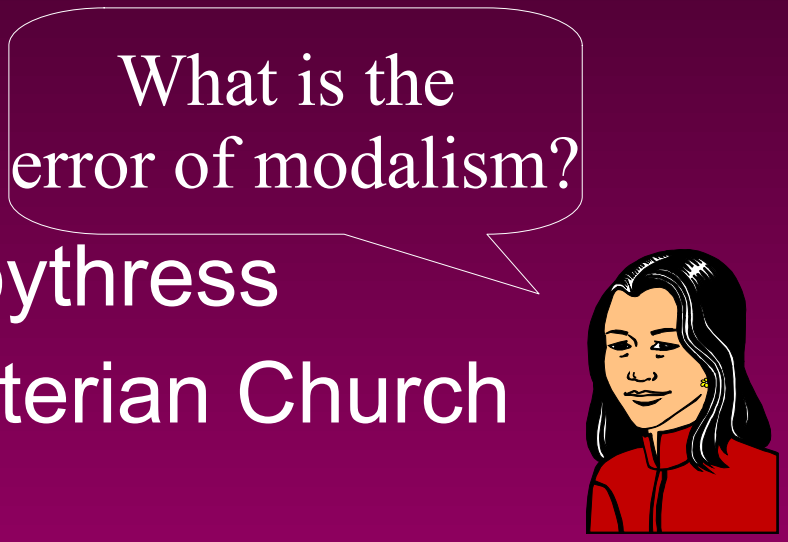
The Trinity
Class 9: The Error of Modalism



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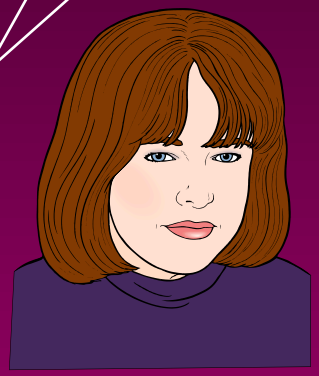
What Is Modalism?

Are there other errors about the Trinity that I need to know about?



Let's talk about modalism.



The Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him all creatures here below.
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen. amen.

A. Application

Child of God: Gal. 4:4-6

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

- Gal. 4:1-7; Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5; John 1:12-13.

B. Basic Formulation

Caution: Road Out! Cliff Ahead!

- Not a good idea to burrow in error
- Rom. 16:19; Phil. 4:8-9
- Remember the principle of human knowledge in dependence on divine knowledge

Modalistic View

- The error: what we know as three persons is actually only one person, appearing in three "modes" (hence, "modal")
- Also known as "Sabellianism"
  - Advocated by Sabellius (c. 220)
- Makes God inaccessible behind the modes

Refuting the Modalistic View

- But: contradicts John 1:1, Matt. 3:16-17, and other verses
- But: Christians know God
- But: salvation is not real if generated by an illusory appearance

C. Biblical Support

Matt. 3:16-17

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 14:16

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

- "Ask" makes no sense with two distinct Persons.
- "Another Helper" makes no sense if there is really only one Helper.

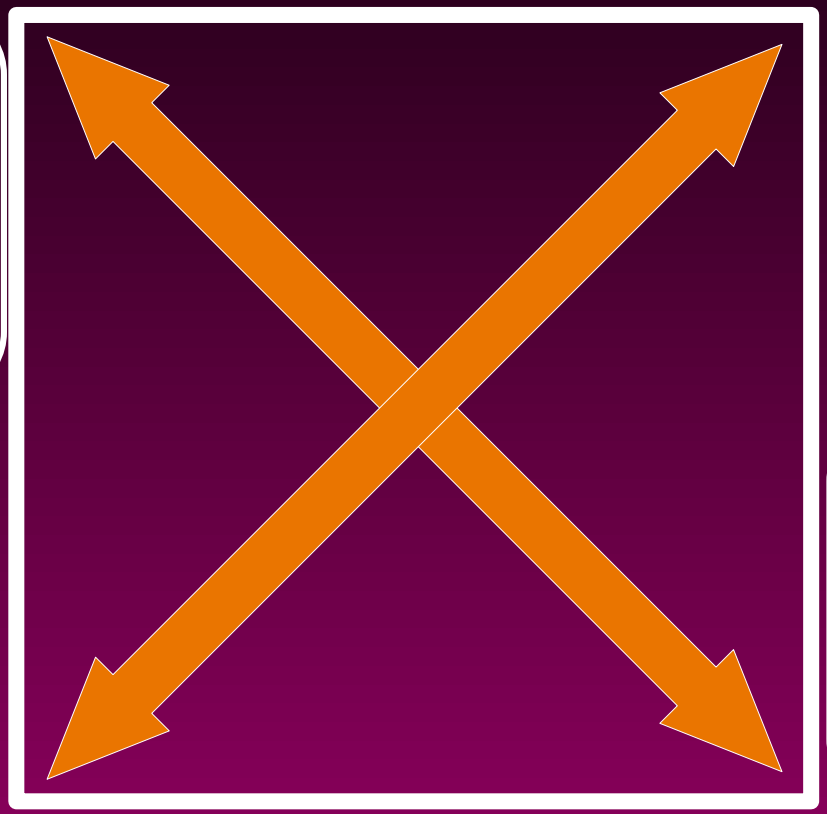
Modalism Self-Refutes

- If the high God has no differentiation
- The language that modalists use is itself undermined by that ultimate smash of meaning together, and cannot articulate the high God
- Trustworthiness of Jesus as revealing God is undermined, because he pretends he is distinct

Frame's Square: Knowledge of Trinity

Modalism

Christian	Non-Christian
1 Transcend-ence: God is Trinity (incom-prehensible)	3 Transcend-ence: God is unknowable
2 Immanence: God says he is Trinity	4 Immanence: human idea: Trinity makes no sense



Answer: Nicene Creed

- Leaders met at
  First Council of Nicaea in 325

Constantinople

Nicaea





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Answer: Nicene Creed



- Result: Nicene Creed
- Amended in 381, to become Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed
- Confirmed in 451 by the Council of Chalcedon

Are there Any Modalists Today?

- Oneness Pentecostalism
- Many ordinary Christians lean that way in practice

D. Applications

You Are a Child of God: Gal. 4:4-6

4 But when the fullness of time had
come, God sent forth his Son, born of
woman, born under the law, 5 to
redeem those who were under the law,
so that we might receive adoption as
sons. 6 And because you are sons, God
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- Gal. 4:1-7; Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5; John 1:12-13.

Action Plan of God for a Rock



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- The Father planned this rock
- The Son specified this rock
- The Spirit breathed this rock

You Hear God: John 17:8

For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

- John 1:1; 15:26; 16:12-15; Heb. 1:1-2.

You Reflect God: 2 Cor. 3:17-18

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and
where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is
freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled
face, beholding the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to
another. For this comes from the Lord
who is the Spirit.

- Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Lev. 19:2; Matt. 5:13-17

You Have New Life: Rom. 8:11

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

- Rom. 6:3-11; Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:20; 3:1-4; 1 Pet. 1:3-5

You Pray: Rom. 8:26-27

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

- Eph. 1:15-17; Heb. 7:23-25; 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5

You Pray: Rom. 8:34

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

- Eph. 1:15-17; Heb. 7:23-25; 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5

You Are Being Saved: Gal. 4:4-5

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- Eph. 1:15-17; Heb. 7:23-25; 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5.

You Are Indwelt: Rom. 8:9-10

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in
the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God
dwells in you. Anyone who does not have
the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.
10 But if Christ is in you, although the
body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is
life because of righteousness.

- John 14:23; 17:21-23; 1 Cor. 6:19.

You Are Under Care: Eph. 1:22

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

- Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 13:20-21; John 10:14-18.

You Serve: Eph. 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- Eph. 4:10-13; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 3:10-13.

God Sustains You: Heb. 1:3

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

- 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Eph. 1:20-23; Rev. 1:18.