

Our Christian Faith



Holy

Yahweh

Hell

Law

Preservation

GOD

When we have the opportunity to engage our neighbors in spiritual conversations, it is important that those involved carefully define their terms so that a truly fruitful discussion can take place. Otherwise, we easily end up talking past each other and both sides end up walking away from the conversation with a totally different understanding of what transpired. One such term that must be settled early on is God's identity. I say "early on" instead of "first" because asking a friend, "Who do you think God is?" is likely a fast track to a very abstract (and argumentative) debate. A much more empathetic and natural starting point is the problem of our sin and the havoc and pain it causes in our lives, which then leads to God's solution for these maladies in Jesus Christ, our perfect Substitute and living Savior. The cross and empty tomb of Christ provide a ready segway to identifying the gracious God, who loves us so deeply and completely that he would give up his own Son for us all. Jesus is the only way into God's presence.¹

The Christian faith asserts that the one true God is a person and personal—that is, God is his own independent being, with self-identity, self-consciousness and will²—and he desires to be in a personal relationship with each person by faith.³ This one divine essence is an eternal, unchanging, perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present (immaterial) spirit. Yet within that unity there are three distinct co-equal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴ The word that our theologians use to describe this mystery is that God is Triune—three in one and one in three.

Now some might ask, "Why get into these 'weeds' about God's identity so soon?" The answer is: if you don't know or have the one true God, you have nothing. You have a powerless illusion, who not only cannot help you, but is actually leading you away from the truth and towards eternal damnation.⁵

When it comes to defining God, nearly 30% of Americans classify themselves as "nones," those without any particular religious affiliation.⁶ Unlike atheists, who deny the very existence of God, nones are spiritual but do not adhere to any particular faith or denomination. Of necessity, such individuals must take a "Mr. Potato Head approach to God," making God into whoever or whatever they want him to be. This practice flat out denies God's autonomy and personhood and arrogantly assumes that we creatures have the right to remake and refashion our Creator according to our own designs, thereby making ourselves superior to him. Yet, we would never dare treat another human being this way saying, "You sit over there while I tell you who *I* say you are!" Such behavior would be an insult and totally detached from reality. A self-created god is no god at all.

In a similar vein other religiously unaffiliated individuals reduce God to a distant creator or an impersonal power or life force. Sadly, such a god cannot providing moral clarity, guidance, or purpose and is incapable of real relationship because you can't have a relationship with a force any more than you can have one with electricity

¹ John 14:6.

² Isaiah 46:9-10.

³ 1 John 1:3.

⁴ Cf. Matthew 28:19.

⁵ Jeremiah 10:5, 14-15.

⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>

or sunlight. For a living relationship to happen you need a person, and we have the God who personally loves and personally saves. Furthermore, it is the height of inconsistency that people would claim personhood for themselves yet deny that same dignity and self-awareness to the God from whom all things come.⁷ The other convenient alternative, of course, is that people declare themselves to be god or part of god, which is self-idolatry in the highest and grossest degree.

Should you in conversation discover that your friend is Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, etc. the most constructive way to talk about God is by going to the heart of sin and grace. Be transparent about your own personal sin and failures and patiently allow your friend to explain how their religion would deal with your guilt and imperfection. You will invariably find out that it is ultimately up to each individual to be “good enough” for God on their own. When they concede that point, you and I have the opportunity to ask two key questions: 1.) “How can I know if I’ve done enough?” and 2.) “If I’m doing good to earn heaven, aren't I doing it for myself and my own benefit? That would be pure selfishness and evil!” None of these false religions have a real solution for sin because none of them have a real personal Savior God, who offered up his Son to pay the full punishment for the whole world and rose to defeat death forever. How blessed we are to know this gracious God and be known by him! Next time we will consider the means by which the one true God has made himself known: the Holy Scriptures, the Bible.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1.) What kind of confusion can result if two people are talking about “God” but don’t have the same understanding of who he is?
- 2.) In what ways is the God who has revealed himself in Scripture unlike any other—consider his person, his grace, and our redemption)?



PRAYER:

Almighty Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—I confess that you are the one and only Lord. There is none like you—perfect in power and mighty in glory, yet full of grace and personal love for each and every sinner. Thank you for finding me and bringing me into a right relationship with you, through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 8:6.