

The One True God is the Father

By Tim Warner, Copyright © 4Winds Fellowships

The Bible teaches monotheism from Genesis to Revelation. The New Testament does not in any way compromise the Shema: *“Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”*¹ Jesus affirmed the Shema without reservation:

Mark 12:28-34

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?”

*29 Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: **‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.** 30 And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

*32 So the scribe said to Him, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, **for there is one God, and there is no other but He.** 33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” But after that no one dared question Him.

That Jesus understood the Shema to indicate that God is one Person is evident by His affirming the scribe’s more elaborate interpretation – *“there is no other but He.”* That this understanding is foundational to Christianity is clear since Jesus said to him, *“You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”* That Jesus could not have understood the Shema as a Trinity of three co-equal, co-eternal Persons is not only evident by His reaction to this scribe, but proven conclusively by His own prayer to the Father.

John 17:1-3

*1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know **You, the only true God,** and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

In this humble statement, Jesus distinguished Himself from *“the only true God”* (τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεόν). **The word “God” means “sovereign,” the ultimate or chief authority.**

¹ Deut. 6:4

However, the term itself can be limited by context. For example, this term is used in reference to human rulers because they can be the “ultimate ruler” within a limited context, such as a state or kingdom.² But Jesus’ statement above declares that the Father is “*the only true God,*” that is “God” in the ultimate and unlimited sense – the Sovereign ruler over all that exists.

Paul also affirmed that the Father alone was “God” (sole Sovereign) for Christians.

1 Cor. 8:4-6

*4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that **there is no other God but one.***

5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),

*6 yet for us **there is one God, the Father,** of whom are all things, and we for Him; and **one Lord Jesus Christ,** through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

The pagans worshipped many gods, because they believed different gods had sole sovereignty over different aspects of nature and life. Thus their loyalties were divided. But for Christians, Paul made it clear that there is one Sovereign over all – the Father. Notice Paul’s statement in verse 4, “*there is no other God but one,*” is virtually identical to the scribe’s confession which Jesus commended, “*for there is one God, and there is no other but He.*” Both statements were a literal interpretation of the Shema, one by a Jewish scholar and the other by the Jewish Apostle, Paul. And both statements are absolutely exclusive, the latter actually excluding Jesus Himself. There was therefore no difference between the traditional Jewish understanding of the Shema and that of Jesus and Paul. There is one ultimate Sovereign over everything, not three Persons who share sovereignty equally.³

Paul also distinguished between “one God” and “one Lord.” The one “God” was clearly defined as the Father – the sole Sovereign. The one “Lord” (κύριος – “master”) was defined as Jesus Christ. Thus, the Father is our “God” (the supreme Sovereign over all) and Jesus Christ is our “Master” (the one who is our immediate superior under God the Father).

² John 10:33-36

³ The term “God” is often misunderstood by both Trinitarians and Unitarians, supposing that it refers to a KIND of being (WHAT God is in His nature and impersonal essence) or to simple Personhood (WHO God is as a Person). But the truth of the matter is that the term “God” primarily refers to a ROLE – God’s STATUS as the supreme authority over everything and everyone. The title “God” defines His Sovereign role and relationship over everything that He has originated. It is because of this misunderstanding that confusion abounds concerning the deity of Christ (which Scripture affirms but Unitarians deny), and the inherent subordination of the Son to the Father (which Scripture affirms but Trinitarians deny).

This implies that the Father is Jesus' own "God." And Scripture testifies to this clearly many times. Jesus Himself cried out to His own "God" while on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me,"⁴ quoting Psalm 22:1. Just after He was raised by the Father from the dead, Jesus told Mary: "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"⁵ This statement by Jesus shows that the Father was Jesus' "God" in the same way that He is our "God." The Apostles taught the same thing to the early Christians. Paul began several of his letters by referring to the Supreme God as "*the God and Father of our Master, Jesus Christ*."⁶ Peter did the same.⁷ In the final book of the Bible, Jesus again repeated four times in the same verse that the Father was also His own "God." "*The one being victorious, I will make him a column in the Temple of My God, which he should not leave thereafter. And I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, (the New Jerusalem, the one descending out of heaven from My God), and My new name.*"⁸

The Bible is clear that the Father alone is the supreme Sovereign. The Son has never been outside of direct submission to the Father as the sole Sovereign, who is His "God," the "only true God." The Son of God has never possessed or exercised authority inherent to Himself, apart from what has been granted to Him by the supreme Sovereign, His Father and God, to act on His behalf.⁹

Yet, sole absolute Sovereignty being the domain of the Father alone (one God), does not in any sense diminish the divinity of the Son of God, since "divinity" does not refer to authority but to "kind"¹⁰ just as Adam's sons were of the same "kind" as Adam – human.

Biblical Monotheism:

"Monotheism" was redefined more narrowly by Rabbinic Judaism after Christianity had such great success and inroads into Judaism. What the Shema meant to Israel in the wilderness, to the scribe that Jesus questioned, or to the Apostles was no longer what it meant to rabbinic Jews who were attempting to insulate themselves and Judaism against the claims of Christians concerning Jesus Christ. Monotheism was intentionally redefined to exclude the Son of God. But this was contrary to the biblical meaning of all the "one God" statements in their historical setting.

The "one God" statements in the Torah and the prophets did not appear when God wished to distinguish Himself from an alleged "Trinity." These statements appeared when

⁴ Matt. 27:46

⁵ John 20:17

⁶ Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3

⁷ 1 Pet. 1:3

⁸ Rev. 3:12 LGV

⁹ Matt. 28:18

¹⁰ Ontological essence

God wished to contrast Himself with the pagan deities. As Moses wrote the Torah during the wilderness wanderings, he repeatedly spoke of the God of Abraham as “one” in relation to the Egyptian deities which were many. Because the pagans had long ago abandoned the one true God, their lives were chaotic. To explain the chaotic nature of life, the pagans had divided all of nature among a pantheon of gods, each one allegedly having sole jurisdiction over a particular aspect of nature and life. For the Egyptians, the god of the Nile controlled the annual flooding of the Nile which produced the fertility for Egyptian agriculture. Thus, they sacrificed to the god of the Nile when they needed his help, since the Nile was his dominion alone. The sun god (Ra) controlled sunlight and the movement of the sun across the sky which caused the crops to grow, and created the seasons. They sacrificed to him so that their agriculture would prosper also. There were a multitude of other “gods” as well, each allegedly controlling a portion of nature – his particular dominion and sovereignty. Other gods and goddesses controlled more personal aspects of life, including fertility, love, etc. These “gods” were by no means united, but allegedly warred against each other. Thus, nature and life was chaotic and seemed random because there was no single deity who had TOTAL SOVEREIGNTY over everything that existed. Consequently, the Egyptians’ loyalties were always divided because the domains within the creation were divided and distributed among warring deities. The surrounding nations had their pantheons of gods as well. This was particularly noted regarding the gods of war. When one nation conquered another, the god of war of the conquering nation was deemed more powerful than the god of war of the conquered nation. Thus virtually every aspect of life and nature was filled with chaos (competing deities), and the people were always scrambling to appease the anger of this god or that god, depending on their circumstances and pressing needs at the time.

This was the backdrop for the statements in the Torah concerning one God. In contrast to the pagan deities, the God of Abraham was “one God,” a single mind, a sole Sovereign over all nature, including all nations. His sole sovereignty stemmed from the fact that He was the creator of everything that exists. His dominion was total. Loyalty, worship, obedience, and sacrifice were due to Him alone! The 10 plagues upon Egypt during the exodus proved that the God of Israel had absolute power over all of the alleged realms of the Egyptian gods who were mere idols (demons). “...Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.”¹¹ Thus, to the Israelites, the “one God” statements did not concern or address modern theological or ontological concepts such as “one Person” or “one substance/essence,” but concerned exclusively the idea of sole Sovereignty, a singular authority, one divine monarchy. This “one God” was both the source of everything and the ultimate ruler over everything, and He proved it in the ten plagues. None of the pagan deities could lift a finger against Him. It is critically important to understand that the term “one God” refers to the one who holds absolute sovereignty over everything that exists,

¹¹ Exod. 12:12

without division. There is none over Him, nor anyone or anything outside of His sole sovereignty. No one can deliver from His hand, or challenge Him successfully.

Revelation repeatedly refers to God as ὁ παντοκράτωρ, often translated “the “Almighty.” But this is not a very precise translation. The Greek word is a compound of “πας” (all, whole, total, everything) and κράτος (dominion, sovereignty). It is better translated “Sovereign of everything.” There are many such titles in Revelation, all of which stress God’s eternity and His sole sovereignty. For example, Rev. 4:8 refers to Him as κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (“Master, God, Sovereign over everything”).

Whether or not this single Sovereign ruler over everything, the divine Monarch, had a “Son” (of the same “kind”) in NO WAY affects His sole sovereignty as long as such a “Son” was subject to the Father, always operating under His authority. In such a case the divine monarchy was not disturbed in any way. This is in contrast to the pagan deities who were not of the same mind, or subject to a single sovereign ruler.

Modern misuse of the so-called “monotheistic” statements in the Scriptures appeal to the modern Jewish and Islamic version of “monotheism,” not the form that was presented in the Hebrew Scriptures or in the New Testament. These later interpretations of monotheism are possible only by conflating sovereignty (authority) with ontology (what God is). It is this incorrect conflation of these two concepts which allows Islam, Rabbinic Judaism, and Christian Unitarianism to gain any traction.