

Doctrine of Monotheism

1. One of the most remarkable facts in observing the religions of the ancient world is their commitment to polytheism which is the worship of many gods and goddesses.
2. In the midst of the worship ceremonies of Egypt, India, Greece, and Rome is the commitment of the Hebrew people to monotheism or the worship of one God who is the Creator of us all.
 - *Malachi 2:10 Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?*
3. Some modern day religious readers would have the church embrace polytheism. One such person was Joseph Smith. Appealing Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34-36, Smith developed a religion whereby men are made into gods. Mormonism can rightfully be called, “The God Makers.”
 - *Psalms 82:6 I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.*
 - *John 10:34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? 35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; 36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?*
4. In response to the idea that men can become gods, the following truth must be remembered.
 - There is a vast distinction between the Creator and His creation. *Isaiah 44:6 Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*
 - The “god” language of Scriptures indicate that these “gods” are part of the created order. These “gods” are not the Creator but are part of the creation.
 - The term “gods” in Scripture refer to angels, magistrates, and even to false gods.

False gods. *Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Isaiah 37:19 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.*

Angels. *Psalms 82:1 A Song or Psalm of A'-saph. God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.*

Magistrates. *1 Corinthians 8:5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)*

- None of the incommunicable attributes of the Lord are attributed to these “gods” mentioned in Scripture. None are omniscient or omnipresent or omnipotent. Yahweh *Elohim* alone has the essential attributes of the one true God; the other *elohim* do not.
 - The language of analogy and accommodation must be remembered. For example, we say there is one President of the United State but there are other presidents (of the P.T.A., Chamber of Commerce, or a corporation etc.). God alone is KING of kings, but there are lesser kings. God alone is Lord, but there are other lords. God alone is our Father, while there are other fathers.
 - Psalm 82:6 does not mean humans are or will be gods that transcend the created order and attain godhood.
 - Psalm 82:6 does mean that that in the “creaturely” and “contingently” way, human can and are “gods” in the sense of rulers, magistrates, and people in authority.
 - Notice that the “gods” of Psalm 82:6 shall die like men. *Psalms 82:7 But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.*
5. The great Shema insists on the concept of monotheism or there being only one God. Parents were to be diligent to teach their children to avoid polytheism.
- *Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: 5 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.*
6. The exclusiveness of God is declared in the Ten Commandments. The followers of Yahweh must have no other God but Himself.

Special Note.

The word “before” does not refer to rank but presence. There are no other gods to be recognized in the presence of Yahweh and Yahweh’s presence extends throughout the universe.

- *Exodus 20:1 And God spake all these words, saying, 2 I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*
7. With the Biblical emphasis on monotheism, the Christian faith finds it challenging to teach the Doctrine of the Trinity. How can God be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Why does the church insist on the Doctrine of the Trinity?

8. The church must insist on the Doctrine of the Trinity because the New Testament speaks of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

- God the Father. *Ephesians 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*
- God the Son. *John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*
- God the Holy Spirit. *Acts 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.*

9. Concerning Christ, notice that the Greek term for “word” is “logos”. In John 1:1 a distinction is made between the Logos and God. The Word was “with” God, and thus a distinction is made.

Special Note.

with = sun (syn-chronize, syn-agogue; together with).

with = meta (alongside of something, side by side)

with = pros (pros, face to face)

10. But then, in John 1:14 the “Logos” is identified as God: “*the Word [Logos] was God.*” “*God was the [Logos] Word.*”

11. When Thomas saw the resurrected Lord, he exclaimed, “*My Lord and my God*” (John 20:28). Jesus accepted the worship of Thomas.

12. Idolatry occurs when any creature is worshipped. Jesus was worshipped because He was not a creature. He was the Creator. Jesus was very God of very God. Because He was God, Jesus healed, and He forgave sins (Mark 2:7).

13. Furthermore, Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8). The Jews understood. Only God is the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus was claiming to be God who instituted the Sabbath Day.

14. John also stated that in Christ, in the Logos, in the Word, was life. Only God has life in Himself and life to give to others.

- *Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*

15. In the book of Hebrews, the person and work of Jesus Christ is exalted which is why the early church affirmed the deity of Christ.
16. In Hebrews, the “*brightness of His glory*” is referenced, which is a glory reserved for God. Mention is also made of “*the express image of his person*” which means that the personhood of Jesus is the same as, but distinct from, that of the Father.
- *Hebrews 1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*
17. When the early church used the term “person” the term person was used different than it was today.
18. The church father, Tertullian, introduced the Latin term, *persona*, in order to express the Logos.
- In legal terms, a person’s legal estate and ownings were part of the *persona* of the individual.
 - In theatrical terms, an actor’s *persona* was based upon the multiple parts played, indicated by a distinct mask for each role.
19. With the passing of time, the concept of person became more refined. In Greek, the term *persona* became *hypostasis*, or hypostatic union.
20. To understand the hypostatic union is to understand several words.
- essence = the “being” element of something.
 - existence = the “becoming” element of something. God does not “exist”, He is in a state of being. He is not “becoming.” The word “existence” comes from the Latin *ex + (s)istentia*, which means “to stand” so that “existence means “to stand out.”
 - subsistence = does not mean less than, or lower than, as is used in modern ways. “sub” does mean, “below,” or “under,” in Greek, it means “standing beneath,” and refers to order.
 - nothing = nothing. “Nothing is the state in which sleeping rocks dream” (Jonathan Edwards).

Special Note.

The Greek word, “*ousios*”, is the present participle of the verb, “*to be*”. It is translated by the word, “*being*”. Other English synonyms for the Greek, *ousios*, would be words like, “essence,” “substance”, or “existence”. A crude translation would simply be, “stuff.”

The ancient philosophers engaged in metaphysics, or that which goes above and beyond what we see and perceive, they were looking for ultimate reality that does not reflect change. They were looking for the essence of things, for a simple reason.

If something is constantly changing, then it is becoming, it cannot be in a state of being.

Question: “Is there anything in a state of being?” If so, then it must have substance to it, or essence, or it would be a “fig newton” of our imagination.

Parmenides (5th century BC), a Greek philosopher, said, “Whatever is, is.” He preceded Socrates and influenced Platonic metaphysics.

Heraclitus (5th century BC), a Greek philosopher said, “Whatever is, is changing.” According to Heraclitus, it is not possible to step into the same river, nor is it possible to touch a mortal substance twice in so far as its state is concerned. Although one side of Heraclitus’ philosophy is that everything is changing, the other side is that within this change there is unity. There is a synthesis of diversity and identity, or order and chaos. This speculative synthesis is Heraclitus’ doctrine of the *logos*. Unity within change and change within unity, this is the pattern or the law of the universe for Heraclitus. He wants to say that this pattern is not visible to everyone. ‘Nature’, he says ‘loves to conceal itself’.

Cratylus (5th century BC), a Greek philosopher, was a student of Heraclitus. Cratylus went a step beyond his master's doctrine and proclaimed that it cannot even be done once.

Socrates (c. 469 – 399 BC) was a Greek philosopher from Athens.

Plato (c. 427- 423 BC) made a distinction between “being” and “becoming.” Plato was concerned about a constantly changing universe because, if this flux of change were the only possible description of existence, then knowledge would not be possible, since knowledge depends on permanence and stability. It appears that the necessary outcome of the doctrine of flux is skepticism. How would it be possible to define anything, if as soon as I called it a name, it changed into something else? A disciple of Heraclitus, Cratylus, took this doctrine so far as to assert that the only credible position would therefore be silence.

Aristotle (384 – 322 BC), a Greek philosopher, said that reality is like a rock being worn down by drops of water, although in the moment in which we are looking at the stone nothing appears to be changing, when we return months or even years later the rock has been hollowed out by the water. What appears stable on the surface to the uneducated human eye conceals continual change.

21. When the church articulated the doctrine of the Trinity, it did not speak of three existence, but subsistence. Subsistence is the Latin equivalent to the Greek concept of hypostases.

22. The term “subsistence” refers to the fact that in the one essence of God, there are three subsistence or standings under the One essence. God is one, subsisting as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.