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# The Unity of the Spirit

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Dear Fellow-believers,

I have been spending a lot of time reading the Psalms over the last few years and have been abundantly blessed by the simplicity, beauty and majesty of their message. In addition to simply reading them over many times I also sometimes use my *NIV Study Bible* or *The Companion Bible* and refer to the study-notes or else look-up the verses in the center reference for further study in other sections of scripture. Perhaps my greatest impression from reading the Psalms is that it is impossible to read very far at any place without being quickly confronted with clear and simple statements about the sovereign power, all encompassing wisdom and gracious love of our God. Psalm 103 is a good example:

*The Lord has established his throne in the heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19).*

When the Bible speaks of God's kingdom ruling over all it is speaking of God's sovereign or kingly reign (rule). The word "kingdom" in the Bible sometimes refers to the "reign" or "rule" of a king while at other times it refers to the "realm" in which the king exercises his rule. Often both meanings are inherent in the same usage as when speaking about the future kingdom of God which will be established in a new heavens and earth after Christ's second coming.

As is clear from many sections of scripture God even now "reigns over all" despite the fact that not all recognize his rulership. In fact, from Genesis to Revelation the Bible presents the story of this sovereign God working in history to bring to pass his own set purposes in accordance with his own divine will. Chief among these purposes is God's plan for the ultimate salvation for all those who love him - a plan that will culminate in the destruction of all of God's enemies and the ushering in of the final paradise of God's kingdom when his rule will be recognized and enjoyed by all who are his.

This is the goal of history and it is the reason for creation itself. The Bible teaches that the world did not come into existence accidentally or by chance. It was created by an all-wise and all-loving God with specific purposes in mind and continues to be ruled, sustained and guided by this God. This is stated explicitly at many places in the Bible and is implicit throughout. God's purposes cannot be prevented from coming to pass - not even by all the power of the spiritual darkness of this world. The first chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians expresses these truths in a beauty which would be difficult to surpass:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

*In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -*

*to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the One he loves ...*

*And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,*

*to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will ... (Eph. 1:3-6, 9-11).*

So great is this plan of salvation and God's wisdom in bringing it to pass that the apostle Paul, after establishing the certainty of God's sovereignty and the election by grace of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Romans 9-11, simply exclaims in utter amazement:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*

*Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?*

*Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?*

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).*

It is precisely because God is the creator, ruler and sustainer of the universe that we can trust him to meet our daily needs as we "seek first his kingdom and righteousness" - because surely if he cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields he will care for us as well (Matt. 6:25-33).

Let there be no misunderstanding - for the Bible also clearly teaches that this "world" or this "present evil age" is in rebellion against the rulership of the one true God (Eph. 2:1-3; 6:10-12). Despite this fact, however, the Bible never once concludes that things have gotten out from under God's over-ruling

control or that he is somehow no longer sovereign over all. As Jesus stated:

*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Matt. 10:29-31).*

It is this certainty that God is all powerful, all wise and all loving that is the bedrock of the believer's life and trust in him. It is this certainty that God is "over all" and that he is "working everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" that makes it possible for the believer to know that in the midst of all things "God works for the good of those who love him" and to be persuaded that nothing "can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:28,38-39). This knowledge of God's sovereignty also assures us that, even in the midst of life's many difficulties, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

This biblical perspective is absolutely essential to a proper understanding of both the Bible and of life itself. As people we see only a very small part of the complete picture. But God who reigns over all and is guiding history to his own appointed goal sees everything from the big picture of eternity. The Bible teaches that it is *only* the transformation that will take place at Christ's second coming that will enable us to understand all of the "whys" and "wherefores" of this present life we now live. Now we only see "but a poor reflection as in a mirror" but then we shall see our savior "face to face" and "know even as we are known" (I Cor. 13:12).

Since the day of Pentecost God has poured out the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) into the hearts of all those who believe in Christ. Thus, the sovereign God who created the heavens and the earth is now our Father. As a result, we can live in joy, peace and confident hope of the final manifestation of God's rule when all of creation will be transformed and we will enjoy forever "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:23).

*Richie Temple*

## God Almighty

by Chuck LaMattina  
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Power. It is the ability to perform effectively and get specific and desired results. It is just about the one thing that everyone wants in some form. Power is what men and women have sought for and fought for since the beginning of recorded history. But power in human hands has been a negative force, for the most part. It usually steals from the many to give to the privileged few. It is rare when power in human hands is freely exerted for the common good. The old saying, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," has a lot of tragic reality behind it. The power of God is different, however.

Psalm 62:11-12a

*God has spoken once, Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God.*

*Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy ...*

Power belongs to God. He is the source of all true might. He is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. His ability to perform effectively and get specific and desired results is infinite.

Speaking to God, Job says,

*I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You (Job 42:2).*

And when Mary questions the angel about her being the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, he tells her,

*... with God nothing will be impossible (Luke 1:37).*

But Psalm 62 also tells us something more. It says in verse 12, "Also to you O Lord, belongs mercy." The Hebrew word for "mercy" is "hesed." It is difficult to translate this precisely into one English word. Hesed is a strong and steadfast graciousness that is seen in acts of lovingkindness, mercy and abundant generosity.

God is the most powerful being in the universe, yet, His power is not a negative force. It doesn't take from others, it gives!

Genesis 17:1-2:

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.*

*And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."*

God appears to Abram (later called Abraham) and reveals Himself as "Almighty God." And he comes not to take from Abram but to bless him. The title or name "Almighty God" is one of the great names of God that is revealed in the Bible. It is the Hebrew "El Shaddai."

The word Shaddai is derived from a root word that literally means "breast." The title Shaddai indicates one who nourishes and supplies, and fully satisfies. Coupled with the title El, which means, the strong one, or mighty one, or the all powerful one, El Shaddai means the all powerful One, who nourishes and supplies and abundantly satisfies! Almost everywhere the name El Shaddai, the Almighty God, is used, it is in the context of great blessing from God.

It is the awesome and infinite power of God, manifested for the good of those He loves, that brings Him great praise and glory and majesty.

Psalm 145:1-16:

*I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless your name forever and ever.*

*Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever.*

*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And his greatness is unsearchable.*

*One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts.*

*I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works.*

*Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness.*

*They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of Your righteousness.*

*The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy.*

*The LORD is good to all, And **His tender mercies** are over all His works.*

*All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You.*

*They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, And talk of Your power,*

*To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, And the glorious majesty of His kingdom.*

*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

*The Lord **upholds all** who fall, And **raises up all** who are bowed down.*

*The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season.*

***You open Your hand** and satisfy the desire of every living thing [my emphasis].*

God opens His hand and satisfies "the desire of every living thing." Proverbs 3:27 declares,

*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so.*

God doesn't! What God has lovingly promised, His power enables Him to do. When He sees a need He acts.

This knowledge of God's "awesome acts" and "majesty", His "great goodness" and "power", is greatly lacking today. This is one of the basic reasons why our faith is often so feeble and our worship so weak. How could our faith be feeble if we were to constantly tell each other of God's "awesome acts"? How could our worship be weak, if we pondered in our hearts "the glorious splendor" of God's "majesty"? If our faith is small it may be because in our hearts our God is too small in power and goodness!

On our own, we may be weak, inadequate, ineffective and ungracious, but God is not, neither are those who avail themselves of His power. Our God is a mighty God!

Psalm 115:3

*He does whatever He pleases.*

Whatever God wills or desires, He can and will do. Whatever God takes pleasure in He does. He is never hindered or stopped from manifesting His power to those who desire it.

Psalm 135:5-6:

*For I know that the LORD is great, And our Lord is above all gods.*

*Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places.*

God commands all of nature and can make it serve His purposes. He can do whatever He desires. He never fails to accomplish His goal.

Isaiah 55:10-11:

*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater,*

*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall **shall accomplish what I please**, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it [my emphasis].*

Our desires are many times far beyond our own powers. There are many things we may purpose or plan, but often we are powerless to bring our own will to pass. But not with God. It is no more difficult for God to create a universe or a butterfly. It is no more difficult for Him to destroy a galaxy or save a soul.

Such power in the hands of men would be terrifying! But our God is not only all powerful, He is righteous. He is the Almighty who abundantly satisfies.

Jeremiah 32:27

*"Behold I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"*

There is nothing too hard for our God. What He has promised He is willing and able to do. There

is no prayer too hard for Him to answer. No need too great for Him to supply. No temptation too powerful for Him to help you overcome. No hurt too deep for Him to heal!

Psalm 89:13-17:

*You have a mighty arm; Strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand.*

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.*

*Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance.*

*In Your name they rejoice all day long, And in Your righteousness they are exalted.*

*For You are the glory of their strength, And in Your favor our horn [strength] is exalted.*

Nothing and no one can be compared to the great majesty and power of our God. He alone uses His great power to cause His people to "rejoice", to have great "strength", and to be "exalted." If we are ever to live powerful lives, what we need to do, what we must do, is develop in our hearts a correct understanding of the awesome and gracious power of God.

In Isaiah chapter 40, God speaks to people who are like many Christians today. They are people of God, but they are despondent, defeated. They are people whose faith is feeble and whose worship is weak. To correct this God takes the initiative and calls out to His people.

Isaiah 40:9

*O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"*

"Behold your God!" Look at what He has done and rest your faith upon the One who can give you power and strength that will not fail.

Isaiah 40:10-31:

*Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, And his arm shall rule for Him;*

*Behold, his reward is with Him, And his work before Him.*

*He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.*

Behold our Almighty God. Though He is all powerful, He is ever so tender with His own people. His power is larger than all Creation since He is the one who created it all.

*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, Measured heaven with a span And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales And the hills in a balance?*

*Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him?*

*With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding?*

*Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.*

*And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.*

*All nations before Him are as nothing, And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.*

*To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?*

*The workman molds an image, The goldsmith overspreads it with gold, And the silversmith casts silver chains.*

*Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution Chooses a tree that will not rot; He seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not tatter.*

Even all the nations of the world are nothing before Him!

*Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?*

*Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*

*It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.*

*He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless.*

*Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.*

*"To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy one.*

*Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing.*

*Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God?"*

*Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.*

***He gives power to the weak,** And to those who have no might He increases strength.*

*Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall,*

*But those who wait on the LORD shall **renew their strength**; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint [my emphasis].*

Behold this awesome description of God and let it sink within the depths of your heart! Who can be compared with Him? Why do we say that God does not see our needs, or that He is unable to help? Our thoughts of God are not big enough!

No force of nature, no country, no power can thwart His purposes. God is able to carry out His will to its fullest and most glorious conclusion. Our God is able to conquer every obstacle. He is able to subdue all things to Himself. And he is willing to help us exchange our strength for His!

If we desire to evidence great strength and power we need to say to one another, "Behold your God!" We need to let our minds be renewed to the reality of God's immense power; power that is there for those He loves. The Bible teaches us that Abraham was strengthened in his faith by giving glory to God (Romans 4:20-21)!

God is not just some nice grandfatherly type who has a kind heart and can give good advice. He is not someone who had a command on things yesterday, is groping for a handle on today, and is out of touch with tomorrow. We have fooled ourselves into thinking that God was powerful in the days of the chariot and the abacus, but He is ineffective today. Today we have turbo charged cars and super computers and with these come turbo charged concerns and super problems. If this is your conception of God, I've got news for you, you are wrong! The God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only all powerful God. And in Christ He has provided power for His people unlike anything seen in the Old Testament.

Romans 1:16

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

We are usually ashamed of things when they don't measure up to our expectations. But Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. In a world of competing ideas and power structures, the apostle found the gospel to be more powerful than them all. The gospel is the power of God for salvation! It is effective in healing absolutely every physical and spiritual sickness. The gospel of Christ is the power to bring about the most profound change we could ever experience. It takes us from being weak to being strong. It liberates us from every form of bondage. And it will bring us to eternal glory at the end of the age.

The power of God in Christ needs to be understood by every child of God. This is why Paul prays what he does in his letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:15-23:

*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,*

*do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:*

*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,*

*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

*and what is the **exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe**, according to the working of His mighty power*

*which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,*

*far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*

*And he put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,*

*which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all [my emphasis].*

God wants you to know "the exceeding greatness of His power" and to avail yourself of it. He wants you to have the power that raised Christ from the dead and gave him authority over all creation.

This great power of God is ours. We have power to transform our lives, power to triumph over all of life, power to live holy lives.

The power of God to those who believe is resurrection power - it raised Christ from the dead. It is ascension power - it has given him authority

over all creation. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as a part of his body, this power is ours!

We need to bring God's power out of the dusty pages of history and into the present reality of our lives. We need to remind one another of God's glorious majesty and power.

Power is available to us, real power. Power to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to bring about salvation and the new birth. There is power to energize our wills, renew our minds, reconcile our relationships and bring us peace.

We need to meditate on this wonderful truth. We need to let it sink into the depths of our hearts and take root. Our God is worthy of our total confidence. He is worthy of our absolute loyalty and He is worthy of our heartfelt praise.

Ephesians 3:20-21:

*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,*

*to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

[This article is excerpted by permission from a wonderful book by Chuck LaMattina entitled, *Our Awesome God*. This book, along with two other godly, inspiring and practical books, *Faithful to the Fundamentals* and *Discovering Christ*, can be obtained by writing to Chuck at the following address after July 1: Chuck LaMattina, Grace Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL, 60645]

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## God is One Person

by Mark Mattison

Kentwood, Michigan

According to the Bible, there is only one God. The Old Testament frequently affirms that God is one (cf. Deut. 6:4). However, I believe the one God of the Old Testament is identified in the New Testament as the Father and the Father alone. No passage of Scripture teaches that the one God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are co-equal, co-eternal persons in one God. In fact, this theory is refuted by the very language of the New Testament itself.

### God and Jesus are Distinct

Paul prefaced each of his letters with a formula that carefully distinguishes between "God the Father" and "our Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>1</sup> Not only is the Father God (Phil. 4:20); the Father is the *only* God ("one God and Father of all," Eph. 4:6). This Father is the God of Jesus Christ. "We always thank God," Paul writes, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Col. 1:3; cp. Eph. 1:17). There is one God, the Father, and this God is distinct from Jesus, his Son.

This observation is not new. In 1531, Michael Servetus wrote: "For that only the Father is called God by nature is plainly enough shown by Scripture, which says, God and CHRIST. CHRIST and God. It so joins them as though CHRIST were a being distinct from God."<sup>2</sup>

Servetus went on to quote (among other verses) I Corinthians 8:6, which states that "there is but one God, the Father ... and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ." Similarly, I Timothy 2:5 states that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." God and Jesus are two separate beings.

Jesus himself referred to the Father as his God. In John 20:17, he instructed Mary Magdalene to tell his disciples that "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." In John 17:3, Jesus said in prayer to God: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know *you*, the *only true God*, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (emphasis mine). Jesus carefully distinguished between the only true God and himself.

This distinction is clear on nearly every page of Scripture. The most famous verse of the Bible proclaims it: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). Notice what that verse does *not* say. It does *not* say that "God so loved the world that he went down into it," nor does it say that "God the Father sent God the Son" or that "the Father, who is God, sent the Son, who is also God." There are two persons in this verse: God and Jesus. God is the one who sends, and Jesus is the one who is sent. God is one person, Jesus is another.

Not only is God distinct from Jesus; he is superior to Jesus in rank. Jesus said "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Paul wrote: "For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:27, 28). Can these verses be reconciled with the teaching that the Son is co-equal with the Father? I do not believe that they can.

Jesus' human experience differentiates him from God. "Jesus *grew in wisdom* and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52, emphasis mine). God, on the other hand, possessed wisdom already (Prov. 8). Jesus "*learned obedience* from what he suffered" and was "*made perfect*" (Heb. 5:10, emphasis mine);<sup>3</sup> God was already perfect (Matt. 5:48). Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and died on the cross; God cannot be tempted (James 1:13) and cannot die (I Tim. 6:16). Jesus "*became* as much superior to the angels as the name

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<sup>1</sup>Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:1, 3; Eph. 1:2, 3; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1,2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Philem. 1:3. Notice also the conspicuous absence of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup>*On the Errors of the Trinity*, p. 12.

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<sup>3</sup>Although he was sinless (Heb. 4:15), Jesus had to be tested and tried and had to reach a state of completion so he could "become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:9; cf. 2:10).

he has *inherited* is superior to theirs" (Heb. 1:4, emphasis mine); God was superior to the angels already and has "inherited" nothing. The Father, and the Father alone, is God.

### The Son of God

If only one person is God - and that person is the Father - then who is Jesus? Again the answer is clear from Scripture. Jesus is God's Messiah, the Son of God. This was Peter's confession of faith (Matt. 16:16). The Gospel of John was "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). Jesus everywhere claimed to be the Son of God, but neither he nor the writers of the New Testament proclaimed him to be God Almighty. "If the New Testament writers believed it vital that the faithful should confess Jesus as 'God'," G.H. Boobyer asks, "is the almost complete absence of just this form of confession in the New Testament explicable?"<sup>1</sup>

On rare occasions Jesus is called "God" in a secondary sense as a representative of God, such as in John's Gospel (20:28). But "it is a misunderstanding to believe that the gospel of John makes Jesus into God, or identical with God," writes Jacob Jervell. "Jesus is not God but God's representative, and, as such, so completely and totally acts on God's behalf that he stands in God's stead before the world."<sup>2</sup>

This is what Jesus meant when he stated that "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He meant that he and the Father were united in purpose (cp. 17:11). His enemies prepared to stone him, accusing him of "blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God"(v. 33). Many Bible students stop at that verse and assert that Jesus' enemies were correct. If we read on, however, we see that Jesus defined his ministry rather in terms of Sonship and divine representation: "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?"<sup>3</sup> If he called them 'gods,' to

whom the word of God came - and the Scripture cannot be broken - what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, I am *God's Son*?" (10:34-36, emphasis mine). Astonished at Jesus' skillful handling of the Scriptures and enmeshed in unbelief, Jesus' enemies were outraged (v. 39). As God's agent, Jesus functions as God, but he is not God himself.

Nor is the Son "eternal" as is commonly taught. He has risen from the dead and conquered death (cf. I Cor. 15:20-26, 57); he is now immortal. But that immortality was given to him at his resurrection. His existence does not extend into eternity past; he was created at a particular point in time.

Luke 1:35 explains the origin of the Son: "The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God'" (emphasis mine). Notice the cause-and-effect relationship here: Mary's child is the Son of God because of the descent of the Spirit, not because his Sonship extends into eternity past. Raymond Brown writes that "the child is totally God's work - a new creation."<sup>4</sup> James D. G. Dunn adds that "it is a begetting, a becoming which is in view, the coming into existence of one who will be called, and will in fact be the Son of God, not the transition of a pre-existent being to become the soul of a human baby or the metamorphosis of a divine being into a human fetus."<sup>5</sup>

The doctrines of the preexistence and deity of Christ are conspicuously absent in the early Church's sermons as recorded in Acts. The apostles' biographical sketches of Christ's life (as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke) begin with his earthly ministry. "Jesus of Nazareth was a man" through whom God worked miracles and whom God raised from the dead (Acts 2:22ff; cf. also 10:36-43). Luke recorded

<sup>1</sup>"Jesus as 'Theos' in the New Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Vol. 50, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup>*Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House), 1984, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Psalm 82:6. The reference is to the judges of Israel. They were "gods" in the sense that "the word of God came" to them and they spoke as God's representatives. If a ruler of Israel could be called "god," how much more

may we say this of Jesus, the supernaturally conceived Messiah of God.

<sup>4</sup>*The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, New York: Image Books), 1977, p. 314; cf. also pp. 290, 291.

<sup>5</sup>*Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 1980, p. 51.

no apostolic sermon which began "God came down from heaven and was born as man."

## The Holy Spirit

What of the Holy Spirit, the alleged "third person" of the Trinity? The New Testament nowhere implies that the Spirit is a divine person distinct from God and Jesus.

Unlike God and Jesus, the Spirit has no name. Nor does the Spirit get "equal time" on the pages of Scripture (cf. note 1), which is strange if the Spirit is a separate co-equal person.

Matthew 11:27 states that "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Some Polish Christians in the seventeenth century asked a very good question: Where does this leave the Holy Spirit? "If the Holy Spirit were a divine person, the Father would not alone know the Son and the Son alone know the Father. The Holy Spirit also, without a revelation from anyone, would know both."<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit is God, but it is not a person separate from God. It is the presence and power of God himself. "Where can I go from your Spirit?" the psalmist asks. "Where can I flee from your presence?" (Psalm 139:7). Clearly God's Spirit is synonymous with his presence.

The Spirit is also the presence of Christ after his resurrection. In John 14:16-17, Jesus told his disciples he would ask the Father to send "another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth." Then he said that "I will come to you" (v.18, emphasis; cp. Matt. 28:20). Lastly, he said that "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make *our* home with him" (v. 23, emphasis mine). The indwelling of God's Spirit is the indwelling of the Father and the Son.

## The Father, the Son and the Spirit

This brings us to an important point. The Bible does talk about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 28:19). I very much believe in them. I believe that God, the Father, is fully

revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ, and that they dwell in us through the Spirit. There is clearly a "threeness" here. However, the Bible does not say that these three are one God, or that the one God includes these three as co-equal, co-eternal persons.

[Mark Mattison is the author of an excellent book entitled *The Making of a Tradition* which offers a detailed analysis of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity (and other traditions). It also offers a more accurate biblical alternative to these traditional beliefs. The book can be obtained by writing to: Ministry School Publications, 3880 Jefferson SE, Wyoming, Michigan, 49548]

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## Music in Review

### *Scripture Memory Songs*

Looking for something good to listen to on your CD or tape player? How about inspiring verses from "God's word" set to beautiful music!?! This is what *Scripture Memory Songs* by Integrity Music, Inc. is all about. There is no need to worry about the words of these songs because they are all taken directly from scripture (a mixture of KJV or NIV). Each tape or CD focuses on verses relating to a specific topic. The music is contemporary with a lot of variety. So far, we have the following five CD's and like them all: *Grace; Praise; Healing; Overcoming Anxiety* and *Overcoming Guilt*. They are a welcome alternative to the other options available on the radio, etc. and it is almost "guaranteed" that the scripture verses from these songs will begin to "play over" in your mind at other times of the day as well.

For information write to: Integrity Music, Inc., P.O. Box 851622, Mobile, AL 36685-1622 or check local Christian bookstores.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in "The Racovian Catechism and the Holy Spirit," Wisdom & Power, November/December 1993, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 7

## For Christian Tolerance in Pursuit of the Truth

[The following letter is from Leszek and Olga Druszkiewicz who are English and Russian teachers as well as translators in Krakow, Poland. They participate in a home Bible fellowship together with other believers and also attend a recently begun 'evangelical' Protestant church (Poland is, nominally, over 90% Roman Catholic). This letter is addressed to the Pastor and is used by permission]

Dear Pastor,

In my previous letter I stated that I did not want to be rebellious and that is still true. However, as you stressed in your last message, the truth based on God's Word is often hard to accept. When *you* say that you direct it towards those who at that time are listening to you, but when we hear it we cannot help thinking that those are the exact words you yourself might need to hear also.

We have never doubted your love and commitment towards Christians in Krakow and we thank God for you and for your work for His kingdom. However, we cannot accept everything you teach, not because God's Word is difficult to accept (though at times it really is!) but because we do not believe that everything you (or probably anyone else) teaches agrees 100% with the Word. We do respect you as a teacher but we also understand that we are *all* Christ's church. Hopefully, you do not believe that "Misja Laski" is the *only* Christian church in Krakow, nor that you and only you have the monopoly for the truth.

The fact that we know we think differently than you on a few topics is also the very reason why we do not get more involved in the activities of the church. We would not like to testify about something we do not believe. For example, we just wouldn't tell anybody that his salvation is doubtful if he does not believe, understand or accept the doctrine of the Trinity. On the other hand, we would not present Unitarian theology as something necessary for salvation either. It simply isn't all totally clear. We believe that it is sufficient for

salvation to accept Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God.

We were brought up in Roman Catholic families but because we didn't see their beliefs in the Scriptures, we started looking for the truth somewhere else, trying to be honest before God. Because of this we had to be disobedient to the Catholic church and even to our own families. Now it seems that we are faced with a somewhat similar situation. We would like you to know that this position we find ourselves in is by no means enjoyable or easy, neither do we think of ourselves as better than others.

We are definitely ready to accept God's Word to the best of our abilities, but with the same readiness we have to oppose the teachings which come from the traditions of men only. We disagreed with certain things taught in the church we were born again in and also in some of the other churches we were in. However, our understanding of God's Word is getting deeper and more complete. Almost every Christian denomination is oriented to serve God and bring new people to Him, using and teaching that part of the truth which they believe they have. Our goal is also to bring the knowledge of God to people by loving them and helping them as much as we can, not by forcing them to believe those issues which are, to say the least, controversial.

We spoke about these things with Pastor Roger (the former Pastor) and he did not tell us to leave the church nor did he scold us for our beliefs. However, we have noticed lately in your messages (not all but quite a few) a constant insistence on 100% acceptance of everything that comes from the pulpit. We do not think that we will ever be able to do that. Let us be clear about our beliefs:

We believe in one God the Father and that His Son, Jesus Christ is our Lord, because God has appointed him to this position (Acts 2:36).

We also believe that Jesus is the Christ, that he came in the flesh: was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin Mary.

We also believe that God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by

making peace through Christ's blood shed on the cross.

We definitely believe and understand the finished work of Christ on the cross and we are grateful to God for His plan of salvation and to Christ for having gone through it.

We also believe that whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the SON of God, God lives in him and he in God (I John 4:15).

We also believe that people should honor their local Pastor, but as you said, we should also be like those who went to the Scriptures and searched daily "to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). So, what should we do when we find out that certain things "are not so?"

Finally, we believe that God has accepted us just as He has accepted you and although we do not agree with you about everything, we would not dare call you a 'heretic.' Can you accept us as well despite our differences?

Having these things in mind, what do you think about our place in the church? We will not go witnessing if we must speak of doctrines which we do not believe nor will we go to Bible school, for certainly we would not pass tests on certain topics. Still we grow in your church having fellowship, however brief, with the other believers. We pray for the church and we are thankful for it. We have received a lot of love there and also have shown love to many others as well. If you do not think we fit in, please tell us - we will accept your decision without feeling offended, always remembering only good things.

God bless you,

Leszek & Olga Druszkiewicz

Krakow, Poland

[Perhaps many of us can relate to this letter. Such issues as those discussed above become even more important when there is not "another church on the next street corner" that one can attend]

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## Faith and Works

by Joe Kiereck

Los Angeles, California

Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. The argument of this occurring before circumcision is to point out that the blessings of God come upon Jew and Gentile both through faith and apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 4:11b).

However, it wasn't just the ceremonial law (circumcision, etc.) that was at issue. If a Gentile who doesn't have the seal of circumcision in his flesh, 'does by nature things contained in the Law,' it is manifest what "Law" we are talking about. *Not* just ceremonial law, but the *entire* Law including the ten commandments or good works of any kind.

Paul (in Rom. 4, etc.) and James (in James 2) are talking about two different things.

James is not answering the question, "How can I be saved?" but rather, how can we know whether faith is authentic:

"You SAY you have faith ... " (verse 18)  
show me your faith BY your works."

Faith takes place *in the heart*, but it is evidenced by the act that follows. God knows my heart. People do not; they can only see the evidence of my faith through my works.

It is not that faith is on one side and works on the other, standing as opposites, but rather that saving faith, by nature, produces works.

The noble Puritan, Thomas Manton said, "By the righteousness of faith we are acquitted from sin, and by the righteousness of works, we are acquitted from hypocrisy."

Christ truly is "the end of the Law for righteousness for everyone that believeth." Our faith may be weak, timid, or immature at times, but if it is *real* faith, it is also *justifying* faith.

[The citations above are from correspondence and conversation with Joe]

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## Living Letters

My name is Laurie Frey. My Mom and Dad are believers of God, and so are my sister and I. My family goes to fellowship on Wednesdays. Our friends who are also believers, told us about a book called "God's Plan of Salvation." We would like to order the book. Now I am only a kid but, I really, really believe in God. So my parents said I could write the letter. If you send the book could you send it in my name? When we get the book we are going to read it as a family. Could you please put my parent's names on the mailing list?

Laurie Frey  
Mishawaka, Indiana

[I apologize to Laurie for not being able to reproduce the beauty of her original handwritten letter]

Thank you very much for *The Unity of the Spirit*. It was a great pleasure to read it. May God help you in continuing it. I liked the first issue very much, especially the reviews about the works of some outstanding theologians of this century.

The main line of my Christian activity is invariably Creationism. Recently, I have received an invitation for two lectures with two groups. It's a big challenge because they are both very large groups. Nevertheless, I am sure God will help me carry out the task.

I am very happy about our upcoming summer meeting. Then we can continue our discussions. May God bless you abundantly.

Ferenc Jeszeszensky  
Budapest, Hungary

God bless you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks so much for your first newsletter and the book ...

I too was involved with The Way, ordained in 1985. After all the "fettucini" hit the fan, I hung around here in Illinois. But I got tired of waiting around for a savior from overseas, and decided that with the spirit of God and a Bible I had all that I needed to do what God called me to do. Today, our fellowship is growing in Christ-like character, and in a passion to bring people to the "obedience of faith ... for His name."

... Chicago is a great place to make known the name of Christ. There are people with great needs including the wise and unwise, poor and rich. Our "church" is quite a mixed bag of people with a wide range of incomes plus a racial mix of white, black and Hispanic. It's a real "mystery" proving ground of the Body of Christ. Every day is a great adventure!

Chuck LaMattina  
Chicago, Illinois

God bless you abundantly. I've been wanting to write you ever since I got your newsletter. Thanks very much. I enjoyed reading every inch of it. I also have some ideas for articles I can contribute. It will be a good challenge for me to write them up. I have also bought an NIV Study Bible and have found it quite useful.

Today I finished reading I Samuel. I am truly amazed at how David walked with God. There are numerous places where David was faced with critical decisions. He inquired of the Lord and the Lord told him what to do. David obeyed and reaped the benefits.

Well, God bless you! Maybe we will meet in the air before we get a chance to correspond again!

Andy Richman  
Aurora, Illinois

God's blessings to you. Thanks for your newsletter and the booklet. I got it today and leave on Saturday for Israel with 28 others I am taking on a tour -- so I'll read them when I get home. I *really* appreciate your thinking of me. I think of you and pray for you often. Hope to talk to you soon!

John Schoenheit  
Charlotte, North Carolina

Thanks much for your excellent first newsletter - we haven't been able to read it all yet, but everything looks worthwhile. We'll be happy to exchange our studies with yours.

Dan and Doris Andersen  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
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## Notes & Quotes on the Bible

### The Sovereignty of God

There are few Biblical subjects more fundamental to a proper understanding of the Bible than the recognition of God's sovereign rule over all. This idea is stated repeatedly in the Bible and underlies almost all of its records, principles and promises for God's people. The Bible is the story or record of what God, the creator of the heavens and earth, has done, is doing and will do in history. This principally involves the bringing to pass of his plan of salvation for mankind - all to his own glory. This plan of salvation is an all-encompassing concept and includes: God's reasons for creation, his dealings with the OT patriarchs, the OT nation of Israel, the life and accomplishments of Jesus Christ, the NT church of the body of Christ and the final out-working of God's purposes brought to pass by the second coming of Christ and the ultimate establishment of his sovereign reign in "a new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13).

In all of this it is God himself who is at work to bring to pass his own plan "in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11). Perhaps, the central idea that must be grasped in all of this is the understanding of the concept of God's "kingdom" as it is presented in the Bible. The NT scholar G.E. Ladd explains in his book *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Eerdmans) what is meant by this Biblical word "kingdom:"

We must set aside our modern idiom if we are to understand Biblical terminology. The *primary* meaning of both the Hebrew word *malkuth* [kingdom] in the Old Testament and of the Greek word *basileia* [kingdom] in the New Testament is the rank, authority and sovereignty exercised by a king. A *basileia* may indeed be a realm over which a sovereign exercises his authority; and it may be the people who belong to that realm and over whom authority is exercised; but these are secondary and derived meanings. First of all, a kingdom is the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king...

When the word refers to God's kingdom, it always refers to His reign, His rule, His sovereignty ... Psalm 103:19, "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." God's kingdom, His *malkuth*, is His universal rule, His sovereignty over all the earth. Psalm 145:13, "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations" ... It is God's *rule* which is everlasting.

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," are we praying for heaven to come to earth? In a sense we are praying for this; but heaven is an object of desire only because the reign of God is to be more perfectly realized than it is now. Therefore, what we pray for is, "Thy kingdom come; *thy will be done* on earth as it is in heaven." This prayer is a petition for God to reign, to manifest His kingly sovereignty and power, to put to flight every enemy of righteousness and of His divine rule, that God alone may be King over all the world.

However, a reign without a realm in which it is exercised is meaningless. Thus we find that the Kingdom of God is also the realm in which God's reign may be experienced. But again the facts are not so simple. Sometimes the Bible speaks of the Kingdom as the realm into which we enter as present, sometimes as though it were future ...

Fundamentally, as we have seen, the Kingdom of God is God's sovereign reign; *but God's reign expresses itself in different stages through redemptive history. Therefore, men may enter into the realm of God's reign in its several stages of manifestation and experience the blessings of His reign in differing degrees.* God's Kingdom is the realm of the Age to Come...; then we shall realize the blessings of His Kingdom (reign) in the perfection of their fullness. But the Kingdom is here now. There is a realm of spiritual blessing into which we may enter today and enjoy in part but in reality the blessings of God's Kingdom (reign).

We pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The confidence that this prayer is to be answered when God brings human history to the divinely ordained consummation enables the Christian to retain his balance and sanity of mind in this mad world in which we live. Our hearts go out to those who have no such hope. Thank God, His

Kingdom is coming, and it will fill all the earth [pp. 19-23].

The sovereignty of God is shown throughout the Bible to include God's rule over both his *creation* and over *time* itself. The NIV does a particularly good job of emphasizing God's sovereignty over his creation in the translation of various titles for God. I will let the translators themselves explain in their book *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (Zondervan):

Because for most readers today the phrases "the LORD of hosts" and "God of hosts" have little meaning, this version renders them "the LORD Almighty" and "God Almighty." These renderings convey the sense of the Hebrew, namely, "he who is sovereign over all the 'hosts' (powers) in heaven and on earth, especially over the 'hosts' (armies) of Israel." For readers unacquainted with Hebrew this does not make clear the distinction between *Sabaoth* ("hosts" or "Almighty") and *Shaddai* (which can also be translated "Almighty"), but the latter occurs infrequently and is always footnoted ...

... The Hebrew for "hosts" can refer to (1) human armies (Ex. 7:4; Ps. 44:9); (2) the celestial bodies such as the sun, moon and stars (Gen. 2:1; Dt. 4:19; Isa 40:26); or (3) the heavenly creatures such as angels (Jos. 5:14; I Kings 22:19; Ps. 148:2). The title, "the LORD of hosts," is perhaps best understood as a general reference to the sovereignty of God over all powers in the universe (hence the NIV rendering, "the LORD Almighty") ...

[OT scholar] Kiss ... maintains...The primary idea of God in Israel is that God is Lord and King of the whole universe ... according to the Old Testament view, there are different powers in the world - angels, hosts of stars, cosmic and natural powers - which are organized like an army. Above them all reigns the Lord. He is the God of gods... the "almighty Lord" ... is a 'royal' concept stressing the kingship of Yahweh.

[OT scholar] Hartley concurs with this analysis of the epithet:

... [Yahweh Sabaoth] affirms his universal rulership that encompasses every force or army, heavenly, cosmic and earthly ... Ps. 24:10 clearly shows that 'Yahweh of hosts' conveys the concept of glorious king. Yahweh is King of the world (cf. Zech. 14:16) and over all the

kingdoms of the earth (Isa. 37:16) ... Although the title has military overtones, it points directly to Yahweh's rulership over the entire universe ... [pp. 109-110].

This same understanding of God's absolute sovereignty is carried over into the NT by the use of such titles as "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of Lords" (I Tim. 6:15) and in the use of OT titles such as "Lord Almighty" and "God Almighty" in various places. In the NT, however, a great deal of emphasis is also placed on God's sovereignty over *time*. Much of this takes place in the light of the background of the OT Book of Daniel where God is shown to be sovereign over all earthly kingdoms and will bring about the glorious victory of his own kingdom according to his own timetable. In his book *Christ and Time* (Westminster, pp. 49-50), NT scholar Oscar Cullman pointed out the significance of God's sovereignty over time:

The terminology of the New Testament teaches us that ... time in its unending extension as well as its individual periods and moments is given by God and ruled by him. Therefore *all* his acting is so inevitably bound up with time that time is not felt to be a problem. It is rather the natural presupposition of all that God causes to occur. This explains the fact that in a great majority of cases the terminology of the Primitive Christian writings has a time reference. Each individual item of the redemptive history has its fixed place in time [e.g. Gal.4:4; Mark 1:15; Rom.5:6; 8:18; Acts1:7; 2:23; 3:21;17:26; Eph.1:10; 2 Thess.2:6; I Tim.6:15; etc.]

I will let the Scriptures have the last word:

*... It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority .....*

*... which God will bring about in his own time - God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.*

And Amen!

*The Unity of the Spirit* is a free newsletter published quarterly through the *Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.* a non-profit foundation set up for the purpose of promoting and translating Biblical studies. Special emphasis is placed on the translation of Biblical studies (books, articles, etc.) into other languages, hence the title of the foundation.

The purpose of *The Unity of the Spirit* is to help Christian believers to better understand and live according to the truth of God's Word so that we may grow together as the one body of Christ. Manuscripts of articles, letters, poems, etc. are welcomed and encouraged. Those who desire to send manuscripts, letters, etc. or to help with the costs of the newsletter or the work of the foundation may send to: Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc., P.O. Box 473, Cary, N.C. 27512-0473. Contributions are tax deductible and are greatly appreciated.

The study booklet *God's Plan of Salvation* is available free of charge from the same address.

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