



Jews – fiercely monotheistic!

- ❖ Creational monotheists
 - There is one God, and one God only, who made all that there is!
 - No other gods at all!
 - God and creation are not the same (they were not pantheists!)
 - God is active, caring, & involved (they were not Deists!)
- ❖ Providential monotheists – God is caring & active
 - God is not an absentee landlord
 - God’s purposes will not be thwarted
- ❖ Covenantal monotheists
 - God is the great covenant-maker and covenant-keeper
- ❖ BUT – none of this had anything to do with their understanding of God’s inner existence!

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The Problem of Jesus

- ❖ Jesus’ death on the cross posed no “problem of understanding” for the disciples
 - Was Jesus of Nazareth just another crucified would-be Messiah?
- ❖ But . . . Jesus’ resurrection changed everything! What did it mean?
 - The disciples/apostles began to look back at what Jesus said and did, trying to make some sense of it, in light of the resurrection.
 - Yes . . . Jesus must be the Messiah, but that was not the same thing as claiming Jesus was God!
- ❖ Could Jesus be God? Would that explain these most extraordinary happenings?

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The Mystery of the Holy Spirit

- ❖ Though the Holy Spirit is present and active in the Old Testament, Jesus promises that God will send, after Jesus leaves, a “comforter” and “advocate”
 - See John 14:18-26 for example
- ❖ On Pentecost, we celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit, who goes on to direct the activities of the Apostles as recorded in the book of Acts.
- ❖ The Spirit of God is ALWAYS referred to using personal pronouns!!

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What does scripture say?

- ❖ Is the Father, God? Is the Son, God? Is the Spirit, God?
 - > Is each Person addressed by distinguishable divine names?
 - > Is each Person assumed to have divine attributes?
 - > Does each Person engage in actions that only God can accomplish?
 - > Is each person thought to be worthy of divine worship?
- ❖ The early church concluded that the answers to all these questions are *Yes!*



Seeing this at work in Scripture (a few examples)

- ❖ The Father as God
 - > Jesus called God, "Father" – Matt 5:45; Mark 14:36
 - > "Holy Father" (John 17:11) "Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt 11:23)
- ❖ Jesus as God
 - > John's prologue – John 1:1-18; Jesus is named the word of God
 - > Jesus forgives sins! Mark 2:7
- ❖ The Spirit as God
 - > "the Spirit of God," "the Holy Spirit," "the Spirit of Christ"
 - > The Spirit gives new life to believers (Titus 3:5)
- ❖ The baptismal formula – Matthew 28:19



A New Understanding of God



- One God in three persons
- God has always known himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
- God is inherently relational!! God is a community of three!!



Three key distortions

- ❖ Collapse the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into one
 - > modalism is an example -- where God appeared first as the Father, then as the Son, then as the Spirit
- ❖ Trying to "rank" the Father, the Son, and the Spirit – particularly, making the Son less than the Father
 - > Differing roles – Father sends the Son; but not a ranking
 - > Was there a time when the Son was not? Is the Son of the same substance as the Father?
 - Arius and the Council of Nicea
- ❖ Focusing too much on one person of the Trinity



Three Key Affirmations (from Migliore)

- ❖ The eternal life of God is personal life in relationship
 - > God IS love (1 John 4:16b) – this makes sense only because of God's inherent relationality
 - > God's identity is personal relationship
- ❖ God exists in community
 - > Yes . . . God has a social life! -- the three persons of God "indwell" each other
 - > God creates a people to live in relationship with him
- ❖ The life of God is essentially self-giving love
 - > The compassion of God – stronger than sin and death!

What does this say about us – we who are made in God's image?
