

the
PERSON
of JESUS



*Radio Addresses on the
Deity of the Savior*

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

With a foreword by DAVID POWLISON

And an introduction by JEFFREY JUE

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To the graduates of Westminster on the mission field,
proclaiming the power of Jesus.



*“We cannot afford to lose either the God
in the man or the man in the God;
our hearts cry out for the complete
God-man whom the Scriptures offer us.”*

—B. B. WARFIELD,
“The Human Development of Jesus”



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FOREWORD

In these talks, J. Gresham Machen uses disarmingly simple words to portray our God. He is speaking with fellow human beings whose welfare matters to him. I will flag three characteristics of how he speaks that can have an impact on how you approach the Christian life and how you go about the ministry of the Word.

First, Machen makes effective use of “lesser to greater” arguments. He points out a common human experience then likens our incomprehensible God to this thing that we easily comprehend. Why is this so significant? It mirrors Jesus’s ministry method. Jesus never talks over people’s heads. He connects who he is to life. So, for example, a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son help us to get how God himself searches out straying children (Luke 16). The *way* God lifts the veil on himself enables sinful and finite creatures to know him. Machen has modeled his ministry on God’s own methods of bringing merciful truth down to earth.

Second, Machen simply listens closely to what Scripture is saying, and then tells us what Scripture says. So how can we know that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, and divine Messiah? Notice who the prophets were waiting for. Notice how Jesus describes himself. Notice how he prays. Notice how those who lived with him spoke of him. There are probably no ideas here that you haven’t heard, read,

thought, or said before. But Machen's lucid exposition makes Jesus come forth as fresh as blue sky after days of dismal gray.

Third, this book aims to teach us *doctrine*. It aims that we become *soundly indoctrinated*. Amen and amen! It's curious that Christian faith is criticized for asserting "doctrines," as if that word denotes something arbitrary, narrow-minded, and unquestioning. But every human being and every worldview asserts doctrines. A point of view that someone believes is true—whether about God, or sex, or identity, or other people, or what makes life worthwhile—is a doctrine. And how sad that "indoctrination" has come to only mean something coercive, manipulative, and closed to examining other points of view. No doubt, indoctrinating voices—advertisers, academics, advocates for a cause, family, friends, and religionists—can be coercive, deceptive, and closed. But to be *soundly indoctrinated* is to learn Scripture's gaze and purposes by heart—the very best way to examine all the other points of view, the very best way to tackle any hard questions.

Sit down with these short chapters. Listen to the warm voice of Machen the pastor as he both nourishes and defends your faith. Your loving trust will deepen as you more clearly perceive the Jesus who has loved you.

—DAVID POWLISON, PhD
Executive Director
Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation

INTRODUCTION

The radio addresses of Dr. J. Gresham Machen, delivered from January to April in 1935, are a unique and condensed summary of some of the most significant doctrinal issues that Dr. Machen taught and defended throughout his career. By 1935 all of Dr. Machen's major works were published, including: *The Origins of Paul's Religion* (1921), *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), and *What is Faith?* (1925). These were all written at the height of the controversy between the modernists and fundamentalists in the Presbyterian church, where Dr. Machen set forth with great clarity and scholarly precision the critical issues that divided orthodox Christianity from liberalism. In these works he distinguished himself as a world-class scholar with an uncanny ability to penetrate to the heart of a theological issue and lay bare the consequences.

However, by 1935 his battle against liberalism was slowly being lost. The Presbyterian Church USA's decision to reorganize the Board of Princeton Theological Seminary resulted in the addition of signers of the infamous Auburn Affirmation (a document supporting liberalism). This signaled the demise, for Dr. Machen and others, of this historic seminary. Along with

three other professors, Dr. Machen resigned from Princeton and founded Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. His hope and desire was to continue the legacy of Old Princeton and the defense of confessional orthodox Christianity.

In addition to founding a new seminary, Dr. Machen continued to fight the steady onslaught of liberalism in his denomination. Dr. Machen opposed liberal leaders of the Board of Foreign Missions who were revising the theological purpose for mission work by the PCUSA. According to the liberals, evangelism was no longer the goal of foreign mission, but simply social service. In order to preserve an orthodox Christian mission board that would support and send gospel-preaching missionaries, Machen founded the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1933.

The following radio addresses were given in 1935 in the midst of his battles within the church courts over the establishment of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Dr. Machen ultimately was suspended from the ministry in 1936, which later compelled him to found a new denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Of course he would not have known it at the time, but these radio addresses would be some of his last public words, as he would fall ill and die unexpectedly on January 1, 1937.

In many ways, these addresses are a remarkably concise

summary of the central theological doctrines that J. Gresham Machen defended throughout his valiant fight against liberalism. In these addresses, Dr. Machen answers the questions: who is Jesus Christ, and what did he do? The answers to these questions were the most pressing for Christians in his day, and they are for us as well. Dr. Machen affirmed that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, truly the eternal God united to a human nature, with all divine authority and supernatural power. And Dr. Machen goes to great lengths to demonstrate this truth from numerous texts of Scripture.

For Dr. Machen, Jesus is not a mere man who serves as an ethical example or a teacher of good principles. He is our Savior, and as Dr. Machen stated, “a purely human, or mere natural, as distinguished from a supernatural, Christ can never be our Savior.” Jesus Christ, God incarnate, came as the Savior and accomplished salvation, according to Dr. Machen. The final demonstration of Jesus Christ’s work was his resurrection. Dr. Machen defends the supernatural bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he asserts that this pivotal historical event evinces the truth of Christianity.

These transcribed radio addresses are commended as a clear and wonderful presentation of the basic orthodox Christian commitments that Dr. Machen embraced and defended. They are delivered by a renowned scholar, but presented in a way that encourages everyone to read and carefully reflect on them. Even

more important, they reveal the heart of one called to proclaim the whole counsel of God to a world that desperately needs to hear the truth. Dr. Machen ended his last address with this plea:

Oh, that God would open men's eyes that they might see, that they might detect the grand sweep and power of his testimony to himself in his Word! Oh, that he would take away the terrible blindness of men's minds! Has he taken away the blindness of *your* minds, my friends? Do you know the risen Christ today as your Savior and your Lord? If you do not yet know him, will you not bow before him at this hour and say, "My Lord and my God!"

No doubt this is as relevant to readers today as it was for Machen's first listeners in 1935.

—JEFFREY K. JUE, PHD
Provost & Executive Vice President
Westminster Theological Seminary

The Triune God

I wish to open this little series of talks by discussing what the Bible teaches about God. The Bible tells us there is a personal God, Creator and Ruler of the world. God, according to the Bible, is not another name for the mighty process of nature, and he is not some one part or aspect of the process. He is a free and holy person, who created the process of nature by the fiat of his will and who is eternally independent of the universe that he has made.

Now we ask more in detail what the Bible tells us about God. When we ask that, I know we shall be met with an objection. We are seeking to know God. Well, there are many people who tell us that we ought not seek to know God. The knowledge of God, they say, is the death of religion. Instead of seeking to know God, they tell us we ought simply to feel him; putting all theology aside, they say we ought just to sink ourselves in the boundless ocean of God's being.

Such is the attitude of the mystics, ancient and modern. But it is not the attitude of the Christian. The Christian, unlike the mystic, knows him whom he has believed.

What shall be said of a religion that depreciates theology, that depreciates the knowledge of God?

One thing that can be said of it is that it hardly possesses any moral quality at all. Pure feeling, if such a thing exists, is non-moral. That can be observed in the sphere of human relationships. What makes my affection for a human friend such an ennobling thing is the knowledge that I have of the character and the needs of my friend. Am I indifferent to such knowledge? Am I indifferent to base slanders which are directed against my friend's reputation? Not if I am a friend worthy of the name. Human affection, apparently so simple, is in reality just bristling with doctrine; it depends upon a host of observations, stored up in the mind, regarding the object of affection.

That is true, I think, even with regard to those human affections that are often thought of as instinctive. Take, for example, the love of a mother for a child. That love is no doubt independent of excellence in the child; it is impossible to kill a mother's love, no matter what one may do. But is a mother's love independent of some knowledge of the child, independent of some knowledge of the child's sufferings and needs, independent of some ability to enter into the soul of the child in order to sympa-

thize and understand? If it is thus independent of all knowledge, I am inclined to think that it is hardly human affection at all; it has descended to an almost sub-human level.

It is to that sub-human, non-personal level that the mystic seeks to degrade our communion with God. Very different is the love of God as the Bible sets it forth. According to the Bible, we love God because he first loved us; and he has told us of his love in his holy Word. We love God, if we obey what the Bible tells us, because God has made himself known to us and has thus shown himself to be worthy of our love.

I do not mean to say that the Christian in his communion with God is always rehearsing consciously the things that God has told us about himself. There are times, as someone has observed, when a child of God, weary with the battle of life, can say only as he lies down to rest: "Lord, thou knowest, we are on the same old terms." There are times when the Christian can be strangely conscious of the presence of God, even though he is not for the moment thinking in detail about the things that he knows regarding God. Certainly the Bible does offer to us an immediate communion with God, which is like no other experience which a man can possibly have; and certainly the Bible does make a distinction between knowing God and merely knowing about God. But underlying that sweet and blessed communion of the Christian with his God there is a true knowledge of God. A

communion with God which is independent of that knowledge of God is communion with some other god and not with the living and true God whom the Bible reveals.

Every true man is resentful of slanders against a human friend. Should we not be grieved ten times more by slanders against our God? How can we possibly listen with polite complacency, then, when men break down the distinction between God and man, and drag God down to man's level? How can we possibly say, as in one way or another is so often said, that orthodoxy makes little difference. We should never talk in any such way about a human friend. We should never say with regard to a human friend that it makes no difference whether our view of him is right or wrong. How, then, can we say that absurd thing with regard to God?

The really consistent Christian can have nothing whatever to do with such doctrinal indifferentism. There is nothing so dishonoring to God, he will say, as to be indifferent to the things that God has told us about himself in his holy Word.

What, then, has God told us about himself in his Word? I certainly cannot now answer that question with any fullness. But there are a few things that I do want to say, and if by saying them I can be helpful to you in your own reading of the Bible, the purpose of this little series of talks will have been attained.

In the Shorter Catechism of the Presbyterian churches, there is the following answer to the question, "What is God?":

God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. (WSC Q&A 4)

That answer is certainly in accordance with the Bible. I think it will help us a little bit to get straight in our minds what the Bible says about God.

Notice that God is here said to be infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. What is meant by saying that he is infinite? Well, the word “infinite” means without an end or a limit. Other beings are limited; God is unlimited. I suppose it is easy for us to fall into our ordinary spatial conceptions in trying to think of God. We may imagine ourselves passing from the earth to the remotest star known to modern astronomy—many, many light-years away. Well, when we have got there, we are not one slightest fraction of an inch nearer to fathoming infinity than we were when we started. We might imagine ourselves traveling ten million times ten million times farther still, and still we would not be any nearer to infinity than when we started. We cannot conceive a limit to space, but neither can we conceive of infinite space. Our mind faints in the presence of infinity.

But we were really wrong in using those spatial conceptions in thinking of infinity, and particularly wrong were we in using spatial conceptions in thinking of the infinite God. It may help us to the threshold of the truth to say that God pervades the

whole vast area of the universe known to science, and then infinitely more; it may help us to the threshold of the truth to say that God inhabits infinite space: but when we look a little deeper we see that space itself belongs to finite things and that the notion of infinite space is without meaning. God created space when he created finite things. He himself is beyond space. There is no near and no far to him. Everything to him is equally near.

So it is when we try to think of God as eternal. If the word “infinity” is related, by way of contrast, to the notion of space, so the word “eternity” is related, by way of contrast, to the notion of time. When we say that God is eternal, we mean that he had no beginning and that he will have no end. But we really mean more than that. We mean that time has no meaning for him, save as it has meaning to the creatures whom he has made. He created time when he created finite creatures. He himself is beyond time. There is no past and no future to him. The Bible puts that in poetical language when it says: “For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night” (Ps 90:4). We of course are obliged to think of the actions of God as taking place in time. We are obliged to think of him as doing one thing after another thing; we are obliged to think of him as doing this today and that tomorrow. We have a perfect right so to think, and the Bible amply confirms us in that

right. To us there is indeed such a thing as past and present and future, and when God deals with us he acts in a truly temporal series. But to God himself all things are equally present. There is no such thing as “before” or “after” to him.

It is very important to see clearly that God is thus infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. These attributes of God are often denied. Those who have denied them have told us that God is a finite God. We must not blame him, they tell us, if things are not just right in the world. He is doing the best he can, they say; he is trying to bring order out of chaos, but he is faced by a recalcitrant material which he did not create and which he can mold only gradually and imperfectly to his will. It is our business to help him, and while we may at first sight regret that we have not the all-powerful God that we used to think we had, yet we can comfort ourselves with the inspiring thought that the God that we do have needs our help and indeed cannot do without it.

What shall we say of such a finite God? I will tell you plainly what I think we ought to say about him. He is not God but *a* god. He is a product of men’s thoughts. Men have made many such little gods. Of the making of gods, as of the making of books, there is no end. But, as for us Christians, with our Bibles before us, we turn from all such little gods of man’s making, out toward the dread mystery of the infinite and eternal, and say, as

Augustine said with a holy fear: “Thou has made us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

The definition in the Shorter Catechism, which we are taking to give us our outline of what the Bible tells us about God, says not only that God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being and in his power and in his holiness, but also that he is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his wisdom and in his justice, goodness, and truth.

Does that seem surprising to you in the light of what we have just been saying? Well, perhaps it might seem to be surprising. These qualities—wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth—are such startlingly human qualities. Can we ascribe them to that infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God of whom we have just been speaking? If we do try to ascribe them to that God, are we not guilty of a naïve anthropomorphism? Are we not guilty of the childish error of thinking of God as though he were just a big man up in the sky? Are we not guilty of making a god in our own image?

The answer is: no, we are not guilty of that. If we think of God as having some attributes which we also possess, we may conceivably be doing it for one or the other of two reasons. In the first place, we may be doing it because we are making God in our own image. But, in the second place, we may be doing it because God has made us in his image.

The Bible tells us that this second alternative is correct. God made man in the image of God, and that is the reason why God possesses some attributes which man also possesses, though God possesses them to an infinitely higher degree.

The Bible is not afraid of speaking of God in a startlingly tender and human sort of way. It does so just in passages where the majesty of God is set forth. “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,” says the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, “and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers” (Isa 40:22). “All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness” (Isa 40:17). But what says that same fortieth chapter of Isaiah about this same terrible God? Here is what it says: “He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Isa 40:11).

How wonderfully the Bible sets forth the tenderness of God! Is that merely figurative? Are we wrong in thinking of God in such childlike fashion? Many philosophers say so. They will not think of God as a person. Oh, no. That would be dragging him down too much to our level! So they make of him a pale abstraction. The Bible seems childish to them in the warm, personal way in which it speaks of God.

Are those philosophers right or is the Bible right? Thank God, the Bible is right, my friends. The philosophers despise

children who think of God as their heavenly Father. But the philosophers are wrong and the children are right. Did not our Lord Jesus say: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (Matt 11:25).

No, God is no pale abstraction. He is a person. That simple truth—precious possession of simple souls—is more profound than all the philosophies of all the ages.

But now we come to a great mystery. God, according to the Bible, is not just one person, but he is three persons in one God. That is the great mystery of the Trinity.

The Trinity is revealed to us only in the Bible. God has revealed some things to us through nature and through conscience. But the Trinity is not among them. This he has revealed to us by supernatural revelation and by supernatural revelation alone.

We can, it is true, detect something in the doctrine of the Trinity that serves to render clearer and richer even what nature and conscience reveal. Nature and conscience reveal—in a revelation which, it is true, sinful man seldom receives—a personal and holy God, Creator of the world. But how can a personal and holy being exist entirely alone? The thing is difficult for us to understand. That difficulty is wonderfully overcome by the doctrine of the Trinity, which tells us that even before God had

created the world there was a personal inter-relation within the Godhead.

But we ought to be exceedingly cautious about such considerations. Though God is a person, he is a person very different from us finite persons, and I am not sure that we could ever have said, on the basis of any general revelation in nature and conscience, that an infinite person could not have existed entirely alone. Let us put such considerations, then, aside. When we are engaging in them we are venturing upon holy ground, where we can walk at best with but trembling and halting footsteps. The thing that is perfectly clear is that we should not have had any real knowledge of the holy mystery of the Trinity had not that mystery been revealed to us in the written Word of God.

Within the Word of God, it is in the New Testament that the doctrine of the Trinity is taught. There are hints of it in the Old Testament, but they are only hints, and it was left to the New Testament for this precious doctrine to be clearly revealed.

In the New Testament, the doctrine is taught with the utmost clearness; and the doctrine is presupposed even more than it is expressly taught, as has well been pointed out by Dr. B. B. Warfield in a splendid article, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity." That is, the New Testament is founded throughout on the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine was really established by

the great facts of the incarnation of the Son of God and the work of the Holy Spirit even before it was enunciated in words.

Only the smallest part of the teaching of the New Testament about the Trinity is found in passages where the doctrine is stated as a whole. What the New Testament ordinarily does is to state parts of the doctrine, so that when we put those parts together, and when we summarize them, we have the great doctrine of the three persons and one God.

For example, all passages in the New Testament where the deity of Jesus Christ is set forth are, when taken in connection with passages setting forth the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, passages supporting the doctrine of the Trinity. In the next talk, I hope to deal with some of those passages.

But what needs to be observed now is that although by far the larger part of the biblical teaching about the Trinity is given in that incidental and partial way—presupposing the doctrine rather than formally enunciating it as a whole—yet there are some passages where the doctrine is definitely presented by the mention, together, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The most famous of such passages, I suppose, is found in the Great Commission, given by the risen Lord to his disciples according to the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

There we have a mention of all three persons of the Trinity in the most complete coordination and equality—yet all three persons are plainly not three Gods but one. Here, in this solemn Commission by our Lord, the God of all true Christians is forever designated as a triune God.

We think also, for example, of the apostolic benediction at the end of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). Here the terminology is a little different from that in the Great Commission. Paul speaks of the Son as “the Lord.” But the word “Lord” in the Pauline epistles is plainly a designation of deity, like the other Greek word which is translated into English by the word “God.” It is the Greek word used to translate the holy name of God, “Jehovah,” in the Greek translation of the Old Testament which Paul used, and Paul does not hesitate to apply to Christ Old Testament passages which speak of Jehovah.

That brings us to something supremely important in the teaching of the whole New Testament about the Trinity. It is this: the New Testament writers, in presenting God as triune, are never for one moment conscious of saying anything that could by any possibility be regarded as contradicting the Old Testament teaching that there is but one God. That teaching is at the very heart and core of the Old Testament. It is every whit

as much at the heart and core of the New Testament. The new Testament is just as much opposed as the Old Testament is to the thought that there are more Gods than one. Yet the New Testament with equal clearness teaches that the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and that these three are not three aspects of the same person but three persons standing in a truly personal relationship to one another. There we have the great doctrine of the three persons but one God.

That doctrine is a mystery. No human mind can fathom it. Yet what a blessed mystery it is! The Christian's heart melts within him in gratitude and joy when he thinks of the divine love and condescension that has thus lifted the veil and allowed us sinful creatures a look into the very depths of the being of God.