

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 2: THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Lesson 6

Monotheism and the Shema — The Oneness of God

The God of Israel and the Unity of the Divine Being

Key Texts: Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Isaiah 45:5–7; Mark 12:29–30; 1 Corinthians 8:4–6

Hear, O Israel — The Confession That Defines the People of God

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Series Verse

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Introduction

In Lesson 5 we closed Unit 2 with the polemical dimension of the doctrine of God's existence, the biblical response to atheism, agnosticism, deism, pantheism, and idolatry. We established that every false view of God is worship misdirected, and that the restless heart of every image-bearer finds its rest only in the one true God who is there and who is not silent. Now, in this sixth and concluding lesson of Unit 2, we narrow our focus to what is perhaps the single most foundational affirmation of the biblical doctrine of God: He is one.

The oneness of God, divine monotheism, is not merely one doctrine among others in the theological encyclopedia. It is, in the words of the great Reformer Martin Luther, the article upon which the church stands or falls, not because every other doctrine is unimportant, but because the unity of God is the irreducible bedrock upon which every other attribute, every other doctrine, and every other claim of the Christian faith is built. A God who is not one is not fully sovereign, not fully trustworthy, not fully worthy of the undivided allegiance that Scripture demands. The monotheism of the Bible is not a theological refinement grafted onto an older polytheism; it is the heartbeat of the entire canonical witness from Genesis to Revelation.

The primary biblical expression of divine monotheism is the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, the confession that has stood at the center of Jewish worship from the giving of the Law at Sinai to this present day, and that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself identified as the first and greatest commandment (Mark 12:29–30). In this lesson we will take up the Shema with the careful attention it deserves, explore what the oneness of God means theologically, situate Old Testament monotheism within its ancient Near Eastern context, grapple with the doctrine of divine simplicity, probe the relationship between monotheism and the Trinity, and draw out the practical implications that the unity of God places upon the life and worship of His people.

I. The Shema: The Confession at the Heart of All Biblical Religion

The word Shema is simply the Hebrew imperative “hear” or “listen”, the opening word of Deuteronomy 6:4. The full text of the classic Shema reads:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!”, Deuteronomy 6:4, NASB 1995

These eight Hebrew words, *Sh'ma Yisrā'el YHWH 'ElōhênU YHWH 'Echād*, constitute the most fundamental confession of the biblical faith. In Jewish practice, the Shema is recited twice daily, morning and evening, as the act of covenant reaffirmation by which the people of Israel bind themselves again to the God who is theirs and whose they are. It is to be written on the doorposts of every home (Deuteronomy 6:9), bound upon the hand and between the eyes (Deuteronomy 6:8), and taught with urgent diligence to every generation of children (Deuteronomy 6:7). It is not background theology; it is the grammar of all faithful life.

The context of the Shema is critical for understanding its force. It stands at the opening of Moses' great catechetical address in Deuteronomy 6, immediately following the repetition of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 and the solemn call to covenant loyalty. Israel is on the threshold of the Promised Land, about to enter a world crowded with Canaanite deities, fertility gods, local shrines, and the seductive polytheism of every surrounding culture. Into that context, Moses speaks with the authority of the LORD: before you enter the land, before you build your homes and plant your vineyards and raise your children, hear this: the LORD is your God, and the LORD is one. There is no other. There never has been. There never will be. He and He alone is God, and He will not share His glory with another.

When the Lord Jesus is asked by a scribe which commandment is first and greatest of all, He answers without hesitation:

“The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”, Mark 12:29–30, NASB 1995

Notice what the Lord does: He quotes the Shema before He quotes the command to love. The love He demands, total, undivided, whole-being love, is grounded in and shaped by the oneness of God. If God were many, a divided allegiance might be appropriate; one could love this deity with the heart and that deity with the mind and that deity with the strength, dividing one's devotion across a divine marketplace. But because the LORD is one, He demands and deserves the love of the whole person, heart, soul, mind, and strength, without remainder. Monotheism is not merely a doctrinal position; it is the theological foundation of the most total claim that any Being has ever made upon a human life.

II. The Meaning of Echad: Absolute Unity or Compound Unity?

The Hebrew word translated “one” in Deuteronomy 6:4 is *echad* (אֶחָד), and its precise meaning has been the subject of considerable theological discussion, particularly in Jewish-Christian dialogue and in debates about the compatibility of Trinitarian theology with biblical monotheism. Some Jewish scholars and anti-Trinitarian Christian interpreters have argued that *echad* denotes absolute, simple, undifferentiated unity, that the Shema explicitly teaches that God is one and only one Person, and that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, with its three Persons in one divine Being, violates the plain meaning of the text. This argument requires careful engagement.

The word *echad* is the most common Hebrew word for “one” and is used across an extremely wide range of contexts in the Old Testament. It can denote simple numerical oneness: one day, one man, one stone. But it can also denote a composite or unified oneness, a oneness that encompasses plurality within it. The clearest biblical examples are instructive. In Genesis 2:24, the man and the woman become “one flesh” (*basar echad*), two persons united into a single covenant reality. In Numbers 13:23, the spies cut down a single cluster of grapes (*eshkol echad*), one cluster comprising many individual grapes. In Ezra 3:1, the people gathered “as one man” (*kr'ish echad*), a great multitude united in a single corporate act. In none of these cases does *echad* require

the absence of internal differentiation or plurality; it requires unity, which may or may not involve compositeness.

This does not mean that the Shema is a proof text for the Trinity, it is not, and we must not press it further than the text will bear. The Shema affirms the unity and uniqueness of God against polytheism and idolatry; it does not by itself elaborate the internal differentiation of that unity into three Persons. The revelation of the Trinity is progressive and reaches its fullness in the New Testament. But it does mean that the argument from *echad* against the Trinity, the argument that the Shema's "one" necessarily excludes any internal plurality within the divine being, is linguistically and exegetically untenable. The word itself is compatible with precisely the kind of unity-in-diversity that Trinitarian theology affirms.

Some have argued for the use of *yachid* (יָחִיד), a Hebrew word that more exclusively denotes solitary, absolute oneness, as evidence that had the Shema meant to teach absolute singularity, it would have used *yachid* rather than *echad*. While this argument must be pressed with caution (the choice of words in any ancient text reflects a complex matrix of factors), the observation is linguistically sound: *echad* does not carry the absolute singularity that *yachid* does, and the difference is theologically significant. The God of the Shema is one, incomparably, uniquely, sovereignly one, but the word chosen to express that oneness does not foreclose the kind of rich, differentiated, personal oneness that the full canonical witness will ultimately disclose.

III. Old Testament Monotheism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context

To appreciate the radical and revolutionary character of the Shema, we must situate it within its ancient Near Eastern context. The world of the ancient Near East was saturated with polytheism. The Mesopotamian pantheon contained hundreds of deities: Enlil, Marduk, Ishtar, Tammuz, Anu, and many more, each presiding over specific domains of life and nature, each demanding specific forms of worship and appeasement, each capable of competing with and defeating the others. The Egyptian pantheon was similarly complex: Ra, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Seth, Thoth, and dozens more, organized in complex genealogical and cosmic hierarchies. The Canaanite religion that Israel was about to encounter in the Promised Land featured Baal the storm god, Asherah the fertility goddess, El the high god of the pantheon, Dagon, Molech, and a host of local deities associated with particular shrines, trees, and bodies of water.

In this world, the claim that there is only one God, one God who alone created the heavens and the earth, who alone governs the nations, who alone holds the future in His hands, was not a modest theological refinement. It was a declaration of war against the entire religious framework of the ancient world. Every other nation had its gods; Israel had the God. Every other nation's gods could be appeased or outmaneuvered by the gods of other nations; Israel's God had no rivals, no competitors, no peers. He was not the strongest god in a pantheon; He was the only God, and the gods of the nations were "nothings" before Him (Psalm 96:5).

Modern critical scholarship has sometimes argued that Israelite monotheism was a late development, that early Israel was actually henotheistic (worshipping one god among many without denying the existence of the others) and that strict monotheism only

emerged during or after the Babylonian exile. This reconstruction, however, does violence to the canonical text. The Shema is set at Sinai, the foundational moment of Israel's existence as a covenant people, and the polemic against other gods runs through the Pentateuch from the very first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3, NASB 1995). The prophetic literature does not introduce monotheism as a new development; it calls Israel back to the monotheism from which she has continually apostatized. The very fact that Israel was so persistently tempted by the polytheism of her neighbors, and so persistently rebuked for it, testifies to the radical and demanding character of the monotheism that was hers from the beginning.

The LORD's own self-declaration in Isaiah 45 stands as the most majestic biblical assertion of exclusive monotheism:

"I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God ... I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.", Isaiah 45:5, 7, NASB 1995

The repetition is deliberate and emphatic: "I am the LORD, and there is no other." This is not the modesty of a deity claiming preeminence within a larger pantheon. This is the absolute, exclusive, non-negotiable claim of the One who alone holds the title of God. And notice the scope: He forms light and creates darkness, causes well-being and creates calamity. The absolute sovereignty that belongs to genuine divinity, sovereignty over all things, including those that seem most contrary to divine purposes, belongs to Him alone. No idol, no rival, no philosophical abstraction can make this claim; only the God of the Bible can and does.

IV. The Unity of God: One Being, One Essence, One God

The theological doctrine that gives precise content to the biblical affirmation of divine oneness is the doctrine of the unity of God. Divine unity means that there is only one God, that this God possesses a single, undivided divine essence, and that there are no other beings who share in or compete with that essence. It is distinct from, but related to, the doctrine of divine simplicity, which we will examine in the next section.

The unity of God has several precise theological dimensions. First, it means that God is numerically one: there are not two Gods, three Gods, or any other number. The divine Being is singular. This is the point of the Shema's echo throughout the whole of Scripture: "I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me" (Isaiah 44:6, NASB 1995); "There is no God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4, NASB 1995). Whatever it means to say that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a question we will take up fully in Unit 6, it does not mean that there are three Gods. There is one divine Being, one divine essence, one God.

Second, the unity of God means that He is qualitatively unique: He is not merely the greatest among a class of beings called "gods," but the only genuine instance of divine being in existence. The gods of the nations are, in the deepest sense, not gods at all; they are idols, projections, or at best demonic counterfeits. The LORD alone possesses aseity, self-existence, independence from all other beings. The LORD alone possesses

the attributes that belong to genuine divinity. In this sense, His unity is not merely numerical but ontological: He stands in a class entirely His own, the One beside whom there is no other.

Third, the unity of God means that His attributes are not externally added to His being but are identical with it. God does not merely have love, wisdom, holiness, and power as separate qualities that have been combined in one Being; God is love, God is wisdom, God is holiness, God is power. This is the insight that transitions us from the doctrine of divine unity to the closely related doctrine of divine simplicity.

Paul's treatment of the unity of God in 1 Corinthians 8:4–6 is particularly rich because it holds together the strict monotheism of the Shema with the emerging Trinitarian faith of the early church:

“...we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”, 1 Corinthians 8:4–6, NASB 1995

This is a stunning passage. Paul affirms the strict monotheism of the Shema, “there is no God but one”, and in the same breath identifies both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God within the framework of monotheistic confession. The pattern mirrors the Shema's twofold use of “YHWH” (“the LORD our God, the LORD is one”); here Paul uses the twofold identification “one God, the Father” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ” within a single monotheistic affirmation. He is not teaching that there are two Gods; he is teaching that the one God of the Shema includes within Himself the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in a way that the full Trinitarian doctrine of Unit 6 will elaborately unpack.

V. The Simplicity of God: He Is His Attributes

The doctrine of divine simplicity is one of the oldest, most carefully articulated, and least popularly understood doctrines of classical Christian theology. It is affirmed, in various formulations, by Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, the Protestant Reformers, and the Westminster divines. And yet it is regularly misunderstood, misrepresented, and dismissed as a piece of alien Greek philosophy imported into Christian theology without biblical warrant. A careful examination of what the doctrine actually teaches, and of its biblical grounding, reveals that it is neither an alien importation nor an abstract philosophical curiosity, but one of the most practically significant truths in the whole of Theology Proper.

Divine simplicity, in its classical formulation, means that God is not composed of parts. He is not a being in whom various attributes, love, holiness, wisdom, power, justice, have been assembled together like components in a machine. He is not a compound of essence and existence (as all created things are: what they are and that they are can be distinguished). He is not divided between what He is and what He has. God simply is: His existence is His essence, His essence is His existence, and His attributes are not additions to His essence but identical with it. God does not merely have love; He is love

(1 John 4:8). God does not merely have wisdom; He is wisdom (Proverbs 8; 1 Corinthians 1:24). God does not merely have life; He has life in Himself (John 5:26).

The biblical grounding of divine simplicity is found not in a single proof text but in the whole architecture of the biblical doctrine of God. Consider: if God's love were one component and His holiness another component, assembled together in the divine being, it would be possible in principle for them to be separated, for God to have love without holiness or holiness without love. But the Scripture everywhere testifies that the divine attributes are not separable and competing forces that must be balanced against one another; they are inseparable and co-expressive dimensions of a single, simple, unified divine being. God's love is always holy love; His holiness is always loving holiness. His justice is always merciful justice; His mercy is always just mercy. The apparent tensions between the divine attributes, tensions that led the ancient Marcionites to split the God of the Old Testament's wrath from the God of the New Testament's love, are not genuine divisions in the divine being; they are expressions of a single, simple divine being seen from different angles and in different relations.

Divine simplicity also means that God is not dependent upon anything outside Himself for any aspect of His being. A composite being, a being made up of parts, would depend upon those parts for its existence and would therefore be ontologically posterior to them. But God is prior to all things; nothing outside of Himself contributes to His being or constitutes any aspect of it. He is the underived, uncaused, self-existent One. This is the meaning of His great name: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14, NASB 1995). He is not a being who exists in a particular way because certain conditions have been met; He simply, absolutely, and necessarily is.

The practical significance of divine simplicity is immense. It means that God cannot be divided against Himself. When He acts in love, He does not set aside His holiness; when He acts in judgment, He does not set aside His mercy. When He forgives the sinner through the atoning work of Christ, both His justice and His love are fully and simultaneously expressed, not in tension, but in a single, glorious, simple divine act. The cross is not the resolution of a conflict between competing divine attributes; it is the supreme expression of the simple, unified, inexhaustibly rich being of the one God who is, at once and always, perfectly holy and perfectly loving.

VI. Monotheism and the Trinity: One God in Three Persons

No treatment of divine monotheism would be complete without addressing the question that inevitably arises: How does the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the affirmation that God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, relate to the strict biblical monotheism of the Shema? Is the Trinity a departure from monotheism, a form of tritheism dressed in sophisticated theological language? Or does it represent a deeper and fuller unfolding of what the oneness of God truly means?

The answer of orthodox Christian theology, developed with painstaking care in the great Trinitarian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, is that the Trinity is not a departure from monotheism but its most profound elaboration. The Nicene and post-Nicene theologians, Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine, were not compromising the Shema when they affirmed the full deity of the Son and the Spirit

alongside the Father; they were unpacking the fullness of a divine unity that was always richer and more internally differentiated than simple numerical oneness.

The classical Trinitarian formula is precise: one Being (*ousia*, essence, substance) in three Persons (hypostases, persons, subsistences). There are not three divine Beings; there is one divine Being. There are not three Gods; there is one God. But this one God exists eternally as a communion of three real, distinct, co-equal Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who share a single divine essence and are not three instances of divinity but three eternal modes of subsistence within the one divine being. The unity of God is not compromised by the Trinity; it is fulfilled by it, for the God of the Bible is not a bare, solitary, undifferentiated monad but the eternally rich and personally differentiated triune God.

The New Testament makes the Trinitarian dimension of the divine unity explicit at every turn, while never abandoning the monotheistic confession. Paul's benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all", addresses three distinct Persons in a single doxological movement. The baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 commands baptism "in the name" (singular) "of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (three Persons), one name, three Persons, a formula that is simultaneously monotheistic and Trinitarian. The baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16–17 presents all three Persons simultaneously: the Son being baptized, the Spirit descending as a dove, the Father speaking from heaven. The three are distinct; the one God is undivided.

It is essential to introduce this connection here, at the doctrine of divine unity, even though the full Trinitarian exposition belongs to Unit 6. For the student of Theology Proper must understand from the outset that the monotheism of the Bible is not the bare monotheism of Islam, which explicitly and forcefully denies any internal differentiation within the divine unity, or the abstract monotheism of philosophical theism, which arrives at a single God by stripping away all distinctions. It is the rich, personal, relationally dynamic monotheism of the triune God of Scripture, the God who is one in a way that is infinitely richer than any mere arithmetic oneness, because His unity is the unity of an eternal, perfect, loving communion of three divine Persons.

VII. The Practical Implications of Monotheism: Undivided Allegiance, Worship, and Trust

We close with what Moses himself understood to be the irreducible practical consequence of the Shema: that the oneness of God demands the total, undivided, whole-being response of the creature He has made and redeemed. The Shema is not merely a creedal assertion; it is a call to action, immediately followed in Deuteronomy 6:5 by the greatest commandment:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”, Deuteronomy 6:5, NASB 1995

Three practical implications of divine monotheism deserve particular attention.

A. Undivided Allegiance

If the LORD is one, then He will not share His people's allegiance with any rival. The first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3, NASB 1995), is the direct practical application of the Shema to the life of the covenant community. A divided allegiance, the LORD on Sunday and Mammon on Monday; the LORD in the sanctuary and Baal in the field, is not merely a pragmatic failure; it is a theological contradiction. It assumes that God is one among several legitimate objects of ultimate trust, which is precisely what the Shema denies. The monotheism of the Bible is not compatible with the soft pluralism of contemporary spirituality, which imagines that all sincere religious devotion, regardless of its object, is equally valid and equally acceptable to a tolerant deity. The God of the Shema will not be tolerated alongside other gods; He will be worshipped as the only God, or He will be disobeyed.

B. Undivided Worship

If there is only one God, then there is only one legitimate object of worship. All genuine worship, prayer, praise, thanksgiving, adoration, sacrifice, obedience, is directed to Him alone. This is the meaning of the first and great commandment, as the Lord Jesus articulates it in Mark 12:29–30: love God with all the heart, all the soul, all the mind, and all the strength. The totality of the devotion demanded reflects the totality of the Object's claim. Because He is the only God, He claims the whole person. Because He is one, the response He demands is one: the gathering up of all that we are and all that we have into a single, undivided, whole-being act of love and worship.

This has direct implications for the church's corporate worship. The worship of the one God must be shaped by the revelation of the one God, it must be ordered by His Word, directed to His person, regulated by His commands. The history of the people of God is a history of the recurring temptation to import the worship patterns of the surrounding culture into the sanctuary of the one God, to worship the right God in the wrong ways, or to blend the worship of the LORD with the worship practices of the nations. Both Testaments condemn this syncretism with unsparing force. The one God is worshipped in the way He has prescribed, or not at all.

C. Undivided Trust

If there is only one God, if the LORD alone is God, Creator, sovereign, and Redeemer, then He is the only legitimate object of absolute trust. He is the only One in whom the soul can rest without qualification, without reservation, without the hedge of a backup plan. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD" (Jeremiah 17:7, NASB 1995). The monotheism of the Bible is the theological basis of all biblical hope: because the God who made the promises is the only God, the One beside whom there is no rival and against whom there is no force that can prevail, His promises are inviolable. He cannot be outmaneuvered by a stronger power; there is no stronger power. He cannot be prevented from keeping His word by competing divine decrees; there are no competing divine decrees. He is one, and therefore His word is absolute, His purposes are certain, and His faithfulness is the most reliable reality in the universe.

This undivided trust is especially the comfort of the suffering and the anchor of the uncertain. When the world feels chaotic, when the nations rage, when the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous to suffer, the monotheism of the Shema is the bedrock

beneath the feet of the believer: the LORD alone is God, the LORD alone is sovereign, and the LORD's purposes will stand. "THE LORD of hosts has sworn saying, 'Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand'" (Isaiah 14:24, NASB 1995). Because He is one, there is no Plan B, no alternative outcome, no possibility of His ultimate defeat. The one God is the one hope, and that hope does not put to shame.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

Deuteronomy 6:4–5

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Isaiah 45:5–7

"I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these."

Mark 12:29–30

"Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'"

1 Corinthians 8:4–6

"...we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Shema	Hebrew for "hear" or "listen" (from shama', to hear). The opening word and title of Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our

	God, the LORD is one!” The most fundamental confession of biblical faith, recited twice daily in Jewish practice, and identified by the Lord Jesus as the first and greatest commandment (Mark 12:29–30).
Echad (אֶחָד)	Hebrew word for “one” used in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4). The most common Hebrew numeral, used in a wide range of contexts including both simple oneness (one day, one man) and composite or unified oneness (one flesh in Genesis 2:24). Its use in the Shema affirms the unity and uniqueness of God but does not preclude the kind of internal differentiation disclosed in the doctrine of the Trinity.
Yachid (יָחִיד)	Hebrew word denoting solitary, absolute, undifferentiated oneness. Used of Isaac as Abraham’s “only” son (Genesis 22:2) and of the mourning for an “only” child (Zechariah 12:10). Notably not used in the Shema, which uses echad. The distinction is theologically significant in Jewish-Christian dialogue about the Shema and the Trinity.
Monotheism	From the Greek monos (one) and theos (God). The belief that only one God exists. Distinguished from henotheism (worship of one god among many without denying the existence of others) and monolatry (exclusive worship of one god). Biblical monotheism is exclusive: the LORD alone is God, and all other claimed deities are not gods at all (Isaiah 44:6; 1 Corinthians 8:4).
Henotheism	The worship of one god as supreme within a larger pantheon, without necessarily denying the existence of other gods. A transitional category sometimes proposed by critical scholars to describe early Israelite religion. The canonical text, however, presents Israelite religion as straightforwardly monotheistic from the Sinai covenant onward, and the prophets call Israel back to the monotheism she has abandoned, not forward to one she has not yet attained.
Divine Unity	The theological doctrine that God is numerically and essentially one: there is only one divine Being, possessing one undivided divine essence. Distinguished from the related doctrine of divine simplicity. God’s unity means that there are no other genuine gods (against polytheism), that He is uniquely and incomparably in a class of His own (against henotheism), and that His being is not divided against itself.
Divine Simplicity	The classical doctrine that God is not composed of parts. His essence and existence are identical; His attributes are not additions to His being but are identical with it. God does not merely have love, holiness, or wisdom; He is these things in the most perfect and undivided sense. Simplicity safeguards the unity of God by ensuring that His attributes cannot be set against one another as competing components but are always co-expressed dimensions of His single, undivided being.
Ousia (οὐσία)	Greek term for “being,” “essence,” or “substance.” In Trinitarian theology, ousia refers to the one divine essence or substance shared

	equally and fully by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed declares the Son to be homoousios, of the same essence or substance, with the Father, affirming that the Son is not a lesser divine being but fully and equally divine.
Hypostasis (ὑπόστασις)	Greek term for “person,” “subsistence,” or “individual reality.” In Trinitarian theology, hypostasis refers to each of the three distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who share the one divine ousia. The classical Trinitarian formula is: one ousia (essence), three hypostases (persons). This ensures that the Persons are genuinely distinct without being three separate Gods.
Homoousios (ὁμοούσιος)	Greek term meaning “of the same substance” or “consubstantial.” The decisive term in the Nicene Creed (325 AD) for expressing the full equality of the Son with the Father in divine essence. Against the Arian formula homoiousios (“of similar substance”), homoousios insists that the Son is not a lesser or derived divine being but shares fully and equally in the one undivided divine essence.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe, with the full weight of the biblical witness behind us, that there is one God and one God only, the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God who has made Himself known in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. We must believe that this oneness is not a bare arithmetic oneness but the rich, personally differentiated, Trinitarian oneness of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must believe that divine simplicity means the divine attributes are not competing forces in God but co-expressive dimensions of His single, undivided being, and that therefore the God we trust is perfectly and simultaneously the God who loves us and the God who is holy, the God who is merciful and the God who is just, without any inner conflict or division. And we must believe that because He is one, He is wholly trustworthy: His word, His promises, and His purposes are as reliable as His nature, which is to say, absolutely.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The Shema is not finally a theological proposition to be assented to; it is a call to love. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The total love demanded by the Shema is made possible, and is the only appropriate response to, the total claim of the one God. Let the study of divine monotheism kindle in our hearts a renewed and deepened love for the God who is worthy of all that we are. Let it also produce a searching self-examination: Are there rival claimants within our hearts that have been given portions of the love that belongs to God alone? The monotheism of the Bible is not only an apologetic position; it is a mirror held up to the soul, revealing where our loves have been divided and calling them back to their rightful singular object.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

1. **Recite and meditate on the Shema.** The practice of the Jewish people in reciting the Shema twice daily, morning and evening, is a discipline of covenant renewal from which we as God's people have much to learn. Consider making Deuteronomy 6:4–5 a regular feature of your personal devotion: a daily reorientation of the whole self to the one God who is yours and whose you are.
2. **Examine your practical monotheism.** Ask yourself honestly: Is the LORD the one God of my actual, practical, daily life? Or have I constructed a functional pantheon of rival goods, career, comfort, reputation, relationships, financial security, that compete with Him for the throne of my affections? The greatest commandment demands not a portion of the heart but the whole of it. What audit of your life does that demand?
3. **Defend Trinitarian monotheism.** The claim that Christianity's Trinitarian theology betrays the Shema is one of the most common objections raised by Muslim apologists and by Jehovah's Witnesses. Know the answer: one ousia, three hypostases; one God, three Persons; the Trinity is not tritheism but the fullest and most glorious elaboration of the divine unity. Be prepared to explain this with clarity and confidence.
4. **Rest your trust entirely in the one God.** Examine where your functional trust actually rests. The monotheism of the Bible not only tells us where to direct our worship; it tells us where to rest our ultimate confidence. If God is one, if there is no rival power, no competing sovereignty, no alternative authority, then He is the only legitimate resting place for the soul. Practice the discipline of bringing every anxiety, every uncertainty, and every fear before the one God who holds all things in His hand.
5. **Worship with undivided focus.** Let the truth of divine monotheism shape the quality of your corporate and personal worship. Bring the whole self to the act of worship, heart, soul, mind, and strength, as the Shema and the greatest commandment demand. Resist the distraction, the partial engagement, and the divided attention that so easily compromise the worship of the one God. He who is one deserves the whole.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: The Shema is your creedal foundation. Everything you will learn in this series, the attributes of God, the Trinity, the decrees, creation, providence, is an elaboration of what it means that the LORD is one. Start here, stay here, and build everything else on this unshakeable bedrock.

For the parent: Deuteronomy 6:7 commands that the Shema be taught diligently to your children, when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. The confession of the one God is not a lesson for Sunday school alone; it is the grammar of the entire household. Make the Shema the heartbeat of your family's spiritual life, and raise your children in the love of the one God who is Lord of every room of the house and every hour of the day.

For the doubter: The oneness of God is your anchor. In a world of competing voices, rival truth claims, and a cacophony of spiritual options, the Shema cuts through the noise: there is one God, and He has spoken. The simplicity of that confession, its stark, uncompromising, singular focus, is not a liability in an age of complexity; it is the most stabilizing truth available to any human soul.

For the one who is suffering: The monotheism of the Shema means that there is no power in the universe that stands outside the sovereign governance of the one God. There is no rival deity who has ambushed your life with suffering beyond the LORD's knowledge or control. The God who is one is the God who holds your situation in His hands, who has purposed your path, and who will bring it to the end He has decreed, an end that, for those who love Him, is always good (Romans 8:28). Rest in the one God. There is no other.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. The Shema has been called the most important sentence in the history of the world. Do you find that claim credible? Why or why not? What makes this eight-word confession so foundational, not merely for theology but for the entire shape of a human life?

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. What is the immediate context of the Shema? What commands flow directly from it in verse 5? What does Moses say in verses 6–9 about how the Shema is to be transmitted and embedded in the life of the covenant community?

3. Read Isaiah 45:5–7. How many times does the LORD declare “there is no other” or “there is no God besides Me” in this passage? What is the scope of His sovereign action described in verse 7? What is the purpose of His self-revelation according to verse 6?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 8:4–6. How does Paul hold together strict monotheism (“there is no God but one”) with his identification of both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God? What does the parallel structure of verse 6 suggest about the relationship between the Father and the Son within the one divine being?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. Explain the difference between *echad* and *yachid* as Hebrew words for “one.” Why does the use of *echad* in the Shema matter for the Christian's defense of Trinitarian monotheism? Does the Shema teach the Trinity? Does it exclude the Trinity? Explain your answer carefully.

6. What is divine simplicity, and why does it matter? How does the doctrine protect us from imagining that God's love and holiness are in tension with one another? How does it illuminate what happened at the cross?
7. In what sense is Old Testament monotheism unique in its ancient Near Eastern context? Why was the Shema a revolutionary claim when first spoken to Israel on the threshold of the Promised Land? What made it so demanding for Israel to maintain in the face of the surrounding polytheistic culture?
8. How does the oneness of God ground the demand for total love in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Mark 12:29–30? Why does a divided allegiance constitute not merely a practical failure but a theological contradiction of the Shema?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. Jesus identifies the Shema and the greatest commandment as inseparable. In what ways does your love for God fail to be total, heart, soul, mind, and strength? What specific rivals to God's total claim do you find most persistent in your own life?
10. The doctrine of divine simplicity means that God's love and His holiness are never in tension. How does this truth change the way you approach confession of sin and the seeking of forgiveness? Does it give you more confidence or less? Why?
11. How would you respond to a Muslim or a Jehovah's Witness who argues that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity violates the Shema? What is the difference between saying "one God in three Persons" and saying "three Gods"?
12. As we complete Unit 2 on the existence of God and prepare to move into Unit 3 on the names of God, consider the arc of what we have studied: the self-evident and argued existence of God (Lesson 4), the biblical response to the denial and distortion of God (Lesson 5), and now the unity and oneness of God (Lesson 6). How do these three lessons form a coherent foundation for all that follows? What is the single most transformative insight from Unit 2 that you want to carry with you into the rest of this series?

Prayer Focus

Close this lesson by praying the Shema, not as a liturgical formula but as a living act of covenant reaffirmation. Let your prayer begin with the confession of the one God: Lord, You are our God, You are one, and there is no other. Let it move to the response the Shema demands: Lord, grant us the grace to love You with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength, to offer You the whole self that Your oneness demands and Your grace makes possible.

Confess before God those places in your life where the allegiance He demands has been divided, where functional idols have been given the devotion that belongs to Him alone. Ask for the Spirit's searching work in exposing every rival claim upon the heart, and for His sanctifying power in bringing the whole of your life into the joyful, wholehearted obedience that the one God deserves. And close with the doxological confession of 1 Corinthians 8:6: "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." To this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all the glory, now and forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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