

Christians Who Dared to Differ



John Milton (1608 – 1674)

By Anthony Buzzard¹

The celebrated poet John Milton was one of three distinguished minds of the seventeenth century, along with Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke (and many other learned dissenters), who protested against the Trinitarian creed of the churches. Milton's timely advice to us was to rely on Scripture alone:

Let us then discard reason in sacred matters, and follow the doctrine of Holy Scripture exclusively...It is most evident...from numberless passages of Scripture that there is in reality but one true independent and supreme God; and as He is called one (inasmuch as human reason and the common language of mankind, and the Jews, the people of God, have always considered him as one person only, that is, one in a numerical sense) let us have recourse to the sacred writings in order to know who this one true and supreme God is. This knowledge ought to be derived in the first instance from the Gospel, since the clearest doctrine respecting the one God must necessarily be that copious and explanatory revelation concerning Him which was delivered by *Christ himself* to his apostles, and by the apostles to their followers. Nor is it to be supposed that the Gospel would be ambiguous or obscure on this subject; for it was not given for the purpose of promulgating new and incredible doctrines respecting the nature of God, hitherto utterly unheard of by his own people, but to announce salvation to the Gentiles through Messiah the Son of God, according to the promise of the God of Abraham, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained Him" (John 1:18). Let us therefore consult the Son in the first place respecting God.

According to the testimony of the Son, delivered in the clearest terms, the Father is that one true God, by whom are all things. Being asked by one of the scribes (Mark 12:28, 29, 32) which was the first commandment of all, he answered from Deuteronomy 6:4, "The first of all the commandments is 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord'"; or as it is in the Hebrew, "Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." The scribe assented; "there is one God, and there is none other but He"; and in the following verse Christ approves this answer. Nothing can be more clear than that it was the opinion of the scribe, as well as other Jews, that by the unity of God is intended His oneness of person. That this God was no other than God the Father is proved from John 8:41, 54, "We have one Father, even God...It is my Father who honors me; of whom you say that He is your God." John 4:21: "Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father." Christ therefore agrees with the whole people of God, that the Father is that one and only God. For who can believe it possible for the very first of the commandments to have been so obscure, and so ill-understood by the Church through such a succession of ages, that two other persons, equally entitled to worship, should have remained wholly unknown to the

people of God, and debarred of divine honors even to that very day?...Christ himself therefore, the Son of God, teaches us nothing in the Gospel respecting the one God but what the Law had before taught, and everywhere clearly asserts him to be his Father. John 17:3: “This is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” 20:17: “I ascend to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God.” If therefore the Father be the God of Christ, and the same be our God, and if there be no other God but one, there can be no God beside the Father. ²

After examining the plainly unitarian statements of Paul, Milton reflects on the prodigious efforts that the Church has made to confuse such simple truth, that God is one Person:

Though all this [the numerical singularity of God] be so self-evident as to require no explanation – namely, that the Father alone is a self-existent God, and that a being which is not self-existent cannot be God – it is wonderful with what futile subtleties, or rather with what juggling artifices, certain individuals have endeavored to elude or obscure the plain meaning of these passages; leaving no stone unturned, recurring to every shift, attempting every means as if their object were not to preach the pure unadulterated truth of the Gospel to the poor and simple, but rather by dint of vehemence and obstinacy to sustain some absurd paradox from falling, by the treacherous aid of sophisms and verbal distinctions, borrowed from the barbarous ignorance of the schools. ³

¹ Excerpted from: *Jesus Was Not A Trinitarian: A Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus*, pp. 64 – 66 by Anthony Buzzard.

² John Milton, “On the Son of God and the Holy Spirit,” rep. *A Journal from the Radical Reformation*, 5:2, 1996, 56 – 58.

³ *Ibid.*, 60.