Father, God the Father, Son, God the Son, Spirit, God the Spirit, and yet one God. Three persons who subsist in one divine essence, one God, we are Unitarian. A God who subsists in Father Son and Spirit, three personalities, we are Trinitarian. Now that is the Trinity. That is God's being. One of the best and most clarifying things about the Trinity will be as you read the Bible and see this develop.

Now I want to talk for a moment about the attributes of God. My, time is almost up. This hour goes very rapidly, for me. Now don't you come up afterwards and say it goes rapidly for me too. I hope it does of course, but nevertheless, don't come and tell

me. The attributes of God, his properties. I have a friend in Huston, he likes to talk about the essence box, and he liked to put a box and then he likes to put the attributes of God in the box, righteousness, holiness, justice et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Well now this of course is his way of speaking of the attributes of God. Theologians have for centuries spoken of the attributes of God as the attributes of God, the properties of God as his attributes. That is the things that belong to his nature and his character. Now these are the things that belong to him as God.

There are many ways in which we could classify them; I'm going to classify them by two big words, his incommunicable attributes and his communicable attributes. In other words there are attributes which he can not convey to others because they're absolute they belong to God only. And then there are some of his attributes which he may convey in measure to us or to others. And let's first of all a few words about his incommunicable attributes. Now of course there is a sense in which we could say no attribute is ever communicable if we're talking about the perfection of the character of God. If we talk about his love which is really communicable, in the sense of his love in its perfection, it is incommunicable; no one ever loved like God loved. If we talk about his holiness that is what distinguishes him from men that could not be communicated in its perfection, as a matter of fact there is no such thing as degree in holiness anyway. But some attributes may be communicated in measure others may not.

His incommunicable attributes are, I'll just list them. Number one: his self existence, his independence, he himself is the first cause, he is uncaused. When I was in Charleston the last few days, one of the members of my family that is one of my nephews said when he was going to Sunday school, asked his Sunday school teacher the kind of question I'm sure that many of you asked when you were in Sunday school. He asked his teacher after his teacher talked about God for a little while he said, “What's the name of God's wife?” And when he was told that God had no wife he had a very difficult time understanding that, typical response of a Johnson I guess. [Laughter] But this is a

question that we frequently ask or we ponder, “Who made God?” Why isn’t God married like the rest of us? Well no one made God, he is the first cause, he is the uncaused existence in this universe, the only uncaused existence. For every other effect there is an adequate and corresponding cause. But for God, there is none, he is the uncaused God, he is independent, he is self existent. He is, “I am who I am.” He is “I am the living one; I am the one who exists.” “I just exist, I am.” Now this is a very very important revelation of God.

I’m going to have to close with just a remark or two about this in a practical way. Sometimes you know I think that in a class like this we’re inclined to think that this is all just theological and it has no real practical significance for us. Now that is not true. Our forefathers who had enough sense to study the Bible and to realize that its revelation was the most important fact in their lives, thought deeply about divine truth. If two hundred years ago you had gone in the home of the average New Englander and looked at his library, you would have been startled. You know why, because most of his books would have probably been about theology. And if he went in your library, he would probably think that you were atheist or at least not a Christian because of the poverty of significant material in it. For the most fundamental question that men have to wrestle with is the question of God. And they wrestled deeply with this question of God, because they realized that their lives were determined by this relationship as a creature which they had to the Creator. And they thought deeply about the attributes. Because you see, these are the things that tell us what God is. And if we come to realize what God is, then the natural application of that is simply this: If he is this, he also is this to me, to me.

So if he is the self existent one, if he is the absolutely independent one, then he is the only person who can really convey to me authoritatively the fact that he never changes in his relationship to men. Have you ever thought about that? You think a prophet can do it? No a prophet can not do it. You see only God can really give us the basic spiritual facts that shore up our trust in him. And so the fact that God is the self

existent one, the God, is the guarantee for all of the revelation that is found in the word of God. It is he who can assure us that he remains the same always in his relationship to us. For example, the Bible says that God is love; the Bible says that God gave Jesus Christ to die for our sins upon the cross at Calvary. The Bible says as the revelation of God that if we believe in the one who died for us we are born again, we are given new life, we become new creatures, we become Christians, we become the sons of God. But you could never really be sure of this and you could never be sure that this was a relationship that existed forever if the God or the person who gave us this revelation was not the self existent independent one who in himself possessed the uncaused life. But you see, because this person is the one who has told us this message we know that we can count on it now, tomorrow, twenty years from now a hundred years from now, on into eternity. The relationships that he establishes with men are eternal, based upon his word, the word of the eternal, uncaused, self existent God. You know I think it wonderful really that he loves us enough to desire to communicate himself to us in this way. And that he is so great that he is God and that he tells us this wonderful message concerning his son, Jesus Christ.

Well I didn't finish what I anticipated finishing, so for next time I will try to conclude and then we're going into our third study which I hope to be able to finish next time too. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these wonderful truths that are in Thy word. We thank Thee that Thou art who Thou art, that Thou art the eternal God. And we thank Thee that Thou hast revealed Thyself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac the God of Jacob, the God of the Sea, the Lord Jesus who died for us. We thank Thee that in Thine omnipotent power and grace Thou hast revealed to us a Savior who is ours on the basis of simple trust. We thank Thee that Thou art the guarantee of the life that he brings.

Accept our thanks for him as we together make our prayer to Thee. In Jesus' Name.

Amen.

[Message] Now for those of you who have to go, feel free to get up and leave, but for the rest of you, if you want to ask a few questions now, you can ask me a few questions and I'll try to answer them. And you can ask them about anything except remember really controversial subjects we'll try to stay off of for a little while. Yes, sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Yes, the Old Testament remember, is written in Hebrew except for a few sections in the Book of Daniel and Ezra and one verse in Jeremiah which are written in Aramaic, very closely related.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well you know I guess I could answer that by saying why don't Christians understand the Bible too, because many who are Christians and who are genuine Christians do not understand much about the word of God. On Wednesday by the way when I was in Charleston, I went down to the YMCA, they have a city wide Bible class and have for a number of years, it's called the Y Bible class, and a lot of the preachers of the city attend it. There were Episcopalian ministers, there were Baptist ministers, there were Lutheran ministers, there were Methodist ministers and Congregational ministers who were present and there were about fifty men, a number of laymen too, and when I finished one of the men came up to me and said, "This is the first Bible study that I can remember having in the Bible class. [Laughter] Now the reason is

simply this, that most Jewish people have never read the Old Testament in the Hebrew text.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Yes it was a stumbling block to them in the time of Christ remember; because they accused our Lord of blaspheme because he claimed that he was God.

[Comment from same audience member]

[Johnson] Right, which of course illustrates that I should have gone on to say to you that it isn't only the knowledge of the fact that is necessary but also the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. And of course that is the same thing that is true today too. Sometimes when you open up the Bible and give the truth to someone and there it is in black and white they who say they believe the Bible will not believe the text. The reason being that the decision that man makes is not only an intellectual decision it's a decision of his moral being as well. Now there's more questions back here...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]