

ONE GOD

by

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The Apostle Paul was all alone in Athens and was greatly bothered to see that the city was full of idols. As he was accustomed to do, he reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greek in the local synagogue about Jesus being resurrected from the dead. But it was not just the Jews and God-fearing Greeks that he spoke to—he, day after day, talked to anyone who happened to be in the marketplace when he went there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers disputed what he said, saying, “What is this babbling trying to say?” They then led him to a meeting at the Areopagus, a place used for public speech.

“May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.”

Paul stood up in the meeting and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and observed your objects of worship, I even found an altar with the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”

There is only one God! The Apostle Paul was not trying to prove there is a God. He was not writing to people rescued from atheism, but from idolatry. It was not the existence of God but his uniqueness which call forth the statement. Incongruous as it may seem it was the Christians who were branded as atheists in the Roman Empire simply because they refused to recognize the genuineness of pagan deities.

Tertullian, in his tract *De Corona Militis*, relates how the saints scorned the sacrifice of heathendom, and turned away with abhorrence from its banquets and gaieties. Tacitus, the pagan historian, says they were convicted of “hatred to mankind” because they refused to participate in the popular games and festivals. Everything in the pagan world was done as a tribute to the pantheon of gods. Whatever the Christians did in word or deed was done in the name of Jesus to the glory of the Father.

There was no meeting ground between the two. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them: And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor. 6:14–16).

“What say I then? That the idol is any thing, or that which is sacrificed to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God; and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: you cannot be partaker of the Lord’s

table and of the table of devils” (1 Cor. 10:19–21). “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians that there is one God he was addressing the saints in one of the centers of idolatry. Here was located the temple of Diana, the many-breasted goddess of fertility. The original temple was burnt down on the night in which Alexander the Great was born. The arsonist was an obscure seeker after fame, Erostratus. Because the citizenry mistakenly thought that a fallen meteor was the goddess of the moon come down to earth, all Asia Minor joined in rebuilding the temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

There were 120 supporting columns, each one the gift of a foreign prince or potentate. More than 220 years were devoted to construction of the temple and its accompanying theater which had seats for 24,500 people. Both the temple and theater are mentioned in a stirring account in Acts 19:21–41. The business agent for a local union of craftsmen affirmed there that “all Asia and the world worshipped at the shrine.”

Paul began his list of the seven planks in the divine unity platform with “the one spirit.” This was logical since the unity which was to be maintained was the unity of the spirit. He closed with “the one God” because this is the cap-sheaf with which to crown all the rest. It is in him “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He does not dwell in temples made with hands. He is not supplied by men’s hands as though he needed anything. Instead, he gives to all life, and breath, and all things. He is the bestower, not the beneficiary.

It is God who made the cosmos a functioning unit. There is a sense in which every atom is dependent upon every other atom. Nothing in nature is independent. The planets are a symphony. The seasons are a harmony. This is a uni-verse and not a multi-verse. The sovereign purpose of God is to bring all things together in Christ. The Greeks had a multitude of gods warring with each other. We know there is one God. Let us consider carefully what is affirmed concerning God.

The one God is the *Father* of all This statement breathes a divine *concern*. God is not indifferent. He is not a God afar off who cannot be touched by our infirmities. God is love. This very love is unitive. And it is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us. It unites us to the Father but it also unites us all to one another. He that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Everyone who loves is begotten of God, and knows God. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son for an atonement for us. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

We know that we have crossed the frontier from death unto life because we love the brethren. The Fatherhood of God creates the brotherhood of the saved. The sonship in him creates the fellowship of the ransomed ones. Regardless of what men may say, regardless of their caviling and minute distinctions to split and splinter, all those who are in Christ Jesus are in the fellowship to which we have been called. They share together a common life, the life of God, eternal life. There is one God and he has made his children one, all of them!

One of the most beautiful revelations ever given is that God is our Father. The very word speaks of tenderness and compassion. It is a “family” word and it implies sons and daughters. It also implies an inheritance so magnificent that the finite mind cannot grasp it and we will have to await the time when we shall see him as he is, and our vile

bodies are changed and made like his glorious body. It is certain the Greek world had no concept of a God like this.

When the apostle declared there is one God *and Father*, he gave hope to millions of nameless slaves, deprived of all hope of identity, treated like things and bought and sold like chattels. But he also gave hope to me. What a thrill it is to be adopted into a family circle where the indwelling Spirit makes it possible for me to cry “Abba, Father.” I would not exchange my status in Jesus for all the money or fame this world has to offer. God is my Father.

The one God is above all. This speaks of divine *control*. The creation was not just set to spinning and left to itself. God is adequate. He is not outmoded by the scientific and technological breakthrough of our day. He is not frustrated by our space exploration nor upset by our discovery of nuclear fission. He is above all nature including “fire, and hail, snow, and vapors, and stormy wind fulfilling his word” (Psalm 148:8). He counts the stars and calls them all by their names (Psalm 147:4). Nature holds no fear for one who trusts in God. “We need not fear even if the world blows up, and the mountains crumble into the sea” (Psalm 46:2).

God is above all *history*. **He calls the things that be not as though they were.** He sees the end from the beginning. No event sneaks upon him unawares. He is never surprised by a sudden turn of events. All the people in the world are nothing in comparison with him. They are but a drop in the bucket, and dust on the scales. That is what the prophet says, and he adds, “All the nations are as nothing to him, in his eyes they are less than nothing—mere emptiness and froth” (Isaiah 40:17). He does not need to subpoena tapes to reach a judgment. He can read what has been erased.

He is above all of this *children*. I know because I am one of them. Do you recall that beautiful benediction Paul used for his Jewish brethren, his relatives in the flesh? “Of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” But God is not just over the Jew, “For the scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. Jew and Gentile are alike in this respect, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Romans 10:11, 12).

The one God is *through* all. This has to do with both communion and communication. It is because the same God works through all of us, sharing our lot, and sending us out, to achieve his transcendent purpose, that we should be one. In the Gentile world there were “gods many” and “lords many” as Paul stated it. Each people had its own god and these gods regarded each other as rivals. The political intrigues upon the brow of Olympus exceeded those of mortals at its base. The people were divided by their very gods.

The jealous passions of imaginary and artificial deities were transferred to men so that the earth was kept in turmoil and peace was unknown. A belief in mono-theism erased all this and provided a philosophical and rational basis for universal tranquility.

God works through all in *proclamation*. The message of hope is to be carried to a hapless world by every follower of Jesus. Every believer is a priest and every child of God a minister.

God works through all in *preparation*. The ultimate goal of life on earth is to prepare for life that is not on earth. We now bear the image of the earthy but we shall bear the image of the heavenly. God wants all men to be saved. He does not want anyone to be lost and he has no favorites.

God works through all in *performance*. Not one single organ or member of either the physical or spiritual body is useless. God made no mere appendages. Each member has a responsibility to fulfill. All are related. The head cannot go where the feet do not take it. The feet cannot go where the head does not direct them. No one can do the work of another. Each has his own work and God has no part-time eyes and ears.

God works through all in *production* of spiritual fruit. He has no purely ornamental trees. God maintains an orchard. He is not the manager of a park. He prunes us that we may bring forth more fruit.

The one God is in all. This speaks of *companionship*. Jesus promised when he went back to heaven that he would not leave his disciples orphans. He said he would come to them, and he made it clear that his coming would be through the presence of another helper, the Holy Spirit. The world could not receive the Spirit. It did not know it and could not see it. But the disciples could know it because it was to be with them and in them forever—that is through the age of the absence of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of God. The Spirit dwells in my body as a temple. I am not a hollow shell. I am not a vacant tabernacle. My own spirit is not alone. It has the companionship of the other helper. I am one spirit with the eternal one. He does not simply walk along with me as a friend outside. He abides in the room of my heart.

God dwells in me to *strengthen my weakness*. I do not know what to pray for as I ought to, but I can be sure that all of the deep inexpressible longings of my being will be translated into intercession. The pull and tug of the world is great but I have the assurance that greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world.

God dwells in me to *supply my wants*. The inner cravings are greater than the outer desires. I desperately want to grasp his grace, share his sufferings, and glimpse his glory through they eye of faith. His closeness to my spirit provides insight and incentive, meaning and motivation.

God dwells in me to *share my worship*. He is not worshiped with men's hands as though he needed anything.

Worship is the prostration of the heart in his presence and since he is ever present, whatever I do in word or deed is worship. I do not go to a temple. I am a temple. I do not pay a pilgrimage to the place where God dwells. I am a place where God dwells. It is not that I bring him things. I simply give him me! And he gives me himself. That's worship!

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