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# CHRISTIANITY'S **DANGEROUS** IDEA

MINI BOOK

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In a book entitled “Christianity’s Dangerous Idea” author Allister McGrath argues that the right of everyone to read and interpret the Bible for themselves is Christianity’s most dangerous idea. McGrath is a professor of historical theology at the University of Oxford in England and is actually speaking about Protestantism, not Christianity in general.

His point is that Luther, Calvin, and other early leaders of the Reformation unleashed a movement within Christianity that they themselves had trouble controlling.

The “danger” in Protestantism (what the Reformation ultimately produced) was the notion that if everyone could read and interpret the Bible for themselves, who would decide what the “right” or “correct” interpretation would be?

He cites the fragmentation of Protestantism into the many denominations of today as proof that once this “dangerous” idea of personal interpretation was let loose, there was no stopping it. As a historian he doesn’t offer any solutions to this problem, he simply describes its evolution from Luther’s break with the Catholic church to the many religious groups today who claim that

theirs is the only church that teaches the “truth” of the Bible.

I do not suggest that I have an easy answer to the question, “Who has the correct interpretation of the Bible?” After more than three decades of preaching and teaching from the Bible, my best answer is that some groups are continually searching to refine their understanding of God's word, and others have simply codified their opinions into dogma.

However, whether or not our church's interpretation of the Bible is superior to another group's opinion is not Christianity's most dangerous idea. It may be Christianity's greatest obstacle to unity and peace, but this idea threatens none except the unity of those who believe in Jesus Christ. This is not to say that Christianity does not have an idea that

threatens to turn the entire world upside down if preached. That idea is its most basic one, that Jesus Christ is God!

Let there not be any misunderstanding here:

- Not that Jesus developed into God.
- Not that Jesus is like God.
- Not that Jesus is godly.
- Not that Jesus is a prophet sent by God.
- Not that Jesus is one of many gods.
- Not that Jesus personifies God.

Christianity's most dangerous idea is that Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph and Mary, the Jesus described in the Bible is:

- God Himself.
- The Supreme Being.
- The Creator of heaven and earth.
- The only true and eternal God.
- Jesus Christ is God.

Paul clearly states this about Jesus in Colossians:

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

- **Colossians 1:17**

In another passage, Thomas, the Apostle who saw Jesus after His resurrection, proclaimed:

My Lord and my God.

- **John 20:28**

Jesus Himself made reference to this reality when He said:

I and the Father are one.  
- **John 10:30**

And in witnessing to the Jews about His true eternal nature, Jesus said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.  
- **John 8:58**

And so, Christianity's most dangerous idea is its most basic:

**THAT ALONG WITH THE FATHER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, JESUS CHRIST IS ALSO GOD.**



# WHY DANGEROUS?

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This is an extremely dangerous idea for several reasons:

## **1. If Jesus Is God, All Other Religions Are Mistaken or False**

Do you see the danger here? Why do you think Christians were martyred in the First and Second Centuries?

- Not for their good works.
- Not for the moral lives they lived.
- Not for their style of worship.

They were killed because they refused to worship the gods imposed on the people by the Roman government. They were considered traitors to the Empire, and the Emperor worship demanded of them. Today, to openly say that only Jesus is God

is not a crime (yet), but it is politically and socially unacceptable for several reasons:

- Those who have no religion or God are offended because they feel you are judging them and have no right to do so.
- Other religious groups take exception because in saying this you are saying that their gods are not gods at all, and their religions are false.
- Society in general likes all religions to be equal because it is easier to ignore them when opposite religious ideas have the same value. If both Hinduism and Christianity have exactly the same worth, then together they are not worth anything. It is society's existential

way of dealing with religion. “If it’s good for you, go for it. So long as you don’t impose it on me.”

- And, of course, within the broad area of Christianity, this dangerous idea must not be shouted out too loudly because we do not want to upset the status quo. If some of the people who attend our churches knew this is what we really thought, they would assume we are radicals, rebels, zealots, or fundamentalists... and might leave.

Strangely enough, this is a dangerous idea even in the church because many Christians today prefer to have peace and a smooth religious ride. When it comes to matters of faith we don’t want to:

- Rock the boat.

- Become victims of ridicule.
- Be marginalized.
- Be rejected by those we admire in the world.
- Be attacked by other religions.

We want people to love and accept us, and if this dangerous idea gets out, we will be persecuted.

*Another reason why this is a dangerous idea:*

## **2. If Jesus Is God Then He Will Judge Me Whether I Agree with This or Not**

God is absolute.

- There is nothing He cannot do.
- There is no one greater.

- His rules are the only ones that count.

This position creates a huge problem because aside from other religions, there are thousands of people out there writing books, doing seminars, and hosting TV shows all with the sole purpose of telling me how to live my life — without any reference to Jesus!

That Jesus is God is a dangerous idea to me personally because it makes me accountable to Him first! Oh yes, I am responsible for my family, my job, my community, even myself — but this dangerous idea changes the order of things and puts Jesus first, even before myself!

If this idea is true, then Jesus is my judge, and His teachings and commands make up the framework of my life. His person also

requires my allegiance — if, after all, He is God! The danger for everyone is that we no longer belong to ourselves, are accountable to ourselves, or live to please and satisfy just ourselves.

This idea threatens the loss of self, the submission of our wills, the subjugation of our plans to His plans, and His character to ultimately replace our own.

This idea is extremely dangerous to Western man because our entire society is conditioned to pursuing happiness and freedom as we see fit — not as God wills! It is a dangerous thing to proclaim that our freedom is really slavery to sin and our happiness will only come if we surrender to this other.

*Finally, the notion that Jesus is God is a dangerous idea because:*

### **3. We Cannot Control It or Him!**

Going back to Professor McGrath's book for a moment. In it he describes how Luther and others tried to stem the growing number of new groups that were unleashed by the promotion of the idea that each should read and be responsible to the Bible for themselves. Once the idea was out, Luther couldn't take it back nor could he control it.

People began reading the Word and it had a more powerful effect upon them than any Luther had imagined.

You see, that's the thing about dangerous ideas — they are dangerous because they can overpower you and create a new order of things not even imagined by those who

first introduced them. If Jesus is God, He then controls the agenda of the world, the church, and of my life which can have a powerful effect on me. Three things immediately come to mind:

A. If Jesus is God, everything He said and everything He inspired His Apostles to say about the world, its condition, and ultimate end is true. For example: He said, through the Apostles, that the world will end suddenly when He returns to judge all who ever lived (I Thessalonians 5:2). No need, therefore, to invest my hope into this place. I should instead devote myself to being ready for His return — I mean, if He is God.

B. If Jesus is God, then He is the head of the church and thus the church should be about honoring and serving Him — not fighting about who has the right Bible interpretation. Jesus' promise is that He



will ultimately reveal Himself completely, and when He does, all opinions and interpretations will finally be clarified by what is completely true about Him. Paul speaks of this when He says:

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but there I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

**- I Corinthians 13:12**

Churches should focus more on proclaiming, disseminating, and circulating this powerful truth about Jesus in any way they can because this is their basic task and in so doing they illuminate this dark world. Infighting between groups, solidarity meetings between denominations, and nasty debates over issues shed no light and

do not demonstrate power of any kind (they actually show weakness). Declaring that Jesus is God, the only true God, may produce dangerous consequences for the church but Jesus, who is God, said,

...Upon this rock (the idea that Jesus is God) I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

- **Matthew 16:18b**

The church cannot overcome the world without declaring boldly the dangerous idea at the core of its beliefs.

C. Finally, if Jesus is God, I must change. I won't be forced to change because of global warming, or to please my neighbors, or even to do what is right, because if Jesus is not God, then I am God and I will do as my

heart leads me for good or evil. However, if I let this dangerous idea into my personal life, if I accept the evidence about who Jesus is, then I am no longer the God of myself, no longer the one who decides and no longer the center of my own universe, Jesus is. And if Jesus Christ is my God, then my life and all I have becomes His for His purpose and His will. If Jesus is God, I must then surrender my will to His will; there is no other way.

What I do today, tomorrow, and for the rest of my life will be to know and do His will, anything less or different will be a gross hypocrisy — that is, if Jesus is God.

## **SUMMARY**

One last but very important thing: If the Bible is true, if Jesus is God, if our faith is justified, then those in danger will not be

us, it will be those who rejected Jesus as God.

This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the

glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

**-II Thessalonians 1:5-10**

If you have not yet confessed your belief that Jesus is God and received His baptism — come. God bless all who believe and preach, and patiently wait for the coming of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God. Amen.

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