

Course Title: DOCTRINE – Lesson 2 (Monotheism)

Goal of This Lesson: The purpose of this course is to present the beautiful truth of God in Christ and to have a working knowledge of the Oneness doctrine in order to lead others to this foundational truth.

Note: This lesson contains important principles, especially for those who really want to understand biblical doctrine. These lessons go hand-in-hand with prayer and revelation.

DOCTRINE OF MONOTHEISM

This study, therefore, takes us into the doctrine of monotheism—the belief that there is only one God. This is the very opposite of polytheism—the belief that there is more than one God. Paul explained the distinction like this: “...For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many, and lords many) [polytheism], but to us there is but one God...” [monotheism] (I Corinthians 8:5, 6a).

“Let Us Make Man” (Genesis 1:26). This phrase has been often put forth to substantiate the concept of a trinity of persons in the Godhead. To whom is God speaking? Since the Bible does not say, it is best to let the Scriptures explain themselves.

There are several possible ways of thinking about this passage, the least scholarly being to pin a trinitarian tag on it and dismiss it as a “revelation” that would be expanded on later when Jesus would come into the world.

The Jews certainly do not get a trinitarian God from this passage. They have mastered the Old Testament but have never found an indication of a God comprised of three separate and distinct persons. Since there is “not another” with Him (Isaiah 44:24), to whom was he speaking?

- Wisdom? God certainly consulted with wisdom in the creation process.
- Himself? Paul indicated that He took “counsel with his own will.”
- The future Adam? Evidently Adam was created to look like Jesus (Romans 4:17; 5:14; 8:3; Philippians 2:7). In that way, the Messiah/Christ could have participated in the creation (Colossians 1:15-17). Man was made in the “image of God.” That did not mean physical form, but it did indicate that God planned his shape and form after “him who was to come.” If God is a trinity, where are my other two?

- A plurality of royalty/majesty? How often one says “us” or “we” when no one else is involved! It does not smack of pride, which relishes the use of “I.” If the scripture means a numerical plurality, then it contradicts the next sentence which uses “he...him” in the singular sense. Note the observations of G. A. Clark on the next point: the similar problem of “Elohim” being a plural term.

The Christian faith rejects the concept of a plurality with regard to Deity. In fact, any attempt to pluralize God is contrary to the wish and will of God Himself. He distinctly and repeatedly declared His unique singularity of being. To hold a view contrary to His expressed will is insubordination; to propagate it constitutes full-scale rebellion!

The effect of polytheism has been detrimental from the beginning of time. In the beginning, God revealed Himself to man, but man didn’t retain God in his knowledge (Romans 1:28). As man forgot the true God, he began worshiping false deities. History is replete with evidence that man—made to worship the true God—will turn to idolatry if he rejects the fact of monotheism.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Leslie Carlson writes: “The biblical world has a multitude of gods, as many as men could invent. In the ancient world, there was only one religion (H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, Columbia University Press N. Y., N. Y. 1948, p. 3).

- Originally, religion was monotheistic, but became debased through idolatrous worship, and the true God and His attributes came to be represented by idols, cult objects, and fetishes.

Because God was unseen and transcendent, men set up idols as a materialistic expression of him. Soon the created thing was worshiped as a god instead of a Creator. Thus, each nation had its chief god and as many more as they felt were necessary.

- Not only were idols used, but also various forms of nature as the heavenly bodies, mountains, seas, rivers, insects, birds and animals.”

So, we can trace the course of history as mankind drifted from the moorings of God’s eternal truth only to be tossed to and fro by the turbulent waves of error and delusion. As soon as man lost his grip on the foundational fact that there is but one God, he was plunged into the dark gulf of polytheism.

- By the time of the New Testament era, they had long since “...changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things...” (Romans 1:23).

The apostles then went forth declaring the truth of one God. Paul, at Mars' Hill, noted the errors of polytheism and pointed out that one God had made the world and its contents (Acts 17:22-24). God had, in times past, winked at such ignorance; but, now all men were under commandment to repent (Acts 17:30).

- The Oneness of God was a cardinal tenet of the gospel of Christ!

With the passage of time, polytheistic elements emerged among those who had embraced Christianity in part. Of this period, E. Washburn Hopkins writes: "Christianity (though built upon the rock of Peter) utilized for the construction of its church much pagan material, some of which had filtered through Jewish sources, while some was inherited from Mediterranean and Grecian cults." With this statement, he begins a chapter on "The Christian Trinity."

NON-MONOTHEISTIC CONTEXT

The two preceding chapters of the quoted text are entitled "The Hindu Trinity" and "The Buddhistic Trinity" respectively. Here the professor had pointed out that the trinitarian concept was heathen in origin. Now, in the chapter on "The Christian Trinity," he shows how nominal Christianity "utilized for the construction of its church much pagan material...."

Not least among the pagan material was the polytheistic concept of the deity! Explaining the historical development of the doctrine of the "Christian Trinity" he writes:

'In general it may be said the early Christian theology was a mixture of Stoic, Gnostic, and Platonic elements incongruously welded upon the old Jewish idea of a Spirit of God or a wisdom of God working in the Son of God, interpreted as Jesus Christ. But the first Christian theology was given in the words 'I and my Father are one' and the plain faith of the early church members who were not doctrinaires was just this and nothing more.

Jesus is God. So proclaimed the first hymns, sung by the early church. Such hymns are attested by Pliny the Younger. Paul of Samosata had to put a ban upon hymns extolling Christ as God. So Ignatius, who had as yet no trinitarian formula, proclaimed, 'One God Jesus Christ' and spoke of deacons as "servants of God Christ." It was a reproach hurled at the Jews by Justin that they 'deny that he is God.'

In the third century, the Bishop of Rome says some (Sabellians) believe Christ to be an emanation of God; some assume three hypostates; and some make Son and Holy Spirit to be mere creatures of God. Origen 'will not affirm that the Savior is God though some believe it' (to Origen he 'had authority as Logos, Wisdom, Justice, Truth of God'). The same observer reports that "some pray to God and some pray to Jesus.

“The final orthodox definition of the trinity was a matter of church politics. It was attained after endless disputes as to how much divinity and how much humanity was in Jesus Christ, when his divinity began, whether he was a creature, an emanation, or consubstantial with God, whether he was one with the Holy Spirit, whether the Holy Spirit was one with God, and finally whether a Gnostic term was to define the triune relationship or not — all theological hairsplitting in regard to questions which were definitively answered only by a party vote.

Then after pointing up the inability of the laity to understand this doctrine, Hopkins mentioned one concept of heathen religious thought that did not find complete acceptance in Western theology—a Mother Spirit.

Then, he concluded his introductory remarks with this observation: “Otherwise, the idea of a God, of a Spirit of Mercy as a manifestation of God, and of an earthly incarnate form of the Logos as God, was not fundamentally different from the Oriental conception as it appears in the two great churches of Hinduism and Buddhism.”

Thus, we can observe the corruptive influence of polytheism historically as it once again took men away from the fundamental truth of monotheism.

Though there was a discernible effort to hold to the concept of one God, the modification of it into “three persons in one God” injected the concept of plurality.

- Since the doctrine declares the three “persons” to be separate and distinct, the inevitable conclusion that there are three deities cannot be avoided if each of these “persons” is God. (If each isn’t God, which is and which isn’t?)
- The confusion confounds the thoughtful, and worship is hindered, if not eliminated.
- The corruptive influence of polytheistic concepts is also obvious doctrinally.

Pure worship is dependent upon pure doctrine. To worship the true God we must know Him as He is.

- A false concept of Him hardly constitutes a knowledge of the true God.

In view of these facts, we will do well to earnestly contend for the faith (body of doctrines) which were once for all delivered to the saints.

“For,” as Jude says, “there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3,4).

DOCTRINAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Two Reliable Witnesses Proving God's Identity:

- Creation: **Reading Assignment:** Acts 14:15, 17; Romans 1:20
- Scripture: **Reading Assignment:** 1 Peter 1:21

Humanistic and False (unreliable philosophies):

- Agnosticism - a denial that God can be known. This term was coined by Thomas Huxley in 1869.
- Atheism- The belief that denies God altogether. The Epicureans denied the existence of God, saying that man created God.
 - **Reading Assignment:** Psalms 14:1
- Deism- Acknowledges God as creator of universe but denies He sustains it.
 - **Reading Assignment:** Psalms 139:7-10
- Pantheism - The belief that the universe, in its ever-changing condition is but a manifestation of the one ever-changing universal substance, which is God. Thus, all is God. Everything is God, and God is everything.
- Polytheism - The doctrine of many gods. Produces a god for the sea, sky, sun, war, love, emotions, etc... (Paul alluded to this in his sermon on Mars' Hill).
- Trinitarianism - One God, eternally existent in three persons—namely, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost—coexistent, coequal, coeternal.

CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM

The belief in only one God is called monotheism. This word is derived from two Greek words;

- monos - meaning alone, single, one; and the
- os - meaning God.

The doctrine of monotheism is held by Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. However, there are those within the ranks of Christianity that have differing views as to the nature of the Godhead.

- One view, called trinitarianism asserts that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead, but yet one God.

- Another view is called binitarianism which believes in two persons in the Godhead—God the Father and God the Son.
- The third view insists that the Godhead cannot be divided into persons and that God is absolutely one. This is called monotheism.

The strict monotheists fall into two classes. Both classes believe in only one God. However, one group denies the full deity of Jesus Christ.

This group finds its beginning in the teaching of Paul of Samosata and Arius. In their teachings Jesus is relegated to the position of a created God, subordinate God, or junior God, yet further states that the fullness of the Godhead is manifested in Jesus Christ.

- Church historians have used the term dynamic monarchianism to describe this view.

Those who hold to the indivisible oneness of God and the full deity of Jesus Christ frequently use the term modalistic monarchianism to describe their belief.

In their efforts to discredit Oneness adherents, early 20th century opponents used the terms “Jesus Only” and “New Issue” in referring to this belief.

CONCLUSION

This study is designed to provide a global view of doctrine. It is also designed to give you the tools with understanding how to navigate through the Word of God and its intended meaning.

[1Pe 3:15 NIV] 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

**Assignment
WORKSHEET**

Student Name: _____
Print Full First Name Middle Initial Print Full Last Name

Church Name: _____ **Pastor:** _____

Date: _____

Take your time to review each verse before you provide your answers.

1. According to the lesson, what is the first verse used to describe monotheism?

2. According to the lesson, which concept does the Christian faith reject?

3. According to the lesson, what was the tenet of the Oneness of God?

4. According to the lesson, pure worship is dependent upon two things. What are they?

5. According to the lesson, what two witnesses prove God's identity?

6. According to the lesson, the doctrine of monotheism is held by whom?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

7. According to the lesson, the effect of ___ o ___ yth ___ sm has been detrimental from the ___ ___ ___ inning of time.
8. According to the lesson, religion was originally monotheistic, but became debased through _____ worship:
 - A. irrelevant
 - B. idolatrous
 - C. inventive
 - D. illuminous
9. According to the lesson, early church hymns first proclaimed that Jesus is God. Please answer the question: ☐ True ☐ False
10. According to the lesson, the corruptive influence of polytheistic concepts is ___ doctrinally. Please select the best answer below:
 - A. oblivious
 - B. obnoxious
 - C. obvious
 - D. objective
11. According to the lesson, ___ ___ ___ s ___ acknowledges God as creator of the universe but denies that He ___ it.
 - A. sustains
 - B. contains
 - C. refrains
 - D. maintains
12. This study is designed to provide you with a global view of doctrine, so that you will have the _____ to understand how to navigate through the Word of God and its intended _____.

 Congratulations on completing this lesson. While some lessons may seem harder than others, you must always study to show yourself approved unto God, and reveal to others, what God has given you.