

When God Prays

By Skip Heitzig

Review & Critique by Barbara Buzzard

In the first three pages of this book we have a contradiction startling and dramatic but so *unnoticed* that no proofreader or editorial board apparently objected. As a foreword to the book, John 17:1-26 is quoted. Verse 3 says this: “This is eternal life: to know You, *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ, the one You sent.” Next, author and Pastor Skip Heitzig says this: “What makes this prayer so remarkable and so deserving of both study and emulation? For one thing, Jesus himself prayed it. This intrigues me. Why, of all people, would Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah and our Savior, need to pray? After all, he’s God, right?”¹

That Position Has Been Filled

Actually no, not according to John 17:3 just quoted, which states that the Father *alone* is the true God. Nor according to 1 Corinthians 8:6 which phrases it this way: “For us there is but one God, the Father...” So at this point, I think, we are entering dangerous territory. We have just had a terrifyingly blatant contradiction: the Father is being addressed by the Son as being the only true God, and then the author says of Jesus, “After all, he’s God, right?” No, not right at all; sorry, that position has already been taken. It is occupied by the Father. At the very least we deserve a “Hey, wait a minute; I thought you just agreed that the Father was the only true God.” As A.H. Newman says of the Trinity and this sort of mental gymnastic: “It is a contradiction, indeed, and not merely a verbal contradiction, but an incompatibility in the human ideas conveyed. We can scarcely make a nearer approach to an exact enunciation of it, than of saying that one thing is two things.”² Dare we ask if the church is in its right mind?!

Praying is a very serious activity; one needs to know to whom one is praying. To pray is *not* to be God. It is to *seek* God. We are being asked to believe that one God is praying to another. Pastor Heitzig states that “The primary goal of prayer should be to deepen our relationship with God.”³ He also says, “We begin to see prayer for what it really is — a source of spiritual strength. Prayer fortifies us and gives us the strength to stand immovable.”⁴ And please consider this from Pastor Heitzig: “In a real sense, that’s what balanced prayer is like. Instead of being an exercise in self-gratification, it’s one of spiritual *edification* as we spend time with God.”⁵

Let us now examine what was just put forth in this book, and not offered as theory, but as doctrine: one God trying to deepen his relationship with the other, and one God who is apparently weak and prays to the other for spiritual strength. And we have one who is praying to the other for spiritual edification. In doing this, one has to change God’s own definition of Himself as being all-powerful, and we inevitably end up with a figure of our own imagination. We are entering a *nonsense land of make-belief*; we have created a God of our own imagination. In the real world, words cannot mean what we want them to mean; only in the world of *Alice in Wonderland*. Surely as Christians we are to be committed to Jesus’ view and also to his creed: “Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is this: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord”’” (Mark 12:29).

¹ Skip Heitzig, *When God Prays*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., p. 4.

² Sadler’s *Gloria Patri*, p. 39, A. H. Newman

³ *When God Prays*, p. 56

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60, emphasis added.

Words, Misused, Corrupt the Thinking

Is it not a tragedy of gigantic proportions that in this technically sophisticated 21st century we are still arguing that one can really mean two?! Or that you can have more than 100% (in the assertion that Jesus was 100% man and 100% God)? Pastor Heitzig states that Jesus “didn’t empty himself of being God.”⁶ However, there are certain things that are impossible. We all know that there are things which God cannot do. He cannot lie; He cannot die; He cannot commit unholy acts. I would even venture to say that in defining Who God is, we might even say that God is One Who does *not* pray. He is all-sufficient. He is where the buck stops. We must not malign His own character as the brilliant Being who set things up this way. For example, you cannot have a glass that is full of water and full of milk at the same time any more than you can have a lady who is pregnant and not pregnant at the same time, or a man who is both married and unmarried. We have been taught that Jesus is a God-man, a false narrative. How very odd that there was a perfectly good word meaning God-man in the Greek language and yet that word was never once used of Jesus. Words, misused, corrupt the thinking. Scripture refers to Jesus as a man, even after his ascension (1 Tim. 2:5). And again, *never* as a God-man.

Dependent and Omniscient at the Same Time?

Pastor Heitzig: “In his prayer to the Father in John 17, Jesus again demonstrates his omniscience.”⁷ However, on the back cover of the book, it is stated that “Throughout his life on earth, Jesus demonstrated his dependence on the Father by spending time in prayer.”⁸ Can we really have a God who is dependent and yet omniscient? Is this sound? Words cannot mean what we want them to mean. Let us leave that to Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*. In *Lectures in Divinity*, however, note what is admitted: “It might tend to moderation and in the end agreement, if we were industrious on all occasions to represent our own doctrine (the Trinity) as wholly *unintelligible*.”⁹

I am not naïve in these matters. I have felt the bitter sting of the tongue of a pastor who cursed me for not conforming to convention. I understand that most of orthodoxy engages in thinking like this: 1+1+1=1. But why if these doctrines are secure is there so much hatred, persecution and name-calling? I would venture to say that the true church is persecuted but never persecutes. What is there to fear from me? If something is true it can surely stand up to questioning and critical thinking (the very reasoning which God invites us to engage in). I am like an ant attacking an elephant, but to allow thinking like this to remain unchallenged when God gave us logic, reason, and skills to study and understand His Scriptures seems awfully wrong. There are so many scholars, seminarians, professors, writers, and historians who know that orthodoxy took some wrong turns and created or invented its theology for private motives. For example, “No responsible NT scholar would claim that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught by Jesus, or preached by the earliest Christians, or consciously held by any writers of the NT.”¹⁰ “It must be admitted by everyone who has the rudiments of an historical sense that the doctrine of the Trinity formed no part of the original message. St. Paul did not know it, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed.”¹¹

Consider, please, the following points which you would have to adhere to in order to maintain the orthodox belief that “after all, He’s God, right?” (And please note what Pastor Heitzig said re: Jesus, while on earth: “He did not exchange deity for humanity. He didn’t empty Himself of being

⁶ Ibid., p. 18

⁷ Ibid., p. 122

⁸ Quotation from back cover

⁹ Dr. Hey, *Lectures in Divinity*, 2, 235.

¹⁰ Dr. A.T. Hansen, *The Image of the Invisible God*.

¹¹ Dr. Matthews, D.D., D. Litt., *God in Christian Experience*, p. 180

God. Divinity was his very nature. He only gave up certain aspects of his position.”) So please do not justify any point by saying “that was when he was human.”

As you peruse these insights, don’t allow yourself to toss them off without accepting the challenges they imply.

If Jesus Is God, What Does This Say about God?

1. If Jesus is God, God begat God. Heb. 1:5.
2. God humbled himself. Phil. 2:8.
3. God died. Phil. 2:8b.
4. God changed to a fleshly human. Jn. 1:14.
5. God gave his blood for sin. (What blood?) Eph. 1:7.
6. God became sin!...for us!! 2 Cor.5:21 ...and God made God who had no sin to become sin for us so that in God we might become the righteousness of God.
7. Mary is the mother of God, so God had a mother, a father and he had a God.
8. God forsook God. (My God, why hast thou forsaken me?) Mt.2 7:46.
9. God became obedient? Who would God obey? (to the point of death) Heb. 9:12.
10. God doesn’t know the day or hour he will come back? Mt. 24:36.
11. God is a high priest and offered sacrifice to God for sin. Heb. 9:26.
12. God is a prophet. Mt. 21:11.
13. God bore disgrace. Heb. 13:13.
14. God prayed to God in the garden, “Not my will but yours be done.” Mt. 26:39.
15. God said to God, “You are the only one who is truly God.” Jn. 17:3.
16. God offered himself unblemished to God. 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.
17. God was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. Mt. 3:15.
18. God said, “Don’t believe my words, believe God’s.” Jn. 12: 4.
19. God offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to God. Heb. 5:7.
20. God reverently submitted to God. Heb. 5:7.
21. God was made perfect through suffering. Heb. 2:10.
22. God suffered and was delivered up by the foreknowledge of God. Acts 2:23.
23. God was beaten. Mt. 27:26.
24. God was the first fruits of humans’ resurrection. 1 Cor.15:20.
25. God resurrected God from the dead. 1 Cor. 15:15.
26. God was a holy servant of God whom God anointed. Acts 4:27.
27. God will be given the throne of his father David. Lk. 1:32.
28. God was the seed of Abraham, Lk.1:33, Judah, Lk.1:34, David, Lk. 1:32, and woman, Gen. 3:15.
29. God was given God’s Holy Spirit without measure. Jn.3:34 (How could God put God into God?)
30. God was GIVEN all authority in heaven and earth from God. Mt. 28:18.
31. God is greater than God. Jn. 14:28.
32. God could only speak what the Father taught him. Jn. 8:28.
33. No man has seen God at any time but God taught everyone about God as a man. Jn. 1:18.
34. God was the second ADAM! 1 Cor. 15:22, 45.
35. God approved of God. Jn. 6:27.
36. God grew in favor with God and man. Lk. 2:52.
37. At the end of his reign, God will turn the kingdom over to God. 1Cor. 15:24.
38. God put his words in God’s mouth. Deut. 18:18.
39. God has nothing, no teaching, except what God gave him. God can do nothing of himself. Jn. 8:28.
40. God is spirit but has flesh and blood. Jn. 4:24 vs. Heb. 2:14
41. God was made like his brothers. Heb. 2:17.
42. God grew in stature and increased in wisdom. Lk. 2:40
43. God was our example of a sinless person. 1 Cor. 11:1.
44. God was made a little lower than the angels. Heb. 2:9.
45. God inherited a superior name. Heb. 1:4.
46. God was a humble servant of God. Acts 4:27.

47. God is the Lamb of God. John 1:36.
48. God was born for the purpose of becoming King. Jn. 18:37
49. God revealed to God what must soon take place. Rev. 1:1.
50. God was born under the Law of God. Gal. 4:4-5.
51. God fulfilled the whole law of God. Jn. 5:17, Eph. 2:15.
52. God ascended to his God and our God. Jn. 20:17.
53. God was raised and seated on the right hand of the throne of God. Heb. 12:2.
54. God was tempted. Heb. 2:18.
55. God was made like his brothers in every way. Heb. 2:17.
56. God is an apostle and a high priest. Heb. 3:1.
57. God who made men holy and those who were made holy are of one family. So God is not ashamed to call them brothers. Heb. 2:11.
58. God was amazed at the lack of faith in Nazareth. Mk. 6:6.
59. God thanked God for his food. Acts 27:35.
60. God was the first-born from the dead. Col. 1:18.
61. God, through God, was pleased to reconcile all things to Himself. Col. 1:20.
62. As they sailed, God fell asleep, Lk 8:23, and was awakened, Lk. 8:24.
63. God conferred on his apostles a kingdom, just as God's Father conferred one on him. Lk. 22:29.
64. God exalted God above everyone. Phil. 2:9.
65. God was a man accredited by God with miracles, signs and wonders. Acts 2:22
66. The grace of God (unmerited favor) was upon God. Lk. 2:40.
67. God was the Holy One of God. Mk. 1:24.
68. God said, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Mk. 10:18.
69. God was the son...of Adam, the son of God. Lk. 3:38.
70. We are heirs of God and co-heirs with God. Rom. 8:17.
71. God had to drink the cup God gave God. Jn. 18:11.

These points come not from me but from a devoted Bible student seeking to understand the nature of God.¹² *Now if you can honestly subscribe to all of the above (and I know of no mind which can) then you can speak about God praying.* Otherwise, please have a rethink. Sometimes we really do need a glass of cold water thrown in our faces. Remember, the theological system which supports this kind of thinking has a God who can die. Something is wrong here. We all need to ask ourselves how well anchored in Scripture our ideas are.

I sent a question to the Billy Graham Association, as this book was one of their recommended library selections. I wanted to be fair to them and understand the mindset of an organization that could support this book. I confess astonishment even at the title of the book, which seems to me ridiculous if not blasphemous. God, all-powerful, all-knowing, the Sustainer of all, the Comforter, the Shepherd, the One who blesses and heals, the all-merciful, all-gracious God *praying*? To me it is akin to speaking of God *dying*. It is an impossibility.

This is the answer I received: "It is often perplexing to note that Jesus addresses God in prayer. The answer to this...is that Jesus was a true man, as well as God...He is described *by theologians* as one Divine Person having two natures, divine and human — the God-man...In all of this *great mystery*, we have only *glimmers of truth* which are beyond human comprehension" (emphasis added). Yes, that is just the problem — he is described by *theologians*. I understand that *theologians* claim this but I need to see it in Scripture. When I then asked for scriptural references to document the above, I received this: "Although we are unable to offer further counsel" I was urged to seek the advice of a pastor. My questions are many but most prominent would be this: Am I really to believe what *theologians* theorize but which offers me only a *glimmer* of truth (if that!) and is beyond my comprehension in any case? How am I to assent to what is incomprehensible? If I did, I would consider that a *failure* of clear thinking.

¹² Carol Siders, *Focus on the Kingdom*, August, 2012

Thinking Is Allowed in Our World

The author of *When God Prays* says this: “Jesus’ prayer takes an important shift at this point. He first prayed for himself (John 17:1-5) and then for his immediate disciples — those who had been with him in his earthly sojourn (John 17:6-19).” Yes, in verse 5 Jesus is praying for himself but do we believe that *God* prayed for himself?! To whom?!

It is not my desire to be flippant or facetious or to write off this book as a no-winner. I just cannot get my head around the idea which frames the whole thesis of the book. Sir Isaac Newton said this: “Tis the temper of the hot and superstitious part of mankind in matters of religion ever to be fond of mysteries and for that reason to like best what they understand least.”

To be sure, there are mysteries in Scripture, but since God has revealed Who He is (11,000 times with singular personal pronouns) — Who He is is not one of those mysteries. Nor, since we are told by God that Jesus is His Son (Luke 1:35), is the Son’s identity one of those mysteries. Granted, in our culture we misunderstand what is meant by Son of God and *think* it means God. Please note that Fuller Seminary’s Colin Brown says this: “To be called a ‘Son of God’ one has to be a being who is *not* God.”¹³ I humbly submit this challenge to the status quo. Thinking is allowed in our world: “The power of reasoning was given us by our Maker, for this very end, to pursue truth.”¹⁴

¹³ Dr. Colin Brown, “Trinity and Incarnation: In Search of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Ex Auditu*, Vol. 7, 1991, p. 88.

¹⁴ J.W. Gilbart, *Logic for the Million*, 1854.