

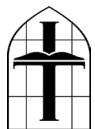
We All Believe in One True God

Tobias Clausnitzer (1619–1684); tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878)

We all believe in One true God,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Present Helper in all need,
Praised by all the heavenly host,
By whose mighty power alone
All is made, and wrought, and done.

And we believe in Jesus Christ,
Son of God, and Mary's Son,
Who descended from His throne,
And for us salvation won;
By whose cross and death are we
Rescued from all misery.

And we confess the Holy Ghost.
Who from both fore'er proceeds;
Who upholds and comforts us
In the midst of fears and needs.
Blest and holy Trinity,
Praise forever be to Thee!



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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Center of Biblical Religion

Kevin T. Bauder

Biblical religion—the biblical approach to knowing and worshipping God—unfolds in stages. Before the fall, people had direct access to God. After the expulsion from Eden, an element of sacrifice became necessary. We know that God called true saints before the flood. These included people like Abel and Enoch. We know that they had the protoevangelion and some form of ongoing revelation. How else would they know to sacrifice? We do not know how much God revealed, nor do we know the details of their approach to God. Later advances occur with Noah, then Abraham, and then Moses. Most of the Old Testament shows Israel's worship under the Sinai Covenant.

God's full revelation arrived with Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1). Christ and His apostles communicated the form of approach that God will require His people to use until the arrival of the eschaton. The New Testament revelation does not cancel out God's previous teaching. The forms change, but the central content of worship remains the same. God's disclosure of His will shows development rather than mere displacement.

That central content is summarized in the Shema and the Greatest Commandment (Deut 6:4–5). The teaching of these verses is fundamental to all biblical religion of every period. It is assumed in all worship before the Sinai Covenant. It is made explicit in the Law, and it continues to dominate and regulate the way that humana must approach God.

The Shema is found in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." The Shema teaches that there is one and only one true and living God. It also identifies this true and living God specifically as Yahweh or Jehovah. No other supposed god is a god at all.

Since Yahweh is the only true and living God, then only Yahweh is worthy of worship. To worship any other supposed god is to worship nothing, emptiness, vanity. All other gods are imposters. Yahweh refuses to share worship with imposter gods. He is a jealous God. Those who worship Yahweh must worship only Him.

To reject Yahweh is to reject everything worth worshipping. If Yahweh alone is God, then He alone can bear the weight of the human soul. We are made to worship Him, and He alone can satisfy the deepest yearnings of our soul. When we turn to any imposter god, we are turning to something that will leave us broken, forlorn, and empty. Just as sand, even if nicely sculpted, cannot take the place of bread, idols cannot take the place of God.

Jehovah is a jealous God, but so are all gods. If we turn to any idol, that god will demand our full obedience. Any effort to worship multiple gods will doom us to frustration.

Consider the man who tries to center his life on the acquisition of money while simultaneously pursuing sensual pleasure. Gaining and retaining wealth requires labor, discipline, and thrift, as the book of Proverbs makes clear. On the other hand, the pursuit of pleasure requires expenditure. “For by means of a whorish woman *a man is brought* to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life” (Prov 6:26). The man who pursues both financial profit and sensual pleasure dooms himself to perpetual frustration. His gods work against each other. Ultimately, he must side with one or the other.

If we do choose some imposter god, it will only betray us. Baal leaves his priests shrieking while Elijah mocks them. The man who worships his career is ultimately forced to retire. The woman who worships her husband eventually experiences widowhood. The academic who worships intellect becomes sooner or later a dotard. Every imposter god will double-cross us.

Only Jehovah deserves our trust. Only He merits our worship. Only He stands worthy of our absolute loyalty and unqualified trust.

To worship a god is to say that serving it is the goal of our existence. Only Yahweh can bear the weight of being our ultimate good. Only He can stand the stresses of our treating Him never as a means, but always as an end.

To worship a god means that we understand who we are in relationship to that god. Without a god we literally do not know who we are. But no imposter god can satisfy this need. When we say that the LORD is our God, we are saying that we know who we are only as we stand before Him. Jehovah alone can show us our true identity. To worship Him is the only way to know ourselves.

We are made for Jehovah. We exist to serve Jehovah. We were created to worship Jehovah. The imposter gods always fail to do what Jehovah alone can do.

We find satisfaction in worshipping and serving Him. We find meaning in worshipping and serving him. We find ourselves in worshipping and serving Him.

Only the LORD deserves our absolute loyalty. Only Yahweh merits our unconditioned trust. For that is what worshipping Him means.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
