

EQTH105 Basic Bible Doctrine

Unit 2c The One God

Presented by the



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As we continue our discussion about the attributes of God, we are asking this central question: What is God like? At a simplistic level, referring to God as God seems to imply that there is only one God. In fact, Scripture clearly establishes that there is indeed only one God who exists. We find this truth taught in both testaments. The Old Testament leaves no doubt that there is only one God who exists. In the Ten Commandments, the following is written: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.” [Exo 20:3-7]

Moses emphasized that the Lord is the only God who exists. He writes, “To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God. There is no other beside him... So acknowledge today and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath, and there is no other.” [Deu 4:35-39] In Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Isaiah, over and over, we read, “The Lord is one. There is no one beside you. There is none like you. There is no God beside you. You alone are the Most High. You alone are God,” and “I am God, and there is no other.” [Deu 6:3-5; 1Sa 2:2; 2Sa 7:22; Psa 83:18; Psa 86:10; Isa 43:10; Isa 44:6; Isa 45:22]

But it is not just the Old Testament that teaches of the one true God. The New Testament echoes the Old. There is only one God who exists. In the gospels, we read Jesus himself speaking, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.’” [Mar 12:29] The scribe said to him, “Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him.” [Mar 12:32] In another place, Jesus said, “How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?” [Jhn 5:44]

Now, we will explore the relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father in the next units when we study the Trinity. But it is important to note that Jesus himself was sharing these facts about the unity of God. But Jesus is not the only one. The writings of Paul echoed the same truth. “So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that ‘An idol is nothing at all in the world’ and that ‘There is no God but one.’ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” [1Co 8:4-6] So it is the same God in both testaments.

Not only does the New Testament recognize the existence of one God. It recognizes the same God as revealed in the Old Testament. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt in the Book of Exodus. Jesus said, “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” [Mat 8:11] At no point in the New Testament is there any hint that there is any god who exists except the one who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and gave the people the law at Mount Sinai.

This is the same God who brought Jesus Christ back from the dead. From the first page until the last, Scripture affirms that only one God has genuine existence. The false gods that Scriptures speak about have no substance. It is also evident that the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is no hint that the God of the Old Testament is a different personage than the God of the New Testament. Hence, the totality of Scripture testifies that only one God has real existence.

Now, as we study this concept of one God, it might be a little confusing to also think of the God of the Trinity and the three persons of the Godhead. But for now, we need to remember the Bible speaks of the unity of God. Remember, this lesson is about one God. Moses wrote, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” [Deu 6:4] So God cannot be divided. And the doctrine of the Trinity does not mean that God is a composite being made up of three Gods, but rather, he is a unity. As a unity, God cannot be divided. The theological term is indivisible. God cannot be divided. Neither is he made of multiple substances. The members of the Trinity are not separate beings within the one divine essence. God is one in number.

While the Scripture teaches that God is a unity, perhaps one way to understand this is to realize that there is a difference between an absolute and a compound unity. For example, if we say one man, we are referring to an absolute unity because only one person is in view. However, when the Scriptures say that man and woman will be one flesh in Genesis 2:24, this is a compound unity. This is because the union consists of two distinct persons. We find examples of compound unity in several passages. “Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.” [Ezr 3:1] Many people were as one. In Ezekiel, we read, “Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.” [Eze 37:17]

Both of these passages use the same Hebrew word for one, but it speaks of a compound unity. When the idea of absolute unity or absolute oneness is met, a different Hebrew word is used. God said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” [Gen 22:2] In the Book of Amos, it says, “I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.” [Amo 8:10] This Hebrew word is used about a dozen times in the Old Testament. It is never used to describe the unity of God. A comparison of the passages where the different Hebrew words are used shows that is a compound unity. That’s what is in mind in Deuteronomy 6:4. Furthermore, the fact that the word for God in Hebrew is Elohim, a plural noun, we have further inference of a compound unity. So the God of the Bible is a compound unity. Although there is only God who exists, within the nature of this one God are three distinct persons.

In looking at the attribute of unity, we have the question: Apart from the God of the Bible, could other gods possibly exist? Does the Bible have anything to say about the existence of other gods? To answer that, the Bible is clear that although there are other so-called gods, there is only one eternal God who exists. Isaiah wrote, “‘You are My witnesses,’ says the Lord,

‘And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.’” [Isa 43:10] Not only do these gods not exist; these gods have no substance. Though the Bible makes reference to false gods, it does not state that these are actual gods who exist. The apostle Paul wrote, “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.” [Gal 4:8]

Scripture shows that these false gods are not to be compared with the one true God. “To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike? They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance; they hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; they prostrate themselves, yes, they worship. They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it and set it in its place, and it stands; from its place it shall not move. Though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer nor save him out of trouble.” [Isa 46:5-7] These so-called gods were inventions in the minds of people who rejected the truth of the one true God. Only the God of the Bible has real substance.

The psalmists wrote, “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats. Those who make them are like them; those are all who trust in them.” [Psa 115:3-8] The bottom line is that there is no room in the universe for another god to exist. Scripture says that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present. He is without limits. It would be absurd to believe that two unlimited beings could occupy the same space. If another god did exist, then God would be limited. However, the Bible says that God has no limitations.

So to summarize this question, the Bible speaks of false gods that exist, but they have no real substance. They never assumed that these gods have any reality. They are the imagination of those people who worship them. Only one God actually exists. Since the God of the Bible has given us reason to believe in his existence, whatever he might say on the matter of other gods is final. Because God says that he is the only God who exists, that solves the question. There are no other true gods. In addition, if another god did exist, then God would not be self-existent, all-powerful. Two all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present beings could not occupy the same space.

Now, a final question to consider in this discussion of the unity of God is a philosophy called Unitarianism. Unitarianism holds the belief that God cannot be properly spoken of as existing in three persons. God is rather a unity in one essence and one person. Unitarianism dates back to the 4th century when Arius, a bishop from Alexandria, denied that Jesus was the eternal God. Arius taught that Jesus’ nature was greater than man’s but less than God’s. He also denied that the Holy Spirit was God. Modern Unitarianism dates from the 16th century. They believed that the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of mankind was unnecessary. Rather than believing that Jesus was a divine savior, they taught that God raised Jesus to divine power as an act of loving kindness to his people. Although they rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, the Unitarians of the 17th and 18th century viewed Jesus as one who had a special commission from God, not unlike a prophet. They taught that Jesus revealed truth from God that man, through his reason, would not otherwise know.

The 19th century saw a shift in the Unitarian position. Influenced by the German higher criticism of the Bible, a school of thought developed within Unitarianism that was anti-supernatural. They came to doubt the four gospels as authoritative sources and rejected the uniqueness of Christianity. This rejection of Christianity was something that earlier Unitarian belief had also held. But within the anti-supernaturalistic attitude, the goodness of man was stressed more than the existence and power of God. Today, Unitarianism does not ascribe to any set of beliefs. What binds Unitarians together is a basic belief in the goodness of man and that God is not limited to any one particular revelation such as the Bible, but can be found in many different religions. Modern Unitarianism goes back to the 16th century. It holds to the belief that God cannot be properly spoken of as existing in three persons. To the Unitarians, God is rather a unity, hence the name, one in essence and person. But Unitarianism is an inadequate way of viewing God's nature. It argues for the unity of God, as we do, but rejects the idea that God is a Trinity. Consequently, the Unitarian view of God is contrary to what Scripture clearly teaches. It either denies or misunderstands what the Bible has to say about the nature of God. Present-day Unitarians do not subscribe to any one set of beliefs.

So the bottom line of this lesson is that the one true God is the only one that has real existence, that he is the same God today as the God of Abraham and Isaac and David, and that even though there is a Trinity, God cannot be divided. There is a Trinity, but that does not mean that there are three separate persons. Confusing, I know. And we will cover more in our unit on the Trinity. See you then.