

### 3. "I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE"

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"I and the Father are one" ... The Jews took up stones again to stone him (John 10:30-31).

**And** so it has ever been. Jesus' claim to "oneness" with his Father-God down through the ages has evoked discussion, debate, disagreement, even deadly danger! What special relationship with the Father was Jesus asserting when he said, "I and the Father are one"? It was rather explosive for it occasioned them picking up stones for missiles.

John informs us these words were spoken by Jesus after his healing of the blind man on the Sabbath (in chapter 9), and after his parable of the good Shepherd (in the earlier part of chapter ten). His works and his words created a division [*lit. a schism*] amongst the Jews (10:19).

"He has a demon" many of them were saying, "he is insane" (v. 20)! "No way!" others retorted in effect, "These are not the sayings of one demon possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he" (v. 21)? <sup>1</sup>

This was developing into another potentially life-threatening situation for Jesus as **the Jews gathered around him (v. 24)** --- or as may equally well be translated, as they **surrounded** him, or **encircled** him with potential hostile intent. Jesus was hemmed in!

Of all places, this volatile incident occurred as **Jesus was walking in the Temple, in the portico of Solomon (v. 23)**. Solomon's Porch was adorned with magnificent pillars almost 40 feet high (about 12 metres), covered with a roof, and was an ideal place for the many rabbis and their students to interact. Nor is this the first time violence has been threatened in a lovely 'church' setting!

Now, if you side with 'the majority' who today believe Jesus' claim to being **one with the Father** is a claim to oneness of Essence, or oneness of Being in the mystery of the Three Persons in the one God, you would appear to be in safe company. After all, **John 10:30** is one of the Top Ten go-to verses allegedly proving that "Jesus is God"!

However, if one --- for reasonable contextual and grammatical grounds --- takes the 'minority' view that Jesus is making no such metaphysical claim to being a member of the so-called trinitarian Godhead, then trouble brews. Like Jesus, such persons may also very well find themselves **surrounded** by folks holding (metaphorical) stones --- ostracism and expulsion from one's own community of faith. And believe me, that can be as deadly to the soul as any rock to the head!

Before unpacking Jesus' claim to being one with the Father, a little background to the incident is worthwhile.

#### HANUKKAH

We are informed this incident happened **at the time the feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem (v. 22)**. And that **it was winter**, or if you will, wintry weather. So, what do we know about this **Feast of Dedication**, or as it was also called the **Feast of Lights**, or more commonly by its Jewish name, **Hanukkah**?

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<sup>1</sup> It is of passing interest to note that unlike the Synoptic Gospels, we have no instances of demon-possession in John's Gospel. The only time the subject comes up is when Jesus' enemies say that it is he who is demon possessed!

Hanukkah, still observed by Jews to this day, is celebrated on the 25th of the month of Chislew which roughly corresponds to our 25th of December! It celebrates the time when, under the Maccabees, the Jews regained control of their Temple and its altar from the megalomaniac king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes who reigned from 175 to 164 B.C. over the Seleucid quarter of Alexander the Great's fractured empire. I say megalomaniac because his self-appointed name 'Epiphanes', being interpreted means, "God Manifest". Not the first dictator to let power and pride go to his head.

Antiochus was in the business of promoting his own grandeur and nobody was going to get in the way of his agenda. He was thoroughly committed to promoting all things Greek. This meant eradicating the Jewish religion in Israel. He tried the subtle way first. He tried to introduce Greek philosophy and Greek gods. Whilst some Jews compromised the faith of their fathers, few relatively speaking, fell for that one.

So, Antiochus then resorted to outright persecution and brute force. In 170 B.C. he attacked Jerusalem and it's reported that up to 80,000 Jews were slain, and as many deported into slavery. Adding insult to injury, Antiochus then raided the Temple treasury and stole an incredible amount of money ... 1,800 talents.

Not content with that insult, Antiochus turned the Temple precincts into brothels. He also profaned the great altar used for burnt offerings by dedicating it to Olympian Zeus, and used it to offer pig's flesh to the pagan gods. Talk about the proverbial red flag to the bull!

Not only so. Any Jew found with a copy of the Torah, was summarily executed. It was also a capital offence to circumcise your baby boy. Indeed, mothers were crucified with their children hanging around their necks for doing so.

After some violent battles under Judas Maccabaeus, the Jews finally expunged this evil from their holy land. In 164 B.C. their Temple was cleansed and rededicated. The altar was rebuilt. The priests' robes and the utensils were replaced. And Judas Maccabaeus directed that, [the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season from year to year, by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month of Chislew, with gladness and joy.](#) <sup>2</sup>

The Temple was purified at that time, and the great seven-branched candlestick (the *Menorah*) was re-lit at the Dedication.

The story goes that the priests could only find one little cruse of unpolluted oil for the lamps. This cruse was still intact, being sealed with the impress of the ring of the High Priest. By all calculations, there should have only been enough oil to light the lamps for a single day. But by a miracle the oil in that one little cruse lasted for eight days, until the new oil had been prepared according to the correct formula and properly consecrated for its holy use.

Thus it is, that to celebrate those eight days of miraculous light in the Temple, Jewish homes put lights in the windows of their houses to this very day. They want to always remember how God made the light to last for eight days of celebration when, by the hand of Judas "the Hammer" Israel became free of that tyranny. Many commentators have pointed out it is with deep significance that at the Feast of Dedication within the Temple precincts, Jesus proclaimed, ["I am the light of the world" \(John 8: 12\).](#)

Such is the time, place, setting and significance of this encounter as we continue in [John 10:19ff](#). The Jews interrogate him, ["How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" \(v. 24\).](#) No doubt some of the Jews genuinely wished to know. Was Jesus their long-awaited deliverer? Others simply asked the question to trap Jesus. Up to this point, Jesus had not publicly nor plainly declared himself to be the Messiah, except to two individuals apart from his inner circle. The

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<sup>2</sup> I Maccabees 4: 59.

Samaritan woman had said, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ) ...” Jesus tells her, “I who speak to you am *he*” (John 4: 25-26). <sup>3</sup>

The second time Jesus directly claims to be the Messiah is after he healed the blind man in John 9: 37. Says Jesus to the healed man, that Messiah “is the one who is talking with you.” And the man confesses, Lord, I believe” (v. 38). <sup>4</sup> After this exchange Jesus says, “I and the Father are one”.

### CONTROVERSY, DEBATE, DANGER!

Historically, the idea that Jesus’ statement “I and the Father are one” suggests a unity of essence (or nature or Being) can be traced to Athenasius in Egypt. <sup>5</sup> It is believed he got that idea from Tertullian who had earlier proposed this saying of Jesus pointed to a unity of substance. <sup>6</sup>

In his footnote on this development, Kegan A. Chandler cites Mark DelCogliano’s relevant comment,

Recent scholarship on patristic exegesis has highlighted the role of Greco-Roman grammatical reading techniques in determining the meaning of the scriptural text ... Unsurprisingly, Christian exegetes trained in these grammatical techniques applied them when reading Scripture. <sup>7</sup>

Which in plain English means the words of the Jewish Jesus were being squeezed into a Hellenistic worldview! (Antiochus’ spirit lives on!) It’s pernicious effect soon became obvious when anybody who would not accept this Athenasian spin was (after the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.) excommunicated, disfellowshipped, pursued, or worse. It continues to this very day. Anyone who dares to challenge the “traditional orthodox” interpretation that Jesus is God because he said he is one with the Father, is politely dismissed or vigorously mocked.

What these defenders of “the Catholic Faith” fail to notice is that there are many fine Biblical scholars amongst their own ranks who deny that the words, “I and the Father are one” mean that Jesus is claiming to be of the one Being or essence with His Father God. <sup>8</sup>

It is a well-known fact that staunch defender of trinitarian orthodoxy John Calvin himself, denied that in John 10:30 Jesus was claiming to be of “the same essence with the Father. For Christ does not argue about the unity of substance, but about the agreement that he has with the Father.” <sup>9</sup>

Esteemed Baptist theologian George R. Beasley-Murray writes that,

From earliest times it has been observed that Jesus says, ‘I and the Father are one’ (Greek: *‘hen’*), not *‘heis’*, i.e., one in action, not in person. <sup>10</sup>

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, an avowed trinitarian publication says,

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<sup>3</sup> Jesus literally says to the woman, “I who speak to you am”, but translators add the pronoun ‘*he*’ in italics at the end to correctly say that Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah in question. This sets the consistent pattern that John uses throughout his Gospel whenever Jesus says, “I am *he*”. It most definitely is **not** a claim to Jesus being the God of the Burning Bush in Exodus 3 where God says, “I am the Existing One” (Ego eimi ho hown)!

<sup>4</sup> In John 9 Jesus’ claim to being “the Son of Man” in verse 35 is equivalent to claiming to be the Messiah as already established in verse 22.

<sup>5</sup> Athenasius in *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Discourse III, Ch.23,4.

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian in *Against Praxeas*, 25

<sup>7</sup> Kegan A. Chandler, *The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma: The Recovery of New Testament Theology*, Restoration Fellowship, Georgia, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* See Kegan Chandler’s list in his footnotes p 183. For example, R.V.G. Tasker, *Tyndale NT Commentaries: John*; J.N. Sanders, B.A. Mastin, *The Gospel According to John*; J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*; Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Born Before All Time?*

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on John*, John 10:30.

<sup>10</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *World Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 36, Thomas Nelson, NY, 1999, p 174

This verse has received a great deal of attention from exegetes and theologians. **In context it seems to refer primarily to the fact that the Father and Son are one in purpose and action. When it comes to preserving the life of the believing flock, they are one in their desire and ability to safeguard every believer ...**

It was Jesus' claim of a special relationship with the Father that his opponents were considering the ultimate sacrilege. <sup>11</sup>

William Barclay also adds some common sense when he notes this obvious fact that,

When Jesus said: "I and the Father are one," he was not moving in the world of philosophy and metaphysics and abstractions; He was moving in the world of *personal relationships*. No one can really understand what a phrase like "a unity of essence" means; but any one can understand what a unity of heart means. Jesus' unity with God came from the twin facts of perfect love and perfect obedience. He was one with God because He loved God perfectly and obeyed God perfectly. <sup>12</sup>

So, if these "orthodox" commentators are correct to say the passage is not about metaphysics (essences and distinctions within Beings) but rather about *personal relationships*, does the text bear this out?

Let's investigate. Jesus has just been speaking about the fact that he is the good Shepherd of his sheep. He has just said no one can snatch them out of his hand. He has just promised to keep his own flock safe and that he will give them "eternal life".

But he did not stop there. He goes on to testify where his saving and keeping power come from. They do not arise from his own ability. For he plainly says, **My Father Who has given *them* to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one (vs. 29-30 NASB).**

It is his Father who gave Jesus the sheep. The Father is the source of all things, including Jesus' own position as the good Shepherd and keeper of God's sheep. As Barclay acknowledges, **Jesus was so sure of himself because he was so sure of God. Jesus' attitude to life was not self-confidence, but God-confidence. Jesus was so certain of ultimate safety and ultimate victory, not because he arrogated all power to himself, but because he assigned all power to God.** <sup>13</sup>

**Bottom line: Both Jesus and the sheep alike are in the Father's hand!**

### AN INTRIGUING ALTERNATE READING

Did you notice I quoted **verse 29** just above in the **New American Standard Bible (NASB)** translation? The word that appears twice in *italics* indicates it is added to make good reading sense --- our translators wish to say that the Father has given *them* (i.e. the sheep) to Jesus, and therefore no one is able to snatch *them* (i.e. the sheep) out of the Father's mighty hand.

There is nothing wrong with this, because the immediate conversation concerns Jesus' sheep. They hear his voice, they know him and they follow him. However, there is another possibility that also fits the context superbly. There is multiple manuscript evidence for **verse 29** to read this way;

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<sup>11</sup> *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Revised Edition, General Editors Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, Zondervan, 2007, p 508 (My bold emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John: The Daily Study Bible*, Vol. 2, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, Third Impression, 1958, pp 57-58

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* p 86 (My bold emphasis).

**“What my Father has given to me is greater than all”.** <sup>14</sup> Indeed, some translations such as the NRSV acknowledge how strong this textual evidence is by actually translating it this way in the main body of their text. But, what is the **“what”**?

Some commentators say the “what” is “the flock” which the Father has given to the Son. Some think it refers to that quality of life (the life of the Age to Come), which Jesus promises the sheep. <sup>15</sup>

There are other ancient manuscript variants that read, **“He Who gave this authority to me is greater than all.”** The **“what”** is **“this authority”**, that is, the authority to take care of the sheep on the Father’s behalf. I think this nuance fits the context like hand in glove.

For, if you go back to the verses immediately preceding, Jesus has just said, **“I have authority to lay my life down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from my Father”** (vs. 18-19). Also recall that chapters nine and ten form one composite whole ... there being no chapter break in the story. The religious leaders had just cast out of their Temple precincts the healed man, having agreed that if anybody confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, that a similar fate awaited them. But Jesus tells them that he is the good Shepherd, and that he is the Door to the fold, and that he has the authority to do what they are arrogating to themselves.

The wider context confirms this stoush is over who has God’s authority --- the authorities or Jesus? Whose words and works prove who has been given the care of God’s flock?

Jesus’ argument is that the works he is engaged in are His Father’s works; **“the works that I do in my Father’s Name, these bear witness of me”** (v. 25). Jesus claims to be God’s ultimate representative.

### THE MESSIAH, GOD’S ANOINTED ONE, IS GOD’S ULTIMATE AMBASSADOR

*The Expositor’s Greek Testament* states that here we would be justified in using the example of an ambassador, which was understood so clearly in that ancient world;

An ambassador whose demands were contested might quite naturally say: “I and my Sovereign are one”, not meaning thereby to claim royal dignity, but only to assert that what he did his sovereign did, that his signature carried his sovereign’s guarantee, and that his pledges would be fulfilled by all the resources of his sovereign.

So here, as God’s representative, Jesus introduces the Father’s power as the final guarantee, and claims that in this respect He and the Father are one... <sup>16</sup>

I would add that, the example of an ambassador is actually found in the context of the passage, and is therefore an appropriate example. For, later in **verse 36** Jesus clearly states, **the Father sanctified and sent him into the world**. That word for **sent** is the word used for sending an ambassador or a messenger. Jesus is testifying that God the Father has given him heaven’s official task to do.

This context is crucial to keep in mind as we come to Jesus’ claim, **“I and the Father are one”**. Blind Freddy can see Jesus is not making metaphysical claims about “essence”! He is saying that he is the authorised shepherd of God’s sheep. The whole context revolves around Jesus being in perfect harmony with His Father’s mission and purpose in sending him. Jesus is so secure in His Father’s plan, so sure of His Father’s power (for **“My father is greater than all”**). The oneness Jesus claims is the

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, the NASB margin admits this: **“Some early mss. read, ‘What My Father has given me is greater than all’”!**

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mi.,1971, p 522

<sup>16</sup> *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, General Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mi.,Vol. 1, 1956, p794

bond of a unity borne out of perfect love — “For this reason the Father loves me *because I lay down my life for the sheep*” (v. 17).

This interpretation is confirmed by comparing other relevant Scriptures. Later in the **seventeenth chapter of John** our Lord prays for his own people just before he went to the cross,

“Holy Father, keep those you have given me in Your Name, so **that they may be one, as we are one**” (John 17:11). The unity between Christians is exactly the same as Jesus’ unity with God the Father! This is a spiritual unity based on mutual love for sure, but not a unity of “essence” or “oneness of Being”. Jesus continues in his prayer,

“I do not ask for these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word (message), **that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be in us**, that the world may believe that You did send (commission, authorise) me (vs. 20-21).

Jesus is praying in simple, straight-forward language; the goal of the Christian life is that we **may all be one even as** he and the Father are one. And what is the unity that should exist? Oneness of essence, oneness of Being, or oneness of the unity of loving relationship in a common purpose?

Jesus is one with God because of his perfect love of the Father. Christians are meant to be one with each other because they have perfect love arising out of their love of Christ and of his Father. This is exactly how John the Beloved Apostle understood Jesus’ meaning when he wrote;

**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah, is born of God; and everyone who loves the parent loves the child** (1 John 5: 1 NRSV).

The same expression of oneness in the work of God is found in **I Corinthians 3:8**,

**Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labour.** The NIV actually reads, “The man who plants and the man who waters **have one purpose...**” The NRSV also translates, “The one who plants and the one who waters have **a common purpose ...**”

The Greek wording is exactly the same as that of **John 10: 30**, yet nobody has ever claimed that Paul and Apollos make up “one being” or share “one essence” or have the “one substance”! <sup>17</sup>

Consistency would demand the same phrase mean the same thing in both places; just as the one who plants and the one who waters are of “**one common purpose**” in the task of evangelism, so too the One Who gives the sheep and the one who keeps those sheep also share the “**one purpose**”. The Father and Jesus have one work and purpose --- to save the sheep!

As **William Barclay** expresses it,

Jesus is one with God, because as no other person ever did, He obeyed God and He loved God. His unity with God is a unity of perfect love, issuing in perfect obedience ... Jesus’ unity with God came from the twin facts of perfect love and perfect obedience. He was one with God because He loved God perfectly and obeyed God perfectly. <sup>18</sup>

## **BUT WHY THEN DID THE JEWS PICK UP STONES TO KILL JESUS FOR BLASPHEMY?**

It will be objected that this exegesis is good only in so far as it goes. **The Expositor’s Bible Commentary**, for instance, states as much: **But the verse must mean more than that** [more than that

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<sup>17</sup> *Hen eisin ... hen esmen* ---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p 87

Jesus has a special relationship with the Father.] It is highly unlikely that the Jews would pick up stones to attack Jesus if all he were saying was that what he was doing was in perfect accord with the will of God. Others could easily make that claim.

But isn't that the precise point the text is making? Jesus has just healed a blind man on the Sabbath day. Jesus is claiming to be in perfect harmony with his Father God. But these "gatekeepers" of the Law refuse to see God at work in Jesus' work(s). Jesus in their minds must be a sinner because of his outrageous claim to be greater than Moses! The source of Jesus' works must be demonic!

Yet the commentary wants us to believe that, in spite of these clear statements in the text, Jesus really is referring to a metaphysical union of "essence" between these two Persons in the "Godhead". Oh dear, if only they had stayed with their statement that ...

It was Jesus' claim of a special relationship with the Father that his opponents were considering the ultimate sacrilege. <sup>19</sup>

We will pick up this good question and the conclusion to the story in the next article ...

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<sup>19</sup> *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Revised Edition, General Editors Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, Zondervan, 2007, p 508