

The Evolution of God

1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

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4 Winds Fellowships and the Bereans Bible Institute hold to doctrines developed by our consistently employing a series of eight principles. These guide our handling of Scripture and provide a cross-check against our theological conclusions.

- I. The original Scriptures are infallible in the original languages.*
- II. Hebrew and Greek grammar cannot be violated or ignored, but must guide interpretation.*
- III. Interpret within the historical situation, culture, and literary context.*
- IV. Interpret the text literally unless compelling evidence demands non-literal interpretation.*
- V. Interpret progressively, with newer revelation always complimenting older revelation.*
- VI. Reject as "illogical" all doctrines that require holding mutually exclusive ideas.*
- VII. All accepted doctrines must be consistent with God's revealed character and with all other true doctrines.*
- VIII. When possible, trace modern doctrines back to the source to see when, where, and why they originated.*

These principles are intended to remove personal bias and faulty presuppositions as much as possible. The first seven principles guide our handling of Scripture. They would be entirely sufficient if we did not have nearly two centuries of theological baggage polluting our modern understandings of the Scriptures. Most of us are not new to Christianity or to the Scriptures. We have been indoctrinated for many years by various denominations and the pastors and teachers in our churches. Some of us have also been indoctrinated by Christian college and/or seminary professors, reading required theological source material, and the various theological systems of the schools we attended. This exposure colors our thinking and imposes biases and presuppositions, many of which do not reflect the pristine teachings of Jesus Christ and His Apostles.¹ Most Christians are oblivious to the fact that their minds have been

¹ The truth of this statement is illustrated by the fact that there are a multitude of Christian churches, groups, and denominations which do not agree with each other on even the fundamentals of the Gospel message or the Christian Faith. Yet, the average Christian just assumes that the church he happens to attend is preaching and teaching the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But why should that particular church or denomination be error-free while all the other hundreds of churches or denominations are teaching error? This simple fact ought to drive Christians to investigate further. Unfortunately, most are too lazy or simply do not know how.

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

conditioned to assume certain things as being true and other things as being anathema and heretical without solid proof. Most have not even attempted to apply Paul's admonishment objectively or thoroughly – *"Test all things; hold fast what is good."*²

It is because of this theological baggage that the eighth principle is absolutely critical if we expect to arrive at the whole truth. This principle provides a check against the possibility that we might have overlooked something important, or are still being influenced by personal biases of which we are not aware. If our conclusions cannot be found in the writings of the earliest Christians, we need to know why. The last thing we want to do is come up with something unique that was not taught by Jesus and His Apostles and thus faithfully passed on to the earliest Christian assemblies. Worse yet, we do not want to teach something that was considered heresy by the earliest Christians who were instructed by the Apostles. Jesus warned that many Christian pastors and teachers will be cut in pieces and cast in with the unbelievers or be beaten with lashes when He returns.³ Referring to this, James warned that Christian teachers will receive a much harsher judgment than the average Christian.⁴ At 4Winds we take these threats and admonitions very, very seriously.

"The Evolution of God" series of articles puts the eighth principle into practice regarding the doctrine of God, His Son, and His holy Breath. This step should not be neglected nor its importance underestimated. Comparing our conclusions with the historical record of early Christianity helps ensure that we are not departing from what the Apostles passed on to their faithful students and was preserved by the ordained pastors and teachers of the local assemblies founded by the Apostles. Examining the post-apostolic development of doctrine and tracing the evolution of doctrine back to its source reveals a great deal about the root – whether something is based on genuine apostolic tradition, wishful thinking driven by presuppositions, or subtle deception from the Enemy. Jesus warned that a tree is known by its fruit. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit neither can a good tree produce bad fruit. The fruit will reveal the root. Likewise, the root reveals the fruit. Therefore, investigating doctrinal evolution, the circumstances and men involved, and the philosophical, social, and political pressures that drove the evolution of doctrine all serve to give us a picture of the tree and root from which the fruit was produced. By embarking on this journey, we are attempting to faithfully follow Jesus' instructions regarding fruit and root inspection,⁵ and Paul's admonition to *"test all things."*

² 1 Thess. 5:21

³ Luke 12:41-48

⁴ James 3:1

⁵ Matt. 7:15-20

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

This process requires examining the earliest Christian writings in an unbiased way just as we try to do with the Scriptures themselves. We cannot use as our sources the works of later theologians and historians since their interpretations of history are all colored by their own theology and presuppositions, some of which would absolutely horrify Bible-believing Christians.

Pseudo-Research based on Pseudo-Scholarship

Certain Unitarian affiliated organizations – Restoration Fellowship,⁶ the Church of God General Conference (McDonough, Georgia),⁷ and Atlanta Bible College⁸ – share many doctrines in common with 4Winds Fellowships.⁹ However, on the most important doctrine of all – who is Jesus Christ – we are light-years apart. Their authors and teachers give the outward appearance of following a methodology similar to our 8th principle. But in reality their method of research cannot lead to truth because it is not founded on objective principles. It is heavily biased and depends on circular reasoning. These teachers and authors do not provide unbiased research into the original source material from earliest Christian and Jewish writings. Instead they state their opinions and support them with excerpted quotations from dead Unitarian scholars. This gives their works a façade of scholarly authority in order to make their views palatable to Evangelical Christians.¹⁰

Unitarians Anthony Buzzard¹¹ and Kegan Chandler¹² have frequently employed this kind of pseudo-scholarship. They selectively quote liberal, Bible-denying Unitarian scholars to support many of their conclusions regarding how the doctrine of the Trinity evolved and how the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ was allegedly invented by man instead of being apostolic teaching. But they fail to inform their readers that the scholars they are quoting as authorities formed their historical opinions based upon assumptions that no Evangelical Christian could possibly accept – the denial that the New Testament Scriptures were “God-breathed” and are error-free.

For example, both Buzzard and Chandler repeatedly quoted Adolf Von Harnack and Levi L. Paine to support their historical claims regarding the sources of these doctrines.

⁶ <http://focusonthe kingdom.org/>

⁷ <http://www.cogc.org/index.php>

⁸ <http://www.atlantabiblecollege.com/>

⁹ These would include Conditional Immortality, the Abrahamic Inheritance of Christians,

¹⁰ In the following examples, we do not intend to imply that these authors are being intentionally deceptive. They may simply be deceived themselves and/or indoctrinated into a biased methodology. They may not be aware that the process they are using is inherently self-serving and deceptive. We do not judge their hearts or motives.

¹¹ Buzzard, Anthony F. & Hunting, Charles F., *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity's Self-inflicted Wound*

¹² Chandler, Kegan A., *The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma*

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

Yet unlike Buzzard and Chandler, Harnack believed that the preexistence of Christ is definitely taught in the New Testament. He maintained his Unitarian views by denying that certain New Testament books which teach the preexistence of Christ were actually written by Jesus' Apostles, that some and those books were embellished with foreign and fabricated material, and that some of the Apostles (Paul and John) were themselves heavily influenced by earlier Jewish Apocalyptic literature and/or Greek philosophy. Thus, in Harnack's opinion, the New Testament itself is the product of religious and philosophical syncretism which is why it teaches the preexistence of Christ. Here are a few comments from the very works that Buzzard and Chandler selectively quoted as authorities, which form the basis of their historical arguments:

Adolf Von Harnack:

*"An accurate examination of the eschatological sayings of Jesus in the synoptists¹³ shows that much foreign matter is mixed with them (see Weiffenback, *Der Wiederkunftsgedanke Jesu*, 1875). That the tradition here is very uncertain, because influenced by the Jewish Apocalyptic, ..."¹⁴*

"Some of the Jewish Apocalyptists¹⁵ had already attributed pre-existence to the expected Messiah, as to other precious things in the Old Testament history and worship, and, without any thought of denying his human nature, placed him as already existing before his appearing in a series of angelic beings. ... The supposed aim was, in a kind of real existence, placed, as first cause, before the means which were destined to realise it on earth. Some of the first confessors of the Gospel [the disciples], though not all the writers of the New Testament, in accordance with the same method, went beyond the declarations which Jesus himself had made about his person, and endeavoured to conceive its value and absolute

¹³ Matthew, Mark, Luke

¹⁴ Harnack, Adolf, *History of Dogma*, 3rd Edition, (Buchanan translation - 1897), Vol. I, p. 101, footnote #4

¹⁵ The designation of Jewish Apocalyptic books include the book of Daniel the prophet plus extra-biblical books which borrowed from it and embellished, such as 1 Enoch. However, liberal scholars like Harnack did not believe the book of Daniel was actually written by Daniel during the Babylonian exile, but was composed much later. The reason they claim this is because of Daniel's very precise prophecies concerning the kings of Persia after the exile, the fall of Persia to Alexander the Great, the division of Alexander's kingdom among his generals, and Antiochus Epiphanies' "abomination of desolation." Since they do not believe in predictive prophecy, they must place the book of Daniel hundreds of years later, after these events took place. However, even this attempt to rewrite the Bible fails because Daniel predicted the first coming of Messiah, His crucifixion, the resulting destruction of Jerusalem a second time (by the Romans) which took place in AD 70. Jesus and His Apostles were familiar with the book of Daniel and quoted from it as genuinely written by Daniel long before this occurred. These scholars are in for a rude awakening when Christ returns and establishes His Kingdom, and raises the dead, and eventually judges the wicked, including them, all of which are part of Daniel's prophecies.

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

significance abstractly and speculatively. The religious convictions: (1) That the founding of the Kingdom of God on earth, and the mission of Jesus as the perfect mediator, were from eternity based on God's plan of Salvation, as his main purpose; (2) that the exalted Christ was called into a position of Godlike Sovereignty belonging to him of right; (3) that God himself was manifested in Jesus, and that he therefore surpasses all mediators of the Old Testament, nay, even all angelic powers, – ***these convictions with some took the form that Jesus preexisted,*** and that in him has appeared and taken flesh a heavenly being fashioned like God, who is older than the world, nay, its creative principle. ***The conceptions of the old Teachers, Paul, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse, and author of the first Epistle of Peter, the fourth Evangelist, differ in many ways when they attempt to define these convictions more closely.*** The latter is the only one who has recognized with perfect clearness that the premundane Christ must be assumed to be θεὸς ὧν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν¹⁶ so as not to endanger by this speculation the contents and significance of the revelation of God which was given in Christ."¹⁷

"But it certainly could not fail to be of importance for the result that already many of the earliest Christian writers, and ***therefore even Paul, perceived in Jesus a spiritual being come down from heaven*** (πνεῦμα)¹⁸ who was ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ¹⁹ and whose real act of love consisted in his very descent."²⁰

"But in the majority of cases, it is absolutely impossible to account subsequently for the causes of such productions, because their formation is subject to ***no law accessible to the understanding.***²¹ ***It is therefore inadmissible to regard as proved the reality of what is recorded and believed to be fact,***²² when motive and interest which led to its acceptance can no longer be ascertained."²³

From these quotations, it is clear that Harnack attributed the origin of the doctrine of Messiah's preexistence first to Jewish apocalyptic writers before the Christian era, and then to the Apostles themselves who wrote the New Testament after having been influenced by these more ancient writings. However, Harnack began with the

¹⁶ θεὸς ὧν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, "God being in the beginning with God" – Harnack's Greek paraphrase of John 1:1

¹⁷ Harnack, Adolf, History of Dogma, Vol. I, pp. 102-104

¹⁸ πνεῦμα – "spirit"

¹⁹ ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ – "in the form of God" quoting Phil. 2:6

²⁰ Harnack, Adolf, History of Dogma, Vol. I, pp. 105, footnote #3

²¹ Here Harnack betrays his ignorance. The "law" through which the Apostles understood the preexistence of Christ was the divine revelation through the Breath of Truth which Jesus promised would continue their education.

²² It is inadmissible to simply believe the New Testament in Harnack's opinion.

²³ Harnack, Adolf, History of Dogma, Vol. I, pp. 106

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

assumption that the preexistence of Messiah is a false and fabricated doctrine, and then attempted to explain how this alleged false idea found its way into the pages of the New Testament. The minds of the biblical writers themselves were allegedly infected with unbiblical Jewish mysticism which then influenced John and Paul, and “the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” and “the author of the first Epistle of Peter” and the “Apocalypse.” Note that such descriptive terminology about these books shows that Harnack did not attribute Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Revelation to the Apostles.

Buzzard and Chandler also support their claims by selectively quoting the late Unitarian scholar, Levi L. Paine.²⁴ Like Harnack, Paine believed that most of the books of the New Testament contain fabricated material, and that some were heavily influenced by Platonic philosophy. In this way, Buzzard and Chandler attempt to link the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ and the incarnation to the influence of Greek philosophy.

Levi L. Paine:

“With this critical explanation, we take the New Testament writings as we find them, and ask what evidence they give us on the question of the evolution of the dogma of the Trinity. The earliest stratum of this evolution is contained in the Book of Acts, and in the Synoptic gospels, with the exception of the opening chapters of Matthew and of Luke, which are later additions, as we shall see further on. The doctrine of Christ in this first stratum is distinctly that of Messiahship. Jesus is a man of God, sent of God to declare his gospel and exhort men to prepare for the kingdom of heaven which is at hand. There is no assertion of Christ’s divinity, or of his preexistence and incarnation, or even of his miraculous birth. Jesus is everywhere described as the son of Joseph and Mary. The Book of Acts is here of primary importance. Although it evidently contains quite a large element of legend, it is equally evident that many of its accounts belong to the earliest apostolic traditions.”²⁵

“The second stratum of evolution in the New Testament is found in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke. These chapters bear on their very face the plain marks of forming a later addition. In the first place, they are historically inconsistent with the rest of the gospels. They represent Jesus as born in Bethlehem, while all the other portions, not only of Matthew and Luke, but also of the entire New Testament, make no allusion to Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus, and speak of him everywhere as of

²⁴ Paine was a Unitarian professor of Ecclesiastical History at Bangor Theological Seminary, Bangor, Maine in the late 1800s

²⁵ Paine, Levi L., A Critical History of the Evolution of Trinitarianism, (1900), pp. 6-7

Nazareth, implying that he was born there. ... With the purpose of harmonizing a new legendary tradition that has grown up around Christ's birth and infancy with the older genealogy, this rude alteration of the text is resorted to."²⁶

"The third stratum of trinitarian evolution is marked by the intrusion of Greek philosophical thought into the Jewish Palestinian. The first two strata belong to Palestinian Aramaic soil, but the third stratum, which is introduced by the Epistles of Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews, is of Alexandrian Greek origin and character. Paul was a Jew, and trained in Jewish schools; but he also had a Greek education, and his epistles bear plain marks of his acquaintance with Greek philosophic literature. It is an interesting question whether he had actually read the writings of the Alexandrian Jewish Philo. This cannot be conclusively proved, but there are some remarkable coincidences of thought and expression between the two writers. At all events, it must be conceded that Paul was at home in the atmosphere of Philonic thought, and we may be quite sure that he owed the real starting point of his new theological departure indirectly if not directly to Philo himself for his doctrine of Christ as a μεσίτης (mediator) between God and men, with all its metaphysical results, is an integral feature of the Philonic Logos doctrine. The very term μεσίτης, which first appears in Paul among Christian writers, was used by Philo again and again. The Epistle to the Hebrews gives equally clear evidence of Alexandrian and Philonic relationship. It is a most remarkable and significant fact that μεσίτης in the special sense of a metaphysical go-between or mediator between God and mankind, is found only in Philo, Paul, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. The reason why it was not employed in later Christian writers was that λόγος [Logos – Word] took its place. The mediation theory of Paul was retained, but it assumed the form of the Logos doctrine. The μεσίτης doctrine of Paul and the λόγος doctrine of Justin Martyr, as we shall see, have one essentially common source, viz., the Greek Platonic philosophy."²⁷

Paine then attributed the Gospel of John to Gnosticism.

"The fourth Gospel is mystical, with a spice of Neo-Platonism, reminding one of Philo. Justin is speculative, with an emanation element which has a Stoic strain. His distinction between the immanent and the personalized Logos is wanting in the fourth Gospel. Behind both is the shadow of Gnosticism. But the fourth Gospel gives the

²⁶ Paine, Levi L., A Critical History of the Evolution of Trinitarianism, pp. 8-9

²⁷ Paine, Levi L., A Critical History of the Evolution of Trinitarianism, pp. 17-19

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

*clearest signs of Gnostic influence. Its peculiar vocabulary is from Gnostic sources.*²⁸

These examples are just the tip of the ice-burg regarding the kind of Bible-denying Unitarian scholarship Buzzard and Chandler have provided as the foundation of their so-called “Biblical Unitarianism.” It is evident in reading the works of Harnack, Paine, and many others that their starting presupposition was the complete rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that He was and is the “only-begotten Son of God” who came down from heaven to redeem mankind. They were convinced that Jesus must be merely a man, nothing more. Their so-called scholarly, historical research was their justification for their own unbelief! Given that they could not deny that the preexistence of Christ is clearly taught in the New Testament, they sought to explain away the evidence by claiming that the New Testament and the Apostles themselves were corrupted by Jewish mysticism and Greek philosophy. Without their overt denial of the accuracy of Scripture, there is absolutely no basis for their arguments of corruption! Their acknowledgement that preexistence of Christ and the incarnation are taught in the New Testament actually settles the question of preexistence IF we affirm that the New Testament is reliable God-breathed Scripture! Unitarianism’s foundation absolutely demands the denial of the inspiration of the New Testament if it interprets the New Testament at face value and according to sound hermeneutics.

There is no doubt that Christian theology evolved during the ministries of Peter and Paul (AD 30 to AD 67), and that this evolution is observable within the pages of the New Testament. The theology in Paul’s later epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Hebrews, Timothy) and in all of John’s works (which were written after the destruction of Jerusalem) is more mature than that of the earliest New Testament books. But there are no contradictions, only further detailed explanations and insight. This should not come as a surprise, since Jesus predicted it just before His death.

John 16:12-15 LGV

12 “I still have much to tell you, but you are powerless to carry it right now. 13 But when that one should come, the Breath of Truth, it will lead you into all the truth, for it will not speak from self, but will speak whatever it hears, and it will inform you [about] what is coming. 14 That one will glorify Me because it will receive out from Me and will relay-message to you. 15 Everything, whatever the Father has, is Mine. Therefore I said [that] it will receive out from Me and will relay-message to you.”²⁹

²⁸ Paine, Levi L., A Critical History of the Evolution of Trinitarianism, p. 33

²⁹ www.4windsfellowships.net/LGV/LGV_John.pdf

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

In Acts we see this actually playing out with the gradual increase in understanding and maturing of the Apostles as the holy Breath of God continued their education.³⁰ Consequently, we would expect that the later books of the New Testament would reflect a much more mature understanding than the earliest books. However, Buzzard's and Chandler's foundational authorities absolutely denied the reality of the preexistence of Christ, His divinity as the preincarnate Son of God, and His incarnation. Because of their false presuppositions, these "blind guides" mistook the observable and genuine maturing of the Apostles themselves for a gradual corruption from external influences – Jewish apocalyptic literature and Greek philosophy.

These Unitarian writers and their sources have used faulty logic in their accusations against both the Apostles and the earliest Christian pastors, apologists, and martyrs. Not only Paul and John, but Justin Martyr is accused of being corrupted by Greek philosophy in his works defending Christianity to a pagan Greek audience. It is true that in such works he used language that was familiar to his readers who were steeped in Greek philosophy. However, this does not equate to his alleged inability to distinguish apostolic doctrine from Greek philosophy. Rather, it shows that Justin was attempting to convey certain Biblical truths using concepts and language that his audience could easily comprehend in their own world-view. Paul himself did exactly the same thing in his address to the Greeks at the Athens.

Acts 17:16-31

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

18 Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?"

20 "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean."

21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

³⁰ The Jerusalem council in Acts 15 is an excellent example

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

23 "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:**

24 "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

25 "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

27 "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

28 "for in Him we live and move and have our being, **as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'**

29 "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

31 "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."

In this address, Paul appealed to certain truths contained in Greek philosophy. First, in verse 23 he claimed to preach to them the one they called "the Unknown God." Where did they get this idea? It was from Plato who claimed that there was one ultimate sovereign God, the source of all other gods, and everything that exists, far superior to all of the Greek and Roman gods, the God who cannot be seen with the eyes but can only be contemplated through the mind. Gaining knowledge of this supreme God was the ultimate goal of all true philosophy.³¹ Thus, by claiming to preach to them "the Unknown God" of Plato, Paul was implicitly agreeing with this aspect of Plato's philosophy.

Second, notice in verse 28 Paul quoted the Greek philosopher, Aratus, "For we are also His offspring." By quoting this statement, Paul was showing commonality between a certain concept of Greek philosophy and Christianity. His hearers were well aware of the book Paul was quoting. Here is Paul's quote of Aratus in its context:

³¹ See Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 3-4

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

*“From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; full is the sea and the havens thereof; always we all have need of Zeus. **For we are also his offspring**; and he in his kindness unto men giveth favourable signs and wakeneth the people to work, reminding them of livelihood. He tells what time the soil is best for the labour of the ox and for the mattock, and what time the seasons are favourable both for the planting of trees and for casting all manner of seeds. **For himself it was who set the signs in heaven, and marked out the constellations**, and for the year devised what stars chiefly should give to men right signs of the seasons, to the end that all things might grow unfaillingly. Wherefore him do men ever worship **first and last**.³² Hail, O Father, mighty marvel, mighty blessing unto men. Hail to thee and to the Elder Race! Hail, ye Muses, right kindly, every one! But for me, too, in answer to my prayer direct all my lay, even as is meet, to tell the stars.”³³*

Should we accuse Paul of preaching Plato’s philosophy or the god Zeus? Was Paul corrupted by Greek philosophy? Or was he doing exactly what he claimed to do as an effective evangelistic tool?

1 Cor. 9:19-23

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;

20 and **to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews**; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;

21 **to those who are without law, as without law** (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), **that I might win those who are without law**;

22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.**

23 Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Paul’s address to the philosophers at Athens is a perfect example of his doing just this, meeting the Greek philosophers on their own ground, approaching them first by agreeing with what the Greek philosophers got right about God, but then showing them the unvarnished and unpolluted truth from God’s own direct revelation. In Romans 1 Paul stated plainly that God has shown Himself to the pagans, *“even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,”* and that they *“knew God.”*³⁴ Thus, even Greek philosophy contains some elements of truth and some divine revelation, albeit polluted with the theories of men. Yet for Harnack, Paine, and many other Unitarian

³² Cf. Rev. 1:11,17; Rev. 2:8,19; Rev. 22:13

³³ Aratus, Phenomena, I

³⁴ Romans 1:20-21

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

scholars, the above Scriptures prove that Paul was himself corrupted by Greek philosophy. However, Bible-believing Christians who are objective see Paul merely employing the tools available to him to preach Jesus Christ in a Greek culture, since his education in Jewish thought, and his familiarity with Greek thought made him the best tool of Jesus Christ to be His Apostle to the Gentiles.

Trashing the Apostolic Fathers:

The so-called “Biblical Unitarians,” who claim to adhere to the inspiration of the Scriptures, attempt to straddle the fence. They repeat and quote the general claims of their scholarly sources regarding the influences that allegedly led to the doctrine of preexistence and incarnation. They hide from their readers the fact that their own sources acknowledge that these doctrines were taught in the New Testament, and instead attempt to shift the blame away from the Apostles themselves and place it squarely on the next generation of Christians after the Apostles. In this way they can keep up their façade of belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures. The Christian writings contiguous with the apostolic age are absolutely deadly to Unitarianism. These earliest Christian writings with one voice affirm the preexistence of Christ, that He was begotten out of God as the “Beginning” of creation, that as God’s only-begotten Son He was God’s agent through whom He made everything in heaven and on earth, and that the Son of God chose to become flesh and came down from heaven in order to redeem mankind. Why should we not simply consider these early Christian pastors, apologists, and martyrs to be good students of the apostolic teaching contained in the New Testament, the very books which Harnack, Paine, and other Unitarian scholars claimed teach preexistence?

Justin Martyr has become the “whipping boy” for these so-called “Biblical Unitarians,” in their attempt to portray him as the source of the syncretism between Christianity and Platonism. But Justin’s works show the same tactics displayed by Paul at Athens. To the Jews Justin became as a Jew, proving to Trypho the Jew the preexistence of Christ and His messiahship exclusively from Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets!³⁵ But to the Greeks Justin became as a Greek, using language and ideas familiar to them in order to convey basic Christian doctrines and explain the practice of Christians.³⁶ This does not imply that Justin was corrupted by Greek philosophy or could not differentiate between pure Christianity and Greek philosophy (as is charged by so-called “Biblical Unitarians”) any more than Paul’s doing the same at Athens.

³⁵ In his Dialogue with Trypho (a Jew), Justin based all of his arguments on the Old Testament Scriptures, using both the Septuagint and the Hebrew.

³⁶ In his works addressed to pagans, Justin used the language of philosophy and occasionally appealed to certain philosophers in order to convey certain Christian concepts in a manner that his Greek audience could understand.

Yet, these earliest post-apostolic writers must be painted as heretics in order to successfully peddle “Biblical Unitarianism” to Evangelicals who believe in biblical authority and inspiration. After poisoning the well of the earliest post-apostolic witnesses, they then attempt to explain away the relevant Scriptures (which their own Unitarian sources claimed teach preexistence) using eisegesis,³⁷ grossly mishandling the Greek text,³⁸ and providing a pseudo-translation of John that turns him into a Unitarian by significantly changing what he actually wrote!³⁹

Objective Research

The process that 4Winds Fellowships and the Bereans Bible Institute follow – the 8th Principle – is not about making our conclusions appear to be historic or providing a façade of scholarship for support. Our process is all about making sure that our conclusions really are historic and linked to the Apostles’ doctrine. It is about removing theological filters, not imposing the filters and presuppositions of Bible-denying scholars. A true and unbiased Christian researcher will provide plenty of **original research and ancient source material which can be verified and which logically leads to his conclusions**. He will not attempt to give weight to his own historical arguments by selectively quoting heavily biased scholarship. That is precisely what this series attempts to do.

Since we follow the eight principles listed at the beginning of this article, we necessarily hold the following suppositions as axiomatic which are the basis for both our interpretations of Scripture and our investigation of the historical record:

- The Apostles and their faithful assistants actually wrote the New Testament.⁴⁰
- Their recorded histories in the four Gospels and Acts are completely accurate.
- They received and accurately recorded new revelation from God after Pentecost.
- The text of the New Testament has been faithfully transmitted down to us.

As will be demonstrated in the following articles in this series, any fair and progressive reading of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament shows undeniably that they uniformly believed in the preexistence of Christ as God’s agent in creation.

³⁷ Proper interpretation of Scripture uses the process of “exegesis,” meaning drawing out of the text its plain meaning. “Eisegesis” is forcing one’s own ideas into the text.

³⁸ Anthony Buzzard ought to know that he is forcing and misrepresenting the Greek text, since he taught theology and Biblical languages for 24 years at Atlanta Bible College, McDonough, Georgia.

³⁹ See my analysis of Buzzard’s translation of John, <http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Logos.pdf>

⁴⁰ Mark was Peter’s nephew and assistant; Luke was Paul’s companion and assistant; Jude was the brother of Jesus and James, the pastor of the Jerusalem assembly. All of the New Testament books were either written by one of the Twelve Apostles or these assistants to the Twelve.

The Evolution of God – 1. Foundational Principles of Historical Research

Yet, within a century after John's death the earliest teaching concerning God and His Son began to evolve away from what the earliest pastors, apologists, and martyrs taught. Corruption from Greek philosophy did indeed creep in. And new views developed and became solidified. In the end, one of these views – Trinitarianism – prevailed and became official Roman Catholic dogma contained in the creeds.

Of course, modern Trinitarians and Unitarians have their handy excuses for why their views do not mesh with the united Christian testimony at the close of the apostolic age. The Trinitarian excuse is the claim that the early Christian writers were not as theologically sophisticated as later theologians who came centuries after them, thus supporting the idea that post-apostolic evolution of theology was a good thing. The Unitarian excuse is to deceptively dismiss the earliest evidence by poisoning the well, revising history, claiming that the earliest Christian pastors and martyrs were already heavily corrupted by Greek philosophy and should be summarily dismissed without consideration. However we will show that the genuine historical record documents the pristine Faith as well as the evolution of theology away from it. This historical record argues strongly against Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, Modalism, and Arianism (as all fruit from a bad tree). Instead, the earliest witnesses to the Apostles' teaching unanimously present a fifth view of the Godhead as being pristine apostolic doctrine. And this view, properly understood, is absolutely compatible with monotheism as understood by first century Judaism.

Part 2, Corruption in Apostolic Times

www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Evolution_002.pdf