

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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GOD THE SON

Does it really matter what we believe? One person believes this, another believes something else – “so what? – as long as they are sincere, that is all that matters.” This is a fairly typical response to the question of religious beliefs. “To each his own” is the motto heard most often in our society. Christianity – biblical Christianity, that is – does not allow such liberty of opinion. The God of the Bible is not an abstract concept. He (and God is He, not She) is not “the man upstairs,” nor is He simply a super-being alongside other beings (cf. Num. 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hosea 11:9). God cannot be identified with anything in creation. To do so is to lapse into idolatry (Ex. 20:4, 5; Deut. 5:8, 9). C. Fitzsimons Allison, in a remarkable little book appropriately titled *The Cruelty of Heresy*, correctly observes: “We are susceptible to heretical teachings because, in one form or another, they nurture and reflect the way we would have it be rather than the way God has provided, which is infinitely better for us. As they lead us into the blind alleys of self-indulgence and escape from life, heresies pander to the most unworthy tendencies of the human heart. It is astonishing how little attention has been given to these two aspects of heresy: its cruelty and its pandering to sin.”¹ We cannot simply worship God as we like, nor can we choose² to think of God as we like. Likewise, we are not allowed to choose to think about Jesus any way we like. The Bible expresses serious concern over false doctrine (heresy) and its counterpart idolatry (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3; note the emphasis on sound teaching in 2 Tim. 1:13). We are exhorted to be on guard against idolatry (1 John 5:21) and alert to doctrinal deception, especially as it touches the content of the gospel (Matt. 24:4; 1 Cor. 11:2; Gal. 1:8). In light of this, it is imperative that we have right (orthodox) beliefs about God. “There is only one question,” said Emil Brunner, “which is really serious, and that is the question concerning the being and nature of God. From this, all other questions derive their significance.”³ This knowledge of God, as the Puritan Stephen Charnock long ago wrote, is more than mere head-knowledge. “This knowledge of God is not only a knowledge of God and Christ in the theory, but such a knowledge which is saving, joined with ardent love to him: cordial trust in him, as 1 Cor. 13:12, ‘Then I shall know even as also I am known,’ i.e., I shall love and rejoice, as I am beloved and delighted in by God. It is not only a knowledge of God in his will, but a knowledge of God in his nature; both must go together; we must know him in his nature, we must be obedient to his will. The devil hath a greater knowledge of God’s being than any man upon earth, but since he is a rebel to his will, he is not happy by his knowledge. It must be such a knowledge as leads to eternal life, and hath a necessary and infallible connection with it, as the effect with the cause, which is not between a speculative knowledge and salvation. It must be therefore such a knowledge which descends from the head to the heart, which is light in the mind and heat in the affections; such a knowledge of God as includes faith in him.”⁴ The deity of Jesus Christ is taught on practically every page of the New Testament. Every attempt to rid the New Testament of His deity is a hopeless and impossible task. Men do, however, attempt the impossible. In their blind rage they will seize any and every possible text that they think will lend itself to their purposes. Usually they focus upon certain words or phrases that on the surface can be construed to teach Jesus Christ is something less than deity. This

study will seek to examine some of the terms that are often put forward as evidence that Jesus Christ is not God.

I. DIVINE ATTRIBUTES PREDICATED TO CHRIST.

- A. *Is the Father Eternal? So is the Son* – Micah 5:2; Jn. 1:2, 14; 8:58; Rev. 1:8, 11, 17, 18; 2:8; comp. with Isa. 44:6, 48:12.
- B. *Is the Father Omnipresent? So is the Son.* Creation demands omnipresence – Matt. 18:20; 28:20 (compare the phrase *tēs sunteleias tou alōnos* with Matt. 13:39, 40, 49 and 24:3 and 23:38).
- C. *Is the Father Immutable? So is the Son* – Heb. 13:8 and 1:8, 10.
- D. *Is the Father Almighty? So is the Son.* Creation demands omnipotence – Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:17; Matt. 28:18; esp. John 5:17-19, where Jesus declares that He does what the Father does. Comp. with Rev. 1:8, 13, 17; 2:8; 22:13, He is “almighty.”
- E. *Is the Father Himself Incomprehensible While Comprehending All Things? So is the Son* – John 21:17; Matt. 11:27 (How can a creature possess this kind of knowledge?) comp. with Jn. 10:15. He is unsearchable in Himself, Eph. 3:18, 19 and Col. 2:3.
- F. *Is the Father Infinitely Good and Holy?* (cf. Matt. 19:7 and 1 Sam. 2:2) *So is the Son* – Acts 3:14; Heb. 7:26; Jn. 1:14; 10:14.
- G. *Is the Father the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of All Things? So is the Son* – Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3; Heb. 1:3; Jn. 1:4; 14:19; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 19:16; NOTE Dan. 7:14; 9:24-26 comp. with Lk. 2:28-38.
- H. *Is the Father the Searcher of Hearts? So is the Son* – Rev. 2:18-23; John 2:24, 25.
- I. *Is the Father the Most High Judge of All? So is the Son* – 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt. 25:31, 32.⁵ Thus, the essential attributes of the Godhead are ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. DIRECT AND DIVINE WORSHIP IS PAID TO CHRIST.

In this section our attention will be directed to worship of the Son and prayer that is addressed to Him. Kermit Zarley, an ardent Unitarian, asks, “What does it mean in Hebrews 1:6 to worship Jesus?” He states, “The author of Hebrews likely meant that the angels of heaven worship Jesus in the same way Paul describes in Phil. 2:10. He therein says of the exalted Jesus, ‘at the name of Jesus *every knee should bow*, of those who are in heaven [viz., the angels], and on earth, and under the earth.’ So, in the eschaton everyone will perform genuflection at the public announcement of Jesus’ name, which act does not necessarily indicate He is God.”⁶ Really? Let’s examine this in some detail.

- A. **Worship.** The principle word occurs some 60 times in the New Testament. (Gk. *proskuneō*). The basic meaning of *proskuneō* is lit. “to kiss.” It is translated in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew) *sāhāh*, meaning “to bow down.”
 - 1. 22 times it is used of worship offered to God the Father – cf. John 4:20-24.
 - 2. 5 times it is used intransitively of Divine Worship – cf. John 12:20.
 - 3. 15 times it is used of worship to Jesus Christ, cf.: (1) Mt. 2:2, 8, 11 – by the magi; (2) Mt. 8:2 – by the leper; (3) Mt. 9:18 – by the ruler; (4) Mt. 14:33 – by the disciples after the storm; (5) Mt. 15:25 – by the women of Tyre; (6) Mt. 20:20 – by Salome; (7) Mt. 28:7, 9 – after the resurrection; (8) Lk. 24:52 – at the ascension; (9) Jn. 9:38 – by the man born blind; (10) Heb. 1:6 – by the angels; (11) Mk. 5:6 – by the possessed; (12) Mk. 15:19 – offered in mockery.
 - 4. 17 times of idolatrous worship condemned – cf. Acts 7:43 and 10:25, 26; esp. Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9.
 - 5. 2 times of salutation to man – cf. Mt. 18:26, 29.

NOTE: In light of the fact that *proskuneō* is refused by men (expressly stated that *only* God is to be worshipped), the worship of Jesus Christ, which He accepted, is either explicit or implicit of His Deity.

B. Prayer. cf. Acts 7:54-60 comp. with Ps. 31:5 and Ecc. 12:7. Comp. also 1 Thess. 3:11 with 2 Thess. 2:16, 17. See also 1 Cor. 1:2 and comp. with Ps. 145:18.

C. Worship of Christ and the Father Joined Together. cf. Rev. 5:8-14 comp. with Rev. 22:1-3.

CONCLUSION: I close with this exhortation from Fred Sanders (our speaker for the 2019 Lloyd Jackson Memorial lectures), “The kind of Trinitarianism that we need is not simply the acceptance of a doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity is not, in the first instance, something to be constructed by argument from texts. At best, that method will lead to mental acknowledgement that ‘the Trinitarian theory’ best accounts for the evidence marshaled. The first step on the way to the heart of the Trinitarian mystery is to recognize that as Christians we find ourselves already deeply involved in the triune life and need only to reflect rightly on that present reality. Most evangelical Christians don’t need to be talked into the Trinitarian theory; they need to be shown that they are immersed in the Trinitarian reality. We need to see and feel that we are surrounded by the Trinity, compassed about on all sides by the presence and work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. From that starting point, truly productive teaching can begin. There is certainly a time and place for introducing the words, concepts, propositions, and truth claims of Trinitarian theology. But too often in contemporary teaching about the Trinity, those words not only come first; they come first, last, and exclusively. The Trinity seems to most evangelicals like a doctrinal formula to be received and believed by a mental act of understanding. In short, it is at best a true fact about God that we hold in our minds in the form of words. Teaching about it is then a matter of using words to lead learners to more words. ‘Words, words, words,’ was Prince Hamlet’s reply when he was asked what he was reading, but that was hardly a sign of a balanced mind or a generous spirit. A Christian who is reading about the Trinity ought to be able to say he is reading more than ‘words, words, words.’ Evangelical commitment to the Trinity should not stay confined to the realm of verbal exercises; it ought to dive deeper and rise higher than the power of words. It ought to begin from the experienced reality of the Trinitarian grace of God and lead us to a deeper encounter with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ C. F. Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy; An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (Morehouse, 1994), p. 17.

² Our word “heresy” comes from the Greek word *hairesis*, which, interestingly enough, has as its root meaning “to choose.” A heretic is someone who chooses his own beliefs. The adjective is used by Paul in Titus 3:10 in reference to a person who is divisive or factious. Thus, a heretic came to refer to someone who promotes false teaching and brings division.

³ As cited in Donald G. Bloesch, *Christian Foundations; God the Almighty* (IVP, 1995).

⁴ *The Works of Stephen Charnock* IV (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 10.

⁵ I have adopted this section from Edward Henry Bickersteth’s classic study *The Rock of Ages, or Three Persons but One God* (rpt. Kregel, 1957).

⁶ K. Zarley, *The Restitution of Jesus Christ* (A Triangle Book, 2008), p. 483. Zarley, a former professional golfer, has no formal training in Biblical studies or theology, likes to call himself Servetus the Evangelical, but Zarley is *not* an evangelical in any sense of the word – nor was Michael Servetus (1511-1553), whose book by the same title denied the doctrine of the Trinity as well as the doctrines of original sin and justification by faith. For an extended analysis of cf. R. W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World To The Wars of Religion, AD 1350-1648* (Baker, 2005), pp. 188-190, and especially Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (Yale Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 215-232.

⁷ Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Crossway, 2010), pp. 33, 34.