

Focus on the Kingdom

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Who Is the One God of the Bible?

Pick up a Bible and ask the simplest and most basic of all questions: Who is the One God of the Bible?

Deuteronomy 32:39: “See now that I, even I, am He and there is no God besides Me.”

Isaiah 43:11: “I, even I, am the LORD [Yahweh] and there is no Savior besides Me.”

Isaiah 44:6: “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts, ‘I am the first and I am the last; and there is no God besides Me.’”

Isaiah 44:8: “Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no rock; I know not one.”

Isaiah 45:5: “I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God.”

Isaiah 45:6: “That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me. I am the Lord and there is none other.”

Hosea 13:4: “Yet I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but Me, and besides Me there is no Savior.”

Deuteronomy 4:35: “To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.”

Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord...”

Mark 12:32 (the scribe agreeing with Jesus): “Right, teacher, you have truly stated that He is One; and there is no one else besides Him.”

It is perfectly obvious that Jesus confirmed the age-old creed of Israel. As every Jew knows this creed asserts that the true God, the God of Israel, is One Person — certainly not three! Jesus subscribed to the understanding of his fellow Jews. Jesus allied himself to the Jews when he defined God. He said, “We [Jews] know whom we worship” (John 4:22). And no Jew ever worshipped the Triune God. Jesus did not deviate one inch from the unitary, non-trinitarian monotheism of Israel. Jesus quoted the Old Testament definition of who God is and thus presented us Christian disciples with our basic creed. It is arrogant in the extreme for us Gentile converts to Christianity to interfere with the creed declared with such clarity by Jesus himself. Note carefully how many persons there are in this creed: “The Lord our God is one Lord.”

One Lord is one Person, not three!

A popular theory declares that God is “one ‘what’ and three ‘who’s.’” This of course depersonalizes God. The One God is never a “what” in the Bible. He is presented as one personal being, denoted thousands and thousands of times by the personal pronouns in

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the singular, I, Me, Thou, Thee, He, Him. In the Bible the word three never occurs in connection with the One God.

God had a unique, virginally conceived Son, the Messiah, and God's spirit is the Spirit of God, His divine presence and power active in the world to enlighten and save. But God never spoke to His own Spirit and the Spirit never sent greetings, was never worshipped nor prayed to.

Both the Father and the Son are addressed in prayer and both are worshipped, Jesus as the Messiah and the Father as the one true God. The biblical word "worship" is an "elastic" term with a meaning different from our English word "worship." David was "worshipped" alongside the One God (I Chron. 29:20) and the saints are going to be "worshipped" by their former persecutors (Rev. 3:9). The Hebrew and Greek words for "worship" apply both to God and to persons who are not the One God, but superior human agents of the One God.

Jesus is the ultimate spokesman for God, His very image, reflecting His mind and character perfectly. But this does not mean that Jesus *is* God. If Jesus were God, this would make two Gods, a biblical impossibility. The Father is the One Lord God, and Jesus is the Lord Messiah.

The distinction between the Father and the Son is brilliantly illumined for us by Psalm 110:1 where the One God, Yahweh, is a different, separate and distinct person from the Lord Messiah. The Lord Messiah is addressed in this prophecy as "Adoni." "Adoni" means "my lord." It never refers to God, but always to a person who is *not* God, but a human superior (occasionally an angel). If Jesus were God he would be described in this Psalm as "Adonai," the word used exclusively for the One God (449 times in the Old Testament). Psalm 110:5, by contrast, depicts "Adonai," the One God, as supporting the Messiah in his future battle for world dominance. The distinction between "Adoni" and "Adonai" is maintained in every case. "Adonai" is the One God and "Adoni" is never a reference to God. How very striking then that in Psalm 110:1 the Messiah Jesus is

distinctly given the superior human title, not the title of eternal Deity! The Jews knew well what was at stake in any departure from the strict monotheism of the creed of Israel.

John and all the Apostles were outstanding exponents of unitary monotheism (i.e., God is a single Person). John recorded Jesus as defining the Father as the "the one who alone is truly God" (John 17:3; 5:44). It follows then that the Apostles and Jesus would have difficulty with some current mainstream religious authorities who would express horror that they were not Trinitarian following the creeds of the 4th and 5th centuries!

Some try to defend post-biblical creeds by appealing to John 1:1. But they read this passage with their minds already made up that the Son of God was an uncreated eternal Second Person in the Godhead. They then make the huge assumption that the "word" means the Son before his birth. But the text tells us that God's *word*, not His Son, preexisted from the beginning. Anyone familiar with Jewish ways of thinking recognizes here a strong parallel with Wisdom which is figuratively presented as being "with God" from the beginning (Prov. 8) Wisdom is personified (i.e., "She" speaks as though she was a person). She says "I was always with Him [God]." Thus the word or wisdom of God was "with God" (John 1:1) and was itself God, that is to say fully expressive of God. Wisdom says in Proverbs, "I am understanding." She is the fullest expression of the mind of God. The word "is" God, not as a one-to-one identity, because the word is also "with God," but as fully expressive of God. The word is God in His self-revelation.

But note carefully that there is only one *Person* in John 1:1, 2. It is the Father and His word/wisdom who created everything. Then, amazingly, in verse 14 the *Son* is introduced for the first time, and we learn of the only begotten *Son* who reveals the Father. John's intention is to tell us that the very word/expression/wisdom of God was manifested in history in a human Person, *the Son* of God. Jesus is therefore what

the word/wisdom of God became. Just as the car on the drawing board takes “flesh” as a real, functioning automobile, so the wisdom/word of God was fully expressed in Jesus. Jesus is the most perfect demonstration of God in a human being, but he is not himself God, that is to say the Son is not an uncreated eternal Person.

There is only One such uncreated Person in the universe and that is the Father. No wonder the Father is called “the [one] God” (*ho theos*, in Greek) over 1300 times in the New Testament. The term “God” is very occasionally applied to Jesus as reflecting God. Remember that Moses was to be “God” to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1). This does not mean that Moses *was* actually God, but that he was His spokesman. In a parallel way Jesus is the ultimate speaker for God, the supreme prophet and the chosen King of David’s royal line.

Over and over again the New Testament informs us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, a title applicable also to the converted Israel of the future (Hosea 1:10). Jesus founded his church on the firm belief that he was the “Messiah, Son of the living God,” and remember what Professor Brown of Fuller Seminary tells us, along with many other expert biblical scholars: “To be called Son of God in the Bible means that you are *not* God.” This is an obvious truth which can be searched out and confirmed by anyone. Simply note that Adam, Israel and men especially close to God are called “Sons of God.” Christians are said to be “Sons of God.” Jesus is the pioneer Christian, the perfect model of what it means to be “Son of God.”

Now listen to Paul: How does he define the One God in whom Christians believe? Paul repeats exactly the Old Testament One God texts quoted above: His statement defining the God of Christianity is based on the Old Testament words we have cited earlier (Deut. 32:39, etc.). Paul tells us precisely *who* that unique divine Person is: “We know that there is no God but One...*To us Christians there is but*

One God, the Father” (I Cor. 8:4-6). This is unitary monotheism.

(Why didn’t Paul write “There is One God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”?) Paul also believed that “there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Messiah Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5).

Was Paul a Trinitarian? Hardly. He wrote: “God is only one Person” (Gal. 3:20, Amplified Version).

Paul’s and Jesus’ creed is strikingly different from the creed of contemporary churches which reads: “We believe in One God, existing eternally in three Persons.” Listen again to Paul: “There is no God but One...There is but One God — the Father” (I Cor. 8:4-6).

The extent of the confusion about this most basic of all questions can be measured by the confident assertions of some that unless one believes in the “historic creed” (of Church Councils) that God is three in One, one is a “cultic figure” and “decidedly non-Christian.” It is to be regretted that Paul and Jesus would not qualify as Christian by the standards decreed by some of America’s “Bible answer men.” Something has gone terribly wrong!

Happily there are signs that a return to the God of the Bible may be coming. Evangelical fundamentalist John MacArthur rightly says: “There is no such thing as ‘the eternal Son’ in the Bible” (see his *Commentary on Hebrews*, ch. 1). MacArthur agrees here with famed commentator Adam Clark, who believed that the concept of the “eternally begotten Son,” central to traditional creeds, was not only meaningless but dangerous. A world-known systematic theologian of Fuller Seminary, Dr. Colin Brown, says correctly: “It is a common but patent error to read John 1:1 as if it said ‘In the beginning was the Son....’”(Ex *Auditu*, 7, 1991). ✧

For a full-length biblical and historical study of this issue, with a large supporting bibliography, see our *The Doctrine of the Trinity* available from any bookstore or from University Press of America at 800-462-6420. (The ISBN number of this 365-page book is 1-57309-309-2.)

A Christological Mess!

At the present time there are millions claiming the name of Christ who firmly believe a variety of theories about Jesus: He was the human manifestation of the Archangel Michael. He was the spirit brother of Satan. He was an eternally begotten uncreated being, part of a Triune Godhead. He was God as well as the same Person as the Father. He was one among many good teachers and prophets.

His true identity was the matter of the greatest concern to Jesus when he asked his chosen agents: “Who do you say that I am?”

The answer is simple: He is the Messiah, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16). On that revelation the church is to be founded (v. 18).

Caution should be exercised when defining the meaning of the title Son of God! And *Adoni* (my lord, Ps. 110:1) never means God, but always a superior other than God, who is *Adonai*.

Quotations

Newton (*Origin of Triads and Trinities*) quotes Professor Sayce (Gifford Lectures and Hibbert Lectures) as follows: “The indebtedness of Christian theological theory to ancient Egyptian dogma is nowhere more striking than in the doctrine of the Trinity. The very same terms used of it by Christian theologians meet us again in the inscriptions and papyri of Egypt.”

Edward Gibbon says in the preface to *History of Christianity*: “If Paganism was conquered by Christianity, it is equally true that Christianity was corrupted by Paganism. The pure deism of the first Christians...was changed, by the Church of Rome, into the incomprehensible dogma of the Trinity. Many of the pagan tenets, invented by the Egyptians and idealized by Plato, were retained as being worthy

of belief.” (Gibbon is a historian’s historian. He would not speak so forthrightly without an enormous basis for his evaluations.)

Commenting on the state of affairs in the early Church, H. G Wells writes: “We shall see presently how, later on, all Christendom was torn apart by disputes about the Trinity. There is no clear evidence that the apostles of Jesus entertained that doctrine” (*Outline of History*, p. 421).

“As far as the New Testament is concerned, one does not find in it an actual doctrine of the Trinity” (Bernard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine*).

“The Pauline Christ who accomplishes the work of salvation is a personality who is both human and superhuman, not God, but the Son of God. Here the idea, which was to develop later, of the union of the two natures is not present” (Maurice Goguel, *Jesus and the Origins of Christianity*, Harper, 1960).

“Jesus is never identified *simpliciter* [absolutely] with God, since the early Christians were not likely to confuse Jesus with God the Father” (Howard Marshall, “Jesus as Lord: The Development of the Concept,” in *Eschatology in the New Testament*, Hendrickson, p. 144).

The Catholic Encyclopedia: “For nowhere in the Old Testament do we find any clear indication of a Third Person. Mention is often made of the Spirit of the Lord, but there is nothing to show that the Spirit was viewed as distinct from Yahweh Himself. The term is always employed to signify God considered in His working, whether in the universe or in the soul of man.”

The Encyclopedia Americana: “Fourth-century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding the nature of

God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching.”

A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge: “Many say that the Trinity is a corruption borrowed from the heathen religions, and ingrafted on the Christian faith.”

“The origin of the Trinity is entirely pagan” (Arthur Weigal, *The Paganism in Our Christianity*).

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: “The doctrines of the Logos and the Trinity received their shape from Greek Fathers, who were much influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Platonic philosophy. That errors and corruptions crept into the church from this source cannot be denied.”

The Church of the First Few Centuries: “The Doctrine of the Trinity was of gradual and comparatively late formation. It had its origin in a source entirely foreign from that of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. It grew up, and was ingrafted on Christianity, through the hands of the Platonizing Fathers.”

Outlines of the History of Dogma: “Church doctrine became rooted in the soil of Hellenism [pagan Greek thought]. Thereby it became a mystery to the great majority of Christians.”

The Illustrated Bible Dictionary: “The word Trinity is not found in the Bible...It did not find a place formally in the theology of the church till the 4th century.”

The Encyclopedia of Religion: “Theologians agree that the New Testament does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity.”

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: “The New Testament does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity.”

The Encyclopedia Americana: “Christianity derived from Judaism, and Judaism was strictly Unitarian [believing that God is one person]. The road that led from Jerusalem to Nicaea was scarcely a straight one. Fourth-century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding the nature of God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching” (1956, Vol. XXVII, p. 294L).

The Nouveau Dictionnaire Universel: “The Platonic Trinity, itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity of attributes that gave rise to the three hypostases or divine persons taught by the Christian churches...This Greek philosopher’s [Plato, fourth century BCE] conception of the divine trinity...can be found in all the ancient [pagan] religions” (Paris, 1865-1870, edited by M. Lachatre, Vol. 2, p. 1467).

Dictionary of the Bible by John L. McKenzie, S.J.: “The trinity of persons within the unity of nature is defined in terms of ‘person’ and ‘nature’ which are Greek philosophical terms; actually the terms do not appear in the Bible. The Trinitarian definitions arose out of long controversies in which these terms and others such as ‘essence’ and ‘substance’ were erroneously applied to God by some theologians” (New York, 1965, p. 899).

The New Encyclopedia Britannica: “Neither the word Trinity, nor the explicit doctrine as such, appears in the New Testament, nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the Shema in the Old Testament: ‘Hear O Israel; YHWH our God is one Lord’ (Deut. 6:4)...The doctrine developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies...By the end of the 4th century the doctrine of the Trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since” (1976, Micropedia, Vol.X, p. 126).

The New Catholic Encyclopedia: “The formulation ‘one God in three persons’ was not solidly established, certainly not fully assimilated into Christian life and its profession of faith, prior to the end of the 4th century. But it is precisely this formula that has first claim to the title the Trinitarian dogma. Among the Apostolic Fathers, there had been nothing even remotely approaching such a mentality or perspective” (1967, Vol. XIV, p. 299). ☩

The “If’s” of Christianity

A popular form of evangelism invites you “just to trust in Jesus and be saved.” This form of preaching can be dangerously misleading unless the matter of trusting Jesus is more carefully defined.

We can all agree that salvation is by grace, but to receive it we must believe in the Jesus of the Bible, the Messiah, the King of Israel and the world; we must also persist in our faith until the end of our life (Matt. 24:13). To believe in the Jesus of Scripture, we must first know something about who he was, what he does now and what he is going to do in the future. We must understand that Jesus is the promised Messiah whom God planned to send by birth from the virgin Mary — a birth having its origin in Holy Spirit, that is, divine power (Matt. 1:20 in the original Greek). The Messiah is not only the one whom God sent to die for the sins of the world; he is also the High Priest of all the Christians and the future King of the world. We must welcome this information about the Savior, before we can believe in him in the way the Bible asks. That is why the Gospel is a call to believe in the Kingdom or Reign of God as well as in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Mark 1:15; Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31).

When we first understand and believe in Jesus, the Messiah, and his teachings, we are rescued from all the false beliefs we have previously held. We should then be baptized as a sign that we want to become a member of God’s family and receive His Spirit. Can we then relax, knowing that there is nothing further for us to do? Here is where the “if’s” of Christianity come in.

After baptism there is a sense in which we have been saved. Yet that is only part of the story. It is not always realized (due to obscure translation in the King James Version) that the Christian is one who is *being* saved and looks forward to complete salvation in the future. This shows that there can be no room for complacency: “Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls” (1 Cor. 10:12). The popular notion that there are no conditions to salvation once you have made an initial commitment is not borne out by the New Testament facts.

The word “if” is a sign of condition. If Paul had taught that salvation could never be rejected after it had been initially granted, he could not have used the “if” as he did. In Colossians 1:21-23 he makes a most interesting statement: “You who were once alienated, enemies in your mind by wicked works, Christ has now reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and unimpeachable IF indeed you continue in the faith founded and firm and not being moved away from the Hope of the Good News which you heard...”

Paul makes it very clear that the Hope offered by the Gospel — the Hope of Resurrection and rulership with the Messiah in his Kingdom when he comes back — must be held on to. This is a condition of receiving salvation. Salvation is indeed offered by grace, but our cooperation is required. Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2: “I made known to you the Good News which I preached to you as the Gospel, which you also received and in which you now stand, by which you are *being* saved, IF you hold fast to the Message

which I announced as the Good News.” This makes it quite clear that persistence in the Gospel is a condition of obtaining final salvation. The facts embodied in the Good News, including faith in the person of the Messiah Jesus, must be held firm. This includes the Hope of rulership with Christ in the Kingdom.

In three other passages Paul uses similar language: In 1 Thessalonians 3:8 he says: “Now we live IF you stand fast in the Lord.” The implication is that he will be most unhappy if they do not! And again, in 2 Timothy 2:12, there is a most important passage written by Paul at the very end of his career as an Apostle: “IF we endure we shall reign as kings with him” — that is, if we successfully come through the trials of this life, we shall reign with him in the Messianic Kingdom of the Coming Age. Paul had said the same thing in slightly different words in Romans 8:17: “IF we suffer with him we shall be glorified with him.” You will find by comparing Mark 10:37 with Matthew 20:21 that the word Glory is another term for Kingdom.

In all the passages we have quoted the IF’S show the condition which must be fulfilled by Christians before they can finally enter the Kingdom of God to be revealed at the Second Coming of Christ. Salvation is therefore in one sense past; we have been rescued from the world, the Satanic system which at present dominates all forms of civilization. In a very important sense salvation is a continuing process — we are being saved. 1 Corinthians 1:18 speaks of those who are being saved as contrasted with the rest who are perishing. Thirdly, salvation is a future event to which we are to look forward. That is why Paul can say “Salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11). That salvation comes to us only IF we hold fast to the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God and the things pertaining to the name of Jesus firm until the end (Heb. 6:11).

The Christian life is thus properly likened to a race. At the starting tape you have not won the

race. You must persist and persevere until you reach the finishing tape. A prize awaits each winner. We must all finish the race! We shall achieve this only by the grace of God working in our lives. ✧

Atlanta Bible College will provide a forum for the discussion of the identity of Jesus, God and the Gospel at our annual **Theological Conference** to be held at Atlanta Bible College, Morrow, GA (800-347-4261) from February 11-13, 2000. Atlanta Bible College is conveniently located to Hartsfield Airport and transportation to the college will be provided. The conference provides a unique opportunity to meet other Truth-seeking believers. In addition, we plan a discussion between a distinguished scientist who does not believe in God and another, also an author of many books on the subject, who supports the existence of God based on argument drawn from observing the structure of creation. This discussion will take place on the afternoon of Friday, 11th Feb., as the opening session of our annual theological conference.

Letters

“All day, every day, I look forward to your radio program ‘Focus on the Kingdom.’ The Message/Word/Gospel about the Kingdom seems delightfully easy to comprehend”—
Michigan

“I have just recently discovered and been reading your writings. They are thrilling and uplifting. I thank God for people like you who have devoted their lives to our Heavenly Father and His precious Word. There is so much to learn and be refreshed on” — *Minnesota*

“I must say I hear very few messages on the Kingdom of God. That sure makes me wonder just what is being taught” — *Michigan*

“I am a regular listener to your radio messages on God’s kingdom. Your messages are often touching and reforming to my soul” —
Nigeria