

## The god who Wasn't There

### Commentary for August 15, 2016 — Universal Salvation and trinity, Not Compatible

The lack of capitalization for the words “god who” in the title and “trinity” in the subtitle are intentional. I recently attended the “Forgotten Gospel Conference” in Denver, Colorado,<sup>1</sup> that may become an annual event. People across America (and some from overseas) who believe in universal salvation attended. About 200 people took part.

Attendance this large for an event promoting universal salvation has not been seen since the early 1900s when the Concordant Publishing Concern had audiences and speaking halls filled with 500 people and more. In the middle and late 1800s, preachers who taught universal salvation had crowds of 1,000 or more for tent and camp meetings, often because they were sources of entertainment. People wanted to hear traveling preachers and evangelists. Today very few viable congregations teach universal salvation. Most are small groups, some Bible study groups, a few internet churches, or teaching organizations like ASK.<sup>2</sup>

### **Most Teach the trinity**

I was uncomfortable with some of the teaching given at the conference. Most presenters taught the trinity as fact and tried to connect that doctrine to the biblical truth of universal salvation. Some went out of their way to teach the trinity as if it was a major component of belief in biblical universal salvation. Of course, organizers of conferences are free to teach what they wish and so are the speakers, but the strong emphasis on the trinity (as if it were a biblical teaching) was surprising to me and some other attendees.

The teaching of the trinity is required for voting membership in most mainstream Evangelical, Protestant, and Catholic churches in the world today. It is disturbing to me that many who teach universal salvation also promote the trinity — even if they cannot find the teaching in

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the conference videos are available online at [“The Forgotten Gospel” video page](#). Perhaps more videos of the conference will go online shortly.

I particularly want to recommend that you view (or listen to) the [“Interview with Dr. Iliana Ramelli.”](#) In the interview, Dr. Ramelli discusses the history of universal salvation in the early *ekklesia*, and how universal salvation was the majority view of Christians from Pentecost in 30 AD to about 500 AD. Her first book of a future trilogy is *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae) (Brill, 2013). It is a massive work, 912 pages, and expensive.

I briefly reviewed in [“Modern Recognition of Universal Salvation,”](#) a 2007 book Dr. Ramelli co-authored: *Terms for Eternity: Aionios and Aidios in Classical and Christian Texts*.

<sup>2</sup> Some who teach universal salvation do so within larger organizations and even as church leaders within denominations where denominational authority is weak and the teacher does not present universal salvation too publicly. I knew one seminary where the professors told students they believed in universal salvation but would not teach it publicly because they signed a “Statement of Faith.” Such statements usually require instructors to believe in an eternal hell and a trinitarian god.

Scripture, even if they cannot understand it or clearly explain it.

There is no discussion about the trinity anywhere in Scripture — not one chapter — yet most ministers will tell you it is a foundational doctrine of the Christian Church, whatever branch of Christianity you adhere to or attend. It seems God neglected to have Christ or the apostles speak or write about a revelation of a trinitarian god anywhere in the Bible. However, God did allow this very clear non-trinitarian Scriptural passage, among others:

**“For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge.”**

• **1 Corinthians 8:5–7**

This passage is specific and shows that there is one God and one Lord. There is no hint of the Holy Spirit as a person or personality. The subject of 1 Corinthians chapter 8 is about food sacrificed to idols. Is that topic more important than the nature of the Almighty Creator God? Remember that the Gentile Corinthian believers were taught by Paul for at least 18 months (Acts 18:11), and were recent polytheists who believed in many gods. Paul confirmed this when he says that in fact there were **“gods many,”** but they needed to be told — with precise language — that there was **“one God, the Father”** and **“one Lord Jesus Christ.”**

God the Father is spirit, or “a spirit” (John 4:24). Paul says, **“The Spirit makes intercession for the saints”** (Romans 8:27). The spirit is not called God IN THAT VERSE, or in any other. We are told 7 verses later who truly intercedes for us: it is **“Christ ... who makes intercession for us [the saints]”** (Romans 8:34). Paul wrote earlier in Romans chapter 8:

**“But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit OF GOD [who is the Father, 1 Corinthians 8:6] dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him [the Father] that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he [the Father] that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you. ... For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit OF GOD [the Father], they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children OF GOD [the Father].”**

• **Romans 8:9–16**

Christ is **“the firstborn among many brethren,”** meaning us believers (Romans 8:29). Therefore, we are **“children of God”** as Christ is the Son of God (1 John 3:1–2). The Father’s Spirit flows through Christ to us as members of the one **“body of Christ”** (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:27). We are **“one in Christ”** (Galatians 3:28) with the Father. A false trinity confuses our true close relationship with God the Father through Christ.

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