

# Of the Unity of God.

by John Gill

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*The unity of God is a fundamental principle of Christian doctrine, established through the necessary existence of God, his independence and eternity, his infinity and incomprehensibility, and his omnipotence, goodness, and perfection.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:28

**Topics:** "Trinity", "Unity of God"

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## Description

John Gill emphasizes the essential doctrine of the unity of God, asserting that there is only one true God, a belief foundational to both reason and revelation. He argues against polytheism and various misconceptions about the nature of God, including Arianism and Sabellianism, while affirming the distinct persons of the Trinity--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--are all one God. Gill supports his claims with numerous scriptural references, highlighting that the unity of God is crucial for proper worship and understanding of faith. He concludes that this doctrine not only clarifies the object of worship but also promotes unity among believers.

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## Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 26

OF THE UNITY OF GOD.

Having treated of the attributes of God, I shall now proceed to prove that this God, who is possessed of all these great and glorious perfections, is but "one". This is a first principle, and not to be doubted of; it is a most certain truth, most surely to be believed, and with the greatest confidence to be asserted; as he is a fool that says there is no God, he is equally so, who says there are more than one; and, indeed, as Tertullian[1] observes, if God is not one, he is not at all.

This is the first and chief commandment which God has given, and requires an assent and obedience to; on which all religion, doctrine, and faith depend, (Mark 12:28-30) it is the voice both of reason and revelation; it is discernible by the light of nature; what teaches men there is a God, teaches them there is but one: and though when men neglected the true God, and his worship, and liked not to retain him in their knowledge, he gave them up to a reprobate mind, to judicial blindness, to believe the Father of lies, who

led them on by degrees into the grossest idolatry; yet the wiser and better sort of them, though they complied with the custom of countries in which they lived, and paid a lesser sort of worship to the rabble of inferior deities, in which they are not at all to be excused from idolatry; yet they held and owned one supreme Being, whom they often call the Father of the gods and men[2]; the chief God with the Assyrians, as Macrobius relates[3], was called Adad; which, he says, signifies "one"; and with the Phoenicians, Adodus, the King of the gods[4]; the same with dxa, "one".

That there is but one God, is an article in the Jewish Creed, and which still continues; and no wonder, since it stands in such a glaring light in the writings of the Old Testament, and is as clearly and as strongly asserted in the New; so that "we" Christians "know" assuredly, "that there is none God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). It is a truth agreed on by all, by Jews and Gentiles; by Jewish doctors[5], and heathen poets and philosophers[6]; by Old and New Testament saints; by the holy angels; and even by the devils themselves: it must be right and well to believe it.

The apostle James commends the faith of it; "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble" (James 2:19). But I go on, 1. First, To give the proof of this doctrine; which may be taken partly from express passages of scripture, both in the Old and New Testament (see Deut. 6:4; Ps. 86:10; Isa. 43:10, 44:6, 8, 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22, 46:9; Mark 12:29; John 17:3; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). The sense of these scriptures will be observed hereafter; and partly from the perfections of God, and his relations to his creatures.

The necessary existence of God is a proof of his unity. The existence of God must be either of necessity, or of will and choice; if of will and choice, then it must be either of the will and choice of another, or of his own; not of another, for then that other would be prior and superior to him, and so be God, and not he: not of his own will and choice, for then he must be before himself, and be and not be at the same instant; which is such an absurdity and contradiction as is not to be endured.

It remains, therefore, that he necessarily exists; and if so, there can be but one God; for no reason can be given why there should be, or can be, more than one necessarily existent Being. God is the first Being, the cause of all other beings; he is the first Cause, and last End of all things; the mind of man, from effects, rises to the knowledge of causes; and from one cause, to the cause of that; and so proceeds on until it arrives to the first Cause, which is without a cause, and is what is truly called God; and as therefore there is but one first Cause, there can be but one God; so, according to Pythagoras and Plato, unity is the principle of all things[7].

God, the first Cause, who is without a cause, and is the Cause of all, is independent; all owe their existence to him, and so depend upon him for the preservation, continuance, and comfort of their being; all live, and move, and have their being in him; but he, receiving his being from none, is independent of any; which can only be said of one; there is but one independent Being, and therefore but one God. God is an eternal Being, before all things, from everlasting to everlasting; and there can be but one.

Eternal, and so but one God; "before me", says he, "there was no God formed; neither shall there be after me", (Isa. 43:10) if then no other, then but one God. God is infinite and incomprehensible; as he is not bounded by time, so not by space; he is not contained or included anywhere, nor comprehended by any. To suppose two infinities, the one must either reach unto, comprehend, and include the other, or not; if it does not, then it is not infinite, and so not God; if it does reach unto, comprehend, and include the other, then that which is comprehended, and included by it, is finite, and so not God; therefore it is clear there

cannot be more infinite than one; and if but one infinite, then but one God.

Omnipotence is a perfection of God; he claims this title to himself, The Lord God almighty: now there cannot be more than one Almighty; omnipotence admits of no degrees; it cannot be said, there is one that is almighty, and another that is more almighty, and a third that is most almighty; there is but one Almighty, and so but one God, who can do all things whatsoever he pleases; nothing is too hard, too difficult, or impossible to him; nor can any turn back his hand, or stay and stop him from acting.

To suppose two almighties, either the one can lay a restraint upon the other, and hinder him from acting, or he cannot; if he cannot, then he is not almighty, the other is mightier than he; if he can, then he on whom the restraint is laid, and is hindered from acting, is not almighty, and so not God; and therefore there can be but one God. God is good, essentially, originally, and inderivatively; the source and fountain of all goodness; "There is none good but me", says Christ, "that is, God", (Matthew 19:17) and therefore but one God.

The heathens call their supreme God "Optimus", the best; and there call be none better than the best. He is the "summum bonum", the chief good; and that is but one, and therefore but one God. God is a perfect Being; "your heavenly Father", says Christ, "is perfect", (Matthew 5:48) he is perfect and entire, wanting nothing, completely perfect: now if there are more gods than one, there must be some essential difference by which they are distinguished from one another, and that must be either an excellency or an imperfection; if the latter, then he to whom it belongs is not God, because not perfect; if the former, he in whom it is, is distinguished from all others in whom it is not, and so is the one and only God.

The true God is "El-Shaddai", God all-sufficient, stands in need of nothing; for of him, and by him, and for him, are all things. All-sufficiency can only be said of One, of Him who is the first Cause and last End of all things; and which, as he is but one, so but one God. Once more, There is but one Creator; whom all receive their beings from, are supported by, and accountable to, (Mal. 2:10) but one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy, (James 4:12) one King and Governor of the world; one kingdom, which belongs to him; who is the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Were there more than one, the greatest confusion would be introduced in the world; if there were more than one that had the sovereign sway, different and contrary laws, edicts, and decrees, might be published, and subjects would not know whom they were to obey, and what their duty to be performed by them; or whose laws they should pay a regard unto. I proceed, 2. Secondly, To explain the sense in which this article of one God is to be understood. And, 2a. First, It is not to be understood in the Arian sense, that there is one supreme God, and two subordinate or inferior ones.

This is no other than what is the notion of the better and wiser sort of pagans, as before observed: and if revelation carries us no further than what the light of nature discovers, and that since the fall, and in its corrupt state, we gain nothing by it, with respect to the knowledge of God; nor are the expressions concerning the unity of the divine Being, which are in the Scriptures levelled so much against the notion of more supreme gods, which is a notion that could never prevail much among the heathens; and is so absurd and contradictory, that there is no danger of mens' giving into it; but against petty and inferior deities men might be tempted to embrace and worship.

Besides, if two subordinate and inferior deities may be admitted, consistent with one God, why not two hundred, or two thousand? no reason can be given why the one should not stand as much excluded as the other: and again, those deities are either creators or creatures; if creators, then they are the one

supreme God; for to create is peculiar to him; but if creatures, for there is no medium between the Creator and the creature, then they are not gods that made the heavens and the earth; and so come under the imprecation of the prophet, "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish, or may they perish from the earth, and from under these heavens", (Jer. 10:11) to which may be added, that such are not entitled to religious worship, which would be worshipping the creature besides and together with the Creator, and would be a breach of the first command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Rom. 1:25; Ex. 20:1, 2). 2b.

Nor is this article to be understood in the Sabellian sense, that God is but one person; for though there is but one God, there are three persons in the Godhead, which the Sabellians deny; who are so called from one Sabellius who lived in the middle of the third century; though this notion was breached before him by Noetus[8], whose followers were called Noetians and Patripassians, asserting, in consequence of their principles, that the Father became incarnate, suffered, and died: and before them Victorinus and Praxeas[9] were much of the same opinion, against whom Tertullian wrote, and who speaks[10] of one sort of the Cataphrygians who held that Jesus Christ was both Son and Father; and even it may be traced up as high as Simon Magus, who asserted that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were only different names of one and the same person, according to his different way of operation[11]: and as before his pretended conversion he gave out that he was some great one, (Acts 8:9) so he did afterwards, and said he was the Father in Samaria, the Son in Judea, and the Holy Ghost in the rest of the nations[12].

Our Socinians and modern Unitarians are much of the same sentiment with the Sabellians in this respect; and some who profess evangelical doctrines have embraced it, or are nibbling at it; fancying they have got new light, when they have only imbibed an old stale-error, an ancient work of darkness, which has been confuted over and over. If the Father, Son, and Spirit, were but one person, they could not be three testifiers, as they are said to be, (1 John 5:7) to testify is a personal action; and if the Father is one that bears record, the Son another, and the Holy Ghost a third, they must be three persons, and not One only; and when Christ says, "I and my Father are one", (John 10:30) he cannot mean one person, for this is to make him say what is the most absurd and contradictory; as that I and myself are one, or that I am one, and my Father who is another, are one person; but of this more hereafter. 2c.

Nor is this doctrine to be understood in a Tritheistic sense, that is, that there are three essences or beings numerically distinct, which maybe said to be one, because of the same nature; as free men may be said to be one, because of the same human nature; but this is to assert three Gods and not one; this the Trinitarians indeed are often charged with, and they as often deny the charge; for though they affirm the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet not that they are three Gods, but one God.

For, 2d. They assert, that there is but one divine essence, undivided, and common to Father, Son, and Spirit, and in this sense but one God; since there is but one essence, though there are different modes of subsisting in it which are called persons; and these possess the whole essence undivided; that is to say, not that the Father has one part, the Son another, and the Holy Spirit a third; but as the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells in the Father, so in the Son, who has all that the Father has, (John 15:16; Col. 2:9) and so in the Spirit, and therefore but one God.

This unity of them is not an unity of testimony only; for it is not said of them as of the three that bear record on earth, that they "agree in one", but that they "are one", (1 John 5:7, 8) but it is an unity of nature; they have one and the same infinite and undivided nature; and this unity is not an unity of parts, which makes one compositum, as the body and soul of man do; for God is a simple and uncompounded Spirit; nor an

unity of genus and species, under which may be many singulars of the same kind, but God is one in number and nature, and stands opposed to the polytheism of the heathens, who had gods many and lords many, (1 Cor. 8:4, 5) and to all nominal and figurative deities, as angels, civil magistrates, judges, &c. even to all who are not by nature God (Gal. 4:8).

Nor is this unity of God to be objected to and set aside by the many names of God, as El, Elohim, Jehovah, &c. since these are names of the one God, as one and the same man may have different names, and yet but one; nor by the "many attributes" of God, which do not differ from him, nor from one another, but are all one in God, and are himself; though distinctly considered by us, because our understandings are too weak to take them in as in the gross, but to consider them apart, as has been observed.

Nor by the "persons" in the Godhead being more than one; for though three persons, they differ not from the divine essence, nor from one another, but by their distinctive modes of subsisting, and are but one God. Nor are those passages of scripture which assert the unity of God to be appropriated to one person only, to the exclusion of the others; but to be considered as including each. The famous passage in Deuteronomy 6:4 which is introduced in a solemn manner, exciting attention, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord!" and which Christ refers the scribe to as the first and chief command, (Mark 12:28, 29) asserts that there is but one Jehovah; but not that this is peculiar to the Father, and as exclusive of the Son and Spirit; for Christ the Son of God is Jehovah, and is often so called (see Ex. 17:7; Num. 21:6 compared with 1 Cor. 10:9; Jer. 23:6; Zech. 12:10) and so the Holy Ghost, (Isa. 6:1, 5, 8, 9 compared with Acts 28:25, 26 and these) with the Father, are the one Lord or Jehovah; and are manifestly included in Elohem, a word of the plural number, and may be rendered our Gods, or rather our divine persons are one Lord; for Christ the Son is one of them, who is that God whose throne is for ever and ever; and the Spirit that God, or divine person, who anointed Christ as man, (Ps. 45:6, 7) and that the three divine persons who are the one Jehovah are here meant, is not only the sense of Christian[13] writers but even of the ancient Jews[14] and besides, the Son and Spirit are entitled to the same sincere and fervent love of men as the Father, and which is required to be given to the one Jehovah, even Father, Son, and Spirit.

The several passages in Isaiah before referred to, and which so strongly assert the unity of the Divine Being, cannot be understood to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit. In one of them, (Isa. 44:6) the only Lord God calls himself "the first and the last", a title which also Christ the Son of God claims as his, (Rev. 1:8) yea in the same passage the one God styles himself the Redeemer, a name very peculiar to the Son, who agreed to be the Redeemer; came in the fulness of time as such, and has obtained eternal redemption for men: and in another of those passages, (Isa. 45:21) the only Lord God is spoken of as a Saviour; and in (Isa. 45:22) Christ is represented as a Saviour inviting and encouraging persons to look to him for salvation, enforcing it with this reason, for I am God, and there is none else: now as the Father cannot be supposed to be excluded hereby, so neither should the Son and Spirit be thought to be excluded by similar expressions elsewhere; besides, the following verse (Isa. 45:23) is manifestly applied to Christ by the Apostle (Rom. 14:10, 11).

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ, (John 17:3) which affirm the Father to be the only true God, cannot be understood to the exclusion of himself; "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent": since Christ also is called the only Lord God, (Jude 1:4) and the true God and eternal life, (1 John 5:20) nor would he have joined himself so closely with the only true God, if he was not so; but he thought it no robbery to be equal with him, yea one with him; of the same nature, power, and glory; and besides, eternal life is made as much to depend on the knowledge of Christ as of

his Father; (see John 6:47, 53, 54) the reason of this mode of expression, distinguishing the one from the other, is because Christ is described by his office as sent of God.

In Romans 3:30 it is said, "It is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith"; that is, there is one God of Jews and Gentiles, which this is said to prove, (Rom. 3:29) but Christ cannot stand excluded from the one God that justifies, since he is Jehovah our righteousness, and the Sun of righteousness, (Jer. 23:6; Mal. 4:2) and it is not only his righteousness by which men are justified, Jews and Gentiles; but he himself justifies them by his knowledge, that is, by faith, (Isa. 53:11) nor the Holy Spirit, who brings near Christ's righteousness, and applies it; works faith to receive it, and pronounces men justified by it (1 Cor. 6:11).

The text in (1 Cor. 8:6) which expresses the faith of Christians, there is "but one God the Father, of whom are all things", stands opposed not to any other persons in the Godhead, but to the many lords and gods among the heathens, (1 Cor. 8:5) nor is the Father called the Father of Christ, or opposed to him, but the Father of all; that is, the Creator; see (Mal. 2:10) in which character, the Son and Spirit are included (Eccl. 12:1). Besides, if Christ could be thought to stand excluded from the one God, the Father, by the same rule of interpretation, God the Father must stand excluded from the one Lord, said of Christ in the same text; and these observations may be applied to (Eph. 4:5, 6) and will serve to clear and explain the words there to the same sense.

It is also said in (1 Tim. 2:5) that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus": now the reason why Christ is spoken of as distinct from the one God, though not different, is for the sake of the mention of him in his office as Mediator; but then if he was not the one God, with the other divine persons; or the true God, and the great God, he could not be a Mediator between God and man; he could not be a daysman between them, and lay his hands on both; he could not draw nigh to God, and entreat with him about peace and reconciliation; and much less make peace for men, and be a ransom for them; as in the following verse: but after all, though there are three persons in the Godhead, as will more clearly appear hereafter, and none of them stand excluded from Deity, yet there is but one God; this is an article that must be inviolably maintained.

The doctrine of the unity of the divine Being, is of great importance in religion; especially in the affair of worship. God, the one only God, is the object of it. This is the sense of the first and second Commands, which forbid owning any other God but one, and the worship of any creature whatever, angels or men, or any other creature, and the likeness of them; which to do is to worship the creature, besides, or along with the Creator. But this hinders not but that the Son and Spirit may have acts of worship performed to them, equally as to the Father; and for this reason, because they are, with him, the one God; hence baptism is administered equally, in the name of all Three; and prayer is jointly made unto them; both solemn acts of religious worship (see Matthew 28:19; Rev. 1:4,5).

And this doctrine of the unity of the divine Being, as it fixes and settles the object of worship, so being closely attended to, it guides the mind right in the consideration of it, while worshipping, without any confusion and division in it; for let the direction, or address, be to which person it may, as each may be distinctly addressed; be it to the Father, he is considered in the act of worship, as the one God, with the Son and Spirit; if the address is to the Son, he is considered as the one God, with the Father and the Spirit; or if the address is to the Spirit, he is considered as the one God, with the Father and Son.

And this doctrine also serves to fix and settle the object of our faith, hope, and love, without division and distraction of mind; which are not to be exercised on different objects, and to be divided between them; but are to centre in one object, the one only true God, Father, Son, and Spirit; whom alone we are to make our confidence, our hope, and the centre of our affections (Jer. 17:7; Ps. 73:25). As well as this doctrine carries a strong and powerful argument to promote unity, harmony, and concord among the saints; for which it is used in Ephesians 4:3-6. ENDNOTE:

[1] Adv. Marcion. l. 1. c. 3.

[2] Homer. Iliad. 1. Hesiod. l. 1. Opera et Dies, v. 59.

[3] Saturnal. l. 1. c. 24.

[4] Sanchoniatho apud Euseb. praepar. Evangel. l. 1. p. 38.

[5] Maimon. Yesode Hattorah, c. 1. s. 4. Joseph Albo in Sepher Ikkarim, l. 2. c. 6, 7.

[6] Vide Mornaeum de Ver. Christ. Relig. c. 3.

[7] Laert. l. 1. in Vita Pythagorae.

[8] Vid. Augustin. de Haeres. c. 36.

[9] Tertullian. de Praescript. Haeret. c. 53. & Adv. Praxeam, c. 1, 2.

[10] De Praescript. c. 52.

[11] Vid. Danaeum in August. de Haeres. c. 1.

[12] Irenaeus Adv. Haeres. c. 23.

[13] Vid. Fulgentii Respons. contr. Arian. Obj. 4. 10.

[14] See my Doctrine of the Trinity, p. 19, 20.

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