



Seeing a World of Difference

Lesson 14

by

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Twoism: Making a World of Difference

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“Something unspeakably holy—I don’t know how else to say this—underlies our discovery and confirmation of the actual details that made our world.”

— Stephen Jay Gould

“Stand in awe of Him.” —King David (Psalm 33:8)

Twoism: Making a World of Difference

A scene in the movie, *The Lord of the Rings*, shows the band of heroes hopelessly surrounded by thousands of orcs in the Mines of Moria. Then, miraculously, the ugly crowd, in a squealing frenzy, dissolves into the shadows. Relief registers on the travelers until...a far more fearsome enemy emerges from the depths of the earth—a Balrog, a demon from the beginning of time.

Christians were relieved when secular humanism, long-time enemy of biblical supernaturalism, scurried off into the shadows. Little did we realize that a demon from the beginning of time now threatens our “Fellowship of the King.” That demon comes in disguise, offering spiritual help from the one place where it cannot be found: within the human soul. It tempts us to find our “unconscious” to be our true self, through which we commune with the powers of nature, reach personal enlightenment, and affect the salvation of the planet. That solution is empty for, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Our “unconscious” is just as sinful as any other part of us, and is in league with the Father of Lies. Only God can understand and transform our subconscious, and if we fail to turn to Him, the Author of Life, we choose eternal death. As the Scripture says: “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind.” (Jeremiah 17:10)

A demon-filled man, whom Jesus healed, had amazing experiences in the tombs—utterly free of all societal controls. But he was bound to the self-destructive forces of evil. Jesus freed him from his invisible demonic shackles, and this happy man ended up sitting at Jesus’ feet, clothed and in his right mind. Why, then, do evangelical Christians have such a hunger for irrational spiritual experience? They seek “spirit” over Scripture, experience over doctrine, deeds over creeds, and Jesus the social activist over Jesus the Lamb of God and Lord of the cosmos. In so doing, they are caught up in the pagan rush to the mystical, Creator-denying worship of nature.

The fundamental truths of the Bible and the person of God are under attack in mainline and evangelical churches alike. Is reality actually Oneist? Is the cosmos self-creating? Is God an impersonal force? Is any religion just as good as another? Is Christianity only a “spirit” that inspires community? Is gender blur nothing but a teenage fad? Is Jesus merely an effective community organizer?

Problems with Twoism

“But,” you say, “Twoism has its own problems.” “We should hope so!” A credible account of this complex universe and of the Lord who made it necessarily entails a gripping declaration of an incomprehensible mystery. We are forced out of our comfort zone and onto our knees. Think Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Paul. God asks Job, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?” All Job can say is, “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth” (Job 40:1–4). When Paul meets the risen Lord Jesus, all he can stammer is, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). True religion starts when we are pinned to the wall by the all-powerful God, who made the universe. There is nothing ho-hum about him.

If God is unimaginably transcendent and “other,” we will obviously not understand everything about Him. God says to Isaiah:

My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8–9)

The Psalmist agrees: “You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you!...Your thoughts are very deep!” (Psalm 40:5; 92:5). Given this knowledge gap, it is inevitable that what God reveals to us doesn’t always compute in our puny minds: “The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath” (Psalm 94:11).

To say that we can’t entirely understand God is not a cop-out. Our natural instinct is to bring God down to our level and judge him by human norms (precisely what Oneism does). It is not true, however, that we can understand nothing of God. We don’t need to bring God down to our level, because he stooped to communicate with us, which is amazingly good news. We can truly know him, though we will never understand everything about him. There are many logical and moral imponderables in Twoism. Two of the more difficult questions are about suffering and foreknowledge.

Suffering

Though I cannot explain all that God intends in allowing suffering, God’s transcendence gives intrinsic meaning to life, even its moments of soul-testing suffering. His mysterious involvement in the most incomprehensible human suffering of all—what happened to Jesus on the cross—assures me that suffering is finally redemptive.

Foreknowledge

Our perspective and God’s are in many ways irreconcilable. It is a mystery that even the Christian Scriptures don’t resolve. They juxtapose the perspectives and ask us to function within the two parameters—God’s sovereign knowledge and justice, on the one hand, and our human knowledge and moral responsibility on the other.

Paul exhorts Christians to “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13). God works, we work, and we await the full story. Another example is Peter’s remarks to the Jews in his first sermon in Jerusalem: “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). In these and other Scripture passages, human evil and divine good are mysteriously and inextricably related, and produce an ultimate good.

Advantages of Twoism

Twoism and Personhood—Romans 1:1–4, 17–18

Unlike the impersonal divine force of Oneism, Paul’s God is the personal triune Creator, revealed as God the Father (Romans 1:1), God the Son (Romans 1:3–4) and God the Spirit (Romans 1:4). God as Trinity is essential to Christianity because the Trinity establishes both personhood and love as an essential part of the fabric of existence—past, present and future. We are not the beginning of God’s love story. Love and personhood were inherent to the nature of the Creator long before the creation. Love existed eternally within the Trinity. Both “otherness” and love are bound up in the triune God. Father, Son and Spirit are totally united, yet remain distinct.

Hence, religions that claim to be theistic but deny the Trinity (such as Islam and modern Judaism) fail to respect the truly personal character of God. What’s more, Jesus brings the already personal God right into our human world, as he reveals to us the Father. God’s “person-ness” has implications for us. Oneists call humans “earthlings,” reducing us to one life form among many. Twoism, however, gives us a basis not only for human rights, but for human relationships. The obvious superiority of the human species within the created order is explained in Twoism by “the image of God,” which marks each human being. Because we are made in his image, we can enter into a personal relationship both with other human beings and with God himself. We are “fit” for intimacy. If God is a force that flows everywhere, and if we and the rest of creation are a part of that same force, then God is impersonal and we can never have a relationship with him—or even with one another.

Dr. Peter Jones tells the story of being on the practice green at golf with an atheist friend, who tried to stump him with the problem of “extra-terrestrial life.” Dr. Jones pointed out that even life on another planet would still be created existence. Oneism gives the impression of transcendence in its worship of the cosmos, but if we could travel to the edge of the five hundred billion galaxies, we would still not get beyond the physical reality of creation. Beyond all that is the transcendent Lord, personal both in his Trinitarian being and in his relationship with human beings, made in his image.

God’s transcendence is fundamental to our personhood. The relationship we have with one another is based on the prior personal nature of God and his plan to make us in his personal image. There is a further implication. Because we have a cosmos where personhood is an integral part of reality, we

can have “love”—so celebrated in our popular songs. It is the love between the persons of the Trinity and the condescension of God in reaching out in love to creatures that establishes a model for selfless human love among human creatures.

Twoism and Ethics—Romans 1:19

No doubt you have people in your life who help keep you straight! Your friends and family will let you know when you do not keep your word. The golfer who cheats in his weekly golf round—though sorely tempted to use his “foot wedge” occasionally—would certainly lose friends! Think about it for a moment. We are rightly horrified when we see a child abused, a woman battered, or a young boy stuffed with drugs and sent out to eviscerate pregnant women as a tactic of war. Our hatred of injustice cannot emerge from a Oneist world. The “wrath of God” (Romans 1:18) is a sign of God’s personal and moral superintendence of his creatures. He is the one who gives ethical significance to existence.

If we are all one, and there are no distinctions, then we are no different from animals that survive by tearing apart their prey. If we derive from an impersonal amoeba, or are the result of an evolutionary “survival of the fittest,” why do we feel such deep moral outrage? The atheist Jewish philosopher, Mitchel Silver, compares the god of the New Spirituality to his own atheism and finds that the foundation for morality remains “obscure” for both systems. Such obscurity does not bode well for humanity. We are equally capable of landing humans on the moon or reducing them to cadavers in concentration camps. It is God (the Person who makes and gives the Law) who provides the explanation of morals.

The Creator/creature distinction makes sense of our human, fallen reality. When we “look within,” we don’t see the divine attributes necessary to save ourselves, let alone all of humanity. Not only do we lack the power, but our hearts can’t be trusted to serve others rather than ourselves. If we are honest, when we look within, we see sinful thoughts, selfish actions and a guilty conscience we can’t ignore. The fantasy world of Oneism tells us to banish guilt from our minds, but mind games and meditation can’t erase the evil we’ve done or create the selfless acts we fail to do. Just as we can’t change the physical face we see in the mirror each morning, so we can’t change the face of the soul we see in the mirror of God’s requirements. Is it not better to prefer the painful reality rather than cock-eyed fantasy? And there is hope, since, as Paul says, “the law drives me to Christ.”

Twoism and Knowledge—Romans 1:2, 19

Paul assures us in Romans 1:19 that what we know of God is not a human projection, but a genuine revelation from God, the source of all things. Because God speaks through his creation, none of us lives in a meaningless universe. In that same created reality, we meet the mystery of persons, the longevity of faithful friendships and the moving expressions of self-sacrifice that are inexplicable without the person of God quietly overseeing our existence. In one sense, we are earthlings, but we are so much more. God not only reveals himself *through* creation, but *to* creation.

To know God more deeply in the mystery of his person, we need his personal self-revelation in Scripture, that “the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures” (Romans 1:2). The Bible is not a security blanket for fearful fundamentalists, but an indispensable component of Twoism. In Oneism, the creature claims to be divine and to have no need of special, divine revelation from a God outside the circle. The Oneist goes within to find truth. Remember our ants on the ocean liner? If they want to know they’re on their way to Sao Paulo, it will have to be because the captain tells them, in “ant” language.

The distinction between the Creator and the creature in Twoism shows us that the God who is outside and above the circle of the earth is the one who speaks into it. If God had not revealed himself to us, we would know little about his true being, since we would know only what we can glean from examining a glorious sunset or discovering delightful creatures at the bottom of the sea. Christians cling tightly to the Bible because it is a Word from our captain, telling us in “ant” language where we’re headed. In that Word we discover that he is other than us, but also that he is a Person who extends love to us. The Bible is a mighty, merciful act of God. Just as the Word had to become flesh, so it had to become text. Such an “objective” source of real knowledge also explains human rationality.

The “death of God” theology spells the disappearance of the Author of the world, who gives truth and meaning to our history and experience. Once God is out of the picture, we only have interpreters, or readers, of existence. How can we read the universe without God? If, however, there is an objective source for rationality and language outside of the created realm to which our sense of significance refers, then we are not condemned to the endless relativism of socially-generated meaning in which Postmodernism leaves us. Significance is not socially generated; it is divinely-generated.

That is, indeed, a faith statement, but it’s a statement that makes sense in a world where reason must be exercised daily. The literary critic, **George Steiner**, believes that any “coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning...is underwritten by the assumption of God’s presence.” Kevin Vanhoozer describes Steiner’s position: “There is a Word in the words to which the reader is responsible.”

Twoism and the Cosmos—Romans 1:20

“Why is there something rather than nothing?” Philosophers can’t really answer that question, but we all know that we were born into “something.” Long ago, King David recognized this: “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3). There is no better answer to this question of the philosophers. The revelation from the Creator begins with an amazing opening chapter, Genesis 1. Read it! Creation of matter occurs when God speaks it into existence. In nature we see intricate, deep-seated design such as that of a human cell. We hear deep-seated structure in the creative, unexpected improvisations of modern jazz. We sense the harmony of tastes in a French meal (especially if compared to pot-luck suppers, where the *pot* may be *pourri*). In his unspeakably glorious creation, God shows himself as the unsurpassed artist, standing

behind and explaining all our attempts at creativity. Genesis describes how God sanctifies matter by separating the material elements for various functions. He places his holy stamp on what he makes, granting creatures place, function and significance. You may recall what the committed evolutionary scientist from Harvard, **Stephen Jay Gould** said about the beauty of the world: “something unspeakably holy—I don’t know how else to say this—underlies our discovery and confirmation of the actual details that made our world.”

The real, objective nature of the world has given rise to genuine science, for which we are all most grateful. But while science can help explain the “how?” it knows nothing of the “why?” or the “who?”—questions we human beings are made to ask. In Romans 1:20, speaking of God’s invisible attributes “eternal power and deity,” Paul uses the phrase: “ever since the creation of the world.” For him, the universe had a beginning, and will have a meaningful consummation. Cosmic history is not an endless karmic cycle of eternal matter, but moves from an absolute beginning to a logical fulfillment, thus answering our deep need of significance and purpose. Life is not a random crowd of amorphous, relativistic individuals trying to make sense of a meaningless universe, but is ordered in meaningful relationships by its Creator. Our world is not governed by a mindless fate that leaves us vulnerable to the whims of cruel human dictators, but is governed by a just and all-powerful king. Though life seems random, meaningless, lonely and cruel at times, there is a God who will accomplish all his purposes and bring to fruitful conclusion all his promises.

We can trust God to direct both the cosmos and our work in it. Our longing for utopia, for consummation, is God-given, built into the world and into the human psyche. Scripture reveals that the original creation was only the first of two stages to bring the cosmos to its ultimate perfection (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). The second stage will arrive when God acts on the original creation to transform it into the future and final psycho-spiritual reality of the new heavens and the earth. This magnificent future utopia cannot be produced by human action, any more than human action produced the creation of the world or the resurrection of the corpse of Jesus.

Oneist spirituality seeks to escape history. Hindus call the everyday world of events “maya,” or illusion. For them, as for all Oneists, true living is found in altered states of consciousness. An Indian Christian tells of a Hindu he met in Mumbai who claimed to view life in terms of both/and. He rejected the biblical, Twoist view based on either/or. As the two of them discussed, while crossing a road, a large truck barreled towards them. They both jumped out of the way. The Christian reminded his Hindu friend that a consistent Oneist would have stayed in the middle of the road, where he could have been a “both/and” Oneist, becoming one with the truck’s front bumper!

The God of Twoism created history, with all its distinctions, and he loves and respects the reality he made. In his Son, he enters history to save it. Christianity is not a mere collection of fine ideas or beautiful poems. It is the account of an event that took place in time and space, not “done in a corner” as Paul says to **Agrippa** (Acts 26:26), but in plain view. It thus promises an abundance of good, real things for this life, and even better real things in the life to come.

How will history end? Our dreams of utopian consummation, as lovely and “evangelical” as they seem, are paltry in relation to what God has in store for us. The sustainable planet, the solar-powered Lexus, a lifespan of one hundred fifty years—these are all rank poverty compared to what God is creating for those who love him. The wealthiest California neighborhood, the ritziest Dubai mansion, the most elegant Paris hotel, and even the most pristine Alaska wilderness—will seem like slums compared to the new earth prepared by the resurrected Jesus in his transformed body. Everyone who lives within the boundaries of the wealthy Rancho Santa Fe, California “covenant” (including the champion golfer, Phil Mickelson) dies. Being Phil’s neighbor might be fun, but we will have a better neighbor than a pro golfer. Jesus himself is waiting for us in a transformed cosmos, which only he, the Creator of matter, has the capacity and the will to re-create. All other utopias will disappoint us, because they are built on a false view of reality, tainted by a rose-colored view of human nature and forever marred by the inevitability of death.

Christians must care for the earth and seek the good of the cities, states or countries in which they live. However, our goal on this earth is not the man-made peace we might briefly patch together. It is the God-made peace offered to us in Christ. As we offer hospitality, care and selfless service to others, we do it for the glory of God, with his name on our lips.

Twoism and Human Aspirations—Romans 1:21, 25

Our entire existence is a reaction to God’s work. For Twoists, that reaction includes worship, thanks, praise and prayer:

- *Worship*: The human soul longs for a worthy object of worship. As Paul indicates, Oneism worships nature and the self, whereas Twoism worships the Other, who is the Creator (Romans 1:25).
- *Thanksgiving*: Oneists “do not give thanks” (Romans 1:21). Imagine an MC capping off an evening of appreciation by saying, “Finally, I would like to thank myself.” A well-known philanthropist (and philanderer) places daily, full-color announcements of his generosity in the *Los Angeles Times*. In one ad, among the pictures of people he was helping, he placed twelve pictures of himself! Oneists are like that philanthropist—Donald Sterling—full of thanks to themselves. Genuine thanks is always offered to someone else, and only makes sense in a Twoist cosmos, where God is the source of all good gifts.
- *Praise*: The sister of thanksgiving, praise, too, makes sense only in Twoism. Oneists do not “honor (or praise) him as God” (Romans 1:21). But we are made to praise, and genuine praise is impossible in a Oneist world. The Oneist poet, Ranier Marie Rilke (1875–1926), in his poem, “I Praise,” gives a sad account of praise in a Oneist universe as addressed to no one in particular, while hoping that a nameless “someone” will hear:

Tell us, poet, what do you do?

I praise.

But how do you bear these dark and deadly days?

How do you endure?

I praise.

And the Nameless, the Unnameable,

How do you call out to that?

I praise.

How heartrending that no one hears such praise, which becomes self-praise. How different the words of the poet, David: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel” (Psalm 22:22-23).

- *Prayer:* Prayer only makes sense in Twoism: When a Oneist prays, he is meditating on himself, talking to himself and becoming reconciled with himself (the gods within). Twoist prayer addresses the personal God, who is a real person, distinct and other—a Father who listens and is in heaven to hear us.

Twoism and Human Sexuality—Romans 1:26–28

A barrage of public arguments and political actions defend an evolving sexuality. Our nearly universal belief in evolution leads inevitably to fluid sexual definitions. But if the biblical revelation is true, then sexuality must be heterosexual. Part of the separating and naming process of God at creation gives place and meaning to Adam and Eve, “male” and “female.” This basic distinction, which God knits into the fabric of creation, reminds us of the main distinction between creature and Creator. Such distinctions are not a curse, as Oneism believes, but the key to our understanding of reality and our fulfillment of the cultural mandate. Heterosexual marriage “fills the earth,” sanctifies and matures both partners via their “differences,” and symbolizes God’s love for the Church.

Oh, and by the way, it offers the best sex you could ever have.

Twoism Provides a Reason to Live—Romans 1:15–16

Remember Paul, the prisoner, walking to certain death with the fires of gospel passion in his eyes? He eagerly pressed on “to preach the gospel...in Rome” (Romans 1:15). This was the driving force of his life of which he was “not ashamed” (Romans 1:16). Knowing his martyrdom loomed, he declared: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” That is real living. Ask any couch potato who hates the thought of one more football game.

Chariots of Fire is the true story of two British Olympic runners. Eric Liddell is a devout Christian, and his sister begs him to leave competition to join the family in its Christian mission in China. Eric explains that he has “a lot of running to do first.” “You’ve got to understand,” he pleads: “God made

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me for...China. He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure. To give it up would be to hold him in contempt...To win is to honor him.”

Eric worships God his Creator first by winning an Olympic gold medal, and later by being martyred for his faith in a Japanese prison. “To honor him” is the entire calling of each Christian, who runs knowing that the “crown of life” awaits. “To honor him” is the only motivation powerful enough to make a human life truly meaningful. Eric Liddell’s race, and the Apostle Paul’s race are inspiring. They made it to the end. But the real runner is the incomparable Jesus—out ahead of us.