

A Simple Lesson in English — and Theology

by Anthony Buzzard

For many centuries Bible readers have been in need of a simple lesson on the meaning of words.

The word in question is “only.” “Only” is a word which limits and excludes. Whatever is described as “only” is in a class of its own — unique. All others are excluded. If something is “the only...” automatically there can be no one or nothing besides it.

Now for the application of our lesson to the text of the Bible. To the Philippians Paul wrote: “No church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you **only**” (Phil. 4:15). All other churches are excluded from Paul’s reference.

Now Mark 13:32: speaking of the Second Coming Jesus said, “Of that day and hour no one knows; not the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father **only**.”

We do not require an army of experts to help us understand these statements. We have all been using similar language involving the word “only” since we learned to speak. We all know what is meant by “only.”

There is an important text in John’s Gospel which also employs the word “only.” Jesus was defining salvation. In a crucially important statement he summed up what we must believe to be saved. Addressing the Father, he said, “This is eternal life — that they may know You, the **only** true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent” (John 17:3).

Jesus described the Father as the true God. With this no one will disagree. But note carefully: not only is the Father the “true God,” He is “the **only** true God.” He, the Father, is the *only* true God.

Let us rehearse our lesson about the word “only.” It limits and excludes. If the Father is “the *only* true God,” no one else is the true God; there is no true God except the Father; there is no true God besides the Father. He, and He alone, is “the only true God.” *Only* the Father is the true God. The Father, *only*, is the true God.

When the theological history of our world is one day completed, one fact will emerge as the most astonishing phenomenon in the history of religious thought: that for at least 1800 years the religion bearing the name of Christ did not accept the definition of God given by Jesus in John 17:3! It refused to admit that the Father is the *only* true God.

The realization that this is so has changed the course of the spiritual journey of many. It will revolutionize your perception of the Bible and of churches. Jesus believed and taught that the *Father* is the *only* true God. Paul agreed. He taught that “there is no God but **one**...There is **one God, the Father**” (1 Cor. 8:4, 6). One God — *the Father*.

No spiritual fact could be simpler — and more revolutionary — than this. An understanding of the Christian faith begins with an appreciation of *who God is*. The *only* true God is the Father (John 17:3; cp. Mal. 2:10).

Traditional creeds claim that not only the Father, but also the Son and Holy Spirit are the true God. They are in conflict with the belief system of Jesus. It is reasonable to ask: How did the simple truth that the Father is the only true God disappear from Christianity?

The process was gradual and it began shortly after the death of the Apostles. Under the influence of Gentile (i.e. non-Jewish) leaders in the Church, Jesus was added to the Godhead — producing a mathematical impossibility that both the Father and Son (two distinct Persons) are the one and “only true God.” Finally in the Athanasian Creed (6th

century AD) it was declared that “the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God.”

Jesus would have disagreed vehemently. He is on record as saying that the *Father* is the *only* true God.

The massive influence of Augustine is well known to all students of Church history. In his commentary on John 17:3 he added Jesus to the Godhead. You will remember that the text says that the Father is the *only* true God. Augustine simply *rearranged* the words of Jesus in John 17:3 and produced a drastic alteration of their meaning!

Augustine claimed that John 17:3 should read: “This is eternal life: that they may know *You and Jesus Christ*, whom You have sent, as the only true God.”

Compare this with the actual words of Jesus: “This is eternal life: that they may know *You* [the Father], *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom You sent.”

The churches replaced Jesus’ creed with a new creed of their own invention. And so it has remained until this day.

Those who want to follow Jesus will return to his creed, which is simple and clear. There is only one true Christian creed: the Father is “the only true God” and Jesus is His Son, the Messiah (Christ).

For confirmation of this see John 5:44, 1 Timothy 2:5, Ephesians 4:6, and 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. Never confuse the Father, who is the *only* true God, with Jesus, who is “the lord Messiah.”