

Expanding Your View of God

Mark 12:35-40

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I enjoy watching videos or interviews that lead to a rather opinionated person being shut down by an obviously smarter person. Many Christian defenders of the faith have been in this situation. They are at a college to talk about the reasonableness of the Christian faith and an atheist or opponent of Christianity gets up in the question-and-answer time to show (they believe) how “foolish” Christianity is. Generally, this comes across with a smug “gotcha” tone. The speaker then explains what the questioner thought was unexplainable, defends what the speaker thought was undefendable, and the person asking the question (or making the charge) slinks back to their seat looking foolish rather than smart.

That is what we are going to see today. Jesus has been on the hot seat. The religious leaders had been peppering Him with questions with the purpose of tripping Him up. Jesus answered them in a way that made those who asked the questions seem a little silly for their smugness. They finally gave up their attempts to ridicule Him.

Jesus made many bold claims.

- “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30)
- ‘You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you . . .’ in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5)
- Even the title “Son of Man” is likely drawn from Daniel 7:13-14 . . . a clear reference to the Lord coming down in power and glory.
- After being accused of sin by healing a man on the Sabbath - Jesus answered “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”.... ‘ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.’(John 5:17-18)
- Matthew 11:27 “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Jesus is going to show the teachers of the Law that these claims were not inconsistent with the Word of God. He is going to challenge them to expand their view of God.

³⁵ Later, as Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple, he asked, “Why do the teachers of religious law claim that the Messiah is the son of David? ³⁶ For David himself, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said,

‘The LORD said to my Lord,
Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.’

³⁷ Since David himself called the Messiah 'my Lord,' how can the Messiah be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with great delight.

I think R.C. Sproul explains this in a fairly concise manner in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark

in Psalm 110, David writes of a conversation in which God invites David's Lord to sit in the seat of highest authority. That much is clear. Still, we have not answered Jesus' question: "Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?" (v. 37a). In other words, how can David describe one of his descendants as greater than himself? In Jewish categories, the son was always subordinate to his father. The son was never greater than the father. By that reasoning, as marvelous as the Messiah would be, if He was to be David's Son, He could not be greater than David. Yet David himself calls his Son "my Lord," indicating that Jesus is not simply the Son of David, He is David's Sovereign.

Even the crowds loved what Jesus was saying. The leaders were saying, "It is impossible for Jesus to be God in human form" . . . even though He did God-like things like heal the sick, make the lame walk, free the demon-possessed, and give sight to the blind and even raise people from the dead. Besides, the crowd saw in Jesus a spiritual insight like they had never witnessed in anyone else in their life! Now Jesus, with one Scripture reference, made their arguments against him look silly.

David must have realized that his descendant was going to be someone far greater than just His descendant. He was going to somehow be the very Son of God. We have a similar passage in the Gospel of John 8:56-58

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Here, it is Jesus claiming to know Abraham. The Jewish leaders did not miss what He was saying. They ridiculed Him saying, in essence, "You couldn't have seen Abraham, you are not even 50 years old." Abraham had lived thousands of years earlier. Jesus responded: "Before Abraham was, I am."

This statement is incendiary, first, because Jesus is claiming He was alive back when Abraham was walking the earth. Second, Jesus did not say, "Before Abraham was, I was too." He said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." That phrase, "I Am" amounts to Jesus taking the name of God for Himself. When Moses asked God for His name God said, "I AM, tell them I AM has sent you." It was a revered term. So revered that no one ever spoke that name. Now Jesus is claiming it for Himself!

If you think I am thin ground here? Notice how the leaders responded: "They picked up stones to throw at Him." They understood exactly what Jesus was saying! He was claiming to be God!

The Shema, which Jews quote everyday you may remember states “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And as for you, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Jesus, by his statement is changing how people viewed God. How can you have One God and still claim Jesus is God? This is where the Doctrine of the Trinity Comes in.” Fasten your seat belts!

The Trinity

The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible. It is a theological term that describes the teaching of the Bible: God is one but exists in three persons. Those three persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Muslims consider Christians to be saying there are actually three Gods. That is not what Christians teach.

As we understand the doctrine of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all fully God. These three persons are in perfect unity with each other, and therefore they are seamlessly One.

Theologian Millard Erickson writes,

The doctrine of the Trinity must be divinely revealed, not humanly constructed. It is so absurd from a human standpoint that no one would have invented it. We do not hold the doctrine of the Trinity because it is self-evident or logically cogent. We hold it because God has revealed that this is what He is like.¹

No one seems to doubt that the Father is God. We also believe Jesus was God in human form. As we saw He claimed to be God. He also claimed to be God by the things He did:

- He spoke of angels as “His” angels – (Matthew 13:41)
- He claimed to forgive sins (Mark 2:8-10)
- He considered the elect of God as His children. (Mark 13:20)
- He also claimed the power to Judge the World (Matthew 25:31)
- And to reign over the world (Matthew 24:30 and Mark 14:62)

Passages like Hebrews 1 shows the early church believes Jesus was God,

“And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.”

¹ Millard Erickson, Christian Theology.

It is much the same with the Holy Spirit. God and the Holy Spirit are used interchangeably. Also in places like in baptisms we read about the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In 1 Peter 1:2 we read this:

God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Our point is the Trinity is proclaimed by the Bible. But it is admittedly still hard to grasp. There are a few things we need to keep in mind.

First, God is different from us. He is far above us. He has a perfect mind, and we have a limited mind. In theological terms we talk of God's transcendence. We actually NEED God to be different from us, otherwise we could not be saved by Him.

But, doesn't the Bible say that we are made in His image? The Mormon Church from this verse concludes that God has a body like we do. They teach Jesus started as a man and worked Himself up the Deity ladder to be appointed God (this allows them to also say that we can all become gods if we follow the Mormon teachings).

However, the Bible says 'God is Spirit.' Jesus said this to the woman at the well in John 4. When the Bible says we were created in His image that means we are able to think and reason in a way similar to what God does. We do not reason the SAME as He does, we have traits that are like His traits. We are not in the same form as He is . . . we are created uniquely by Him and for Him.

We always need to be careful when we are trying to explain the nature of God. Words cannot convey what is incomprehensible to us. In other words, God is so big that our words cannot adequately describe Him. That certainly is true when we talk about the Trinity.

The Second thing to keep in mind is: any attempt to make the Trinity comprehensible is bound to fall short. People like to use analogies like: God is like water: it can exist as a solid (ice), liquid (water), or as steam. But . . . water cannot be all three of those things at the same time.

It helps me to think that God's oneness is similar to the oneness between a husband and a wife. There are two people who function as one unit. However, the unity between a husband and wife is imperfect. We have our disagreements and struggles at times to maintain that oneness. That is never the case with the Lord! The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all function in perfect unity with each other. They always have and always will.

Sometimes as kids we learn that we can play one parent against the other. When we want something, we know that one parent is more likely to say, "OK" than the other parent. We cannot play one member of the Trinity against the other. The unity that is between them is seamless while each of the members of the Trinity is distinct.

Third, it is important to know that the function of one member of the Trinity may be subordinate to the other(s) at times but that does not mean they are inferior to the other members. In other words, while Jesus was on earth, He was submissive to the plan of redemption. Philippians tells us “

Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

During His earthly life Jesus said He spoke only what His father told Him to speak and do. Jesus prayed to the Father. The Son is not inferior to the Father, because they are One. However, in this role, the Son submitted to the Father. Is your head spinning yet?

Why is this Important?

Let me concede that these are deep truths. Let us also concede they will never make perfect sense to us because we have no frame of reference to parallel the Trinity. I hope that you, like me, are OK with serving a God who is more complex than my mind can describe or grasp.

There are some practical things we should take away from this theological mind-stretcher.

First, Our Lord Jesus is much bigger than we generally think of Him. We like “good-buddy Jesus.” We like the fact that he experienced life as we know it. He identifies with us. It is an amazing truth.

“Pastor Dan Kimball spent years interviewing people regarding their perceptions of Jesus Christ. In his book entitled *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, he chronicles the positive but ill-informed perception of Jesus in modern culture: “Most people . . . understand Jesus as a peacemaker who loved others and died for what he believed in. They think of him as a rebel who fought for the poor and the oppressed and stood against religious hypocrites.” (Kimball, TLJNC, 255) Kimball discovered that though people claimed to know Jesus, they did not know Him at all.

C.S. Lewis wrote,

He (Jesus) said, “If you can look at me and talk to me and walk away saying, ‘Okay, okay,’ ‘He is a good teacher. I can learn from him. He is inspirational,’ I am *not* inspirational. I am devastating. If you just use me to get over the humps in your life, if you use me as an example, if you use me as somebody to refer to when you’re in trouble, you have put me in a little box.

I am breaking out. I am not a mere mortal. I am the judge of the earth. I am the eternal high priest. I am the way to God. You have to eat my flesh and drink my blood if you're going to have life." "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me." That's outrageous. That's what he is doing.. He is saying, "I'm breaking out of the box. You're not hearing me unless you take evasive action. Choose this day who you will serve."

See, he says, "Who is David's son? This is David's Lord. How can you think the Messiah is a mere mortal? I am he. I am not a mere mortal. I am not a mere political leader. I am not the Messiah you *want*. I'm the Messiah you *need*. I'm the Messiah you *have*. Therefore, change. Jump up. Be afraid. Hate me, or love me and serve me utterly and build your entire life around me. I will not allow you to do anything in the middle." He was outrageous. He was in the face.²

The truth is, it is not just our view of Jesus that is too small, we would all benefit from having a God that is bigger than our minds can embrace. Thinking about the Almighty God should cause us to be filled with awe and gasp at his greatness.

Second, we see that God is deeply invested in our relationship with Him. Our awesome God has gone to great lengths to rescue us from ourselves. The God who put the stars and galaxies in place has come near. We sometimes complain that God seems far away. That is either because we are hiding from Him because of our sin, or we are following our feelings instead of trusting God's Promise for all who put their trust in Him.

Jesus said, "I did not come into the world to condemn it, but to save it." The whole reason Jesus walked this earth was because the 3 in 1 God cared about the humans He created. That means He also cares about you!

Finally, we should hear the words of Jesus as if they were coming from Mount Sinai. We take seriously (as we should) the Ten Commandments which were given to Moses by God. Jesus is the same God who spoke to Moses. The same God who formed the world with just a word.

His words are not little slogans to remember or put on a magnet on your refrigerator. These are the very words of the Almighty. When Jesus tells us something It is the Triune God that is speaking through Him. We should hear these and take note. We should confess where we have failed and ask for the death of Jesus to cleanse us from our sin. We should follow where He leads us and behave as He instructs us . . . even if it is completely opposite of the world around us.

Yes, the Trinity is one of the most difficult doctrines in the Christian faith. But it is also one of the most beautiful. If we can grasp it . . . even just a little . . . we will be joyfully overwhelmed with the greatness of God. And this in turn will lead us to a security that will not be shaken.

² C.S. Lewis as quoted by Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).