

Apostolic Distinctives
Lesson 2
There is Just One!

John 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

I. Review

1. Last week we began our mini-series, "Apostolic Distinctives," in which we will cover four areas in which the Apostolic church is distinct. And not only distinct from the world, but even distinct from other religious groups.
 - a. Lesson 1: How to get ready for heaven. We discussed Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus about how to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said you must be born of the water and Spirit to enter. Then in Acts 2, at the birth of the church, that born-again experience is further explained and now called the Apostles' Doctrine, affirming it as distinctly apostolic. In that chapter, the born of water and Spirit experience is explained as being baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. You will find the biblical emphasis on Jesus' name baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues is not emphasized in many churches so it makes us distinct.
 - b. Lesson 2: Tonight we will address a second Apostolic Distinctive, There is Just One! Paul said Jesus is the "blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of Lords." (1 Tim 6:15) Jesus is the one and only King, and in fact Jesus said, "when you have seen me, you have seen the Father." (John 14:9) That is our focus tonight.
 - c. Lesson 3: How to Worship Him. Having such a wonderful experience in the Holy Ghost, and knowing there is but one God who gave Himself for us, is cause to be an exuberant worshiper. We will discuss worship not as a thing, but as an action that involves passionate participation. This makes the apostolic church distinct among many who don't emphasize passionate worship.
 - d. Lesson 4: How to live Godly for Him. Since the word, "church," literally means "called-out ones," we will describe what it means to be called out from the world. As born-again worshipers of just one God, we are called to live holy lives unto Him. We are called to "come out from among them and be separate, touch not the unclean thing, cleanse ourselves from filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." There are godly lifestyle choices that cover everything from how to treat our neighbor and our brother, to appropriate restrictions on conduct with the opposite sex, to how to dress modestly and gender appropriately, to avoiding things that defile our temple (body). And since the Bible's emphasis on personal holiness runs against modern culture and even against many churches that follow the culture, holiness has become another apostolic distinctive.

II. Brief History of the development of the trinity

1. The New Testament church was born among God's Old Testament people, the Jews, who held a strict monotheism interpretation of God, that, although they knew that

others believed in multiple gods, they understood that there was only one true God, Yahweh. And when Jesus came, the early believers saw Jesus as God in flesh, the image of the invisible God. Not a second deity, or even a second personality or second person among three persons.

2. The development of the teaching of God as three persons did not originate from scripture, but it was an idea that was formally defined in later centuries when the Roman Emperor Constantine **[slide]** (reigned 306-337) formally “converted” to Christianity and used religion as a tool to unite divisions in the Roman Empire. Using religion as a method of unifying a people has been used by emperors and politicians throughout the ages. Constantine worked toward creating a universalized form of Christianity, and the church that came out of that union became known as, Catholic, which means, universal.
3. Under the emperor’s guidance, with state-approved clergy, the Holy Roman Catholic Church was birthed, in an early merger of church and state.
4. Many saw this merger as a welcomed break from the deadly persecutions of the former Roman emperors. However, instantly, many adherents to the original ideas about the church from scripture, were now classed as heretics according to the new definitions of the church.
5. The church began to construct unifying teachings that helped to merge the empire’s pagan traditions with a more liberal and progressive form of Christianity that arose in that union of church and state.
6. If you study the early ecumenical councils, beginning with the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325 AD, **[slide: council]** you will find that when the idea of the trinity was being formulated and discussed, those who proposed it recognized that the majority of the believers of that day did not accept it.¹ **[slide-Nicene Creed]**
7. Yet from that council, and other councils that followed, official creeds were developed that standardized a tradition that baptism was now to be done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And more significantly, they imposed the view that God existed in three distinct persons.
8. If you do a careful study of the earliest biblical manuscripts, you will find a stronger Christology than in manuscripts produced in later centuries.
9. **[slide-progression]** For instance, the earliest manuscript of John 1:18 refers to Jesus as “the only begotten God,” where later manuscripts refer to “the only begotten son.”
10. Another example is found in 1 John 5:7-8. The earliest manuscripts of read:
1 John 5:7-8 7 For there are three that testify, 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three are in agreement. NET
11. Later manuscripts add:
*1 John 5:7-8
7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.
8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. KJV*

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<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity#:~:text=The%20first%20defense%20of%20the,found%20issue%20with%20his%20doctrine.>

12. Another notable example is the Lord's prayer. We know the Lord's prayer as ending with, "thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen." There is a translation of Matthew made during the time the trinity was being formulated by the councils, by Chrysostom (347-407) the Archbishop of Constantinople, written during this period, that ends the prayer with "yours is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen." ²
13. So a study of church history beginning in the 3rd century will show that the Bible's focus on Just One God came open for review and redefining by progressive theologians and cunning politicians. We have seen that same process at work over the past decade in our culture as age-old ideas about marriage and family have been redefined.
14. **[slide-just one] The Just One God essential teaching of the Old Testament that was affirmed by the New Testament church**, was then redefined by the Roman church in the 4th century, and many Christian churches have followed their tradition.
15. That is why our choice to continue to emphasize the biblical teaching that there is Just One makes us distinct even among many Christian churches.

III. Just One God in History

1. So why is this subject of just one God important?
2. Here is a good illustration of that. The prophet Isaiah described a common practice he observed in the 700s BC.
3. He said a man cut down a tree, used part of it to make a fire to warm himself, bake his bread and roast his kill. Then he used the rest of that tree to make himself a god:
Isa 44:17 And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.
4. The danger of having multiple gods is that if someone places faith for their soul's salvation in a god that is not a god at all, their soul will be lost for eternity because of their incorrectly placed hope.
5. The Old Testament prophets and writers boldly proclaimed that there was only one true God, not many, and then when Jesus came along, He just as boldly proclaimed that He was that one true God:
John 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.
6. The original text actually says "if ye believe not that I Am, ye shall die in your sins." And the Jews knew that "I Am" was the divine name of God as revealed in Exodus 3:14.
7. This was controversial to Jesus' listeners, because that statement was either blasphemy or divine revelation.
8. Well it was and is divine revelation. Jesus was the one God of eternity who now stood before them in flesh.
9. As it turns out, what you believe about God is very important, lest we die in our sins.

IV. He is one

² Comfort, Philip W., *Essential Guide to Bible Versions*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, Illinois, 2000, p. 241.

- A. Anchored in the commandments
1. Look at this verse:
Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:
 2. Not only does this important commandment state that there is but one God, but also that God is one. Not a plurality of beings or a trinity of persons, but one.
 3. This belief distinguished Old Testament Jews from other peoples of the ancient world who believed in many gods. It was a Jewish distinctive that interestingly has now become an apostolic distinctive.
 4. The very first commandment forbid acknowledging or worshiping other gods:
Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
 5. They may be some confusion about God's titles, for in scripture, **[slide] God is identified with various names and titles, such as Jehovah or Yahweh, Lord, Father, King, The Almighty, Word, Holy Ghost, Jesus, The Holy One, yet all refer to the same one God.**
- B. The greatest commandment
6. It is interesting that the first commandment identifies just one God, but Jesus went so far as to identify that commandment as the greatest commandment.
Mark 12:28-30
28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?
29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:
30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.
 7. The parallel passage in Matthew calls it the first and greatest commandment:
Matt 22:38 This is the first and greatest commandment. NET
 8. What Jesus called the greatest commandment was Deuteronomy 6:4 that we just read, noting that all-important statement about God's nature—God is one.
 9. Jesus identified this truth, that God is one, as the most important commandment of scripture.
- C. None beside Him
1. We read in Isaiah 6 that the prophet Isaiah was given a vision of God's throne room. That is important because Isaiah spoke several times of God as one:
Isaiah 43:10-11
10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.
11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.
 2. And again:
Isa 45:21 Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.
 3. This is what is referred to as strict monotheism. No other gods exist, none others have been created, and none others are beside Him.

D. Identity of Jesus as the one God

1. To understand how there is just one, it is helpful to understand that God, the one referred to as the heavenly Father, is an invisible spirit with no permanent physical form that could be seen by humans:

John 6:46 Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God [referring to Himself], he hath seen the Father.

2. But later, when Philip asked Jesus, "Show us the Father," Jesus' response was:
*John 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not **known me**, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?*
3. Jesus meant that God has no other permanent visible form other than Himself.
4. Paul confirmed that identifying Jesus as God over all:
*Rom 9:5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of **Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.** NIV*
5. Jesus made it plain that He was God from above:
John 8:23-24
*23 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; **I am from above**: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.*
*24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for **if ye believe not that I am [he], ye shall die in your sins.***
6. Jesus was and is the one God from heaven. Even many trinitarian scholars teach no one will ever see the Father except in the face of Jesus, and that there is only one throne in heaven and Jesus will be the only one seen on that throne.

E. Only One Creator and Savior

1. It boils down to this: there is but one God who created us and who also came to save us.
Isaiah 44:6, 24

6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

24 Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;

2. God created all by Himself, so compare that verse to this one. Verse 13 identifies Jesus as the subject of this verse:
Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:
3. And Revelation 4:11 reveals that Jesus is worshipped in heaven as the one on the throne, the Creator!
4. And He is the only savior:
*Isaiah 43:11 I, [even] I, [am] the LORD; and **beside me [there is] no saviour.***
5. That was spoken by God, yet that same God sent an angel to make this proclamation to a group of shepherds near Bethlehem:
Luke 2:10-11
10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great

joy, which shall be to all people.

*11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is **Christ** the Lord.*

6. This is not a contradiction, but a statement that the God of eternity chose to be born in a physical form as a baby, as a Savior with human flesh.
7. We find the scripture saying interchangeably that God is Savior and Jesus is Savior only two verses apart:
Titus 3:4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Titus 3:6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;
8. To worship and honor Jesus as Savior does not identify Him as a second person in addition to God, but the one God becoming human and fulfilling His role as Savior.

V. Conclusion

1. In closing this lesson, “There is Just One,” let us consider two more points, one from Isaiah and one from Jesus.
2. Across the world, voices proclaim the importance of inclusivity, pluralism, acceptance, and tolerance.
3. We are encouraged to accept the beliefs of others as worthy of respect and often that they are all equally valid.
4. But there is a problem with that. Almost all religions have at the core of their teaching that their belief system is true, and because they are in truth, people who believe otherwise are not in truth.
5. All statements cannot be truth, even if they are sincerely believed.
6. A pilot whose instruments have failed may sincerely believe he is flying level, but if the nose is in reality pointing down, he will face the consequences of that truth, regardless of what he believes.
7. There is no amount of tolerance for his belief that will keep the plane from crashing if the nose of the plane is in reality headed to the ground.
8. The gods of the Greeks, Romans, Hindus, Buddhists, or Muslims, are all proclaimed as gods, what about when the God of the Bible says:
*Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and **there is none else**; I am God, and **there is none like me**,*
9. Not only is there no another god out there, there is not even another god-like being out there.
10. There is one Creator and it is Jesus. There is one Savior, and it is Jesus. There is one God over all, and it is Jesus.
11. Finally, read again Jesus’ opinion on tolerance for other beliefs about God:
John 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.
12. We can respect other people as God’s creation, but we also hold to the belief that Jesus is who He said He is, the only God, Creator, and Savior.
13. Believing this truth sets us apart from others, but it is an important distinction—an apostolic distinctive.