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# **MINEOLA BIBLE INSTITUTE AND SEMINARY**

**The Divided God**

**Radical, Biblical, Apostolic, Christianity**



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**--THE DIVIDED GOD--**

**Apostolic Theology and the Biblical Challenge to  
Contemporary Trinitarianism**

Larry L. Yates, ThD, DMin

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“And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs and wonders...that ye may know and understand that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel”

-----Deuteronomy 26:8; Exodus 11:7

“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help...but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel...”

-----Isaiah 31:1

“Thus saith the LORD, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...”

-----Jeremiah 6:1

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“In the year 317, a new contention arose in Egypt with consequences of a pernicious nature. The subject of this fatal controversy, which kindled such deplorable divisions throughout the Christian world, was the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead, a doctrine which in the three preceding centuries had happily escaped the vain curiosity of human researchers.”

-----J.L. Mosheim

“When we look back through the long ages of the reign of the (doctrine of the) trinity...we shall perceive that few doctrines have produced more unmixed evil.”

-----Andrews Norton

“Thou, O Lady, wast filled with grace, that thou mightest be the way of our salvation and the means of our ascent into the heavenly Kingdom.”

-----Athanasius, Architect of the doctrine of the trinity, speaking of Mary the mother of Jesus

## Preface

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Perhaps more than any other belief in the history of Christianity, the doctrine of the trinity, has been a fundamental source of contention, division, disagreement, violence and death. The result of this failure to comprehend the Biblical teaching on the nature of the Godhead has been a powerless Church, increasingly ineffective and marginalized in a Post Christian society.

When we consider the Church World as a whole, a wide variety of teaching exists on this subject. It is crucial therefore, that we examine our beliefs in the clear light of God's Word, not in the light of our experience, nor that of our particular Church, Denomination, or favorite teacher.

We have failed to grasp both the significance and the implications of the words of Jesus when He told us plainly that, **"...no man knoweth who the son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him...Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see."** (Luke 10:22, 23). God doesn't want his true disciples to be ignorant of these things, that is why He provided His Word and put His Spirit within us to teach us. In spite of this, the fact remains that confusion and misunderstanding abounds when it comes to this subject.

Of one thing we can be absolutely certain---This is not a subject to be cast lightly aside as insignificant to the Body of Christ. Our comprehension of the nature of God as clearly revealed in Scripture is vital to our relationship with Him and to the success of the Church. God does not fill His Book with trivia, nor does He waste words or make unnecessary statements and He has much to say regarding who He is.

## Introduction

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The Biblical challenge to contemporary trinitarianism may be one of Orthodox Christianity's most closely guarded secrets. The average Church member remains blissfully unaware of the growing body of non-trinitarian literature and the formidable battery of arguments that have undermined most of their cherished Biblical "proofs." Indeed, it is within the pages of scripture itself that the doctrine of the trinity stands or falls. This book will examine some of the major points of scripture often presented as Biblical "evidence" for the existence of the trinity in popular Christian thinking.

It is important for me to point out that when anyone receives the Word of God, it sometimes conflicts with what he has previously been taught. This causes you to have to deal with old traditions and wrong teachings. This book may contain some new light from God's Word and it may be opposed to some traditions you have previously been taught. Therefore I urge you to study prayerfully, following through the scriptures in your Bible, so that you may receive and understand the revelation, and make a choice for the Word of God rather than the traditions of men.

Any challenge to the traditional doctrine of the trinity is fraught with risk and carries with it the potential to stir great emotion. Sadly, on far too many occasions, books on both sides of this issue have been written seemingly with an acid filled pen; sermons have been preached with little grace or thoughtfulness of others; lectures given that vilify and malign those with differing views. Naturally, all of this is done with the firm conviction that the correct doctrine has been properly presented and defended. Instead, the result is typically alienation and a reproach on the Name of Christ.

John 17:3 assures us that ***"This is life eternal--that they may know Thee, the only True God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."*** In light of these words of Jesus, the importance of truly understanding the nature of the God we worship cannot be overstated. The Church of the new millennium cannot afford the luxury of continuing to blindly follow tradition at the expense of the treasure brought by this amazing revelation. If we do so, it will be at great peril to ourselves as well as those we minister to.

Much as the Apostle Paul before him did, the God ordained minister is called upon to declare the whole counsel of God. This specifically includes the revelation of who He is! While controversy should never be sought--neither should it be avoided, if it comes about as the result of the faithful exposition of the Word of God.

Understanding all too well the challenges inherent in writing on this topic, I have attempted to address the various issues with grace and tact in as straight forward a manner as possible. Hopefully, you will find no complicated arguments here, no theological “hat tricks” or ranting tirades. I have tried to be ever mindful of the admonition that brothers can disagree without being disagreeable. The fact that two intelligent and equally sincere believers do not agree on an issue does not mean that one of them is evil. We have all been deceived at different times on various issues. It is only as we submit our ideas, doctrines and beliefs to the searchlight of God’s Word that we can expel the darkness of wrong beliefs.

This is not intended to be a speculative work filled with new concepts presented for critical analysis and evaluation; it is rather a crucial message from the pages of scripture from a servant of the Lord. Having been raised in a Trinitarian denomination; I am well-schooled in the prevailing understanding of the nature of God as consisting of three distinct persons. I have intimate, firsthand knowledge of this doctrine and the powerful hold it often possesses on those who accept it as truth. You do not simply wake up one day and decide not to believe it.

The title of this book--*The Divided God*--comes from my own experience and that of many others who were willing to be truly honest with themselves. During my thirty plus years as a trinitarian, I found it difficult, in fact impossible, to escape the nagging suspicion that three persons, each of Whom is called God, in the final analysis amounts to having three Gods.

President Thomas Jefferson once remarked that the trinity is “an unintelligible proposition of Platonic mysticisms that three are one and one is three; and yet three are not one and one is not three.” He further admitted, “I never had enough sense to comprehend the trinity, and it appeared to me that comprehension must precede assent.” Could this be the condition of most of the Church world today? I discovered time and again that, despite their vigorous protests to the contrary and in spite of all their talk of the “unity in the Godhead,” many trinitarians are in fact, tri-theistic in their thinking. Theirs is, in final analysis, -- a divided God.

This book does not attempt to cover every possible argument and objection concerning the trinity--that is beyond the scope of this book. I simply desire to drive sincere believers to the Word and help them to understand that there cannot be two equally valid, yet radically different views of God supported in scripture; one of them has to be a deception. It is vitally important that we not accept something simply because we have been taught it by someone we like, or admire, or because we have always believed that way. Like the Bereans of old, each of us is responsible before God to search the scriptures for ourselves, to see if these things be so. This is especially true for something as vital as who God truly is. It is essential to our spiritual welfare and will have direct impact on the level of anointing that will manifest in our lives and ministry.

Finally, let me admit, that the anguish which accompanies the reversal of belief on such a critical theological position, held tenaciously over the course of a lifetime, can only be fully appreciated by those who have also traveled that road and felt its torturous path under their feet. In light of this, I dedicate this to my fellow travelers and seekers of truth. Wherever you find yourself in your own journey, may you find here comfort and encouragement in your quest.

## Chapter 1 2001: A Theological Odyssey

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Most people write books because it is what they want to do. Usually it is a topic of interest to them or a subject they feel strongly about. While I am certainly passionate about this subject, I really had no desire to write about it—it came rather by way of necessity laid on me by the Spirit of God. It is the end product of some of the most difficult, heart wrenching and stressful years of my life. Many were the nights of agonizing tearful prayer, endless hours of study and soul searching. God alone will ever know the full extent of the struggle I faced. I felt at times, like Jacob at Peniel, wrestling for my very life.

It is not my desire here to be overly personal--I simply want to help you to better understand what follows and the process by which it came to be. My concern revolves around one simple question: Does the Bible support the concept of unitary monotheism as held by Apostolic Pentecostals, or is the traditional trinitarian model the one actually supported in scripture?

As a former Southern Baptist, I had believed and taught the doctrine of the trinity for over thirty years. Even when I later left the Baptist Church, I remained firmly trinitarian in my beliefs. I am, therefore, fully aware of the verses in scripture which seem to support the traditional view. However, several years of extensive research and study of the scriptures, as well as an examination of the actual history of the doctrine itself caused me to reevaluate my previous beliefs. I have become convinced that trinitarianism is based on a treatment of scripture that is, at best, questionable. It disregards or completely ignores massive Biblical evidence for the true oneness of God, drawing its conclusions from a handful of verses which it interprets in isolation from their context of the whole of scripture.

The use of a literal hermeneutic or interpretation, in which Bible doctrine is established by the plain statements of scripture, causes real problems for trinitarians. When the scriptures are taken at face value and seen in balance and context with the rest of the Word of God and according to the ordinary rules of language, it presents a portrait of God quite unlike that of the traditional belief system.

It is truly a marvel of modern theology and ecclesiastical history that in spite of the overwhelming testimony of scripture, this doctrine has maintained widespread acceptance and unquestioned allegiance for such a long period of time. There is, in fact, a tendency on the part of many, to treat the doctrine of the trinity as if it were the central and defining doctrine of Christianity. To disagree with it is to brand oneself as an outcast and heretic in most circles. The well-known Athanasian Creed of the fourth century goes so far as to make

the belief in the trinity an absolute requirement and condition for salvation, actually condemning to death those who disagree.

We learn from scripture that the Apostle Paul preached the whole gospel or counsel of God (Acts 20:28). In doing so, he explained to the Corinthian Church **“that there is none other God but one”** (I Co 8:4). Why did he not take this opportunity to explain to them the doctrine of the trinity? He goes on instead to identify this one God as the Father while lamenting that, **“Howbeit there is not in every man this knowledge...”** (v.7). Sadly, it seems Paul would find that not much has changed over the ensuing years.

One author noted that, “The dogma of the trinity is that potion of hemlock that agnostically-inclined theologians deliberately chose to drink, mixing the pure stream of Hebrew doctrine with the poison of Greek philosophy. Then they forced the mixture on their disciples. The penalty for refusal would be eternal damnation.”<sup>1</sup> The condemnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed and their subsequent execution by Church leaders, Catholic as well as Protestant, are the elephant in the living room that trinitarians would have us ignore.

There is a long tradition on the part of trinitarians of accusing non-trinitarians of not actually being Christian. This is especially interesting in light of the scriptural declaration that eternal life is contingent upon knowledge of the truth about the one God and the man Jesus Christ (Jn 17:3; I Tim 2:3). Based on a careful examination of scripture, it seems to me that it is the trinitarian community that should be concerned--not Biblical monotheists.

Trinitarian history is rife with tragic and bloody episodes resulting from its “defense” of the Faith. An honest heart will admit that something appears terribly amiss. The violence with which the doctrine of the trinity has been upheld casts a pall of suspicion over it. Something indeed, seems desperately wrong with a teaching that has precipitated such tragic and bloody episodes in Church history.

The dogma, which even its proponents say cannot be explained and one which makes little sense to the rational mind, was actually the product of Greek thinking. Most scholars, in fact, readily admit that trinitarianism cannot be truly documented in the Bible. It is rather, a Greek and Alexandrian distortion that arose long after the close of the scriptural canon.

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<sup>1</sup>(Buzzard and Hunting, 1998.xiii).

When Greek speculation and mythology entered the Faith, it blended with the corrupted theology of Alexandria, Egypt with devastating consequences. Canon Goudge writes: "When the Greek and Roman mind instead of the Hebrew mind came to dominate the Church, there occurred a disaster in doctrine and practice from which we have never recovered."<sup>2</sup> This is not a topic that makes for easy discussion. I found it very difficult in the early stages of my own investigation to examine the evidence with an open mind. Having been trained and entrenched in trinitarian theology since childhood, I actually began my research with the express purpose of disproving the apostolic viewpoint.

My initial exposure to Oneness theology came through family and friends that attended the local Apostolic Pentecostal Church in my hometown. While thoroughly enjoying the worship and fellowship I found there, I rejected many of their doctrines out of hand. Over time however, the continuing conflicts created by our different views finally forced me into a critical examination of the apostolic belief system. What I began to see clearly in scripture, challenged me on both an emotional and intellectual level as it repeatedly failed to line up with my previously held convictions.

My own denomination, every Church I had ever attended, all of my contemporary and historical heroes of the Faith, as well as, every mentor and colleague were without exception trinitarian.

As a result of my exposure to the Oneness belief system, a seed was planted, that grew into months and finally years of serious Biblical investigation. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, something began to happen that I am unable to adequately describe. It came with a flood of questions for which there were no easy answers.

Was it possible, in spite of my earnestness and sincerity that I had been both believing and teaching a concept of God that the Bible did not support? Was I, in fact, teaching a *false* doctrine? Had I become one of those described by the Apostle Paul as having *another Jesus* and a *different gospel*? (Gal. 1:6-9). In believing and teaching the traditional doctrine of the trinity, was I, however unintentionally, misrepresenting a significant truth of God's Word? Of one thing I was certain--I could not remain passive on these questions. I would have to honestly reconsider the Biblical basis for my trinitarian position; and while I was at it, the New Birth, Water Baptism, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and perhaps a few other things.

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<sup>2</sup> (Goudge 1939 in Buzzard and Hunting, 1998, p. 82).

I am not sure it is ever possible to be truly objective on such an emotionally charged matter but I determined to do my best. Over several months, I researched dozens of books and articles on both sides of the issue. Ultimately however, I found my answers not in the pages of some obscure theological treatise, but in those of scripture itself. While I am committed to the proposition that God has given gifted men to the Church--among them teachers from whom I have learned much and for whom I have great respect--we must always return to the Bible itself as our final authority.

Deeply cherished beliefs, when submitted to the platinum yardstick of the Word of God, must be revised or discarded completely when seen to be inconsistent with what can be shown to be clear Biblical truth. I soon realized that to be even remotely objective or serious in my quest, I had to abandon my attempts to defend a system and simply allow the Word itself to take me where it would.

What I discovered, when I did this, led me, in 2001 to enroll in a formal program of study at an Apostolic Bible College where I subsequently earned a Master's degree in theology. I continued my studies and completed dual Doctorates in Apostolic Theology and Oneness Pentecostalism. Things began to get really interesting when I tried to share what I was learning with my trinitarian friends. What I wanted was their help in understanding what I was seeing clearly in the pages of scripture. I solicited that help from qualified Christian leaders, Pastors and teachers as well as fellow students from trinitarian Bible Colleges. I was hoping, however naively it turned out, for objective non-adversarial counsel. What I found instead was universal skepticism and outright rejection.

My experience helped me to understand clearly the intense emotional investment which surrounds the doctrine of the trinity. I learned much, as well, of the desire, perhaps even need, that we possess for group conformity and our uncanny ability to blindly follow our leaders as we parrot ideas and concepts we do not truly understand.

There is an almost reflexive posture of defense that is taken whenever a person's view of the trinity is called into question. I saw it in my own life and almost without exception, that of my friends and colleagues. The Oneness position is not in my opinion, examined for merit, it is hardly even considered. Instead, it is attacked out of what I believe to be a deep seated fear. Obviously both views of God cannot be true. If the Apostolic view is correct, then trinitarianism is wrong. It is just that simple and for some reason, that is too frightening for many to even consider.

Extensive and prayerful research has led me to conclude that in the final analysis, the doctrine of the trinity is not a Biblical doctrine, nor is it the product of genuine Biblical

thought. It is, rather, the product of theological reflection and philosophical speculation which is far removed from scripture itself. The doctrine finds its true origin in Greek philosophy and the fusion of Alexandrian theology and Jewish monotheism. The Alexandrian School of Theology is well known for its use of Grecian dialectics and a syncretism designed supposedly to explain and harmonize the truths of scripture.

The result of this collusion of cultures and ideologies was the outright corruption of the Biblical text itself, producing the codices Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus, and Vaticanus. Many Christians would be surprised to learn that it is these altered manuscripts which form the basis for the plethora of modern “versions” of the Bible. I find it strangely ironic that those who often cry out the loudest over these corrupt Alexandrian translations have at the same time fallen for a far more subtle and tragic error in their wholesale acceptance of an Alexandrian trinity.

It is this very same philosophy that the Apostle Paul cautioned the Church about in Colossians 2:8-9. Speaking to the true Apostolic Church He warns: **“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit; after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world and not according to Christ.”** Paul refers here to the errors of false teachers, who in speculating on the nature of the Godhead, went beyond the declarations which God Himself had made on this subject.

Jesus Christ is not the second person of a triune Godhead. Paul informs us, rather, that **“In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”** (v. 9). It may be helpful for us to remember and heed Paul’s admonition in I Corinthians 4:6 that we **“...learn not to go beyond what is written.”** It is in going beyond the plain statements of scripture that we find ourselves becoming trapped in doctrinal quagmires. Ultimately, the question is a simple one, do we or do we not, properly understand the nature of the God we worship?

Theologians and Bible teachers, perhaps more than individuals in most other disciplines, are trained to be narrow and dogmatic (in a positive sense), to be **“set for the defense of the Gospel”** (Phil. 1:17). But it is often difficult to know where true doctrine or dogma ends and where traditions of men begin.

Dogma is that great body of Biblical truth that has been held by true believers down through the centuries. It is viewed as fixed, inviolable, non-rescindable, and non-negotiable. Literal creationism, verbal plenary inspiration of the scriptures, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, Christ’s bodily resurrection, His ascension and enthronement, His second coming, a literal Heaven and Hell, eternal condemnation for the wicked, eternal bliss for the righteous, all of these are examples of dogma and are clearly

spelled out in the pages of scripture.

But we are commanded **“to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Pet. 3:18). Growing in knowledge, of a necessity, includes not only learning new truths but also the examination of old beliefs and the correction of what may have been erroneously held to be truth. I doubt there is a Pastor in existence who has not wished that he could withdraw some of his sermons, or a Bible college professor who didn't lament the content of a former lecture, far beyond retrieval. The problem comes the moment we stop learning, examining, and most importantly correcting our doctrine.

Doctrines strongly held are not easily released--and that is as it should be. Sadly however, men often hold tenaciously to an erroneous idea for many years, preach it as doctrine, write about it, persuade people of it, and defend it until these “doctrines” become, in their minds a crucial and unquestionable dogma. When this happens they are no longer willing to submit that doctrine to the searchlight of God's Word. Anyone who then dares to invade that domain is viewed as hostile and greeted with open hostility.

How much better the attitude of the “Prince of Preachers,” Charles Haddon Spurgeon who, when asked if he defended the Bible replied, “Yes, I defend it the way I would defend a lion, I open the cage and let it out.” As true believers we need not be intimidated by those who legitimately question some area of our theology. While we must **“always be prepared to give an answer to those who ask for a reason for the hope that lies within us”** (1 Pet 3:15), we must continue to bear in mind that the Word of God is its own defense.

How strange that so-called Fundamentalist Christianity which loudly boasts of and aggressively champions its belief in Biblical inspiration, seems unwilling to accept scriptures' own testimony on this matter. What Jesus Himself identified as the most important commandment of all, clearly and plainly states, **“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD...”** (Deut. 6:4). He linked our very salvation to this issue when he stated in John 17:3, **“This is eternal life, that they may know thee, the ONLY TRUE GOD, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.”** Have we forgotten His warning that, **“In vain do they worship, Me teaching as doctrine the precepts of men”** (Mt. 15:9). Is it possible that, in spite of Paul's admonition in Colossians we have been “taken captive?” Have we allowed the seductive influence of Alexandrian theology and Greek philosophy to so soon remove us **“from Him that called (us) into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.** (Gal. 1:6)? Have we forgotten and forsaken the Hebrew belief in One God which formed the basis for the Apostolic Church?

After long and thoughtful examination of the Biblical data I no longer believe that either

Testament offers any substantial evidence for the doctrine of the trinity. There is no passage of scripture which asserts that God is three; no authentic verse that truly supports a “triune” Godhead. The trinitarian concept rests upon a sophisticated argument based on tortured logic which lacks any solid support, either in the Bible or the earliest Christian writings.

Is any of this really important? Does our view of the nature of the Godhead ultimately matter? In light of Jesus’ words in John 17 and Paul’s words to the Galatian Church, could *anything* matter more? We simply can no longer afford to ignore the implications of Jesus’ claim that, “...**unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins**” (Jn 8:24).

Sadly, the average believer is blissfully unaware of this debate; they simply go to Church and continue to be spoon fed their beliefs by their Pastor who more often than not is also unaware. But what if the doctrine of the trinity is, after all, a house of cards? If we believe that God has revealed Himself in the pages of scripture and that Eternal Life is indeed, based on our knowledge of Him; it is incumbent upon every believer to examine the evidence for himself and come to a full and complete knowledge (*epignosis*) of the truth about who God is. It is not without significance that scripture tells us, “**those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth**” (Jn 4:24). We must choose, as did the Bereans before us, (Acts 17:11), to become personally responsible, before God, for what we believe. We must dare to search the scriptures to see if indeed these things are so--only then will we truly believe.

The doctrine of the trinity has been explained as a mystery, unfathomable to the finite mind. Yet the Bible says that it has been given to us as disciples both to know and to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:11). How can we be expected to agree with a doctrine that can neither be explained nor understood? Is it really reasonable to expect someone to accept “on faith” a doctrine that is never once mentioned by name in scripture, or, as admitted by scholars, never even discussed in the pages of the New Testament? Shouldn’t we rather, as stewards of the mysteries of God (I Co 4:1), call into question any doctrine that so challenges our understanding and is not clearly revealed in scripture?

Even a casual reading of Church History will show that the concept of plurality in the Godhead did not appear in theological discussion until almost three hundred years after Jesus’ ascension into Heaven. Its formal acceptance at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD ultimately led to the deaths of multiplied thousands of Christians who died at the hands of other “Christians” because of their sincere and Biblical belief in the One True God.

As I studied this issue and discussed it with others, I found myself frequently puzzled by the anger and agitation that often manifests when the doctrine of the trinity is called into question. One acquaintance told me plainly that He could think of only three reasons I would

question the existence of the trinity: 1) I had unconfessed sin in my life, 2) God was giving me the “proper revelation” but I was unable, for some reason to accept it, or 3) I was simply in rebellion. When I proposed, as a fourth consideration, that I might be right and that the Bible teaches an undeniable unitary monotheism, he angrily rejected the idea as impossible and stormed off.

And yet, the honest student must acknowledge as irrefutable the Hebrew belief in a single creator God, with no plurality or distinction of persons. This was the Jews most sacred tenet and was repeated by every Jewish boy and girl from childhood until death, upon arising in the morning and upon retiring. We must always bear in mind that the early Church remained essentially Jewish in nature. The sudden revelation of a triune Godhead would have been a shocking and revolutionary concept which would have rocked the First Century Church, most likely necessitating its very own Acts 15 type council.

Consider carefully the earliest recorded history of the Church, the book of Acts. It devotes the entire chapter of Acts 15 to the details of a conference held at Jerusalem to decide such questions as gentile circumcision, eating foods containing blood, the consumption of meat from strangled animals, etc. Because they constituted a departure from basic Jewish practice, these seemingly simple physical matters were considered worthy of an often heated formal debate. How much more would a similar conference be necessary to discuss the explosive change from belief in the single-person God of Israel to that of a previously unknown, unheard of and unimagined triune God. Among these fiercely monotheistic Jews who were the leaders of this early Christian community, that would have made for a very lively discussion indeed!

What seems even more extraordinary, in view of all of Jesus’ controversy with his chief critics, is this: Never was there the slightest trace of any argument concerning the nature of the Godhead. Instead, Jesus continued to affirm the Jews belief in the One True God.

It remains a fact that the doctrine of the trinity was never defended in the whole of the New Testament. Could it be that it simply did not exist? It is significant that we find no trace of any revolution over the nature of the Godhead in the early Church.

By no means is this meant to challenge the deep and utter sincerity of trinitarians or to question the genuineness of their faith. But we must point out that sincerity is not a test of truth. Never underestimate the power of shared beliefs or the role of tradition in shaping theological concepts and thought. Nor should we on either side fail to appreciate the virtually unlimited ability we possess as teachers to believe that what we teach is fully supported by scripture. We must KNOW or we will answer to God for all those we mislead.

Having said that, I will freely admit that what follows is designed to directly challenge one of the most fundamental beliefs of orthodox Christianity. I am fully convinced, after months of research involving thousands of hours of study that a radically new concept of God emerged in the third and fourth centuries resulting from the blending of Greek philosophy and Alexandrian theology. This new faith superseded the original apostolic faith and ushered in the Dark Ages.

The realization, that after all, the scriptures themselves were not the true source of my trinitarian beliefs was emotionally very difficult for me to accept. Therefore, I deeply sympathize with those who presently wrestle with the disparity between their own convictions and what they see in the pages of the Bible. Despite the fact that many of my friends and family continue to cling to their trinitarian beliefs, refusing even to consider the evidence, I am undaunted. I appeal to those who truly seek the truth to consider carefully the glaring differences between what they believe and teach when compared to the Apostles' Doctrine.

A final word--I do not deny the existence of mystery in our walk with God. Certainly there remain things we do not fully understand. I do not reject an idea simply on the basis that I cannot explain it. But, mystery and contradiction are two very different horses. The doctrine of the trinity challenges logic, reason and credulity in unnecessary ways and it directly opposes the most basic and fundamental supposition of scripture. In fact, one of the strongest arguments against the doctrine of the trinity is that it cannot be expressed without abandoning Biblical language.

As we consider some of the problems inherent in the trinitarian idea itself, we will examine several of the key passages of scripture that may seem, on the surface, to support it, as well as those which directly oppose it. We will also consider the major theological arguments for the existence of the trinity and see if they are supported by scripture.

It is important to understand that an ever increasing number of people worldwide simply do not accept this doctrine. They reject, on the basis of the careful examination of scripture, any notion of a God in three persons. They choose rather to believe Jesus when He said that the greatest and most important commandment of all is, "**Hear O, Israel, The LORD our God is one.**" (Mk 12:29) and "**When you have seen Me you have seen the Father.**" (Jn 10:10).

## Chapter 2 Modern Day Apostolics

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***“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance...and they continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine....***

-----Acts 2:1-4, 42

If we want to know what the Church is meant to be today, then we must examine the Church as described in God’s Word. The Divine pattern for the Church of God remains the same today as it was in those first years after Christ’s ascension into Heaven. People’s ideas of Christianity have certainly changed, but God’s purposes can never be altered.

First, some history: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the waiting disciples, as recorded in Acts Chapter 2, marked the beginning of the Church Age. The one sign of that outpouring which consistently appears throughout the Book of Acts, when people received the Holy Spirit is the ability to speak in tongues (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:4).

Only thirty-six short years following the events of Pentecost, Jude warned of a falling away that had already begun in the Church, and urged the people to ***“earnestly contend for the faith which was once (and for all) delivered unto the saints”*** (v. 3).

Through the centuries that followed, there were only a few who received this wonderful experience of the infilling or Baptism of the Holy Spirit. That segment of Christianity that believes accepts and continues these practices today are known as Pentecostals. At various intervals throughout the past centuries, the followers of the Apostolic faith and doctrine have become prominent through great revivals that have appeared in Great Britain, as well as in the United States and Canada; proof that God’s truth endures to all generations (Ps 100:5).

We find, in Romans 11, an important principle from the story of the life of Elijah; the principle of preservation. That is, God always has a remnant. Even when His people as a whole reject Him there will always remain those that will serve Him according to the truth. Rest assured God will always have a people; even in times of great apostasy; He will preserve a faithful remnant who believe and obey Him.

Because of this, Satan will not be able to prevail against The Church. I believe that the True Church, as defined by the Apostles’ Doctrine and New Testament experience, has existed in every age since the day of Pentecost. We are experiencing in our day a fresh wave of the Holy Spirit designed specifically to restore, to our generation, New Testament patterns, principles, priorities and power.

In the closing days of the nineteenth century, a small group of spiritually hungry and

earnest Bible students, ministers and Christian workers gathered at Bethel Bible College, in Topeka, Kansas, for a season of fasting and prayer. It was Christmas break and the end of the semester they had sanctified a solemn fast to pray for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God heard their prayer and in the early morning hours of January 1, 1901, He answered in power and the modern Pentecostal movement was born. God's Spirit was poured out afresh and God's people, once again, spoke with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, just as occurred on the original day of Pentecost in 33 AD. A tremendous revival resulted which soon spread to Houston, Texas and eventually to Los Angeles. In 1906, it culminated in the great Azusa Street revival that eventually spread the Pentecostal experience worldwide.

With the coming of this fresh move of the Holy Spirit, the word of the Lord became a new book. Truths that had long been hidden by neglect were unveiled and made clear. At the height of the revival, in 1914, came a fresh revelation of the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The pivotal doctrines of His absolute Deity and water baptism in His Name alone became tenets of faith for the new movement.

God marvelously confirmed this message of restoration, as the Gospel, once again, was preached in its fullness and power, which was hidden in the Name of Jesus. Literally thousands were re-baptized into the Name of Jesus Christ, and multitudes received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: many of them while still in the waters of baptism. Great numbers were healed of incurable diseases; demons were cast out just as in the days of the Apostles and the glorious report of the Samaritan revival began to be duplicated in our time (Acts 8:6-8, 12).

Harvard theologian, Harvey Cox, in his book, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, noted that Pentecostalism was growing by twenty million members per year. According to Cox, it has become the fastest growing form of worship in the world, and is now the dominant expression of the Christian faith in Mega-cities worldwide. Cox says, "This experiential, theologically conservative, spiritually oriented, and culturally diverse form of Christianity is especially strong in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and North America."<sup>3</sup>

According to statistics compiled by David Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Pentecostals are now larger than any other Protestant group. By 2000, the total number of Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals numbered around 524 million. This means they account for over one-fourth of all Christians and eight percent of the total world population, with a projected growth to over 800 million by 2025.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cox, 1995, xv, xvi,

<sup>4</sup> Barrett and Johnson, 2002; 287

In contrast to trinitarianism, over a quarter of Pentecostals in this country and around the world, adhere to a doctrine commonly referred to as “Oneness”. Also known as, Apostolic Pentecostals or simply “Apostolics”, there are nearly one hundred Oneness organizations in existence worldwide. Unfortunately, because of their rejection of the “orthodox” doctrine of the trinity, they are often horribly maligned and misrepresented in trinitarian literature.

Referring specifically to the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI), the largest of these Oneness organizations, theologian Wayne Grudem writes, “Because of its denial of the three distinct persons in God, the denomination should not be considered to be evangelical, and it is doubtful whether it should be considered genuinely Christian at all.”<sup>5</sup>

In my own experience, growing up in the Baptist Church, it was common to hear the UPCI referred to as “that cult up the road.” Even a casual familiarity, however, with their beliefs and practices will forever dispel any notion or suspicion of any form of cultic leaning.

It should be noted that the use of the word “Apostolic” by Oneness Pentecostals has nothing at all to do with any sort of claim to an imaginary “unbroken line of apostolic succession.” Their theology is characterized as Apostolic because of the way in which they fully, and accurately, represent the apostolic tradition in early Christianity.

There is no need to doubt what the Apostles believed and taught. As we will see, their testimonies are plainly recorded in the Gospels, The Book of Acts, in the Epistles and in the Book of Revelation. If there is any confusion today, regarding the Apostle’s Doctrine (Acts 2:42), it arises from those who refuse to take their words at face value.

Essentially, the beliefs and practices of Apostolic Pentecostals are the same as those of their fellow Pentecostals. These beliefs are shared by most if not all, Evangelical groups. They believe in one God, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of a virgin, suffered and died to save us from our sins and rose again from the dead, ascending into Heaven, from which He poured out His Spirit. They believe in a literal Heaven and Hell and their views regarding the Bible, end-time events, worship and standards of holiness are common to many evangelical groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Grudem, 1994; 243

Make no mistake about it--evangelism is one of their highest priorities. Consider the UPCI, with over 28,000 churches in over 170 other nations, and a foreign constituency of more than 3 million; their yearly foreign missions budget is more than 32 million dollars. They have a high regard for scripture and a deep and abiding respect for the absolute Deity of Christ. One Evangelical missionary described the typical apostolic service as being quite a moving experience: "United Pentecostals really seem to enjoy their meetings. The emotionally charged atmosphere of their Church service offers a feeling of joy, of fiesta and of the sensational (miracles, tongues, healings) that thrills, excites and lifts these humble believers from the dreariness and drudgery of daily life...Then there is freedom in their meetings--liberty to pray aloud, pray all at once, to stand and shout and to interject a 'amen', 'hallelujah', 'praise the Lord', as they wish...this liberty is often mentioned by both Pastors and members as a major factor in the appeal of their meetings." <sup>6</sup>

Pentecostal worship, when contrasted with the worship of many contemporary Churches is, in fact, rather different. The verbal congregational expressions in prayer and praise, the significant role of singing and use of a variety of musical instruments, the physical demonstrations in worship and the energetic preaching may appear as irreverent to the stoic.

Many formal denominations consider the Church service to be a place reserved for deep meditation, silent introspection, restrained participation and pious formality. Pentecostals, while deeply respecting these methods and acknowledging their place, believe the Church service is, primarily, a celebration--we are the celebrants and Jesus the celebrity! Therefore, the atmosphere is alive with joyous expressions celebrating the majesty and greatness of God.<sup>7</sup>

Pentecostal worship finds its roots in the apostolic pattern of the New Testament. This original model forms the design and basis for the entire Oneness belief system. The Oneness Church today is merely an extension of that first century Church, born on the day of Pentecost (Eph. 2:20). They worship the same Jesus and have been baptized in the same Spirit as those early believers.

It is not just happenstance that the Pentecostal Churches are the ones that practice Biblical methods of worship with exuberance and enthusiasm. The Churches that forbid many

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<sup>6</sup> Dynamic Religious Movements, p. 234

<sup>7</sup> Meet the UPCI, 68

Biblical worship methods are the same Churches that, mistakenly, denounce the Pentecostal experience as no longer available in our day. While those Churches are stagnant and declining both spiritually and numerically--Pentecostal Churches are exploding with the life and power of God worldwide.<sup>8</sup>

Three things that distinguish Oneness believers from other Pentecostal groups is their practice of baptism in the Name of Jesus only, their belief in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues as a necessary and essential part of New Testament salvation and their understanding of the nature of the Godhead.

It is often, mistakenly, assumed that Oneness Pentecostalism is a strictly twentieth century American phenomenon. In my study of Church history, I was surprised to learn that since the days of the Apostles, many different people and groups have independently, yet consistently, arrived at a similar form of Oneness theology.

For example, consider the Modalists and Sabellians of the Ante-Nicene era, Michael Servetus (1531), John Miller (1896), Andrew Urshan (1910), R.E. McAlister, John Sheppe and Frank Ewart (1917) as well as many, many others. This is quite significant, for it means that Oneness theology cannot be analyzed solely by the historical development of the modern Oneness movement. Serious attention must be given to the Biblical texts, which have prompted its persistent recurrence within the Church.

Pastor and theologian David K. Bernard sums up the heart of the Oneness doctrine simply in two propositions:

- 1) There is one, indivisible God with no distinction of persons (Dt 6:4, Gal 3:20); and
- 2) Jesus Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form (Jn 20:28, Col.2:9).

All the titles of God properly apply to Him and all aspects of the Divine personality are manifest in Him, for He is the One True God, manifest in the flesh.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Meet the UPCI, 77

<sup>9</sup> Essentials of Oneness Theology, 8

## Chapter 3 Radical Monotheism

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David Bernard says that the basis of Apostolic Theology is a radical concept of monotheism. Simply put, God is absolutely and indivisibly one. There are no essential distinctions or divisions in His eternal nature. All the names and titles of God such as Elohim, Jehovah/Yahweh, Adonai, Father, Word and Holy Spirit refer to one and the same being, or, in trinitarian terms--to one person.<sup>10</sup>

Contrast this with the doctrine of the trinity. The popular *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*, a standard trinitarian reference, has this to say:

“What we mean by divine trinity is that there are three separate and distinct persons in the Godhead, each one having His own personal spirit body, personal soul and personal spirit in the same sense that each human being, angel, or any other being has his own body, soul and spirit. We mean by body, whether a spirit body or a flesh body, the house for the indwelling of the personal soul and spirit. That soul is that which feels and the spirit is that which knows.”<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the trinity, Dake explains further:

“As individual persons each can be called God and collectively they can be spoken of as one God because of their perfect unity. The word God is used either as a singular or a plural word like sheep.”<sup>12</sup>

The problems inherent in this idea might not be readily apparent, but will become clear as we progress.

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<sup>10</sup> Bernard, *The Essentials of Oneness Theology*, 8

<sup>11</sup> Dake, 489

<sup>12</sup> Dake, 489

In stark contrast and with remarkable consistency, the Bible insists on the unique personality of the one God, creator and father, and the absolute necessity of truly knowing this one God, and His manifestation in the flesh as the Messiah. The abundance of monotheistic texts, in scripture, forever dispels any idea that there can be more than one who is truly God.

“Whatever is described as *only* is in a class of its own--it is absolutely and completely unique. All other things are excluded. If something is the only, automatically there can be nothing besides it. All of us know what only means. Jesus described the Father as the only true God (Jn 17:3). No one would question or disagree with the fact that the Father is the true God. But note carefully: according to Jesus, the Father is not simply the True God; He is the **only** True God. We would naturally be suspicious of someone who claimed he had only one wife, if His household consisted of three separate women, each claiming to be his one wife!”<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, according to the ordinary rules of language, where we have a number of more than one, the prefix *mono* no longer applies. For instance, in our above example, having three wives, our man is no longer monogamous, but rather polygamous. On this basis, we can rightfully and confidently question the validity of speaking of trinitarianism as being in anyway, monotheistic. It most certainly is not in the Biblical, Hebraic sense. It bears repeating that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that three persons, each of whom is called God, amounts to three Gods.

A systematic and careful study of scripture reveals a very different picture than that presented by Dake and others. The only plurality associated with God is the plurality of attributes, titles, roles, manifestations, modes of activity or relationships to man.<sup>14</sup> This is, of course, the Biblical and historic position of Judaism.

Both Apostolic and Jewish believers find the classic expression of this belief in the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4: “**Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.**” This simple statement is the central and defining creed of the nation of Israel. As stated before, it is, even today, spoken by every pious Israelite upon arising each day, as he retires at night and at the hour of his death. It is the first thing taught to every Jewish child and represents the most fundamental tenet of the Old Testament theology of God.

Every Jew of the first century would have held the unshakable conviction that there is one

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<sup>13</sup> Bernard, *The Oneness of God*,

<sup>14</sup> Bernard, *The Essentials of Oneness Theology*, 8

and only one, supreme, creator God, who alone was worthy of worship. Much of the Old Testament is a history of the dealings of this One God with His chosen nation Israel. It is in this very same Testament that we find the prophecy of a glorious coming day for this nation, and a world in which everyone on Earth will recognize and serve the One True God of Israel.

***And the LORD shall be King over all the Earth: in that day shall there be One LORD, and His name One.***

-----Zechariah 14:9

For Apostolics, this is a crucial prophecy that finds its fulfillment in the appearance of Jesus as the Messiah and His eventual reign as King over all the earth. He reigns, however, not as the second person of a triune Godhead, as many believe, but as the One True God of Israel, manifested in the flesh.

***And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.***

----I Timothy 3:16

***Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily***

----Colossians 2:8, 9

From the very beginning of His revelation to man, God was careful to explain the nature of His existence. Not only was He the sole creator, but the only True God in existence. His revelation to Israel, through Moses, was clear and unambiguous: ***“Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD He is God; there is none else beside Him.”*** (Dt 4:35).

It is without question that the nation of Israel, to whom the first revelations about God were entrusted, knew nothing about any plurality or trinity of persons in the Godhead. Their belief in a unipersonal God conferred on Israel a worldview which forever separated her from all

other philosophies, religions, cultures and nations.

In order to emphasize His absolute numerical oneness to national Israel, so that there could be no chance of mistake or misunderstanding, the Lord repeated to them through Moses: **“Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else”** (Dt 4:39). If language means anything, this statement is proof against all possibility of misinterpretation. The Jews understood *one* to mean ONE, (*Echad*, in the Hebrew), and they were never in doubt regarding the expression ***none else***.

Jesus reemphasized the importance of this teaching when He explained the foundation of His own belief system by echoing the words of Moses: **“Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God is one LORD; and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first (most important) commandment”** (Mk 12:29).

Jesus' confirmation of the *Shema* forces us to conclude that He must have not only understood, but also agreed with whatever Moses himself, believed these words to mean. He certainly did not use the opportunity to reinterpret or explain a deeper meaning as was, so often, His custom. The Scribe (Biblical scholar) in Mark 12, poses a highly significant question; we must not overlook its vital importance. Paraphrased in today's term, he might have asked, “Jesus, what is the core, the central idea, or guiding principle of what you believe and teach? Tell us what is the single most important tenet of your theology.”

This would have been an ideal teaching moment; the perfect opportunity for Jesus to declare, “Moses wrote unto you ‘God is one,’ but I say unto you rather, He is three-in-one.” Instead He fully endorses Moses' understanding of the absolute numerical oneness of God by His use of the Greek numeral one (*heis*) in place of the Hebrew *Echad*.

Students of scripture should consider carefully whether they have truly grasped the implications of Jesus' response here. He quite obviously treats the Old Testament words of Moses as a repository of divine truth. His definition then of God, relies for its authority on what Jesus and His audience knew to be a primary revelation.

Jesus simply restated with complete clarity the fundamental doctrine and tenet of the Jewish religious system, confirming beyond any question or argument that the True God is One LORD--and thus one person. The conversation which follows reveals the critical nature of

the original question. How? ***“There is none other commandment greater...”*** (Mk 12:31b). Few exchanges in the pages of scripture are more enlightening, as we see Jesus Himself, laying the groundwork for all true faith and understanding.

Many other passages in the Old Testament emphasize the oneness of God and affirm a strict and uncompromising monotheism. For example:

***“See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no God with me”***

----Dt 32:39

***“Ye are my witnesses...understand that I am He; before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me. I, even I am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour.”***

----Is 43:10-11

***“I am the first, and I am the last, and beside Me there is no God”***

----Is 44:6

***“Is there a God beside Me? Yea, there is no God: I know not any”***

----Is 44:8

Hardly an endorsement of the so-called compound unity of trinitarianism, Isaiah's continual emphasis on the numerical oneness of God is pointed and clear. This becomes even more striking when in six separate verses in a single chapter Isaiah quotes God as saying:

***“I am the LORD, and there is none else, There is no God beside me... I am the LORD, and there is none else...there is none else, there is no God...I am the LORD, and there is none else...there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me...for I am God, and there is none else”***

----Is 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22

Each of these statements is designed by God to forever fix in the minds of His people, the understanding that, in contrast to the plurality and multiplicity of the *gods* around them--He is absolutely and numerically one.

These are far from isolated texts, ripped out of context to fit a particular theology. Instead, they represent a basic and essential teaching of scripture. This is the fundamental Biblical understanding of the nature of God. There are dozens of these passages scattered throughout scripture, (almost fifty in Isaiah alone), and are interpreted literally to exclude any plurality in the Godhead.

We will examine the idea of the trinity in creation, in more detail, later, but consider the words of the prophet of God regarding Israel's creator: ***"I am the LORD that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens ALONE; that spreadeth abroad the earth BY MYSELF"*** (Is 44:24). Few statements could be better calculated to banish forever, from our minds, the idea that more than one person had been involved in creation.

Two additional passages challenge, not simply Israel, but the rest of us as well, to faithful devotion to the One True God:

***"Who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I the LORD? And there is no God else beside me; A just God and a Saviour; there is none else beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."***

---- Is 45:21, 22

Notice carefully the use of the word *Savior* and its frequent application in reference to Jesus. This is key to a proper understanding of Biblical Christology, because God says clearly elsewhere: ***"Thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no Saviour beside me"*** (Hos 13:4). We find this reaffirmed in the New Covenant when Jude 25 reveals that He remains, ***"the only wise God, our Saviour."***

It is a simple historical fact, documented in the Biblical record, that when Israel chose to

embrace other gods, chaos ensued, the nation was fractured, and the terrible prophecies made against them came to pass. Could it be that the confusion and fragmentation we see in the Church today and throughout its two thousand year history, can be traced to this very same disregard for the belief in God's absolute numerical oneness?

The concept of a unipersonal Godhead is hardly unique to the prophet Isaiah. At the close of the period of the Judges, Hannah knelt in the house of the Lord and rejoiced in prayer, saying: **"There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none beside Thee: neither is there any rock like our God" (I Sam 2:2)**. Later we find David praising the Lord following his deliverance out of the hands of his enemies and out of the hands of Saul. He asks simply: **"Who is God save the LORD? And who is a rock, save our God?" (2 Sam 22:32)**.

The prophet Joel, speaking of a future restored national Israel, says of them, **"and ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the LORD your God and none else..." (Joel 2:27)**. From these testimonies, we learn that whatever or whoever the God of the Jews was to the people of the Old Testament, He was to remain that forever.

It was the creator God who fathered the Nation, prompting Malachi to ask pointedly, **"Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers" (Malachi 2:10)**. Nothing could be clearer than that the one God of Jewish monotheism, on which the Christian Church was founded, was the Father--of Israel, of the Lord Jesus Christ and of us as believers.

It is significant that not a single Old Testament passage explicitly contains any form of trinitarian doctrine; it simply cannot, in fact, be derived from an exegesis of Old Testament texts alone. This means then, that if threeness is an essential part of God's nature--He did not reveal it to His chosen people. If correct, trinitarianism stands alone as a fundamental and key aspect of God's nature, totally unknown in the Old Testament but, revealed in the New <sup>15</sup>

If God is indeed a trinity then neither Moses, nor Abraham, the father of the faithful of all ages, comprehended the nature of the God they worshipped and in whom they placed complete faith. Yet we are told that **"the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex 33:11)**. This implies a relationship unique in its intimacy and yet, neither Moses, Abraham or even Isaiah, whose vision of God is so vividly recorded for us, give any hint of a plurality in the Godhead. Did they simply not know or understand?

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard, *Essentials of Oneness Theology*, 8

Hardly, Jesus Himself eliminated any possibility of that conclusion when He told the Samaritan woman at the well: ***“Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews”*** (Jn 4:22).

## Chapter 4 Old Testament Passages

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In spite of the overwhelming testimony of Old Testament scripture to the oneness of God, many still cling to the mistaken belief that the trinity is revealed in the pages of the Old Covenant. It is very difficult for them to understand that when they do this they are, however unknowingly, engaged in *eisegesis*, the practice of reading into scripture.

It is common knowledge that we tend to see in scripture exactly what we expect to see--what we have conceived as already being there. It is often difficult to accept the threatening possibility that our "received" understanding does not coincide with the actual teaching of the Bible. The problem is only compounded if we are engaged in the teaching or preaching ministry. A false doctrine that has been accepted emotionally and intellectually is very difficult to dislodge.

So then, what about the passages presented by trinitarians as "proof" of the existence of the trinity? A survey of theological literature reveals an interesting situation among trinitarian scholars. An increasing number of them no longer rely on the popular arguments to support their view of a plural Godhead. Yet, many others continue to trot out these Old Testament texts as if it were somehow self-evident that their testimony favors a trinity. Might there be, after all, a way of explaining these passages that is more consistent with the overall testimony of scripture? In fact there is.

Oneness theologians offer the following explanations for the Old Testament passages frequently cited by Trinitarians as veiled references to a trinity:

- References to the Son, in the Old Testament, are seen as prophetic of the man Christ Jesus and point to God's future manifestation in the flesh.
- References to the Spirit of God, the Word of God, or the wisdom of God do not imply a plurality of persons any more than when one speaks of the spirit, word or wisdom of a man.
- The Old Testament theophanies are understood, not as pre-incarnate appearances of Christ, but as manifestations of the one omnipotent, omnipresent God. There are however, passages where the "angel of the Lord" denotes a literal angel distinguished from God.
- The attribution of human body parts, hands, feet, etc., is viewed as anthropomorphic and figurative. As a spirit, God does not have a permanent physical body apart from His incarnation as the Son of Mary.

Trinitarians commonly explain that the monotheistic passages, used to show God's oneness, speak instead of a "compound unity" and perfect agreement among the members of the trinity. It should be pointed out however, that neither the Biblical writers nor their original audience would have understood this to be so.

Furthermore, this view would allow for outright polytheism, for many different and distinct deities could exist together in perfect harmony and agreement.<sup>16</sup> This directly violates the express purpose and intent of these passages, which is to affirm the absolute numerical oneness of God.

In a nutshell, this represents the Oneness response to several of the common arguments alleging a revelation of a trinity in the Old Testament. A few passages however, warrant a more extensive treatment, for they represent crucial pillars of trinitarian theology which do seem, on the surface, to support a plurality in the Godhead. Taken together, they comprise a formidable stronghold that is often difficult to deal with in a brief or casual way. We will examine four of these.

### Elohim

One of the most frequent and consistently used arguments for the presence of a trinity in the Old Testament is the supposed "uniplurality" of *elohim*, the Hebrew word for God. *Elohim* is a uniplural noun, so the argument goes, and this is supposedly proof positive of the doctrine of the trinity, already in place in the opening verses of the Bible. ***"In the beginning God [elohim, therefore the trinity] created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).***

The problem with this argument is that it has absolutely no support, whatsoever, from those trained in the Hebrew language. Honest scholars simply do not accept the Hebrew *elohim* to indicate any sort of plurality in the Godhead. To do so would contradict the evidence of thousands of singular pronouns denoting the one God as well as discounting the overall testimony of scripture.

As we will see in a moment, it is as misleading to speak of *elohim* as a uniplural word as it

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<sup>16</sup> *Essentials of Oneness Theology*, David K Bernard, Word Aflame Press, p9

is to contend that the Hebrew numeral one, *echad*, means “compound unity” and therefore also, supports a plural Godhead. Many standard Hebrew lexicons will confirm that *elohim* is not a uniplural, nor does it imply two or more persons in the Godhead. The recognized facts of the Hebrew language simply will not support the contention of multiple, distinct and separate persons as the One True God. Recognized authority, the *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* has this to say regarding *elohim*:

“The plurality of majesty...sums up the several characteristics belonging to the idea, besides posing the secondary sense of an intensification of the original idea...that the language has entirely rejected the idea of a numerical plurality in Elohim (whenever it denotes one God), is proved especially by its being almost invariably joined with a singular attribute.”<sup>17</sup>

We simply cannot ignore the fact that the Jews familiarity with their own language had never led them to conclude that a plurality of persons in the Godhead was even remotely hinted at in the creation chapter of Genesis. Lest we conclude that the Jews simply missed something from their own scriptures remember our point earlier regarding the words of Jesus. **“Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).**

We should take further note that in the succeeding verses of Genesis (vv. 27-31), the singular pronoun is always used with the word God: **“...His [not their] own image, in the image of God created He [not “they”] them.” (v. 27).**

It would be difficult indeed to conclude from this verse that a plurality of beings was meant. Note as well: **“Behold, I [not we] have given you every plant yielding seed...and God saw all that He [not they] had made and it was very good.” (vss 29-31).**

Genesis additionally lists many other examples of Hebrew words that have plural endings, which are not plural in meaning. Consider for example, *panim* is Hebrew for face. Where a plural verb is found with *elohim* in 2 Samuel 7:23, the parallel passage in I Chronicles 17:21 replace the plural with a singular verb.

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<sup>17</sup> Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. 1910 p. 398

Careful study of the Hebrew lends no support to the persistent idea that *elohim* describes a plurality of persons in the Godhead. Consider an obvious difficulty with such an interpretation. If *elohim* implies more than one person in these texts, how are we going to explain the use of the very same word in reference to Moses in Exodus chapter seven: **“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have made thee a god (*elohim*) to Pharaoh: and Aaron, thy brother shall be thy prophet”** (Ex. 7:1). Surely no one would try to imply a plurality for Moses! The single Pagan deity Dagon is called *elohim* in I Samuel 5:7, and the very same word is used in Judges 11:24 in reference to the false god of the Amorites.

While *elohim* is plural in form, as we have seen, it is always singular in meaning. When it refers to the One True God, it is always paired with a singular verb. No one prior to the twelfth century imagined that a plurality in the Godhead was in any way indicated by the Hebrew title for God. Many Trinitarians have themselves long since ceased to argue for the trinity from Genesis 1:1 or 1:26.

If singular pronouns designating The One God, along with the consistent and overwhelming witness of Scripture, cannot persuade the reader that God is a single individual, then sadly, there is little else in language that can. *elohim* has singular verbs in nearly all of its 2500 references to the One God. An occasional anomaly proves as little as the fact that Joseph’s master, Potipher, is described in the Hebrew by a plural noun in Genesis 39:2, 3, 7, 8, 19, and 20. Do we therefore contend that Joseph’s master (plural in the Hebrew) took (singular verb) him, and put him into the prison is an incorrect translation? Hardly!

In the Hebrew of Genesis 24:9,10 Abraham is the “masters” of his servant. Is this then a valid reference to a “plurality” in Abraham? Of course not. The fallacy of this kind of logic is readily apparent. And yet all of these examples show the very same plurality in Abraham, Potipher, and Joseph as is supposedly found in *elohim* when used in reference to the one true God.

These facts led one Trinitarian writer to conclude in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* that: “It is exegesis of mischievous if pious sort that would find the doctrine of the trinity in a plural form of *elohim*.” ().<sup>18</sup> The Article on God in the same work concludes: “There is in the Old Testament no indication of distinctions in the Godhead. It is

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<sup>18</sup> W. Fulton, *Trinity*, ERE. 12:458

anachronism to find either the doctrine of the incarnation or that of the trinity in its pages.”<sup>19</sup>

The definition supplied by the *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* contradicts the notion that God is “three persons!” “Though plural in form, *elohim* can be treated as a singular, in which case it means the One Supreme Deity...There is only one Supreme God and He is a person.”<sup>20</sup>

Other recognized authorities and reference works have similar things to say:

“The plural is used in prose and poetry to enlarge and intensify the idea expressed by the singular, and was never meant to imply persons or Gods in the Godhead.”<sup>21</sup>

“The fanciful idea that the plural form of *elohim* referred to the trinity of persons in the Godhead, hardly now finds a supporter among scholars. It is either what grammarians call the plural of majesty or it denotes the fullness of divine strength, the sum of the powers displayed by God.”<sup>22</sup>

“The most frequent Hebrew word for God (over 2500 times in the Old Testament). Several theories of the origin of the word have been proposed, some connecting it with the Hebrew *el* or *eloh*, others distinguishing them from *elohim*. The origin is prehistoric and therefore incapable of direct proof.

*Elohim* is plural in form, but it is singular in construction, (used with a singular verb or adjective). When applied to the One True God, the plural is due to the Hebrew idiom of a plural of magnitude or majesty.”<sup>23</sup>

Noted language authority Spiros Zodhiates author of the popular *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* has this to say in his *Lexical Aids to the Old Testament* regarding *elohim*: “A masculine Hebrew noun--plural in form but when used of God it always carries a singular

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<sup>19</sup> W.T. Davison, *God Biblical and Christian* in ERE, 6:252-260

<sup>20</sup> Intervarsity Press. *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 1980; 571

<sup>21</sup> *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*

<sup>22</sup> *Smith's Bible Dictionary*

<sup>23</sup> *Zondervan's New International Bible Dictionary*. 1987.308

verb, so no implication of any plurality in the divine nature can be inferred from the fact that the word is plural.”<sup>24</sup>

From all of this we conclude, along with Oneness Theologian David K. Bernard that despite popular teaching to the contrary: “The use of a plural word *elohim* does not denote a plurality of persons, but is a characteristic way to express greatness or majesty in the Hebrew language.”<sup>25</sup>

Flanders and Cresson, in their *Introduction to the Bible*, confirm that indeed, “the Hebrew pluralized nouns to express greatness or Majesty.”<sup>26</sup>

The point we need to keep in mind is that the Jews in whose language the Old Testament is recorded, never employed the word *elohim*, as used of the One True God, to mean more than one person. Those who attempt to read the trinity into the opening chapters of Genesis are involved in a forced interpretation with no linguistic support.

Closely related to the discussion of *elohim* is the concept of multiple persons participating in creation.

### The Trinity in Creation

***“In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth. And the Earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”***

**--Genesis 1:1, 2.**

As we have already seen, based upon a misunderstanding of the Hebrew language and

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<sup>24</sup> Zodhiates. 1984. 1998

<sup>25</sup> Bernard. 1984.9

<sup>26</sup> Flanders and Cresson. 1973. P.48n.8.

occasionally, even outright misrepresentation--trinitarians often advance the idea of plurality of persons involved in creation. This comes not only from the misuse of the Hebrew Word for God--*Elohim* which is found here in Genesis 1:1; but also from a failure to understand the nature of the Spirit of God and the removal of certain other passages from their context of scripture as a whole, which are then misinterpreted in isolation to support their views.

It is helpful, sometimes even necessary to remind ourselves that we must not permit occasional "difficult verses" to override the overall testimony of Scripture.

Typical of those who advance the argument for the presence of a trinity at creation is Wayne Grudem, research professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary in Scottsdale, Arizona. Writing in his volume, *Systematic Theology*, he says:

"God the Father was the primary agent in initiating the act of creation. But the Son and Holy Spirit were also active. The Son as the one through whom creation came about. ***'All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made'*** (John1:31). Paul says ***'There is one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we exist.'***(Col.1:16). We read also that ***'the son is the one through whom God created the world'*** (Heb1:2). These passages give a consistent picture of the son as the active agent carrying out the plans and directions of the Father."<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the alleged role of the Holy Spirit, Grudem has this to say: "The Holy Spirit was also at work in creation. He is generally pictured as completing, filling and giving life to God's creation. In Genesis 1:2, 'The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters,' indicating a preserving, sustaining, governing function"<sup>28</sup>

To be fair, a casual approach to scripture, coupled with a trinitarian theology will certainly seem to support these statements. Take for instance the words of the writer of Hebrews who tells us that God, ***"Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds."*** (Heb. 1:2). Or, consider the words of the Apostle Paul, to the Church at Colossi: ***"For by Him were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him."*** (Col. 1:16).

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<sup>27</sup> Grudem.1994; 266

<sup>28</sup> Grudem. p267

Here again, on the surface, these are seemingly clear and straight forward assertions of the role of Jesus in creation. But we must not take these texts in isolation and forget that their context is the whole of scripture.

Highly placed in Jewish religious circles and self-described “Hebrew of Hebrews,” without question Paul’s background would have made him uncompromisingly monotheistic--a dedicated advocate of belief in the One True God as a single person. Paul’s Jewish heritage had placed the single-person God of Israel at the pinnacle of his belief system. His complete devotion to this one God of the Hebrew Bible remained, after his conversion to Christianity, the prime motivating force behind all his activity.

We have noted earlier that when Paul insists **“that there is no God but One,”** he also laments the fact that **“Howbeit then there is not in every man this knowledge”(I Co 8:4, 6).** Paul made repeated and consistent references in his letters to the One True God, meaning the Father alone, even in contexts where both Father and Son are mentioned together. This is a reflection of Paul’s revelatory understanding of the distinction between the Deity and humanity of Christ.

We must be careful to avoid, at all costs, the tendency of reading our own twenty-first century interpretations into the writings and beliefs of the first century Church. Words must be permitted to mean what they meant in their original context. Paul’s thinking is inherently consistent. He expressed himself with complete clarity, when he spoke of the One True God. So we must guard against the danger of reading Paul as though he must have been familiar with the much later decisions of the multiple Church Councils. Suggestions of a plural Godhead would not appear for almost three hundred years after the ministry of Jesus. Paul’s letters should be read and understood in their own Hebrew context.

Too many authors and teachers make the mistake of reading later trinitarian tradition into first century monotheistic Hebrew understanding. As noted, this tendency is known as *eisegesis*, and is quite prevalent in popular Christian literature. Consequently, it is all too easy for those trained in a trinitarian model to fall into the trap of unconsciously, reading scripture through lenses tinted with the doctrines formulated in the second to fifth centuries.

Referring to the One God of Israel, Paul says: **“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of Heaven and Earth, dwelleth not in temples made**

**with hands” (Acts 17:24).** Compare this with God’s declaration to the Prophet Isaiah: **“I am the LORD that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the Earth by myself” (Is 44:24).** To interfere with or to ignore this fundamental aspect of Jewish monotheism and introduce another uncreated “person” as an active agent in the creation would have been totally contrary, even offensive to Paul’s belief in the basic tenets of Jewish theology, primarily its uncompromising unitary monotheism.

Much of trinitarian theology relies on “proofs” heavy on inference drawn from single verses taken out of context. Consider the passage in Colossians 1:16 for example. It has been supposed by many that this verse is evidence of an eternal preexistence of the Messiah and that Jesus created the world. This might seem to be confirmed by a casual reading of the King James Version which claims that **“all things were made by Him.”** Examination of the Greek however, reveals that this phrase is more properly translated **“Through Him.”** It is the Son, **“Through whom also He (God) made the ages [not ‘worlds’].” (Heb. 1:2).** Likewise, Paul believed that it was “in” and “through” Jesus that **“all things have been created” (Col 1:16).** He did not say or mean to imply that in fact they had been created “by Him.” This is an important, if not obvious distinction, which will become clear.

Paul’s firm belief in monotheism can be seen in his own words:

***“We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one...to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by (through) whom are all things and we (through) Him”***

----- I Co 8:4,6

As a Jew Paul understood that the Father alone is Jehovah God. As an expert on Hebrew scripture he was well acquainted with the facts of creation. As Nehemiah explains:

***“Thou, even Thou art LORD (Jehovah) alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is therein; Thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshipeth Thee--Thou art the LORD, the God [Lit. the Jehovah-The Elohim] who didst choose Abraham...”***

-----Neh 9:6, 7.

We might take note here of the relationship between the LORD, Jehovah who **“preservest them all”** and Jesus, who is the **“brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person,”** who **“upholds all things by the word of His power.”** It is the same Lord Jesus of whom it is said, **“and again when He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, ‘and let all the angels (the host of heaven) worship Him”** (Heb 1:3, 6). It is this same Jesus who said in Luke 4:8, **“it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him alone shalt thou serve.”**

So, how are we to understand, that according to Hebrews 1:2, God made the worlds by, or more properly, through the Son? Well, certainly, the Spirit of God who was in the Son was also the creator of the worlds. Scripture has much to say on the subject of creation and we must consider all of it in balance and context. Isaiah, for instance, tells us of the prayer of King Hezekiah, who prayed: **“O LORD of Hosts, God of Israel, that dwelleth between the Cherubim, Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the Earth: Thou hast made heaven and Earth.”**(Isaiah 37:16).

According to Isaiah then, God was unaccompanied at creation. Further on he records:

**“Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and He that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the Earth by myself.”** [Lit. Heb. “who was with me”]

-----Is 44:24

Isaiah makes dozens of references to the oneness of God; references that only make sense if understood to mean, not a compound unity, but rather, an absolute numerical oneness. He has much to say as well, regarding the activities of this one God in creation.

**“I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me...there is none beside me. I am the LORD and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness...I the LORD do all these things...for thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and**

***made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited. I am the LORD; and there is none else***

-----Is 45:5-7, 18

There is nothing here that allows for or even hints at a second or third person of the trinity present at creation; quite the opposite. We find here as well as in Hebrews, that the One True God, Jehovah, Elohim, was alone present at creation. But He established the ages of human history with Jesus at the very center of His purpose. It is this God who declares: ***“It is I who made the Earth, and created man upon it...there is none else, no other God.”*** (Is 45:12, 14).

How, on the basis of these, and the many similar verses, scattered throughout scripture, can the idea of a plurality of persons in creation be sustained? Even Jesus, in the Gospels, attributes the work of creation to the Father. He makes no claim of partnership or agency in the Genesis creation (Mk 10:6; Mt 6:30, 19:4; Lk12:28). Why does He seem to make it a point to expressly declare the Father to be the sole creator? If Jesus had indeed played a role as co-creator of the heavens and earth in Genesis, why does He not tell us this? Perhaps more significantly, if He is indeed the physical manifestation of the creator God, why not simply declare, “I did it”?

I believe that Jesus in fact, does just this, but only to those who have, “ears to hear and eyes to see.” He spoke to His disciples in Mark chapter four, in a conversation that bears directly on our subject. Following His presentation of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus responds to a question regarding the purpose and use of parables. Jesus answers:

***“Unto you (true disciples) it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing, they may see and not perceive; and hearing, they may hear, and not understand”***

-----Mk 4:11,12

Jesus told Philip in John 14: ***“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (Jn14:9)***. This statement has tremendous significance. As we have already seen, a study of the

Hebrew *Elohim* lends no support to the persistent idea that “God” in Genesis 1:1 refers not only to the Father, but also the Son and Spirit as well. It is important to note that Isaiah, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, identifies *Elohim* (God), as Jehovah and the Hebrew scriptures plainly limit the name Jehovah to the Father alone (See Dt 32:6; Is 63:16, 64:8; Jer 31:9). Malachi has this to say: **“Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?” (Mal 2:10).**

By the careful comparison of scripture with scripture, it quickly becomes clear that the idea of a trinity of persons present at creation is simply not supported by the Biblical evidence. What we find instead, is the declaration of the One True God, who alone is the creator, sustainer, and redeemer. This is the God **“which alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8).** For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, do we have in this brief passage a clue to the identity of the Man from Galilee? Consider carefully, for we find in the Gospel of Matthew that **“...in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went out to them, walking on the sea...” (Mt 14:26).**

Rather than trying to allege the presence of a trinity at work in creation, a more Biblical approach would be to take the scriptures themselves at face value. When seen in balance and context, all of the “problem passages” fall into place and our eyes are opened to a simple and marvelous truth:

**“By the Word of the Lord were the Heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath [Heb. Ruach/spirit] of His mouth”**

-----Ps 33:6

The One True God of the Bible, who is spirit--Jehovah-Elohim--the Father, that **“*calleth those things which be not as though they were*”** spoke the worlds into existence. It’s just that simple. Nothing in the Genesis account or anywhere else in scripture requires a trinitarian explanation or the presence of a supposed co-creator.

### The “US” Verses

Closely related to the discussion of the trinity in creation and the Hebrew word for God-*Elohim*, is the problem created by the mishandling of Genesis 1:26, and the related verses, Genesis 3:22, 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8. Many see in these an implicit (some would say explicit) suggestion that God exists as more than one person. After all, what else could the plural

verb “let us” and the plural noun “our” mean? Is not the best explanation the fact that already in the very first chapter of the opening book of scripture, we have an indication of a plurality of persons in the Godhead? We are not told how many persons, and we have nothing approaching a complete or explicit doctrine of the trinity. It does seem, however, to imply more than one person is involved. Or does it?

Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting in their work, *“The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-inflicted Wound,”* point out that “An occasional grammatical anomaly cannot possibly offset the evidence of thousands of occurrences in which the Divine Name and titles take singular verbs.”<sup>29</sup>

The singular *EI* and *Eloah* (God), both affirm the oneness of God. It is amazing the tenacity of those who continue to advance, against the evidence of thousands of texts in which God is described by singular pronouns and verbs, the four “US” verses, as proof positive that God is triune. Genesis 1:26 is perhaps the most familiar of these:

***“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness...”***

To assert this as conclusive of God’s plurality is precarious at best. As in the case with *Elohim*, most modern scholars no longer take the phrase “Let us” to mean a plurality of persons in the trinity. The same can be said of Genesis 3:22, ***“Behold, the man has become as one of us...”*** Genesis 11:7 ***“...let us go down, and there confound their language.”*** and Isaiah 6:8 ***“Whom shall I send and who will go for us”.*** Note carefully the combination of singular and plural in the same sentence in the Isaiah passage. This same combination also appears in the Genesis creation account. Genesis 1:26 says, ***“Let us make man in our image...”*** However, in Genesis 1:27 we find that ***“...God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him...”***

The use of this so-called “Divine Plural” has puzzled scholars and students of scripture for thousands of years. It has been understood historically in several ways:

- 1) God conversing with the angels (The historic Jewish viewpoint)

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<sup>29</sup> Buzzard and Hunting. 1998. 23

- 2) God counseling with His own will (As also in Eph. 1:11)
- 3) A plural pronoun agreeing with and necessitated by the plural noun *Elohim*
- 4) A majestic or literary plural
- 5) A prophetic reference to the future manifestation of the Son of God

It is fanciful to imagine that this verse supports the idea that God was speaking to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Where in scripture does the Lord ever speak to His own Spirit? The text says nothing about an eternal son, the second member of a co-equal, co-eternal trinity. The “Us” in the text gives no indication of two other equal partners in the Godhead. To claim otherwise is merely creative imagination or faulty exegesis. If God is indeed a single “person” His use of the word “us” means that He is addressing someone other than Himself, someone other than God.

Even among Trinitarians, different authors take different sides on this issue. Some have suggested these are plurals of majesty, a form of speech a king would use in saying, for example, “We are not amused,” or “We are pleased to grant your request.” In Old Testament Hebrew there are no other examples of a monarch using plural pronouns of himself in such a plural of majesty. This leads some to conclude that this suggestion has no evidence to support it. It should be noted however, that both Alexander the Great (152 BC) and King Demetrius (145 BC) refer to themselves in this way in the Septuagint text of I Maccabees 10:19 and 11:31. Of course this is Greek, not Hebrew and written long after Genesis.

Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar rejects the Plural of Majesty as an incorrect explanation for these passages. It prefers, in the case of Genesis 1:26-- “A plural of self-deliberation.”<sup>30</sup> (Compare this with Ephesians 1:11).

A search for a Jewish interpretation in the Babylonian Talmud, the Targumim and the Midrashim reveals only that the later rabbinic interpreters were unable to reach agreement on a satisfactory interpretation of the passage. The “Plural of Majesty” and “God speaking to angels” are the most commonly suggested interpretations.

Regarding the suggestion that God is here speaking to angels, Buzzard and Hunting

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<sup>30</sup> Gesenius. 1910. 124.n2

agree saying, "It is most likely that the plural pronoun "we" contains a reference to God's attendant council of angels, who themselves had been created in the image of God and had been witness to the creation of the universe."<sup>31</sup>

Wayne Grudem disagrees claiming, "Angels did not participate in the creation of man, nor was man created in the image and likeness of angels, so this suggestion is not convincing."<sup>32</sup> Before we reject this idea out of hand, we should carefully consider the passages in I Kings 22:19-22 and II Chronicles 18:18-22.

Regarding Genesis 1:26, Trinitarian commentator G. J. Wenham writes in *The Word Biblical Commentary*, "Christians have traditionally seen this verse as adumbrating the trinity. It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural meant to the original author."<sup>33</sup>

The related entry in *The NIV Study Bible* reads: "God speaks as the creator-king announcing His crowning work to the members of His Heavenly court. (See Genesis 3:22, 11:7; Is 6:8; See also I Kings 22:19-23; Job 15:8; Jer 23:18)."<sup>34</sup>

A reasonable question to pose to Trinitarians who see God as a plurality: Why do they not put an "s" on the end of God? In the English language, plurals are commonly noted by a final "s." It is a standard and recognized format of the language, a universally accepted rule of grammar. If the plural pronoun "us" in Genesis 1:26 refers to a plural Godhead, then the trinity ought regularly to be referred to as "they" and "them". Trinitarians are unhappy with this suggestion, showing that their notion of the Godhead in addition to being unbiblical, also defies the rules of language, as well as the laws of logic.

Prominent Trinitarian writers seem to have gone far beyond the evidence of scripture when asserting that the third person of the trinity was involved in conversation when God said, "**Let us make man in our image.**" It seems imaginative at best, to say that God here spoke to the Holy Spirit. God never once speaks to His Spirit anywhere in scripture. To do so would make as much sense as you speaking to your own spirit--He would be talking to

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<sup>31</sup> Buzzard and Hunting. 1998. 22

<sup>32</sup> Grudem.1994.227

<sup>33</sup> Wordbook.1987.27

<sup>34</sup> Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1985

Himself.

I believe that it is quite reasonable therefore, to assume that this is yet another prophetic reference to the future manifestation of the Son of God. God made all things with Jesus in mind and thus for Him. Significantly, in fulfilling this verse, God created Adam as one person, with one body, mind, personality, spirit and will. The Bible tells us in Romans 5:14 that Adam was made in the figure or likeness of Him that was to come, which is Jesus.

God in His omniscience and foreknowledge, foreseeing man's sin and His own ultimate revelation in the flesh as man's redeemer--looked at Christ as the blueprint for making Adam. Therefore, Adam was made in the image and likeness of Christ--the Father God's manifestation in the flesh. God knew when He created Adam that He would become flesh in order to redeem mankind. We see in Revelation 13:8, Christ as the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world. Although it was thousands of years until He actually hung on the cross at Calvary, in the mind of God He was already slain. In the very same way, when God made Adam, he was made in the image of Christ that existed in the mind of God; the image of God Himself.

### Echad

In making the claim for God of "compound unity" rather than an absolute numerical oneness, Trinitarians are wittingly or unwittingly engaging in a deception regarding the use of the Hebrew word for one found in Deuteronomy 6:4, *Echad*.

Robert Morey and others argue that when "one" modifies a collective noun such as "bunch" or "herd," a plurality is implied by the use of *echad*.<sup>35</sup>

This argument is fallacious at best. One simply cannot successfully argue for the existence of a trinity from the fact the *echad* can modify a collective noun, therefore, leading us to believe that God is compound. The sense of plurality is derived from the collective noun itself, not from the word "one."

Echad is simply the numeral "one" in Hebrew. "Jehovah is one LORD," so states

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<sup>35</sup> Morey. *The Trinity*.1996

Deuteronomy 6:4. The same word, *echad*, also appears as a modifier for Abraham in Ezekiel 33:24, (“only one man”-NIV). Isaiah 51:2 also describes Abraham as “one/*echad*.”

*Echad* appears in translation variously as the numeral “one,” “only,” “alone,” “undivided,” “one single.” Its most natural meaning is “one and not two” (Ecc 4:8).

There is nothing at all in the word Jehovah which even remotely suggests a plurality. The word occurs with singular verbs and pronouns in all of its approximately 6700 occurrences. It is important to note that the One God is identified as the Father in Malachi 1:6 and 2:10.

The claim that “one” really means “compound unity” is a perfect example of argument by assertion without logical proof. The argument involves an easily detectable linguistic fallacy. *Echad* appears some 650 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and in not one single case does the word itself carry even a hint of plurality. It means strictly “one” not two or more. *Echad* is of course a numerical adjective and naturally enough will sometimes be found modifying a collective noun- one family, one bunch, or one herd. But as noted, we must be careful to understand that the sense of plurality resides in the compound noun and never in the word *one/echad*.

In the second chapter of Genesis, we are told that, **“the two will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24)**. Yet even here, the word one means *precisely* ONE and no more--one flesh--not two “fleshes”! This point can be confirmed by any standard lexicon of Biblical Hebrew. For instance, Koehler and Baumgartner give as the fundamental or primary meaning of *echad*, “one single”<sup>36</sup> You will see this plainly illustrated in scripture in verses such as: Job 12:9-24; I Kings 22:8; Ezekiel 33:24 and 48:31-34. Thus when we come to the matter of Deuteronomy 6:4, the text is informing us that Israel’s Supreme God, Jehovah-Elohim, is “one single LORD,” or “one Lord alone.”

It is necessary to belabor this point, as well as the truth about Elohim, the trinity in Creation, and the “us” verses, because they represent key components of the trinitarian stronghold. They build their case for a multi-personal God on what they believe to be a firm foundation in the Hebrew. The simple fact however, is that linguistically, *echad* never means or even implies “compound unity,” but strictly an “absolute numerical oneness,” hence, its translation into the Greek by the Greek numeral one- *heis*.

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<sup>36</sup> Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. 1967

Since this strange argument regarding a supposed plurality in the numeral one is so pervasive and has been uncritically accepted by Christians everywhere, we should note the words of Gregory Boyd. In his book, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*, Boyd, a Trinitarian refers to the arguments for both *Elohim* and *echad* as “weak,” and claims they “really prove nothing.” He notes the frailty of both arguments and concludes that no case for a multi-personal God can be based on them.<sup>37</sup>

Considering the Greek *heis*, which always translates the Hebrew *echad*, we find it to always refer to a single individual. Jesus said, **“But be not ye called rabbi, for one [heis] is your master and all ye are brothers. And call no man your father upon the earth, for one [heis] is your Father, which is in Heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one [heis] is your master even Christ.”** (Mt 23:8-10). In each case “one” means precisely one person.

For Paul Christ is “one person” [heis]: **“[God] saith not ‘and to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘and to thy seed,’ which is Christ”** (Gal 3:16). Only a few verses later, Paul uses the exact language in reference to God. **“Now a mediator is not a mediator of one [heis], but God is one [heis]”** (Gal 3:20). The meaning of course is that God is “one party” or “one person.” All of this is consistent with the uniform testimony of scripture that God is one.

It is true that *heis* can designate a collective unity: **“ye are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Gal 3:27). But this meaning is quite inappropriate in reference to God who is consistently described by singular pronouns and equated with the Father, who is obviously one person.

Occasionally the argument is made that if numerical oneness was what was meant for God, it would have been better described by the Hebrew word *yachid*, “solitary, isolated, the only one.” However, *yachid* is rare in Biblical Hebrew and because it carries the meaning of “lonely” or “only-begotten” is inappropriate as a description of God. The use of *echad* is quite sufficient to indicate that God is one person.

There is however, another Hebrew word, *bad*, which does in fact describe the one God. It means “alone, by oneself, or isolated.” Deuteronomy 4:35 states that **“there is none else**

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<sup>37</sup> Boyd.1995.47.48

***beside Him.”***

God’s absolute numerical oneness is similarly emphasized when He is addressed: ***“Thou, even Thou art LORD (Jehovah) alone”*** (Neh 9:6). ***“Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth”*** (II Kings 19:15), ***“Thou art God alone”*** (Ps 86:10). In short then, the one God of the Bible is not a plurality or a trinity. He is a single being (Person), unrivaled and in a class all His own. He is one, absolutely, with all of the mathematical simplicity that word implies.

A search of the Hebrew Scriptures for any sign of a duality or trinity of divine persons active in creation will prove fruitless.

“There is in the Old Testament no indication of distinctions in the Godhead: it is an anachronism to find the doctrine...of the trinity in its pages.”<sup>38</sup>

“Theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the trinity.”<sup>39</sup>

“The doctrine of the trinity is not taught in the Old Testament.”<sup>40</sup>

The Old Testament is strictly monotheistic; it reveals God as a single personal being. The idea that a trinity can be found there, either explicitly or by implication, is an assumption that has long held sway in theology, but is absolutely without foundation. To propose a Godhead of more than one person requires us to cast aside the ordinary rules of language and grammar. Respected and responsible historians, both secular and religious, agree that the Jews of Jesus’ time held firmly to faith in a uni-personal God.

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<sup>38</sup> Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.1913. 6:254

<sup>39</sup> The Encyclopedia of Religion.1987.15:54

<sup>40</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia

How ironic that throughout history, Christian theologians have denied the Jews the right to explain the meaning of their God in their own scriptures. Rare indeed are those with the ability to deal truthfully with the scriptures on this vital issue. A notable exception writes: "The Old Testament tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit...There is no evidence that any sacred writer even suspected the existence of a [trinity] within the Godhead...even to see in the Old Testament suggestions or foreshadowing or "veiled" signs of a trinity of persons, is to go beyond the words and intent of the writers."<sup>41</sup> Perhaps it is time for these ancient voices to be heard again!

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<sup>41</sup> Fortman.1972.xv, 8, 9

## Chapter 5 New Testament Passages

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When dealing with the New Testament, Oneness exponents stress the importance of exegeting in the light of culture and context. The original speakers and writers were strictly monotheistic Jews who had absolutely no thought of introducing a dramatic new revelation of a plurality in the Godhead.

Neither the authors of scripture nor their readers thought in anything approaching Trinitarian categories. Both the doctrine and the terminology of the trinity had yet to be formulated. Their development would not take place for almost three hundred years.

Many New Testament passages affirm Old Testament monotheism:

***“And Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is, ‘Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord’...and the scribe said unto him, well, master, Thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other than He”***

-----Mark 12:29, 32

***“Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the gentiles? Yes, of the gentiles also: seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith.”***

-----Romans 3:29, 30

***“...there is none other God but one...to us there is but one God, the father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him.”***

-----I Corinthians 8: 4, 6

***“Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.”***

-----Galatians 3:20

***“[There is]...one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”***

-----Ephesians 4:6

***“For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man, Jesus Christ.”***

-----I Timothy 2:5

***“Thou believest that there is one God; Thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble.”***

-----James 2:19

***“And immediately I was in the Spirit: and behold, a throne was set in Heaven, and one sat on the throne.”***

-----Revelation 4:12

Trinitarian author Calvin Beisner recognizes the force of these verses. In a chapter entitled, “Monotheism in the New Testament,” he acknowledges that the monotheistic view “pervades the whole outlook of Jesus.” Citing John 17:3, Beisner correctly points out that Paul as well, shares this viewpoint. Concerning I Corinthians 8:4-6, he says: “This monotheistic viewpoint rules the whole New Testament, but is nowhere more strongly stated than here in the writings of Paul.”<sup>42</sup>

We should point out that neither Testament uses the word trinity or associates the word three or persons with God in any significant way. The only passage to use the word three in

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<sup>42</sup> Beisner.1984, 26, 27

relation to God is the much disputed text of I John 5:7. This passage is widely regarded as a spurious addition to the text, possibly by an overzealous scribe trying to force the new idea on the original text.

The problem with this verse is that it appears in only a very small number of unreliable Greek manuscripts, the earliest of which is from the thirteenth century. No modern translation includes it. This passage does not appear in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts from all major textual traditions, including several very reliable manuscripts from the fourth and fifth centuries. It is also omitted in quotations by Church Fathers such as Irenaeus (202 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (212 A.D.) and Tertullian (220 A.D.), as well as the great defender of the trinity, Athanasius (373 A.D.).

Textual critic and well known Bible translator, the late Bruce Metzger, in his work, "*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*," flatly declares, "These words have no right to stand in the New Testament."<sup>43</sup> Their first appearance in Greek is in 1215 A.D. and only as a translation of the Latin "*Acts of the Lateran Council*." Not until the sixteenth century are the words found in any Greek manuscript, and only then as a translation of a Latin version of the Bible.

Regardless of where one stands in relation to the argument surrounding this verse, it is clear that it does not divide the Father, Word and Spirit into separate and distinct persons. In fact, the verse concludes by clearly pointing out that these three are one. It merely speaks of three ways in which God has revealed Himself. Hebrews 1:3 is the only passage in the entire Bible to use the word person (*hypostasis*) in relation to God and it reveals that the Son is the image of God's own person—literally "substance"—not a separate person or substance.

Oneness theology offers the following explanations for the New Testament passages frequently cited as evidence for the existence of a trinity:

- Plural references to the Father and Son simply point to the distinction between Christ's Deity and humanity.
- Other plural references to God distinguish between various manifestations, attributes, roles, or relationships that the one God has. Consider II Corinthians 13:14. Paul here describes three aspects, attributes or works of God—grace, love and communion—

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<sup>43</sup> Metzger.1971.715

and links them with the names or titles which correspond most directly with those qualities—Lord Jesus Christ, God and Holy Ghost. In a similar way, I Peter 1:2 speaks of the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit and the Blood of Jesus.

- Christ’s description of the Holy Ghost as *allon parakleton*, “another comforter” in John 14 means literally, “another of the same kind,” indicating a difference in form or relationship—Christ in Spirit rather than in flesh.
- John 17 speaks of the unity of the man Christ with the Father. As a human being, Christ was one with God in mind purpose and will, just as we also are one with God in the same sense. However, other passages teach that Christ is one with God in a sense that we cannot be, in that He is God Himself.
- Speaking of Jesus as being at the right hand of the Father does not denote a physical positioning of two beings with two separate bodies. This view would be indistinguishable from di-theism. God is a spirit and does not have a physical body apart from Jesus Christ. The phrase is actually a Hebrew idiom or figure of speech, meaning that Christ possesses all the power, authority and preeminence of God. It describes His present mediatorial role because of the cross.
- Paul’s epistles often include a salutation such as: **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7)**. Rather than indicating a distinction of persons, this emphasizes the need to acknowledge not only God’s role as Father and creator, but also His revelation in the flesh as Jesus Christ. The Greek conjunction *kai* (and), can be translated as “even,” thus identifying the Father and Jesus as one and the same being. In related passages, such as II Thessalonians 1:12 and Titus 2:13, Granville Sharp’s rule applies: If two personal nouns of the same gender, number and case are connected by *kai*, if the first has the definite article and the second does not, they both relate to the same person.
- The so-called *Kenosis* of Christ, described in Philippians 2:6-8 does not mean that Christ emptied Himself of attributes of Deity such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, for then Christ would be merely a demi-god. The Spirit of Christ retained all the attributes of Deity even while He manifested all of His character in the flesh. Philippians simply refers to limitations Christ imposed on Himself relative to His humanity. The *kenosis* was a voluntary surrender of glory, dignity, and Godly prerogatives, not an abdication of His Deity. The union of Deity and humanity that was Christ Jesus was equal with God and proceeded from God, but became obedient unto death.<sup>44</sup>

Probably the two most misunderstood passages of scripture in the New Testament regarding alleged distinctions in the Godhead are those involving the prayers of Christ and His baptism in the Jordan River. It is important that we treat these passages carefully, lest we find ourselves inadvertently reading them through the lens of tradition, thus failing to grasp their true meaning.

- The prayers of Christ represent the struggle of the human will as it is submitted to

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<sup>44</sup> *Essentials of Oneness Theology*; David K Bernard, Word Aflame Press, pp 16-18

the divine will. Jesus prayed from His humanity, not as the second person of the trinity, for by definition God has no need to pray. This also explains the other examples of the seeming inferiority of the Son in power and knowledge.

We need to realize and acknowledge that if these examples are used to try and demonstrate a plurality of persons in the Godhead—they establish the subordination of one person to the other, contrary to the trinitarian doctrine of co-equality. This illustrates another of the many inconsistencies in trinitarian theology. All of the examples then, of communication, conversation and expressions of love between the Father and Son, are simply the communication between the Divine and human natures of Jesus.

However, while acknowledging that Christ has two natures in one person, we should admit that the technical terms nature and person are not wholly suitable. Derived from Greek philosophy and colored by trinitarian usage, they are simply inadequate to convey the full concept of the incarnation. Therefore, it is not truly accurate to say one nature prayed to another or that one nature loved another. It is more accurate to say simply that Christ prayed as an authentic human being and that the Son loved the Father as all of us are to love God. At any rate, the point is that to try and use these verses to demonstrate a distinction of persons, is to establish separate centers of consciousness in the Godhead, which is in effect polytheism.

### The Baptism of Jesus

Most people believe that at the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven in the form of a dove and the voice of God spoke audibly from Heaven in a dramatic manifestation of the trinity. I suggest this may not in fact, be the best way to understand these passages. There is another viewpoint that many believe better represents the Biblical data; one that is consistent and more in harmony with the Biblical emphasis on the oneness of God.

First, a careful examination of the relevant passages is in order. Beginning in Matthew's Gospel we will consider them in order.

***“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized of Thee, and Thou comest unto me?’ And Jesus answering said unto him, ‘Suffer it to be so now: For thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he***

***suffered Him. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water, and lo, the Heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting on Him: and lo, a voice from Heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'***

-----Matthew

**3:13-17**

If this were the only thing scripture had to say on this issue, we would probably have to agree with the traditional interpretation of the events. From these verses alone things appear pretty straightforward—Jesus is in the water, the Holy Ghost descends from Heaven and the Father speaks.

We must, however, always remember that we are never permitted to base our doctrine on a single passage of scripture taken in isolation. The principle laid down for us in both testaments and confirmed to us by both Jesus and Paul, is that two or three witnesses are required to establish truth. So, before we take verses like these in Matthew at face value and build our case from them alone--we should first examine any related passages for any data that might be relevant.

Jesus' baptism is one of the few incidents in His life to be recorded in all four Gospels. This is significant for a number of reasons. First of all, it indicates the importance of the event itself. It was considered significant enough to warrant coverage by each of the Gospel writers. Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, it provides four independent sources and four different accounts from which we can draw the information on which to base our conclusions regarding what actually took place.

***"And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and there came a voice from Heaven, saying, 'Thou art my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.' And immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness."***

-----Mark

**1:9-11**

***"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also, being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost***

***descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, 'Thou art my beloved son; in Thee I am well pleased.'"***

**-----Luke 3:21-22**

Even when we investigate these additional sources we find little to argue with.

Jesus was born a Jew under the dispensation of the law; therefore He was baptized under the Law. He was not baptized for sin, for He knew no sin in regard to Himself. John recognized this when he exclaimed that Jesus should be the one to baptize him. Jesus was baptized, according to scripture, to fulfill all righteousness, and as our example. He was both the sacrificial Lamb of God and our High Priest. As High Priest, Jesus fulfills the high priestly function under the law of going to the laver of water--in this case the Jordan River--prior to going to the Altar of Sacrifice.

The Laver of water in the Tabernacle was a type or symbol of water baptism. With all of this in mind, we will now consider our fourth and final witness and see what it adds to our discussion.

***"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of Whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for He was before me. And I knew Him not; but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.' And John bare record saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said to me, 'upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.'"***

**-----John**

**1:29-34**

This passage presents some interesting details not contained in the other accounts and it is on these we will focus our attention. The scriptures indicate that John did not know Jesus. This is especially intriguing in light of the fact that they were cousins and only six months apart in age. How is this possible? Palestine is not that large of an area. Surely they would

have known each other as they grew up. Various theories exist to account for this confusing statement. Some authors believe that Jesus spent a majority of His early life away from the area of Palestine. Another view is that John himself had not been around much, having spent most of his life alone in the deserts, preparing for the work for which he was born. There is however, a third consideration and it is here I believe we should look for our answers.

In comparing the Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah 40:3 as well as Malachi 3:1, we discover that John the Baptist had a very unique and quite specific call on his life.

***“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the LORD, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”***

-----Isaiah 40:3

***“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: Behold, he shall come saith the LORD of Hosts.”***

-----Malachi 3:1

We understand from these passages that John the Baptist was to be the forerunner of Jehovah God, preparing the way for the one true God of Israel. John's ministry could not be fulfilled or complete therefore, until Jehovah Himself appeared on the scene in flesh.

It is, I believe, in this understanding that we find the explanation for John's declaration, “I knew Him not.” Certainly he knew Jesus, the man from Galilee—but how was he to know and understand that Jesus was the manifestation in the flesh of Jehovah God? The Lord had spoken directly to John and commissioned him into his calling and ministry as “The Baptizer” and forerunner. He let him know that one day while John was baptizing, there would come to him one desiring baptism who would be the Messiah, the savior and redeemer of Israel. God would identify Him to John in a very specific way. He would give to John a unique vision that would allow him to know that this was the one he had been waiting for (John 1:33, 34). John was to know and bare record that Jesus was the Christ by seeing the Spirit, in a vision, descending and remaining on Him. This then, would be the one who baptizes with the Holy Ghost.

Who is this Jehovah that John was making way for? Does the Bible reveal this name as the name of the trinity as many claim or does it in fact limit the use of the name Jehovah only to the Father?

***“Do you requite the LORD (Jehovah), O foolish people and unwise? Is not He thy father that hath bought thee? Hath He not made thee, and established thee?”***

**-----Deuteronomy 32:6**

***“...Thou, O LORD (Jehovah), art our father...”***

**-----Isaiah 63:16; 64:8**

In Jeremiah 31:9 Jehovah speaks declaring, ***“I am a father to Israel.”*** Taken together, these and many other scriptures reveal clearly that Jehovah is the covenant and redemptive name of the Father of the Old Testament. We will see later that, in the New Covenant, God accompanied the revelation of Himself in the flesh with a new name.

By giving attention to John’s own words and the specific details in the various accounts, I believe we can arrive at a very clear and accurate understanding of the facts more in keeping with the overall testimony of scripture. Rather than finding support for the concept of a trinity, I believe we will have a very satisfactory explanation of the baptismal events more compatible with the oneness of God.

Returning to the Gospel accounts, I want to focus specifically on the phrase “the heavens were opened” and “the voice from heaven.” Based on a careful study of scripture, I no longer believe either of these statements are to be taken literally. In fact, there is nothing in the text itself to suggest that anyone in the crowd understood what was happening. If either of these events occurred in a manner visible to those gathered at the river, surely there would have been some sort of reaction on their part. An event of this magnitude would have been a notable occurrence.

Consider the phrase, “the heavens were opened.” In addition to the four accounts we have in the Gospels, the same phrase occurs in several other places throughout scripture.

In Ezekiel 1:1 it is connected with Ezekiel's vision of God beside the river Chebar. Malachi 3:10 speaks of God opening the "windows of Heaven," and pouring out a blessing on His obedient children. In each of these cases this is obviously, a symbolic figure of speech, pointing to a spiritual reality.

Turning our attention to the New Testament, Jesus tells the astonished Nathaniel. **"...Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."** (John 1:51). This is hardly a reference to a literal and visible occurrence. In the well-known account of the stoning of Stephen and his vision of Jesus "standing at the right hand of the Father," we have no indication that anyone but Stephen saw this vision.

When the "Heavens were opened" to Peter inaugurating his mission outreach to the gentiles at the house of Cornelius we are, again dealing with a spiritual vision and not a literal visible manifestation. Finally, when the heavens were opened to John in Revelation 4:1 and 19:11, we have, as with all seven previous accounts, not the slightest indication that this was anything other than a revelatory vision experienced by only one person.

Each of these references is figurative and symbolic. In Revelation 6:14-17 however, we find a very different picture altogether. Here the **"heavens depart as a scroll,"** all men see it and are terrified and hide themselves in caves, rocks, and mountains. Such would be the natural and expected reaction of all men if the heavens were literally and visibly opened to them.

At the baptism of Jesus the scriptures do not say that the heavens were opened unto all of the people, but rather "to him," meaning John the Baptist. It was John alone that saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove. This was the sign promised, by which he would recognize the Messiah.

But what about this "voice from Heaven"? That this is the Father speaking is made clear from His statement "This is my beloved Son..." Was this then an audible voice heard by the multitude? Let's examine some other scriptural accounts and see what we can learn.

In Exodus 20:18-19 we have the story of the giving of the Law to the people of Israel at Sinai, the children of Israel who heard the literal and audible voice of God were terrified (compare Heb. 12: 18-21). The physical manifestation of God, speaking to His people provoked an immediate reaction of tremendous fear.

Compare the account of Jesus and the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Here we find the Father making virtually the same statement as recorded at the baptismal scene. Upon hearing the audible voice of God, the disciples fell to the ground in terror. Finally, in Acts 9:3-7 we find the account of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. While on the surface, there seems to be no reaction on the part of those present with Saul, the Greek phrase translated as “speechless” is quite revealing. Occurring only here it literally means “breathless.” Do you find yourself a little breathless when you are frightened?

Quite significantly and contrary to every other recorded instance in scripture in which a voice was heard from Heaven or the heavens literally opened, here at the baptism of Jesus we see not a single reaction from the crowd; not the slightest indication that anyone except John and Jesus were aware of what was taking place. Why? Because the things recorded here were part of John’s vision. The revelation was for him alone; no one else apparently saw or heard anything.

It is important for us to understand that the phrase, “the Heavens were opened,” is a Hebrew idiom—a figure of speech, signifying that a vision was taking place or that a revelation was being given. John saw the Spirit of God, in what I believe to be a vision, descending like a dove. This served to identify Jesus to John as Jehovah-Elohim manifested in the flesh—the anointed Messiah of Israel. On Jesus’ part it signified His anointing and commissioning for ministry—He was now thirty years old, the age at which Jewish men became eligible to enter the priesthood.

Additionally, the total lack of response on the part of the crowd gives us good reason to believe that only John and Jesus heard the voice from heaven. Taking all of this together, we can therefore conclude that, according to the scriptures rightly divided, John the Baptist, in a vision only, saw the heavens opened, the Spirit descend like a dove, and heard the voice of the Father from Heaven confirming to him that this was indeed the promised Messiah.

There was no actual dove sitting on Christ’s shoulder. The Holy Ghost is not a bird—He doesn’t have wings or feathers. This is simply a description of the anointing presence and power of God descending and remaining on Jesus. All that the people saw there on that day was the person of Jesus, standing with John in the waters of the Jordan River. John the Baptist, however, saw by revelation, the carpenter from Nazareth, become the anointed Messiah, now commissioned as the one who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. It is this that John bore record and saw (Jn 1:32-34). It came to him by revelation knowledge to show him

that Jesus was the Christ, the Jehovah God of Israel—manifested in the flesh.

Consider this from another angle: suppose for a moment that indeed, as many believe, the heavens were literally opened, an actual dove floated down from Heaven, landing upon Christ, and the voice of God thundered from Heaven. Without question this would have been one of the greatest events ever to have happened in their day. Were this to have taken place in a manner visible to all, everyone there that day, including John the Baptist would immediately begin to broadcast this event to any and all who would listen. News of this momentous occasion would have spread like wildfire, drawing crowds from all the surrounding towns and villages. This would have been a complete contradiction of Jesus' desire in the early phase of His ministry, as recorded in scripture, of maintaining a low profile. He repeatedly warned people not to broadcast His miracles, so as to minister unhindered.

Additionally, with the presence of so many eyewitnesses, no one would have been able to long doubt or be likely to forget something of this significance. It is therefore telling that just a short time later, while in prison John sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question, **“Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?” (Mt 11:3).** In other words “Are you really Him, or was it all just my imagination at the river?”

Why not simply confer with the others who supposedly saw the same thing? If John experienced, along with everyone else, the heavens literally opened, a physical dove land on Jesus' shoulder, and an audible voice from Heaven—can we honestly believe he would so soon forget? Would anyone for that manner be so quick to doubt or call into question such an experience?

Jesus' response to this inquiry is highly significant. As recorded in the Gospel of Luke, it seems that Jesus ignored their question. He continues on with His business of healing the sick and ministering to the afflicted. He casts out demons and restores sight to the blind (Lk 7:19-23). Only then does He turn to the disciples of John and with gentle love and patience He says, **“Go and show John again those things which you do see and hear: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” (Mt 11:4-5).**

The baptism of Jesus was not meant to introduce to the devout Jewish onlookers, a radical and innovative doctrine of plurality in the Godhead. Instead it signified the authoritative anointing of Jesus as the Messiah. A proper understanding of God's omnipresence will dispel any notion that the heavenly voice and “dove” either indicate or require separate persons. But what about Jesus' enigmatic response to John's question? In

verses that John would have been intimately familiar with, the Prophet Isaiah prophesies in chapter 35:

***“Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not: Behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with recompense; He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame man will leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”***

-----Isaiah 35:3-6,

**(Compare also Isaiah 61:1-2)**

A careful examination of all these accounts in harmony leads one to believe with confidence that before his death, John had the assurance that indeed, the Messiah had come. Jesus Christ—Jehovah-Elohim—the Lord of Glory walked among men.

### The Mystery of the Trinity

It is claimed by many that the trinity is a mystery which cannot be explained; that it is beyond our ability to comprehend and must be accepted by faith. Yet, this is totally opposed to the teaching of scripture. In Romans 1:20, the Apostle Paul says, ***“that which we may know about God [the Father], even His eternal power and Godhead, is manifest, being clearly seen and understood by the things which He has made...”***

Paul didn't use the wisdom of the world or the enticing words of man's wisdom when he made known the things of God. He didn't receive his Gospel or his knowledge of Jesus Christ from man--not even those who had been apostles before him. He got it by divine revelation from Jesus Himself.

Jesus did not reveal to Paul a trinity of persons in the Godhead, there is simply no such

doctrine in any of Paul's writings. Rather, Jesus confirmed the clear teaching of the Old Testament that God is absolutely and indivisibly one (Ro 3:30, Gal 3:30, I Tim 2:5), and that Jesus is the manifestation of that one God manifest in the flesh (I Tim 3:16, II Col 5:19, Col 1:15, 19).

Paul was caught up to the third Heaven and had a profound revelatory experience with God. If anyone was ever qualified to speak on the true nature of God it was Paul. Jesus revealed nothing about a trinity or God in three persons--He revealed the fact that the father is in Christ, God in flesh, the Spirit in humanity. (Compare also the visions of Isaiah and John: Is 6:1; Rev 1:12-16 with Dan 7:9; and Rev 4:1-3).

Jesus is not the second person of a Christianized pagan trinity. He is exactly what He claimed and what scripture reveals Him to be—the manifestation in the flesh of the one true God. Hardly limited to a secondary role as one third of a mythical triune Godhead, Paul reveals that all the fullness of the Godhead is in Jesus (Col. 2:9).

If there were indeed three persons in the Godhead, Jesus would have made this clear. He would not have shrouded it in "mystery." We have already seen that Jesus links eternal life to the full and complete knowledge (*epignosis*) of God (Jn17:3). In addition, He plainly tells us that ***"it has been given unto you [disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom."*** (Mt 13:11).

It was Paul who explained that the revelation of "the mystery" is now made manifest and that we give glory to the only wise God through Jesus Christ (Col 1:26). As ministers of God, we are stewards of the mysteries of God (Col. 1:26-27). That part of this revealed mystery includes the revelation of the Godhead becomes clear upon reading of Colossians 2:8, 9.

In spite of this we continue to read and hear about the so called mystery of a trinity that defies explanation. Jesus said that the Father is pleased to reveal things unto babes (Lk 10:21). Will these things be seen and understood by all? No! God hides these things from the wise and prudent. The things of God will remain hidden from those who refuse to see.

When Jesus spoke these words in Luke 10, it was in direct reference to the nature of the Godhead, for He continues in the next verse to explain that ***"all things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, and who the Father is but the Son, and He to whom the Son will reveal Him"*** (Lk 10:22). Paul explains in I Corinthians 2:10, that these things are revealed to us by God through His Spirit—***"For the Spirit searcheth***

***all things, yea the deep things of God.”***

In biblical terms, a mystery is never something unexplainable or impossible to understand or comprehend; it is instead, a divine truth formerly hidden but now revealed to those with ears to hear and eyes to see. Christian mysteries are then, revealed truths. Who has secrets? Who has mysteries revealed only to special classes of initiates or adepts? The ancient mystery religions from which the doctrine of the trinity was derived, are the keepers of secrets.

This is not to imply that we now understand everything or in any way have arrived at perfect knowledge. We simply acknowledge that the truths of God’s word are given to us to reveal the hidden things of God and He has put His Spirit within us to guide us into all truth (Jn 16:13).

There is a raging debate as to whether Jesus is in the Godhead or the Godhead is in Jesus. The debate is easily settled by the simple appeal to scripture. The Bible is clear—Jesus is not in the Godhead—Paul tells us plainly that all the fullness of the Godhead is in Him (Col 2:9). We are warned not to be “spoiled” or taken captive being misled by the worldly philosophy of men to believe otherwise. All the fullness of the Godhead means just that—all the attributes, all the nature and character of the Deity—all of it, dwells in bodily form in Jesus Christ and we are complete in Him and in Him alone.

Why is this important? It is important because if satan can confuse our minds and divide our hearts, his battle is half won. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, not divide it between three supposedly co-equal persons, each of whom is God!

For the Apostle Paul, it was simple—Jesus is the One God, manifest in the flesh. He received this knowledge by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11, 12). Paul came to understand that Jesus Christ is Lord-Jehovah. He baptized his converts in the name of Jesus for he understood, as we will see later, that this is the only saving name (Acts 4:12); the name above all names (Phil 2:9). It is in fact, the one name of Zechariah 14:9—Jesus—Jehovah is Salvation.

For apostolic believers there is no mystery in the Godhead. There is one God. All the fullness of that one God rests in Christ, who alone is the image of the invisible God. He is God manifest in the flesh, and the exact representation of His person (Col 1:15/ Heb 1:3).

This is the God we worship—His name is Jesus!

In evaluating the Oneness position Pastor David Bernard makes note of an interesting conclusion found in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*; Speaking of the doctrine of the trinity it states: “There is the recognition on the part of exegetes and biblical theologians...that one should not speak of trinitarianism in the New Testament without serious qualifications...New Testament exegesis is now accepted as having shown that not only the verbal idiom but even the patterns of thought characteristic of the patristic [Church Fathers] and the conciliar [Church Councils] development would have been quite foreign to the mind and culture of the New Testament writers.<sup>45</sup> Protestant theologian Emil Brunner agrees and in his book, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, writes plainly when he admits that, “The doctrine of the trinity itself, however, is not a biblical doctrine....”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 1967.xiv 295-3050

<sup>46</sup> Brunner. 1949.236-39

## Chapter 6 The Absolute Deity of Jesus Christ

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The primary distinguishing mark of a cult or other aberrant “Christian” groups is their denial, either explicitly or implicitly of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Affirmation of the full deity of Christ is a fundamental requirement for salvation and the bond that unites evangelical Christians regardless of denomination.

Oneness theologians identify Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the one true God, based on a literal interpretation of verses such as I Timothy 3:6 and Colossians 2:9, 10. Paul tells us in Timothy that Jesus is none other than God Himself manifest in the flesh, while Colossians, as we have already seen, explains that, **“In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power.”** Thus the scriptures reveal that Jesus is not the second part of a triune Godhead, but rather, all of the Godhead is in Him. Jesus is not the incarnation of one person of a trinity, but the manifestation in the flesh of all the character, quality, and personality of the one indivisible God.

In other words, the one and only God of the Old Testament came to earth, incarnating Himself in Jesus Christ. **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself”** (II Cor 5:19). The apostle Thomas recognized this and confessed Jesus as **“My Lord and my God”** (Jn 20:28), or in the words of Peter, **“Both Lord (Jehovah) and Christ.”** (Acts 2:36). In biblical terminology, Jesus Christ is “God with us,” “God blessed forever,” “God manifest in the flesh,” “Our God and savior,” and the “express image” of God’s own person/substance. (Mt 1:23; Ro 9:5; I Tim3:16; II Co 4:4; Col 1:15; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:3; II Pet1:1).

Trinitarians are often unsure as to whether they will see one divine being or three in heaven. Apostolic believers strongly reject any notion of three divine beings as tritheism. In this respect it is interesting to note the words of the late Dr. W.A. Criswell, former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas and past president of the Southern Baptist Convention. In his book, *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, Criswell, a Trinitarian, shares his understanding of the nature of the Godhead and the deity of Christ in terms identical to the oneness position:

“I often wonder at people who think that in Heaven they are going to see three Gods. If you ever see three Gods, then you are not a monotheist, you are a polytheist. You believe in a multiplication of God’s—plural. ‘Hear O, Israel, the Lord our God is One.’ We know God as our Father, we know God

as our savior and we know God by His Spirit in our hearts. But there are not three Gods. The true Christian is a monotheist. There is one God. 'I and my Father are one.' 'He that has seen me has seen the Father.' The Lord God is He that speaks. It is He that John saw when he turned around. The only God you will ever see is the Lord God whom John saw in the lampstands. The only God you will ever feel is the Lord God's Spirit in your heart. The only God there is, is the great Father of us all, the one Lord God, Christ. In the Old Testament we call Him Jehovah. In the New Testament, the New Covenant, we call Him Jesus, the One Great God...Never persuade yourself that in glory we are going to look at God No. 1 and God No.2 and God No.3. No! There is one great Lord God. We know Him as our Father, we know Him as our savior, and we know Him as the Holy Spirit in our hearts. There is one God and this is the great God, called in the Old Testament, Jehovah, and, incarnate, called in the New Testament Jesus, the prince of Heaven, who is coming."<sup>47</sup>

The Bible establishes for us that the acknowledgement of the deity of Christ is essential to salvation. Jesus said, "**If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins,**" (Jn 8:24), and affirmed, "**Before Abraham was, 'I am'**"(Jn 8:58). Only if Jesus is truly God, does he have the power to save from sin, for only God is the Savior and He alone can forgive sin. (Isaiah 43:25; 45:21, 22; 49:26; Mk 2:7; Titus 2:10). All of the names and titles of God properly and fully apply to Jesus, He is God(Jn 20:28), Lord (Acts 9:5), Jehovah(Is 45:23 with Phil 2:10, 11), I am (Jn 8:24, 58), Father (Is 9:6; Rev 21: 6-7), Word(Jn 1:14), and Holy Spirit( Jn 14:17, 18). trinitarianism states as its basic premise that there are three separate and distinct persons or beings in the Godhead. They further explain that the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit and that the Spirit is not the Father--carefully differentiating between the three. They are absolutely distinct from one another. On the other hand, apostolic theology affirms in the strongest possible terms that Jesus is the one God, manifest in the flesh and applies all the titles of deity to him.

Is Jesus really the Jehovah of the Old Testament? Yes, and this is easily understood by simply studying the many Old Testament statements concerning Jehovah that the New Testament clearly applies to Jesus. For example, in Isaiah 45:23, Jehovah said, "unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue confess." But Paul applies this Prophecy directly to Christ in both Philippians 2:10-11 and Romans 14:10-11. Consider as well, Isaiah 40:3 which speaks of "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness prepare ye the way of Jehovah..." Yet we know from Mathew 3:3 that this is a reference to John the Baptist in his role as the Forerunner of Jesus. Jesus is the Incarnation of the Father. "His name shall be called wonderful, counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father ..." (Is 9:6). I am often amazed at those who point to this verse as absolute proof of the Deity of Christ yet seem unable to accept that the very same verse identifies him also as the Everlasting Father. Throughout the Gospel record Jesus continually affirmed His identity as the Father. "**I and my Father are one**" (Jn 10:30), "**The Father is in me and I in Him.**" (Jn 10:38). "**He that has seen me has seen the Father**" (Jn 14:9). Jesus is the Father of the overcomers in Revelation

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<sup>47</sup> Criswell. 1961-66. pp238-239

21:6-7, and He promised not to leave His disciples Fatherless (Jn 14:18). In light of the scriptural assertion that we have only one Father, again, the evidence is clear and inescapable. (Mal 2:10; Mt 23:9).

The Bible attributes many works, both to the Father and to Jesus! Resurrecting Christ's body, sending the *paraclete*, drawing men to God, answering prayer, sanctifying believers, and resurrecting the dead. The mental and theological gymnastics needed to explain how these are all done by separate members of the trinity are eliminated by a matured understanding of God's oneness, but that still leaves us with the question of The Holy Spirit.

Is Jesus the Holy Spirit? Well, the Bible seems to think so. According to scripture the Holy Spirit is literally the spirit that was in Christ. Jesus spoke to all his disciples of the spirit of Truth which he claimed, "He **dwelleth with you and shall be in you,**" then to make certain that they understand his meaning, he said plainly--"**I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.**"(John 14: 17, 18).

Paul tells you in Ephesians that there is one Lord and one Spirit and in II Corinthians 3:17, he reveals that "**The Lord is that Spirit;**" all of us confess that Jesus is Lord. As my daughter would say, "do the math!" It's just not that complicated.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of the Father as can be seen by a comparison of Matthew 10:20 with Mark 13:11. However, a further comparison of these with the passage in Luke 21:15 makes this a reference to Christ himself. This puzzle is made clear when we examine Galatians 4:6 and Philipians 1:19 where the Holy Spirit is defined as the Spirit of the Son and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Finally, analysis of II Peter 1:20, 21 in conjunction with I Peter 1:11 confirms that indeed the Spirit of Christ is the Holy Spirit, the author and inspiration of scripture. Trinitarian Lewis Smedes identifies the Holy Spirit as "the ascended Jesus in His earthly action."<sup>48</sup>

Finally, Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the one on the throne in Heaven, as can be seen by comparing the description of Jesus in Revelation Chapter One with that of the one on the throne in Revelation Four and by realizing that "God and the Lamb" is one being in Revelation 22:3,4. The vision of the one on the throne and the Lamb in Revelation Five is symbolic. The one on the throne represents all the Deity, while the Lamb represents the Son in His human, sacrificial role.

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<sup>48</sup> Smedes.1983,pp41-54

## Chapter 7 Father, Son and Holy Ghost

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**“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is the Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.”**

--- I Jn 2:22

Those who do not understand the biblical teaching on the oneness of God frequently cite I Jn 2:22 in an effort discredit oneness groups. This demonstrates either a misunderstanding on their part or an outright misrepresentation of the oneness position.

We must not suppose that oneness denies the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. It simply provides nontrinitarian definitions for these biblical terms. While the Bible clearly speaks of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, it does not reveal these as separate and distinct beings or persons in the godhead.

The title Father refers to the one God's role as the Father of all creation, the Father of the only Begotten Son, as well as the Father of Israel, and of the born again believer (Dt 32:6, Mat 2:10). The title of Son refers to the incarnation or God manifest in the flesh. The baby Jesus was literally conceived by the Holy Spirit (Spirit of God) who was literally his Father (Mat 1:18-20; Luke 1:35). (By implication trinitarianism gives Jesus two separate and distinct Fathers). Finally, the title of the Holy Spirit simply describes what God is; the fundamental character of God's nature. He is spirit and He is Holy. The title refers specifically to God in activity, in particular, his work in anointing, regenerating and indwelling man--works God can do by virtue of the fact that he is spirit (Gen 1:2; Jn 4:24; Acts 1:5-8).

Hardly an example of the Antichrist of I John 2, oneness fully and completely affirms the multiple roles and works described by the terms Father, Son, and the Spirit. They simply deny that these titles reflect an essential threeness or plurality in God's nature, while affirming that all exist simultaneously in Christ as revealed in scripture.

These titles can also be understood in terms of God's revelation of himself to man, Father refers to God in a family relationship; Son refers to God manifest in flesh, and Spirit to God in activity. For example, one man can have three significant relationships or functions such as administrator, teacher, and counselor, and yet be one person in every sense of the word. God is not defined by or in any way limited to an essential threeness. The Bible nowhere

speaks of God as a “trinity” or as “three persons.” It does however; repeatedly refer to him as the Holy one.

So, as we have seen, in contrast to trinitarian thought, the divine nature of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is identified in scripture as both the Father and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Father and the Holy Spirit are shown to be one and the same being. The words Holy Spirit simply describes what the Father is.

The Holy Spirit is literally the Father of Jesus, since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost. The Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jehovah, the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of the Father--it also identifies him clearly as the Spirit of Christ. Many of the works of God the Father are also attributed to the Spirit such as resurrecting Christ, and indwelling, comforting, sanctifying, and resurrecting believers.

## Chapter 8 The Son

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As should now be apparent, apostolic believers emphasize the dual nature of Christ, using this fact to explain the distinction passages which seem to be plural references to the Father and Son in the gospels.

Not only must we acknowledge the one true God of the Old Testament -- the Father and Creator-- but we must also acknowledge his revelation in flesh, as Jesus Christ. Salvation does not come to us simply because God is spirit, but specifically through the atoning death of the man Jesus Christ. That is why Jn 17:3 says that to be saved we must not only know the one true God but also Jesus Christ whom he sent. This understanding also explains the typical greeting in Paul's Epistles: **"Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 1:7), likewise, I Timothy 2:5 says **"there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ."** A second divine person is not our mediator; the man who became a sacrifice for our sins is our mediator with God.

A truly biblical Christology must distinguish between God in his transcendence and God as manifested in the flesh. Otherwise there is no way to explain the prayers of Christ, his submission to the Father's will, the Son's lack of independent knowledge, and power, and so on. Oneness theology stresses that these so-called "distinction passages" do not prove a plurality of persons but simply arise from and demonstrate the authentic humanity of Jesus.

This genuine and complete humanity is declared plainly in scripture (Ro 1:3; Heb. 2:14, 17; 5:7, 8). In whatever way we define the essential components of humanity, Christ had them. He was a real man in every way, and he underwent everything in the human experience, yet without sin. His humanity as well as his deity, was full and complete. In every way that we as humans can speak of our humanity and our relationship to God, so could Jesus, except for sin. Yet at the same time, He could also speak and act as God, being simultaneously both God and man. It is this truth alone which explains the plural reference to the Father and Son in the gospels.

Sometimes he acted and spoke from the human perspective, as when he hungered or grew tired; and sometimes he acted and spoke from the divine perspective, as when he raised the dead, and fed a multitude from five loaves of bread and two fish. The two natures never acted in conflict, for they were perfectly united in one person. This is known theologically as the "hypostatic union." There is no way to glorify God except through the union of deity and humanity.

As with his deity, belief in Christ's true humanity is essential to salvation (I Jn 4:3). If God did not truly come in the flesh, then there is no blood for remission of sin, no sacrifice for atonement. The very purpose of the incarnation was to provide a sinless man to mediate between Holy God and sinful mankind.

It is important for us to understand that this does not mean that Christ had two different personalities. His was a unique personality resulting from the perfect union of deity and humanity. This was defined theologically by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., which basically explained that Christ has two natures in one person. However, as noted previously, the technical terms Nature and Person do not fully convey the biblical understanding of the concept of the incarnation.

As already stated, although we must distinguish between Christ's deity and humanity, it is impossible to separate the two in Christ (Jn 1:1, 14; 10:30; 14:10, 11; 16; 32). The Father united with humanity to form one being--Jesus Christ, the Godhead incarnate. While on earth Jesus was fully God, not merely an anointed man. At the same time, he was fully man, not just the appearance of a man. He possessed the unlimited power, authority, and character of God. He was God by nature, by right, and by identity; He was not merely deified by an anointing or indwelling. Though Jesus ministered as a man anointed by the Spirit of God, unlike a spirit-filled believer, the humanity of Jesus was intricately joined with all the fullness of God's Spirit.

Jesus is the fullness of God dwelling in perfect humanity and manifesting himself as a perfect human being. He is not the transmutation of God into flesh, the manifestation of a portion of God, the animation of a human body by God, or God temporarily dwelling in a separate human being. Jesus Christ is the incarnation--embodiment, human personification--of the one God.

### The Doctrine of the Eternal Sonship

Oneness exponents define the term Son to mean the manifestation of the one God in the flesh. They insist that the term can never be used apart from the incarnation. The terms "God the Son" and "Eternal Son" are simply not biblical. The role of the Son began when Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Spirit (Lk 1:35; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:5). Jesus pre-existed the incarnation, not as the eternal Son but as the eternal Spirit of God himself.

This understanding is almost as difficult for trinitarians to accept as the idea of God's oneness. However, this is not a concept unique to oneness theology. There are many dedicated trinitarians who also reject the notion of an eternal Son. In fact, it is a difficult thing for trinitarians to truly support the doctrine of the eternal Sonship from scripture. Kenneth Wuest informs us that Jesus proceeded "by eternal generation as the Son of God, from the Father in a birth that never took place because it always was."<sup>49</sup> I can't help but wonder how such theological double talk helps in any way to promote the Christian faith. In scripture we find that the begetting of the son DID in fact, take place and it took place at a particular moment in time. There is not a hint in any of the gospels of a supposed pre-existent Son or pre-incarnate Christ as a second part of the Godhead. Could this be because the idea had simply never occurred to them?

Raymond Brown, a noted Catholic theologian and certainly no foe of the doctrine of the trinity, makes the point that Matthew and Luke "show no knowledge of [Jesus] preexistence: seemingly for them the conception was the becoming (begetting) of God's son."<sup>50</sup>

This is important for us to understand because if Jesus did not preexist, there is no eternal Son, therefore no evidence that either Matthew or Luke believed in a triune God. Luke recorded the fact that Mary's Son was to be conceived in a miraculous way, by a special divine intervention: "**The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the highest shall over shadow thee; therefore also, that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the son of God.**" (Lk 1: 35). Nothing mentioned here regarding a divine "eternal Sonship," simply the promise that her offspring would be called the Son of God, because of the miracle which God would perform in her.

The miraculous conception in Mary, according to Luke, was the proximate cause of the divine Sonship of Jesus. It is "therefore" or "for that reason"--the conception by Mary through the power of God's Holy Spirit--that Jesus was to be called the Son of God.

It is readily apparent that Luke's view of Jesus' Sonship is completely at variance with the traditional idea that one who already existed as both God and Son of God had entered the womb of Mary. The traditional concept of preexistence means that the conception of Jesus was the breaking off of an existence as God and the beginning of an earthly career, not the beginning of God's Son, yet for Luke, Jesus begins to exist in the womb of Mary;

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<sup>49</sup> Wuest, 1952.30

<sup>50</sup> Brown, 1977.31, fa 17

“conception is causality related to divine Sonship.” ().<sup>51</sup>

Referring to the word “therefore” in Luke 1: 35, Brown says that “it would involve a certain causality.” Jesus Sonship is derived from the miraculous conception. This he says, “is an embarrassment to many orthodox theologians because in traditional incarnational theology a conception by the Holy Spirit does not bring about God’s son,” he refers to Trinitarian theologians who “try to avoid the causal connection ‘therefore’ in Luke 1: 35 by arguing that the conception of the child does not bring the Son of God into being.”<sup>52</sup>

What Brown has disclosed is merely the reluctance of the average Bible student to admit that scripture, in this critical matter of the origin and nature of Jesus, does not agree with what they had previously accepted as truth without careful examination. Brown is hardly alone in his views. Many Protestant theologians also speak out on this issue. Speaking of Luke 1: 35, Adam Clarke, trinitarian and author of the popular, standard reference, *Clarke’s Commentary* had this to say: “... the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is, in my opinion, antisciptural and highly dangerous. This doctrine I reject for the following reasons: 1.) I have not been able to find any express declaration in the scriptures concerning it, 2.) If Christ is the Son of God as to his divine nature, then he cannot be eternal: for Son implies Father and Father implies the idea of generation, and generation implies a time in which it was effected and time also antecedent to such generation, 3.) if Christ is the Son of God as to his divine nature, then the Father is of necessity prior, consequently superior to him. 4.) again, if this divine nature were begotten of the Father, then it must be in time, i.e., there was a period in which it did not exist. This destroys the eternity of our blessed Lord and robs him at once of his Godhead. 5.) to say that He was begotten from all eternity is in my opinion absurd, and the phrase eternal Son is a positive self-contradiction. Eternity is that which has no beginning, nor stands in any reference to time. Son presupposes time, generation and Father; and time also antecedent to such generation. Therefore, the conjunction of these two terms, Son and eternity, is absolutely impossible, as they imply essentially different and opposite ideas.”<sup>53</sup>

The late Pentecostal pastor and author Finis Duke, whom we noted earlier was a dedicated trinitarian, had this to say about eternal Sonship in his popular annotated reference bible:

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<sup>51</sup> Brown, 1977, 291

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Clark. 1837 on Lk 1: 35

“Sonship with Christ always refers to humanity, not to deity. As God, he had no beginning (Micah 5: 2, Jn 1: 1-2); [He was] not begotten or he would have had a beginning as God; and he was not God’s Son. But as a man, he had a beginning, was begotten, and was God’s son (Ps 2:7, 12; Mt 1: 18-25; Luke 1: 35; Heb 1: 5, 6). In these passages it is clear that there was a certain day when God was to have a Son and the Son to have a Father. It was to be in the future from the time the Prophets spoke. If Sonship refers to deity, then his deity had a beginning on a certain day and he was not eternal. But if it refers to humanity, then all scriptures are clear and we have no man-made mystery of the so-called eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. If it refers to both deity and humanity, then when did he become God, when was he begotten, how could he have been eternal? If he had a beginning and was begotten then he was not, nor is he, an eternal God. If he was a Son of God by creation, then he is no greater than angels and other beings who had beginnings.”

Dake then includes insightfully, “multiplied problems increase and become unanswerable with Scripture if we hold to the theory of eternal Sonship, but all questions are clear when we accept the plain statements of Scripture that Sonship refers to humanity.”<sup>54</sup> What Dake fails to understand is how this completely undermines the doctrine of the trinity.

Some authors use John 3:16 to try and allege that because God “sent” the Son he therefore must have preexisted. It should be noted however, that John the Baptist was also “a man sent from God,” (Jn 1:6), yet we claim no preexistence for John. Christians are also called “Sons of the Most High,” but this does not make them eternally preexistent beings. Along with the trinitarian understanding of the baptism of Jesus, the doctrine of the eternal Son is a crucial support for the platform of trinitarian theology, but can the doctrine of the trinity stand if there is no scriptural support for “eternal generation”?

In establishing the beginning of the Son, oneness believers appeal to verses like Luke 1: 35, Galatians 4: 4, Hebrew 1: 5 and others. They insist that the term “Son of God” can never be used apart from God’s incarnation. They reject the term “God the Son,” the doctrine of Eternal Sonship and the doctrine of the eternal begetting. The phrase “only begotten Son” does not refer to an inexplicable, spiritual generation of the son from the Father, but to the miraculous conception of Jesus in the virgin’s womb by the Holy Spirit.

They also point to a time when the distinctive role of the Son will end, when the redemption purpose for which God manifested himself in the flesh will no longer exist. This does not

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<sup>54</sup> Dake, *Annotated Reference Bible*.2001

imply that Christ's immortal, glorified, human body will cease to exist, but only that the mediatorial work and reign of the Son will end. The role of the Son will be submerged back into the greatness of God, who will remain in his original role as Father, creator, and ruler of all. ***"Then shall the son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."*** (I Co. 15: 20). The doctrine of the trinity cannot be sustained unless it can be shown that Jesus preexisted as the eternal Son of God before his birth. In the final analysis, rather than debating Christology in historical and philosophical terms, from the oneness perspective it is preferable to pass over the ancient Creeds and Councils and go directly to scripture. Based on scripture we can now confidently make five important affirmations regarding the doctrine of Christ:

- 1.) Christ is full and perfect God, the one true God incarnate.
- 2.) Christ is full and perfect human, without sin.
- 3.) There is a distinction between the transcendent, eternal deity, and His manifestation in the flesh as the man Christ Jesus.
- 4.) Deity and humanity are inseparably united in Christ.
- 5.) The genetic relationship of Christ to humanity was inherited through his mother Mary.

In summary, Jesus Christ is the fullness of God dwelling as perfect humanity; God manifested himself as a perfect human being. Jesus Christ is not a mere man, demigod, a second person "in" the Godhead, a divine person temporarily stripped of some divine attributes, the transmutation of God into flesh, the manifestation of a portion of God, the animation of a human body by God, God manifesting himself as incomplete humanity or God temporarily dwelling in a separate human person. Jesus Christ is nothing less than the incarnation, the embodiment, human personification and manifestation of the one true God.

### The Logos Problem

Having considered the problems inherent in the doctrine of eternal Sonship, we also need to examine the problems which are created by the mishandling of John's *logos*. The *logos* (word) of John Chapter One is not equivalent to the title Son in Oneness theology as it is in trinitarianism. Son is limited to the incarnation but *logos* is not.

In John 1:1, John not only calls Jesus "God" but also refers to him as "the word" (Gk-*logos*). John's readers would have recognized in this term a dual reference both to the powerful, creative Word of God in the Old Testament by which the heavens and the earth were created (Ps 33:6), and to the organizing or unifying principal of the universe, the thing that held it together and allowed it to make sense in Greek thinking. John is identifying Jesus with both of these ideas and saying that He is not only the powerful, creative Word of God and the organizing or unifying force in the universe, but also that this *logos* became

man. John's choice in this word *logos* has created more problems for the development of a truly biblical Christology than perhaps any other segment of scripture.

To help us to better understand the nature of the problem, we need to go back to the time 130-180 A.D.; this was the period of the Greek apologists. The primary author of this time period was Justin Martyr, whose works were numerous. It was during the same period that the doctrine of *logos* was developed and propagated. The *logos* concept had been popular in Hellenistic culture and philosophy for some time. To the Greek mind, the *logos* was reason as the controlling principle of the universe. It was impersonal, existing entirely in the realms of ideas. This reason was seen as an intermediary between the "ineffable one" and physical reality. The apologists, Justin in particular, took the Hellenistic *logos* doctrine and incorporated it into Christian theology.

Justin was the first prolific writer to clearly teach a plurality within the Godhead. He even numbered them! The *logos* became the second person next to the Father, and was subordinate to Him, thus, the biblical doctrine of the *logos* came to be explained in terms of Greek philosophical thought rather than by Hebrew scripture, which in turn led to a false understanding of Christ and his relationship to the Father. What was the reason for the misunderstanding? The scriptural distinction between God and his Son, which related entirely to the incarnation, was wrongly imputed to the divine nature of God himself. The term Son therefore, came to be seen as a deity separate and distinct from that of the Father, instead of God's revelation of his self to man in human form.

We should keep in mind that the early theological debates from the middle of the second century on were largely between Antioch, a center of Jewish Christianity, on one hand, and Alexandrian Christianity, heavily colored by neoplatonic speculation on the other. We have already noted that all was not well with the faith as it succumbed to the temptation to borrow religious concepts from the surrounding pagan environment. L.W. Grenstead wrote in 1933:

"The heritage from philosophy came in...insidiously. In the second century we find Justin Martyr and others proclaiming Christianity as a philosophy of the schools...The *logos* of Stoicism is identified with the *logos* of John...The [resultant] growing web of fantasy [regarding the nature of the Godhead]...It remained a very real danger, and so remains down to this present day...Meanwhile and most serious of all, a radical confusion had fallen upon the doctrine of God. The personal God of Judaism was very imperfectly fused with the demigods of popular Greek religion and with the metaphysical abstracts whereby the philosophers had sought to make the concept of God adequate as a basis for thought and

being" ( ).<sup>55</sup>

The findings of scholars of the pre-Nicene development of the doctrine of Christ frequently suggest that a corrupting influence was at work on the Christian faith as it moved away from the shelter of its original Hebrew environment into the menacing atmosphere of Greek philosophy. This transition seems to have involved much more than simply the legitimate restatement of Christian truth for gentile believers.

It had been noted insightfully that in those early days of the faith, Christianity conquered paganism and in the process was itself terribly corrupted by pagan philosophy. The basic question is a simple one. Can the New Testament, with its rich heritage in the prophets of Israel, be invaded by Greek philosophy without the loss of an essential element? The answer seems to be a resounding no! As Norman Snaith points out: "the reinterpretation of Biblical theology in terms of Greek philosophy has been both widespread throughout the centuries and everywhere distinctive to the essence of the Christian faith". Snaith makes the point that even a casual examination will reveal that, "there is often a great difference between Christian theology and Biblical theology...neither Catholic nor Protestant theology is based on Biblical theology. In each case we have a dominion of Christian theology by Greek thought."<sup>56</sup>

The developments which culminated at Nicaea and Chalcedon may be traced in three major stages. First, the *logos* of Greek philosophy was identified by the Alexandrian theologians with an alleged pre-existent Christ. Next, Origen postulated his imagined and unbiblical doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. Finally, we arrive at the so-called Athanasian creed and the contemporary doctrine of the trinity was foisted on an unsuspecting world as absolute divine truth.

Theologian Hans Wendt, of Jena, the author of *System der Christ lichen Lehre*, writes in a section entitled "Difficulties with the early Christian dogma"--"monotheism which for the Christian view of God is not an insignificant matter, but of fundamental importance, was impaired...if the *logos* which belongs to the eternal God is a person and as such to be distinguished from the person of the Father, there inevitably arises a plurality in God and pure monotheism is destroyed."<sup>57</sup> Such is the problem created by the understanding of John's *logos* on the part of orthodox Trinitarians.

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<sup>55</sup> Grenstead, 1933.122

<sup>56</sup> Snaith 1944. 187, 185

<sup>57</sup> Wendt 1907.368

John 1:1 has been subjected to more critical and minute analysis than perhaps any other verse of scripture, and by communicators of every shade of opinion. On the one hand we have the Arian interpretation of the Watchtower which makes Jesus simply “a god.” On the opposite extreme we have translations such as the Good News Bible which states, “**before anything else existed, there was Christ with God. He has always been alive and himself God**” (GNB). Several other translations follow this trend and offer a blatantly trinitarian interpretation of this verse.

It is a little known fact that the “word” of John 1:1 was not assumed to be a second divine person in English translation prior to the King James Version. The Bishop’s Bible of 1568, which was replaced by the King James Version in 1611, understands the “word” to be impersonal, and uses the pronoun “it”, rather than “he” or “him”. The Geneva Bible of 1560 does this as well. Why do we feel like we have to translate the masculine *logos* as “he”? Only because it supports the traditional interpretation of John’s prologue. If instead, *logos* is understood as “God’s plan”, not as a reference to a living Son prior to his birth, another major support is removed from the traditional view of preexistence and the doctrine of the trinity here in John’s gospel.

It is simply a theological assumption to say that by “word” John meant a second uncreated personal being existing alongside the One God. This is especially true when we consider that elsewhere John recognizes the Father as “**the only true God**” (Jn 12:3), and “**the one who alone is God**” (Jn 5:44-lit). We need to realize that a misunderstanding of the Old Testament will in and of itself cause the misunderstanding of the New as well. This is significant because no occurrence of the Hebrew word *davan* (word)--which corresponds to the Greek *logos* of John 1--provides any evidence that “the word from the beginning” means a person, much less an uncreated second divine person, the eternal Son of God, co-existing alongside his Father the One God of Israel. Why not assume therefore, that John instead is saying that God’s creative, and expressive activity, his word or wisdom, was “with him”, just as wisdom was “with [*para*] him” in Proverbs 8:30 (LXX)? Significantly, John always uses the proposition *para* (with) to express the proximity of one person to another (1:39; 4:40; 8:38; etc.). Yet in the prologue he chooses instead to use *pros*, suggesting that “word” was not intended to designate a person.

Many have recognized an obvious connection between the “word” and what is said of wisdom in the Hebrew bible. Just as in Proverbs “wisdom” is personified and said to be “with” God. (Pr 8:30), so John says that the word was “with God”, (*pros ton theon*). In the Old Testament, a vision, a word or purpose, is said to be “with” the person who receives or possesses it. The word therefore, has a quasi-existence all its own. “The word of the Lord is with him”, etc. (2 Kings 3:12; Jer 23:28, 1 Kings 8:17; 2 Chronicles 6:7; Job 12:13, 15; 10:13, and 23:10, 14). Wisdom in the Old Testament is “with God”, in striking parallel to John’s opening sentence.

A much needed and insightful commentary on Jn 1:1 may be found in John's first epistle. It is here that John reveals that "eternal life was with [*pros*] the Father". (I Jn 1:2), on the basis of these parallels it is difficult and perhaps unwise to conclude with certainty that the "word" in John 1:1-2 must mean a second member of the trinity--that is, the preexisting Son of God.

Wendt has shown that when the "word" is understood in the Hebrew sense as God's creative activity--based on its consistent appearance in that sense in the Old Testament--there is simply no reason to assume that John meant to say: "in the beginning was the co-eternal Son of God and the Son was with the Father and the Son was God." Such an interpretation completely ignores the central principle of all Biblical revelation that God is a single "person." This development dealt a fatal blow to the Hebrew monotheism which Jesus himself had publically confessed in the presence of both an inquiring Hebrew theologian and his own disciples.

If the logos/word of John1:1 is taken to mean just what it says "the word of God", it then becomes clear that John has in mind the creative word of Genesis 1:1-3; Psalm 33:6,9 and 119:103-105. The fatal step was taken, according to professor Wendt, when the "word" of John's prologue was understood, not in terms of its Hebrew background, but in the Alexandrian sense as an intermediary between God and man.

"The opening sentences of John gospel, which might sound like the philosophy of Philo, could be understood by an educated Jew or Christian without reference to Philo. Therefore, we should not argue from Philo's meaning of the "word" as a hypothesis that John also meant by "word" a preexisting personality. In the remainder of the Gospel and in I John, "word" is never understood in a personal sense...It means rather the "revelation" of God which had earlier been given to Israel (10:35), had come to the Jews in the Holy Scriptures (5:38) and which had been entrusted to Jesus and committed by him to his disciples (8:35, 12:48; 17:6,8,14,17; I John 1:1), and which now would be preserved by them (I John 1:10; 2:5,14). The slightly personifying way in which the word is spoken of as a coming into the world (1: 9-14) is typical of the personifying style of the Old Testament references to the word (Is 55:11; Ps 107:20; 147:15;). It cannot be proved that the author of the prologue thought of the word as a real person. Only the historical Jesus and not the original word is said to be the Son (Jn 1:14, 18)."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wendt 1907 353:54

It is a considerable mistake to read John 1:1 as though it means “in the beginning was the Son...” This is not what John either wrote or meant. The German poet Goethe wrestled to find a correct translation: “in the beginning was the word, thought, power, or the deed.” He settled on deed. This comes very close to John’s intention. What the evangelist wanted to say was: “the creative thought of God had been operating from all eternity.”

When John presents the eternal word he is not thinking of a being in anyway separate from God, or some hypothesis. In choosing *logos*, he chooses a term most appropriate for expressing his message, for is not a man’s “word” the expression of his mind? And his mind is his essential personality.

John seems in his first epistle to be correcting an emergent misunderstanding of his use of *logos* in the gospel (Jn 1:1-3). It was the impersonal “eternal life” which was “with the Father” (I Jn 1:2), before the birth of Jesus, not the Son Himself preexisting. In other words, John intended us to understand that when the word become flesh (Jn 1:14), it was the “word” of God being embodied as a human being.

The subsequent development of trinitarian thinking was encouraged by a misunderstanding of the Hebrew notion of “word” by Justin Martyr. For John, *logos* signified not a second person in the Godhead, but the self-expressive activity of God. John did not mean that a second eternal person existed alongside the Father, it was the impersonal “word” or “life” (Jn 1:1,2) which had now been manifested in a real human person--Jesus. What preexisted was not the Son of God, but the word or message--the promise of life.

Thus, it is quite in order to read John 1:1-3a: “in the beginning was the creative purpose of God and fully expressive of God,” just as wisdom was also with God before creation (Prov 5:30).

It is interesting to note that Tertullian (c 155-230AD), the first to use the word “trinitas” in regard to God, translates *logos* as *sermo* or “speech”. He then notes of John 1:1 that “it is the simple use of our people to say that the word of revelation was with God.” He urged that *logos* should be understood in terms of “whatever you think.” Referring to a time before creation, he adds that although God had not yet sent forth his word, “he had it with him and in reason within himself.”<sup>59</sup> While Tertullian believed in the pre-existence of the son, he expressly denied his eternity: “there was a time when neither son existed nor the son.”

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<sup>59</sup> Against Praxeus. 5

Elsewhere, he said: “there was a time when the son did not exist; God was not always a Father.”<sup>60</sup>

Ardnt and Gingrich in their *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, had this to say regarding the *logos* of John 1:1; “our literature shows traces of a way of thinking that was widespread in contemporary syncretism, as well as Jewish wisdom literature and Philo, the most prominent feature of which is the concept of the *logos*, the independent, personified “word” (of God)...The divine “word” took on human form in an historical person.”<sup>61</sup> Notice they say nothing at all about the word meaning the Son before the birth of Jesus. The “word” in John 1:1 is a personification rather than a person.

John A.T. Robertson and James Dunn share the view that John’s “word” is the utterance of God personified, not a divine person, distinct from God. Only when Jesus is conceived does the “word” become personalized as distinct from personified. For Robinson the “word”, which was *theos* was fully expressive of God’s plan, purpose, and character. That “word” becomes fully embodied in a human person when it became flesh. Jesus is therefore, what the word became. His is not to be identified one-to-one with the pre-existent word, as though He Himself preexisted. The difference is a subtle one but has devastating implications for the development of a genuinely biblical Christology.<sup>62</sup>

In Oneness theology then, the *logos* is God’s self-expression, “God’s means of self-disclosure” or “God uttering himself.” Before the incarnation, the *logos* was the expressed thought or plan in the mind of God, which had a reality no human thought could have because of God’s perfect foreknowledge, and in the case of the incarnation, God’s predestination. In the beginning, the *logos* was with God, not as a separate person but as God himself—pertaining to and belonging to God much like a man and his word. In the fullness of time, God put flesh on the *logos*; he expressed himself in flesh.

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<sup>60</sup> Against Hermogenes, Ch. 3

<sup>61</sup> Ardnt & Gingrich 1857.480

<sup>62</sup> Dunn, 1980. *Dunn on John*, Theology 85 (Sept 1982): 332-338

## Chapter 9 The Significance and Theology of the Name of Jesus

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In Bible times the use of names, especially in Old Testament times, carried a much greater significance than in our day. Names were used most often to reveal something about the characteristics, history, or nature of an individual. This was no less true with God. The Amplified Bible points out that, “to know the name of God is to witness the manifestation of those attributes and apprehend that character which the name denotes...God’s name, that is his self-revelation...signifies the active presence of the person [of God] in the fullness of the revealed character”, (Amp, I Kings 8:42). Flanders and Cresson, professors at Baylor University wrote; “to the ancients the name is part of the person, an extension of the personality of the individual.”

Oneness theology places strong emphasis on the doctrine of the name of God as expressed in both the Old and New Testaments. In Biblical understanding the name is an essential part of the person, an extension as it were of the personality. That being the case, the name of God represents the revelation of his presence, character, power, and authority.

God used his name as a means of progressive self-revelation. For example, in Exodus 6:3 God said, **“and I appeared into Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them.”** We see from verses 4 thru 8 that the significance to Israel of the name Jehovah rested in its association with salvation and redemption. We know that Abraham did in fact use the name of Jehovah (Ge 22:14); but, God did not make known to him the full significance of the name. In Exodus 6:3, God is promising to reveal himself to his people in a new way. He therefore, began to associate with His name the understanding of his character and presence. What this means for us is a powerful truth. When Solomon asked how a God who fills the universe, could be contained in a man-made structure, such as the temple-he answered his own question by reminding God of his promise; **“My name shall be there”** (I Kings 8:23). Today we are the temple of God and a People for his name.

God’s name represents the following:

- His presence
- The revelation of his character
- His power
- His authority

With the significance of the name in mind, let’s see how this relates to the names of God used in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, Jehovah is the distinctly the redemptive name of God. It is the unique name by which he progressively revealed his various attributes and his character. It was the name by which the one true God distinguished himself from all other gods (Is 42:8). It means essentially the “self-existing one or the eternal one”. We see this concept in the related phrases “I am that I am” and “I am,” used by God himself. Jehovah is the rough English equivalent of the third person form of the verb “to be” in Hebrew. It simply means “He is”. When used of God it is in the first person, or “I am”. In other words Jehovah and “I am” are merely different forms of the same verb.

In the Old Testament we see that God progressively revealed more about himself as various needs arose in the lives of his people, and he used names specifically to express this self-revelation. For instance, when Abraham needed a lamb to sacrifice, God revealed himself as Jehovah--Jireh, the Lord that provides. When Israel needed deliverance, God revealed that his name Jehovah had a previously unknown significance with respect to deliverance and salvation (Ex 6:3-8). When they needed protection from disease and sickness, God revealed himself as Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord that heals. When his people needed victory over their enemies, God revealed himself as Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord our Banner, signifying victory. Thus, the various compound redemptive names and titles described in scripture all reveal important aspects about the nature of God. From these names we gain a progressive revelation and understanding of who God is in all of his redemptive character.

There are eleven compound-redemptive names of Jehovah in the Old Testament.

- 1.) Jehovah-Elyon--The Lord most High (Psalm 7:17)
- 2.) Jehovah-Tsabaoth--The Lord of hosts (Samuel 1:13)
- 3.) Jehovah-Rohi--The Lord my shepherd (Psalm 23:1)
- 4.) Jehovah-Tsidkenu--The Lord our righteousness (Jeremiah 33:6)
- 5.) Jehovah-Makeddesh--The Lord who sanctifies (Ex 31:13)
- 6.) Jehovah-Rapha--The Lord who heals (Ex 15:26)
- 7.) Jehovah-Jireh--The Lord will provide (Genesis 22:14)
- 8.) Jehovah-Nissi--The Lord our banner (Ex 17:15)
- 9.) Jehovah-Shalom--The Lord is peace (Judges 6:24)
- 10.) Jehovah-Shammah--The Lord is there (Ezekiel 48:35)
- 11.) Jehovah-Elohim--The Lord-God

We have already demonstrated that the name Jehovah is exclusively used in scripture as the redemptive name of the Father. In speaking of the last days however, Zechariah 14:9 tells us that, **“the Lord (Jehovah) shall be King over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord and his name one.”** Oneness teachers therefore, maintain that in the new covenant God has accompanied the revelation of himself in the flesh with a new name. That

name is Jesus, which both includes and supersedes Jehovah. It is the ultimate expression to man of who God is, meaning literally—Jehovah saves or Jehovah is salvation.

Though others may have borne the name Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, the man from Galilee, is the only one who actually is all that this name describes.

- 1.) Jesus is the Most High (Mt. 28:18, Lk 1:32)
- 2.) Jesus is the Lord of Hosts (James 5:4-7)
- 3.) Jesus is our shepherd (Jn 10:11-14; Heb 13:5)
- 4.) Jesus is our righteousness (1 Co 1:30)
- 5.) Jesus is our sanctification (1 Co 1:30)
- 6.) Jesus is our healing (Mt 4:23)
- 7.) Jesus is our provider (Lk 9:12-17)
- 8.) Jesus is our banner (Rev 19:14)
- 9.) Jesus is our peace (Jn 14:27; Eph 2:14)
- 10.) Jesus is there (Mt 28:20)
  
- 11.) Jesus is God manifested in the flesh (II Timothy 3:16)

Jesus is our salvation. This is why the angel said, ***“and she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins”*** (Mt 1:21). The identification of the name of Jesus with salvation (Acts 4:12) is particularly evident in the Hebrew—Joshua is practically identical to the Hebrew word for salvation.

Jesus then is the culmination of all the Old Testament names of God. It is the ***“name above all names”*** (Phil 2:9), the highest, most exalted name ever revealed to mankind. Jesus fulfills all of the eleven compound redemptive names of Jehovah. It is the name God promised to reveal when he said, ***“therefore my people shall know my name”*** (Isaiah 52:6). It is the one name of Zechariah 14:9, encompassing and including every other name of God in its meaning.

While Trinitarians typically recognize the name of Jesus merely as the human name of “God the Son,” apostolic believers see this as the redemptive name of God in the New Covenant, carrying with it all of the power and authority so desperately needed by the Church today. For support they appeal directly to such passages of scripture as:

***“if ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it”***

---John 14:14

*“neither is there any salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved”*

---Acts 4:1

*“thru his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”*

---Acts 10:43

*“wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and give him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in Earth, and things under the Earth”*

---Phil 2:9, 10

*“whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of Jesus”*

---Col 3:17

The theology of the name holds a central place in apostolic theology and in the lives of apostolic believers. The New Testament church in fact, is identified by the name Jesus Christ, and he said we would be hated among all men for his name's sake (Mt 10:22). The early church was persecuted for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:28; 9:21; 15:26), and considered it a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer for his name (Acts 5:41). Peter declared that the lame man at the temple was healed *“by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”* (Acts 4:10), and there he revealed the supremacy and necessity of that name in regards to salvation.

- We teach and preach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17,18; 5:28)
- We cast out devils and speak with new tongues (Mark 16:17)
- We receive supernatural power and protection(Acts 1:8; Mk 16:18)
- We pray for the sick, all in the name of Jesus (Jn 14:13-14;16:23)
- We baptize in the Name of Jesus (Acts 2:38)
- We gather together in that Name (Mt 18:20)
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This is not to imply that the Name of Jesus is some kind of magical formula. No. For the Name of Jesus to be effective it must be spoken in faith by one who has a personal relationship with the one represented by that name. (Acts 3:16; 19:13-17).

The name of Jesus is unique because, as is true with no other name, it represents the presence and power of its owner. When we speak the Name of Jesus in faith, Jesus Himself is actually present and begins to work on our behalf.

The power does not come from some mystical way the name sounds, but comes rather from our having been given the “power of attorney” to use the Name and all that it implies. The utterance of the Name in faith demonstrates obedience to the Word of God as well as faith in the person and finished work of Jesus. When we call on His Name in faith, He manifests His presence, performs the work and meets our need.

It is through the Name of Jesus, therefore, that God has finally and fully revealed Himself to His people. To the extent we see, know, honor, believe and receive Jesus, to just that extent we see, know, honor, believe and receive the Father (Jn 5:23; 8:19; 12:44, 45; 13:20; 14:7-9). If we deny Jesus, we deny the Father (I Jn 2:33), but our use of the Name of Jesus brings glory to the Father (Col 3:17).

The Bible foretold that the Messiah would declare the Name of Jehovah (Ps 22:22: See Heb 2:12). Jesus asserted that He had manifested and declared the Name of the Father (Jn 17:6, 26). (Consider carefully the Name He declared and revealed). We are told that He received His Name by inheritance from the Father (Heb 1:4).

How did Jesus manifest and declare the Father’s name? He did so by unveiling the meaning of that Name through the works that he did, which were the works of Jehovah (Jn 14:10, 11). Just as God in the Old Covenant progressively revealed more and more of His nature and His Name by responding to the needs of his people, so Jesus in the New

Covenant fully revealed the Name and nature of God through miracles, healings, the casting out of devils, and forgiveness of sins.

Jesus declared the Father's name by his works; and by them He proved that He was indeed the One True God of the Old Testament—(see Isaiah 35:4-6 with Luke 7:19-22).

Why do we as apostolic believers maintain that the name of Jesus is final and full revelation of God? Simply because we realize the truth that Jesus is Jehovah and in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9).

## Chapter 10 Formula for Water Baptism

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The actual significance of the name of Jesus in water baptism simply cannot be overemphasized. The combination of the theology of the name and the explicit rejection of trinitarianism demands the use of a Christological formula for water baptism. Therefore, Apostolic Theology teaches that water baptism should be administered with the verbal invocation of the name of Jesus. Usually the titles Lord and/or Christ are also used for the purpose of further identification as seen in the book of Acts. Outsiders or those with little knowledge or understanding of Apostolic Theology or church history have often used this fact to ridicule or minimize the Oneness Movement--labeling it as the "Jesus only" movement.

Exponents of Oneness however, simply point out that every time the Bible describes the formula used at an actual Baptism, it is always the name of Jesus alone that is used (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16). Were the apostles then "Jesus only," or did they perhaps understand something essential and vital that the modern church has long forgotten? In addition to these historical accounts in Acts, the Epistles make several allusions to the Jesus name formula (Ro 6:4; I Co 1:13; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12).

The controversy over this issue surrounds the fact that the vast majority of Christendom views the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 as the only valid formula of baptism to be used by the church. Oneness exponents however, believe that even Matthew 28:19 refers to the name of Jesus, for it describes a singular name which represents all the redemptive manifestations of the Godhead.

The Apostolic understanding of Matthew 28:19 can be summarized as follows:

- The grammar of Matthew 28:19 itself denotes a singular name. Jesus said we are to baptize **"in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"**. We know that the Name of the Son is Jesus, however, "son" indicates relationship or modes of activity of the One God. Since Jesus is at once Father, Son, and Spirit, since he came in his Father's name and sends the Spirit in his name, this supports the view that the one name of Matthew 28:19 is Jesus. Many trinitarians readily admit that "the name" is singular, though they assert it to be a reference to Jehovah. As we have seen Apostolic theology points out that God's redemptive name in the New Testament is not Jehovah but Jesus.
- The very concept of Matthew 28:19 demands a Christological formula. Christ was saying in effect, "I have all power and authority, so go and make disciples unto

me, baptizing them in my name". Many trinitarian scholars have openly acknowledged the force of this argument. Many also claim that this verse represents either a paraphrase by Matthew or a later insertion by a copyist rather than the *ipsissima verba* or actual words of Jesus.

- Significantly, Eusebius often quoted this verse prior to the Council of Nicaea, as "in my Name." Many other early writers do this as well. Still other trinitarians suggest that the church did not originally see this verse as an actual baptismal formula. The accepted wording poses no problem for Apostolic believers who recognize it simply as descriptive of the full authority of the Name of Jesus.
- The parallel accounts of the Great Commission in Mark 16 and Luke 24 both prescribe the Name of Jesus.
- The early Church, of which Matthew was a prominent part, carried out Christ's instructions in Matthew 28:19 by baptizing in the Name of Jesus. The significance of this must not be overlooked.

Church historians now generally admit that the original formula for water baptism was indeed "in the Name of Jesus". Not all trinitarians however, accept that this denotes the oral invocation of the Name of Jesus. Apostolic theology affirms that it does because:

- This is the most natural, literally reading linguistically.
- In Acts 22:16 Paul was instructed by Ananias to invoke the Name of Christ in baptism.
- Both Acts 15:17 and James indicate that the Name of Jesus was orally invoked over Christians at a specific point in time. The Amplified Bible identifies James 2:7 as a reference to water baptism.
- When the disciples prayed, laid hands on the sick and cast out devils in the name of Jesus, it always involved the oral invocation of the name. (Acts 3:6; 16:18; 19:13).
- While the phrase does indeed represent the power and authority of Jesus. That power and authority is always invoked by the actual use of his Name.
- If Acts 2:38 doesn't represent a biblical formula, then neither does Matthew 28:19, because in the original language the grammatical structure is identical.
- Although the precise wording of the various baptismal accounts differ, all, (including Mt 28:19), describe the Name of Jesus alone.

The book of Acts establishes beyond question that the apostles and the early church consistently baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ. This should be the pattern and norm for the church today as well. It is our responsibility to obey the commands and follow the example of scripture regardless of whether or not we understand the reasons for this practice or the importance of it.

In 1913 when R.E. McAlister noted that the Church in the book of Acts always baptized in

the name of Jesus Christ and not in the traditional trinitarian formula of “the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost,” it was quickly recognized as the restoration of a vital and significant truth from the Word of God, His observation stirred immediate interest as well as controversy.

By the following spring, Frank Ewart had likewise concluded that the singular name in Matthew 28:19 was Jesus Christ. To support this assumption he pointed to the baptismal accounts in Acts, as well as to the multiple references in the epistles, while noting the full deity of Christ in Colossians 2:9.

Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is not an arbitrary practice; it is inextricably linked with the very purposes of baptism itself. All of the reasons for being baptized in water in the first place are the very same reasons for the use of the Name of Jesus. Those who refuse to acknowledge the significance of the Name of Jesus in water baptism have simply not grasped the significance of water baptism itself, or the reasons why baptism is commanded in the first place. Let’s examine some of those reasons:

- 1.) All Christian groups or denominates agree as a minimum, that water baptism is to express faith in Jesus as Lord and savior. When the listeners on the day of Pentecost accepted Jesus as their Messiah and Lord, they were baptized (Acts 2:36-38, 41). When the Samaritans **“believed Philip preaching...concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized”** (Acts 8:12). The disciples of John at Ephesus, upon hearing that Jesus was the fulfillment of John’s prophecy, were baptized (Acts 19:4-5). When the Corinthians “believed on the Lord” they were baptized (Acts 18:8). The proper way to express faith in Jesus is to confess his name. In all of the above cases, the Baptismal candidates expressed their faith in Jesus by being baptized in his Name. (Acts 2:28; 8:16; 19:5; and Co 1:13).
- 2.) Water Baptism is **“for the remission of sins”** (Acts 2:38), or to **“wash away...sins”** (Acts 22:16), and the name of Jesus is the only name given for remission of sins. It is **“through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”** (Acts 10:43). Thus the proper way to seek remission of sins at baptism is to invoke the name of Jesus in obedient faith. Acts 2:38 and 22:16 not only connect the remission of sins with water baptism, but they specifically link remissions of sins to water baptism in the Name of Jesus.
- 3.) Baptism is part of our experience of salvation (Mk 16:16; I Pet 3:21), and the name of Jesus is the only name given for salvation. **“Neither is there salvation in any other way: For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12; 2:21; Romans 10:9, 13). Thus the proper way to integrate water baptism with New Testament salvation is by invocation of the name of Jesus in the waters of baptism.

- 4.) Baptism represents our burial with Jesus Christ (Romans 6:4; Col 2:12). The Spirit of God did not die for us, neither did the Father; only the man Jesus died for us and was buried in the tomb. To be buried with Christ, we must be baptized in his Name.
- 5.) Baptism is part of our personal identification with Christ. **“so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death”** (Ro 6:3). **“For as many of you that have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”** (Gal 3:27). If we truly want to be identified with him, we should take his Name.
- 6.) Baptism is part of the New Birth by which we are born again into the spiritual family of God (Jn 3:5; Titus 3:5). It is also compared to our adoption into God’s Family (Ro 8:15, 16). A newborn or adopted child always takes on the name of his new family. Since we seek to enter the Church of Jesus Christ, his body, and his bride, we must therefore take on his name (Eph 5:23, 24-32).
- 7.) Baptism is part of our spiritual circumcision—our initiation or entrance into the New Covenant (Col 2:11-13). Under the Old Covenant a male child officially received his name at the ceremony of circumcision (Lk 2:21). Water Baptism is the New Covenant equivalent and the time when our new family name is invoked upon us. In this connection, we know that the identifying name of our new spiritual family is Jesus, for at least two reasons. First, it is the only name in which we can receive salvation (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12). Second, it is the supreme name by which God has chosen to reveal himself to us—the name “above all names”. (Phil 2:9-11).<sup>63</sup>

Colossians 3:17 says **“whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”** This does not require us to pronounce the Name of Jesus orally before every activity, but rather deals with the attitude of heart with which we approach and conduct those activities. All of our words and actions should be consistent with our declaration of Jesus as Lord. When we have cause to invoke the name of Jesus formally, as in water baptism, this verse is particularly relevant. It tells us that we are to approach Holy God in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ

Just as we pray, lay hands on the sick, and cast out demons in the Name of Jesus, so should we baptize in his name. Using the Name of Jesus in the formula for water baptism expresses our faith in the person of Christ (who he really is); the work of Christ (his death, burial and resurrection—the gospel); and the power and authority of Christ (his ability to save us by himself).

In short, water baptism in the Name of Jesus signifies that we trust in Jesus alone as our savior, and thus it expresses the essence of saving faith. Since the only one who can take

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<sup>63</sup> *Essentials of Oneness Theology*, David K. Bernard, Word Aflame Press, pp 24-26

away sins is Jesus—not the water, and not the preacher—we call upon Him in obedient faith, depending on him to do the work he has promised to do.

The Bible teaches plainly that everyone should be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. It also reveals that every single one of the reasons for water Baptism is intimately connected to the Name of Jesus. Thus we understand that water baptism in the name of Jesus demonstrates reverence for and obedience to the Word of God over and above man-made tradition, convenience or peer pressure.

In the view of the scriptural significance of the name of Jesus, why would anyone doubt the need to be baptized into his name? Why would anyone hesitate to take on the precious name of the one who died for us and to identify publically with him? Why would anyone reject the only saving name, that name that is above every name?

The Early Church continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine (Acts 2:42) and the Apostles held water baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins to be essential to the New Birth constituting the entry into the New Covenant—both their preaching and their example makes this clear and indisputable.

## Chapter 11 Receiving the Holy Spirit

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As we noted earlier, one of the three things which distinguished Apostolic Pentecostals from their fellow Pentecostals is their belief that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues is necessary and essential to salvation. It is important for us to understand first of all, why Oneness believers teach this. A proper comprehension of this issue depends on an appreciation of the purpose of tongues, as well as, the true nature of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Trinitarian Pentecostals have frequently been accused of glorifying the Holy Spirit at the expense of the Son, because they sharply distinguish between receiving Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Oneness doctrine avoids this problem because in the Apostolic view—to receive Christ is to receive the Holy Spirit. In theory at least, all of the major branches of Christendom teach that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is necessary to salvation. Catholics, Protestants, as well as Orthodox all teach that one receives the Holy Spirit at conversion. They do not however, typically recognize speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, most Holiness people, Trinitarian Pentecostals, and charismatics generally teach that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is an optional post conversion experience.

Oneness believers acknowledge that the Baptism with, by, of, or in the Holy Spirit is a vital aspect of New Testament salvation (Jn 3:5; Ro 8:1-16; I Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13, 14; Titus 3:5). The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the normal and basic New Testament experience with God, the birth of the Spirit. The Spirit is received by simply asking God for this gift in repentance and faith (Luke 11:13; Acts 5:32).

Oneness Pentecostals typically expect the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to follow immediately upon repentance, as part of the Apostolic conversion experience. The disciples “tarried” until Pentecost for their spirit Baptism only because it was not available to them prior to the founding of the New Testament church, on that day. Only a short time later however, Cornelius and his entire household received the spirit immediately when they believed the preaching of Peter.

Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit as part of his three day conversion experience. The Samaritans in Acts 8 as well as the disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19 received the Holy Spirit when they came into the fullness of Christ. Unlike trinitarian Pentecostals then, Oneness believers understand the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to be an integral part of receiving Christ. For them it is not an optional, post-conversion experience, nor is it a

“second work of grace” or a new encounter with a different member of the trinity.

This experience then is vital to salvation as shown by the fact that **“if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”** (Roman 8:9). This does not refer to some sort of “Christ like attitude” or spirit of meekness, as some teach. It is rather, a direct reference to the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost which is the Spirit of Christ. This verse alone demonstrates forever that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is essential to salvation. The only question remaining therefore, concerns the relationship between this experience and the practice of speaking in tongues.

The Bible records five historical accounts of receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church: The Jews (Acts 10); the Apostle Paul (Acts 9), and the disciples of John at Ephesus (Acts 19). This record establishes beyond question that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is indeed for everyone (Lk 11:13; Acts 2:39), and is invariably accompanied by the evidence or initial sign of speaking in tongues.

Three of the accounts explicitly describe speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of receiving the Spirit and tongues are implicit in the other two accounts. We cannot ignore the fact that tongues are what convinced the skeptical, astonished Jews that the gentles gathered at the home of Cornelius had just received the Holy Ghost; tongues alone sufficiently identified this as the Pentecostal—New Birth experience. They understood **“that on the Gentiles was also poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost, for [because] they heard from them speak with tongues and magnify God”** (Acts 10:46).

From all of this therefore, it seems only reasonable to conclude that we should always expect speaking in tongues to manifest when someone receives the Holy Spirit. Since to receive the Spirit is to receive Christ we also therefore, can safely say that no one is saved without speaking in tongues.

## Chapter 12 True New Testament Salvation

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No examination of the Oneness view of God is complete without the discussion of how this view affects the doctrine of the New Birth and our understanding of the nature of New Testament Salvation.

A crucial difference exists between the Gospel presentation of mainstream Christianity and what you will find in Oneness Pentecostalism. In essence, the primary differences center on justification. It is an inaccurate over simplification, however, to claim that traditional Christians define justification as being counted righteous by faith alone and that Apostolics somehow believe justification to involve both faith and works. This doctrine is such a major source of tension and controversy between Apostolics and Orthodox believers it is helpful to examine the truth regarding the Apostolic understanding of justification and the New Birth.

In his work *Justification and the Holy Spirit*, Bernard points out that:

“Traditional protestant theology emphasizes the forensic model of justification. Under this view, justification is essentially something that takes place outside of humans. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for human sins on the cross and God accepts this atoning act as the necessary and sufficient satisfaction for those sins. This remedy is applied to an individual’s heart by grace, though Faith, which enables the person to be justified, or counted righteous. In the theologies of both Martin Luther and John Calvin, even this faith is extrinsic to humans... Luther even insisted on adding the word “alone” to his German translation of Romans 3:28 so that it is said, “a man is justified by faith [alone].”<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand traditional Catholic theology goes to the opposite extreme in emphasizing that justification is of works and requires the active cooperation of humans. While this view also has merit, Apostolic theology recognizes that neither position is an accurate representation of the process of the New Testament justification.

While justification begins with faith, it nevertheless, also involves the active cooperation of the believer—it is both maintained and increased by works, which are motivated by grace through faith. Justification therefore, involves both being counted as righteous and actually being made righteous by the work of the Holy Spirit. Bernard again:

“The forensic model accurately describes Christ’s death as the necessary atonement for all human sins, and Protestantism correctly insists that...no human works can earn salvation. Nevertheless, the traditional Protestant interpretation of justification does not give sufficient attention to the resurrection of Christ and to the corresponding role of the Holy Spirit. Here the Catholic explanation gives a useful hint by pointing to the work of the Spirit in

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<sup>64</sup> Bernard 2007.117, 106

the believer's life."<sup>65</sup>

What is needed for a full and complete theology of justification is something more than either of those two approaches. Bernard explains the Apostolic view as a synthesis of the traditional perspectives. Which is why Romans certainly “serves to invalidate any system of legalism or works—righteousness, it is important to place it in its historical and social context. The Jews who rejected the Christian message were intent on maintaining their identity and their status by keeping the law. Their error was not merely covenantal monism or legal exclusivism, but it was supremely their rejection of the saving work of Christ—specifically, his death, burial, and resurrection. The error was not in acting as opposed to believing; rather it was in acting by the power of the flesh rather than by the power of the Spirit. They sought to obey God by the law, which was outmoded because it relied on the ability of the flesh...When Paul stated that no one could be justified by the works of the law (Roman 3:20), he referred to the inability of the flesh, the inability of a person who has not received the power of the Spirit (Ro 8:3, 7). But when people believe in Jesus and obey his gospel, then they receive the Holy Spirit, with accompanying power to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law.”<sup>66</sup>

Oneness Pentecostals recognize that the atoning work of Christ is the only basis of salvation in every age. In Apostolic theology, this means that God himself came in the flesh as Jesus Christ in order to provide salvation for his fallen creation. The incarnation was thus, for the express purpose of the atonement. In the context of scripture, salvation means deliverance from all the power and effects of sin, and it has past, present, and future aspects.

Scofield, in his notes on Romans 1:16 states it this way: “the Heb. And Gr. Words for salvation imply the ideas of deliverance, safety, preservation, healing, and soundness. Salvation is the great inclusive word of the Gospel gathering into itself all the redemptive acts and processes: as justification, redemption, grace, propitiation, imputation, forgiveness, sanctification, and glorification. Salvation is in three tenses:

- 1) The believer **has been saved** from the guilt and penalty of sin (Lk 7:50; I Cor 1:18 II Cor 1:15; Eph 2:5,8; II Tim1:9) and is safe.
- 2.) The believer **is being saved** from the habit and dominion of sin (Rom 6:14; Phil 1:19; 2:12, 13; II Thess 2:13; Rom 8:2; Gal 2:19, 20; II Cor 3:18).
- 3.) The believer **is to be saved** in the sense of entire conforming to Christ (Rom 13:11; Heb 10:36; I Pet 1:5; I Jn 3:2). Salvation is by grace through faith, is a free gift, and wholly without works (Rom 3:27, 28; 4:1-8; 6:23; Eph 2:8).”<sup>67</sup>

Apostolic theology fully recognizes that justification is by faith and not by works of the law.

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<sup>65</sup> Bernard 2007, 118

<sup>66</sup> Bernard 2007.113, 79

<sup>67</sup> Scofield 1901, 1192

It also recognizes however that biblical faith is far more than mental assent. “It involves trust, reliance, and commitment, which in turns means acting upon what we believe and obeying what we are convinced is true...Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin”. (Bernard 2007. 74). While conversion is a result of belief in the gospel (Ro 6:16, 17), it is clearly also the result of obeying that Gospel (Ro 6:17). For Apostolics then, true belief in the doctrine of Christ is equivalent to acting in accordance with that doctrine. Thus “it is proper to attribute conversion to faith but also to the response of faith. There cannot be one without the other. This response of faith is not equivalent to works of the Law, or meritorious works in general, but is the essence of saving faith...A lack of obedience is equivalent to a lack of faith.”<sup>68</sup>

I believe this is what Hebrew 4:2 is speaking of when it tells us of those who had the gospel preached to them—**“but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with the faith in them that heard it.”**

Scripture plainly declares that faith without works is dead—it explains that the reason it is dead is that it is faith “alone”. (James 2:17,20). This presents us with an interpretational or hermeneutical dilemma because Ephesians 2:8,9 says it is **“by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, less any man should boast.”**

So in one place we are told that it’s all of faith not works and yet the very same New Testament tells us that faith without works is dead and cannot save us—that man is, in fact, justified by works and not by faith alone; on the surface a seemingly clear and unavoidable contradiction. The confusion is not resolved by reaching for your Strong’s concordance of your copy of Zodhiate’s either. In both passages the Greek word for works is exactly the same--*ergon*.

As students of scripture, we must accept the reality that when faced with two scriptures that seem to contradict one another—we can’t simply pick the one we like and ignore the other because it doesn’t fit our theology. This is precisely what orthodox Christianity has done in this case. Most people never even consider that the reason it might not fit their theology because their theology is in error.

How then do we resolve this? The solution is simply to realize that despite their use of the exact same Greek word, Paul and James are nonetheless speaking of two completely different things. Paul is speaking of works of the law or works of the flesh which are activities done in an effort to impress God and somehow earn favor with him—while James is using the very same word—*ergon*—to refer to legitimate works done in obedience to the command of God.

So we see that a crucial difference exists between Apostolic theology’s definition of “faith”

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<sup>68</sup> Bernard 2007. 75

and the common understanding of orthodoxy. Some have found it helpful to understand that “faith without corresponding actions is dead;” Not the “works” of the flesh spoken of by Paul but rather the “corresponding actions” of faith.

In a similar way, in Apostolic Theology, grace is viewed not merely as “God’s unmerited favor” as in orthodox theology, but as an endowment of power from God. For Apostolic believers grace is the power from God that enables us to do what he has called us to do. In New Testament times...**“The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we all should live sensibly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”** (Titus 2:11,12). In the biblical mind then, Grace must be understood as inspiring and requiring action on our part in obedience to faith.

## Repentance

Recently, some prominent and respected voices in evangelical circles have gone on record as saying that any gospel presentation that requires repentance (or likewise, baptism), as well as faith is actually preaching salvation by works. Their argument is that any viewpoint that advocates repentance, or baptism as a condition of salvation or which mandates that repentance and faith must go together, is a false gospel of “lordship salvation”. They claim that saving faith only involves “trusting Christ as savior”. They state plainly that anything “added to faith” is legalism and works based salvation that completely nullifies the gospel of salvation by grace. The implication is that submission to Jesus as Lord is unnecessary for salvation and that saving faith requires simply mental assent or intellectual agreement with the facts of the Gospel.

The apparent source of this understanding of the gospel is the late Lewis Sperry Chafer, first President of Dallas theological seminary, as well two current Dallas seminary professors.<sup>69</sup>

In volume three of his systematic theology, Chafer says, “the New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation.”<sup>70</sup> He goes on to assert that, “the added demand that the unsaved must dedicate themselves to do God’s will in their daily life as well as to believe in Christ” is a “confusing intrusion into the doctrine that salvation is conditioned alone upon believing.”<sup>71</sup>

The most contemporary exponents of this view point have again, been Dallas Seminary professors Zane C. Hodges, in his book *The Gospel Under Siege* and Charles C. Ryrie, author of the popular Ryrie Study Bible, in his work, *So Great Salvation*. Based on their understanding of the nature of the New Testament salvation, specifically their interpretation

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<sup>69</sup> Hodges 1989. 145-146; Ryrie 1997,96

<sup>70</sup> Chafer.1946-47,376

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 384

of justification by faith, both openly deny that repentance is an integral part of Christian conversion. In a similar way, most orthodox believers also deny any role of baptism or obedience, claiming that this represents a legalistic imposition which is a denial of Christ's work on the cross.

By contrast, Apostolic Theology asserts a comprehensive view of New Testament salvation which integrates Christian initiation as discussed throughout the book of Acts (repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus and the Baptism of The Holy Spirit) with justification by faith as discussed in Romans, representing the position of most, if not all apostolic groups. The manual of the United Pentecostal Church international states that:

“The basic and fundamental doctrine of this organization is the Bible standard of full salvation, which is repentance, baptism in water by immersion in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking with other tongues as the spirit ones utterance.”<sup>72</sup>

It is clearly contrary to scripture to speak of the possibility of ever having genuine saving faith without also having repentance from sins. When we turn *to* Christ *for* salvation from sin, we are at one and the same time turning *away from* the sin we are asking to be saved from. If this is not the case it can hardly be considered to be a genuine turning to him—much less a demonstration of trust in his saving power.

Genuine repentance will result in a changed life. We do not however, understand repentance as some form of obedience by which we impress God with our sincerity or somehow earn our salvation. Nevertheless, a truly repentant person demonstrates a Godly sorrow for sin resulting in a changed life i.e., “**works meet for repentance**” (Acts 26:20). It is evident that in the New Testament model neither repentance nor faith comes first; they appear together as two sides of the same coin.

Apostolic theology recognizes that no one in the Gospels or Acts ever seem to have come to sincere faith without first repenting of their sins. This has become a source of tremendous controversy in Evangelicalism, with prominent voices on both sides of the debate. The bottom line is that a very convincing argument can be made from Scripture that one cannot truly accept Christ as Savior without at the same time making him Lord of his life. This means that there can be no true saving faith without repentance. The vast majority of the Church world however, preaches the other view. The result in most cases is a cheapened gospel that offers unconverted people a false security by telling them they are saved simply because they have mentally agreed with the facts of the gospel and prayed the “sinner’s prayer.” In reality, this represents a “different gospel” which in the absence of genuine repentance produces no real change of life. This has “resulted in a whole generation of professing Christians whose lives are no different from the surrounding culture and who are not really saved at all.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> UPCI 2006.25

<sup>73</sup> Grudem 1994.715

The Apostolic position is that New Testament salvation involves more than merely mental assent to the facts of the gospel; it must include not only the sincere, heartfelt coming to Christ in personal dependence on his finished work but also, genuine repentance from sin and willing obedience to his commands. It was after all, Jesus himself who asked, **“Why call ye me lord, lord, and do not the things which I say?”** (Lk 6:46) (See also Heb 5:9; Acts 5:32)

When he offers sinners the invitation, **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”** Jesus says in the very same breath, **“take my yoke upon you and learn of me,”** too (Mt 11:28,229). To come to Jesus for salvation includes more than simply “believing on him,” it includes taking his yoke upon us which speaks of obedient subjection to his direction and guidance. If we are not willing to make such a commitment, then have we truly placed our trust in him?

This position does not represent salvation by works as is commonly alleged. It simply allows scripture to define the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith rather than contemporary theology.

Grudem writes, “When we realize that genuine saving faith must be accompanied by genuine repentance for sin, it helps us to understand why some preaching of the gospel has such inadequate results to pay. If there is no mention of the need for repentance, sometimes the gospel message becomes only, “believe in Jesus Christ and be saved”, without any mention of repentance at all. But this watered-down version of the gospel does not ask for a whole hearted commitment to Christ. Commitment to Christ, if genuine, must include a commitment to turn from sin. Preaching the need for faith without preaching repentance is preaching only half the gospel.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Grudem 1994. 716-717

## Chapter 13 THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER BAPTISM

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Regarding the question of whether Baptism is also necessary for salvation, it is true that Paul tells the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”** Even here though, we find the frank acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ. Moreover, in the following verses we find that Paul said much more to the man than simply “believe”, for we read, **“And they spoke unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them that same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and his, straight way.”** (Acts 16:32-33).

Rather than an argument against baptism as commonly used, the complete passage, taken in context, is actually one of the strongest supports in scripture for the vital importance of baptism. How else can we account for the sense of urgency that would require baptism at three or four in the morning following such a stressful and eventful midnight hour?

A comparison of the related passages in Acts 2:41 and 8:12 demonstrates that according to the New Testament pattern baptism follows immediately upon belief or “reception” of the word of God. They, “believed and were baptized” or “those who received the word were baptized.”

While neither repentance on our part or the act of baptism in and of itself, divorced from faith has any saving efficiency, scripture has much to say on the subject of baptism and its vital relationship with our salvation.

In John 3:5 Jesus says, **“Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”** Apostolic theology understands this as a clear and unmistakable reference to water baptism and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Similarly Titus 3:5 speaks of **“the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”** Here Paul clarifies that neither of these are **“works of righteousness which we have done.”** (Titus 3:5). Simply stated then, obedience to God is not “works.” Jesus declared, **“he that believeth not shall be damned”** (Mk 16:16). What could make it any plainer than this?

The typical response to this verse is that it says nothing about those who are not baptized. This argument is pointless for obviously those who do not believe are not candidates for baptism nor would they seek it.

But what about those who believe and are not baptized? We simply must be honest and acknowledge that on this subject scripture is silent. We have no record in the New Testament of an unbaptized believer after the day of Pentecost, nor does this passage address any such unusual case.

Obviously we must recognize the absolute need for saving faith in connection with both repentance and water baptism, For example, when Paul says that we are **“buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him,”** he is quick to point out that this is only possible **“through faith of [Greek-“in”] the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead”** (Col 2:12).

Of course the most conclusive verse on this issue is I Peter 3:21, when Peter declares, **“baptism doth also now save us.”** Does this not offer clear support to the Apostolic view that baptism is a vital component of New Testament salvation? In fact, it does! When Peter makes this statement he continues on in the same sentence to explain his exact meaning. He points out carefully that the way in which baptism saves us is **“not [by] the putting away of the filth [Lit. “dirt”] of the flesh, but [by] the answer of a good conscience toward God”**. While many continue to wrestle over the precise meaning and intent of Peter’s words, they may be properly understood by simply accepting them at face value. Peter is merely explaining the role of baptism in the salvation process. It is not as an outward physical act which washes dirt away from the body **“but the answer of a good conscience toward God.”**

In back of the physical act of baptism is the inward, spiritual transaction, it is here that Peter focuses our attention. A valid paraphrase could be: “Baptism now saves you—not the outward ritual act, but the spiritual reality which this ritual depicts.” We must guard against the belief that baptism possesses any form inherent saving power, while also avoiding the opposite extreme of viewing it as a completely unnecessary ritual having nothing to do with our salvation.

The phrase “the answer of a good conscience toward God” is perhaps better understood as “the request made to God for a clean conscience,” or even “the request for forgiveness of sins and a new heart.” Both Hebrew 9:14 and 10:22 address this. The scripture is quite clear that baptism is for the remission of sins and to obey the Lord in believer’s baptism is to make just such an appeal to God.

While I Peter 3:21 does not teach that Baptism saves automatically in the absence of faith or that it confers grace **ex opera operato** implying that the act of itself has saving power--it does demonstrate that salvation comes about by the obedient exercise of faith which baptism represents.

On the basis of a misunderstanding of Ephesians 5:26, 36 many declare that it is the Word of God which “washes” us from our sins. These verses say that **“Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”** It is claimed that it is the Word of God that performs the “washing of water” referred to here and not the physical act of baptism. This is accepted as true by the vast majority of the Protestant Church world and is the dominate theme of most evangelical commentaries on this verse.

We must recognize the truth however, that to make this assertion is to be on tenuous ground biblically. Water in scripture is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit by Jesus in both John 4:14 and 7:38, 39; it is questionable that it ever refers to the word of God. Dake for example identifies John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; James 1:18; and I Peter 1:27 all as figuratively using water to refer to the word of God.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Dake 2001, 924

A simple cursory reading however, of these five passages will reveal that one is an obvious reference to water baptism, while three contain no reference to water whatsoever. That leaves Ephesians 5:26 which alone seems to connect the word of God with water. But is this in fact what is happening in this verse? No, for the Greek construction of the verse gives an entirely different picture than the English alone.

By his choice of the word *rhema* rather than *logos*, Paul is revealing that he is referring here not to the written word of God as commonly taught—that would be *logos*—but rather to a spoken word or saying. What the verse is actually saying more literally is, “the bath of water *in saying!*” As with the previous verses, this is clearly a reference, I believe to the physical waters of Baptism which “wash away” or remit our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). As to the “word” or “saying” spoken of here—could this not simply be a reference to the Name of Jesus which is spoken over the candidate during water baptism?

It has been claimed by some that the assertion that repentance or baptism is necessary for salvation is similar to the argument of Judaizers of the first century, which Paul addresses in Galatians. Paul directly accuses the proponents of circumcision of preaching a “different gospel” (Gal 1:16). He points out that those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse (Gal 3:10). The misconception is that in doing this Paul is also sharply rebuking all others who would “add” any form of obedience as a requirement for salvation.

Note carefully the translation from the Revised Standard Version: “***Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace.***” (Gal 5:4). It is very important for us to recognize Paul’s emphasis here on “the works of the law”. It would be to go beyond the purpose and intent of Paul’s words both here and in Romans and thereby conclude that nothing at all is required on our part in the salvation process.

We should note here that Apostolic Theology acknowledges the biblical parallels between water baptism and circumcision. In the New Covenant, water baptism replaces physical circumcision as the visual sign of entrance into the covenant community. This is seen most clearly in Colossians 2:11, 12. Baptism therefore, is the New Testament counterpart to Old Testament circumcision. It is for this very reason that Paul so aggressively fought against the Judaizers who sought to retain the components of the previous dispensation while attempting to live under the New Covenant.

It is vital that we understand the truth that neither repentance nor water baptism are in any way connected with the Law of Moses. The problem with the Judaizers was their unwillingness to fully accept the New Covenant with its new dispensation of Grace. By insisting on circumcision, Sabbath keeping and observance of the Law of Moses they were in effect trying to live in two worlds at the same time. Paul told them to choose what covenant they wanted—it was impossible to have both, and only one would lead them to life—the other brought only bondage.

Both repentance and water baptism are components of the New Covenant; their observance commanded by Jesus as a necessary essential component of New Testament salvation. As we have shown, this has nothing whatsoever to do with “works of the law.” But is rather the simple obedience to Christ which leads to eternal life. Some have referred to

this as a “penitent faith” or “believing repentance.”<sup>76</sup> Scripture refers to it simply as the “obedience of faith.” While salvation is without question by grace through faith, there are none-the-less, clearly prescribed biblical acts of obedience both commanded and required on our part.

Repentance and water baptism in the Name Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins demonstrate the reality of our faith and enable the finished work of Christ to perform its work in us, thereby allowing Him to baptize us in his Holy Spirit thus completing our salvation.

While a detailed examination of Apostolic Theology as it relates to New Testament salvation is beyond the scope of this book, it is hoped that this brief review of the scriptural aspects of the New Birth will be useful for a prosper understanding of Apostolic Theology and Oneness Pentecostalism.

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<sup>76</sup> Grudem 1984. 714

## Summary and Conclusion

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It is a most significant fact, often overlooked, that Jesus equates/links eternal life with knowledge of one true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (Jn 17:3). We have demonstrated from scripture that this refers to our acknowledgement of both the divinity and the humanity of Christ (Jn 8:24, 55, I Jn4:3). It is not as many believe a reference to two divine beings.

The insistence on God's absolute numerical oneness, as well as, His manifestation in the flesh for our salvation are the overarching themes of scripture. This alone should caution us against divorcing our beliefs from the biblical theology of God; thus building for ourselves the image of another Jesus and thereby receiving a different gospel.

We must not ignore his warning, ***"If you believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins... He that believeth on me believeth not on me, But on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him who sent me...He the rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day"***(Jn 8:24; 12:44,45,48).

This should lay rest to any question about the importance of "doctrine." For, ***"whosoever trangresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the father and the son."*** (II Jn 9). Jesus' own creed (Mark12:29), is central to all he said and did. But does our tradition faithfully reflect that "Jewish" creed?

According to the Savior, it is not possible to believe Him if we are not prepared to believe Moses (Jn 5:46, 47). Our failures to grasp the realities of our Hebrew heritage and what Moses, Isaiah, and others have said about the nature of God, will lead to disastrous results when it comes to the exercise of our faith.

A genuine relationship with Jesus can only be built on the foundation of a proper understanding of who he is. This understanding will only come by our acceptance of the teaching of scripture, even when that scripture violates our "sacred" traditions.

Our ability to avoid conforming to the culture around us and achieve the separation demanded of us as God's people will only come as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may prove what is the will of God (Rom 12:1-2).

It is only by the inspired word of God that this will ever take place, as the mind of the Spirit is transferred to the believer and we come to have the mind of Christ. Could it be that we are breathing the contaminated atmosphere of Greek philosophy and Alexandrian theology and would experience dramatic improvements in spiritual health from the fresh air of the plain truth of God in its original Hebrew context?

Our success as believers depends upon our attention to Jesus' admonition that... **"Ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,"** (Jn 15:7; II Jn 9; Jn 8:32). All false doctrine is dangerous, because it is built on a rejection of what Jesus said. How much greater in this case, being built on the rejection of who He is. No apology is necessary, therefore, for our desire to discover what, in fact, according to scripture, God has revealed about Himself and his relationship to man.

It matters very much what a Christian understands and believes for, as perhaps never before in her history the church today is asleep and in bondage. The current opinion ("fad") that doctrine divides and should be avoided for the sake of unity, is simply unbiblical. The very opposite is true: doctrine based on the clear teaching of scripture and the true knowledge of God is the only hope for genuine unity in the midst of the chaos and division present in the church today.

The object of this work, therefore, has been to present a biblical challenge to contemporary trinitarianism, to propose a way of understanding more accurately what God has revealed about himself, thus bringing our doctrine more in line with the truths of scripture.

The recovery of belief in Jesus as the physical manifestation of the one true God will dispel the fog of confusion which has enveloped the church for generations. Loss of this clear understanding about who he is has resulted in our acceptance of "another Jesus" and "a different gospel" and has created an entrenched and dangerous theological misunderstanding regarding the true nature of salvation.

The doctrine of the trinity is a tragic diversion which replaces the biblical focus on faith in the one true God with philosophical speculation and metaphysical arguments regarding the

nature of the “Godhead.” In many cases the result is the false worship of a “divided God” on the part of people with divided hearts.

It is no longer sufficient simply to make the assertion that “Jesus = God” as if that is a legitimate reflection of New Testament truth. Since God in the Bible never means “God in three persons,” intelligent and honest Bible study must seek for a revised Christology which allows for the obvious and necessary conclusion that Jesus is the promised incarnation of the Father.

In his book, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, Emil Brunner makes the following pointed observation regarding the Trinity: “The History of Christian Theology and dogma teaches us to regard the dogma of the trinity as the distinctive element in the Christian idea of God... On the other hand we must honestly admit that the doctrine of the trinity did not form part of the early Christian New Testament...It was never the intent of the original witness to Christ in the New Testament to set before us the intellectual problem--that of three divine persons--and then to tell us silently to worship this mystery of three in one. This “*mysterium logicum*,” the fact that God is three yet one, lies wholly outside the message of the Bible. It is a mystery which the Church places before the faithful in her theology, but which has no connection with the message of Jesus and the Apostles. No Apostle would have dreamt of thinking that here are three divine persons, whose mutual relations and paradoxical unity are beyond our understanding. The mystery of the trinity is a pseudo-mystery which sprang out of an aberration in logical thought from the lines laid down in the bible and not from the biblical doctrine itself.”<sup>77</sup>

As I said in the opening chapter, in the final analysis, the doctrine of the trinity is simply not a biblical doctrine but rather the product of theological reflection and philosophical speculation. It may be in reality, satan's masterstroke of deception.

In contradistinction to trinitarianism, Apostolic or Oneness theology asserts the following:

- 1) God is indivisibly and absolutely numerically one with no distinction of persons.
- 2) The nature of the Godhead is not a mystery but one of the clearest revelations of scripture.
- 3) Jesus is the absolute fullness of the Godhead; He is one and at the same time--Elohim, Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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<sup>77</sup> Brunner. 1950. 1; 205, 226, 238

- 4) The Son of God was begotten after the flesh at a specific moment in time and did not exist from all Eternity. It is a term which refers only and specifically to God's incarnation.
- 5) The logos (word) is not a separate person, but rather the mind, thought, plan, activity, or expression of the Father.
- 6) Jesus is the redemptive name of God, revealed in the New Testament. It is the ultimate revelation of who God is, representing the Salvation, Healing, Delivering Power and Authority of God manifested to man.
- 7) Water Baptism should be administered by the oral invocation of the Name of Jesus as part of the Christological baptismal formula.
- 8) Believers will definitely see only one Divine Being in Heaven: Jesus Christ, The Lord of Glory.
- 9)

The Oneness doctrine does not destroy or alter any doctrine or belief essential to biblical Christianity; it absolutely upholds the sole authority of scripture, the Deity of Christ, his substitutionary atonement and justification by faith. Additionally, as part of Gods ongoing program of reformation and restoration, Apostolic Theology restores and upholds biblical Christianity in at least four specific ways:

- A) It restores biblical terminology and biblical patterns of thought on the subject of the God head, clearly establishing, New Testament Christianity as the heir of Old Testament Judaism.
- B) It proclaims the absolute Deity of Jesus Christ, revealing his true identity as the incarnation of the One True God.
- C) It restores apostolic authority and the biblical emphasis on The Name to the church, making the power of his Name available to every believer.
- D) It restores the basic and fundamental doctrine of the New Testament church which is the bible standard of full salvation. It is repentance, water baptism by immersion in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance.

Not only must the church know and believe these truths, but in view of their crucial significance, we must begin to propagate them everywhere. The Church has the vital responsibility to teach this message from her pulpits, in her Sunday Schools, in home bible studies, and through every appropriate outlet. The fivefold ministry has been given to the church for the purpose of equipping the Saints for ministry. Every believer therefore, is a minister, anointed by God and entrusted with the grave responsibility of sharing these profound realities with others.

In short, the message of the Mighty God in Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to the restoration of biblical belief, apostolic authority and the return to New Testament patterns, principles, priorities, and power. It is the only hope for a dying world; our only means of success in what God has called us to do.

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## Historical References Regarding the Trinity

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"The necessity to formulate the doctrine was thrust upon the Church by forces from without, and it was, in particular, its faith in the deity of Christ, and the necessity to defend it, that first compelled the Church to face the duty of formulating a full doctrine of the Trinity for its rule of faith" (New Bible Dictionary, J. D. Douglas & F. F. Bruce, Trinity, p 1298).

"In the immediate post New Testament period of the Apostolic Fathers no attempt was made to work out the God-Christ (Father-Son) relationship in ontological terms. By the end of the fourth century, and owing mainly to the challenge posed by various heresies, theologians went beyond the immediate testimony of the Bible and also beyond liturgical and creedal expressions of trinitarian faith to the ontological trinity of coequal persons "within" God. The shift is from function to ontology, from the "economic trinity" (Father, Son, and Spirit in relation to us) to the "imminent" or "Essential Trinity" (Father, Son, and Spirit in relation to each other) it was prompted chiefly by belief in the divinity of Christ and later in the divinity of the Holy Spirit, but even earlier by the consistent worship of God in a trinitarian pattern and the practice of baptism into the threefold name of God. By the close of the fourth century the orthodox teaching was in place: God is one nature, three persons (mia ousia, treis hypostaseis)" (The Encyclopedia of Religion, Mircea Eliade, Trinity, Vol 15, p53-57),

"In the New Testament affirmations about the Son were largely functional and soteriological, and stressed what the Son is to us. Arians willingly recited these affirmations but read into them their own meaning. To preclude this Arian abuse of the Scripture affirmations Nicea transposed these Biblical affirmations into ontological formulas, and gathered the multiplicity of scriptural affirmations, titles, symbols, images, and predicates about the Son into a single affirmation that the Son is not made but born of the Father, true God from true God, and consubstantial with the Father" (The Triune God, Edmund J. Fortman, p 66-70).

"Economic and essential trinity: - (a) The transition from the Trinity of experience to the Trinity of dogma is describable in other terms as the transition from the economic or dispensational Trinity [Greek] to the essential, immanent or ontological Trinity [Greek]. At first the Christian faith was not Trinitarian in a strictly ontological reference. It was not so in the apostolic and subapostolic ages, as reflected in apostolic, the NT and other early Christian writings. Nor was it so even in the age of the Christian apologists. And even Tertullian, who founded the nomenclature of the orthodox doctrine, knew as little of an ontological Trinity as did the apologists; his was still the economic or relative conception of the Johannine and Pauline theology. So Harnack holds, and he says further that the whole history of Christological and Trinitarian dogma from Athanasius to Augustine is the history of the displacement of the Logos-conception by that of the Son, of the substitution of the immanent and absolute Trinity for the economic and relative. In any case the orthodox

doctrine in its developed form is a Trinity of essence rather than of manifestation, as having to do in the first instance with the subjective rather than the objective Being of God. And, just because these two meanings of the Trinity--the theoretical and the practical, as they might also be described--are being sharply distinguished in modern Christian thought, it might be well if the term 'Trinity' were employed to designate the Trinity of revelation, or the doctrine of the threefold self-manifestation of God), and the term 'Triunity' (cf. Germ. Dreienigkeit) Adopted as the designation of the essential Trinity (or the doctrine of the tri-personal nature of God)" (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, James Hastings, Trinity, p 461).

"Of course the doctrine of our Lord's divinity itself partly implies and partly recommends the doctrine of the Trinity... First, the Creeds of that early day make no mention in their letter of the Catholic doctrine at all. They make mention indeed of a Three; but that there is any mystery in the doctrine, that the Three are One, that They are coequal, coeternal, all increate, all omnipotent, all incomprehensible, is not stated and never could be gathered from them. Of course we believe that they imply it, or rather intend it" (Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, John Henry Newman, a Cardinal by Pope Leo III in 1879,1878, p40-42),

"The ideas implicit in these early catechetical and liturgical formulae, as in the New Testament writers' use of the same dyadic and triadic patterns, represent a pre-reflective, pre-theological phase of Christian belief. It was out of the raw material thus provided by the preaching, worshipping Church that theologians had to construct their more sophisticated accounts of the —Christian doctrine of the Godhead" (J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p 90).

"First, it is important to note that the doctrine of the Trinity does not go back to non-Christian sources [*this is his opinion*], as has sometimes been supposed in the past. There has been no lack of attempts to find the initial form of the doctrine of the Trinity in Plato, or in Hinduism, or in Parsiism. All such attempts may be regarded today as having floundered [*again his opinion refuted below*]. It is another question, of course, whether or not the church, in developing the doctrine of the Trinity [*why develop something if it already existed?*], had recourse to certain thought forms already present in the philosophical and religious environment, in order that, with the help of these, it might give its own faith clear intellectual expression [see *an admission of borrowing pagan philosophy*]. This question must definitely be answered in the affirmative. In particular cases the appropriation of this concept or that can often be proved. Unfortunately, however, it is true that particularly in reference to the beginnings of the doctrine of the Trinity there is still much uncertainty. In this area final clarity has not yet been achieved. As far as the New Testament is concerned, one does not find in it an actual doctrine of the Trinity. This does not mean very much, however, for generally speaking the New Testament is less intent upon setting forth certain doctrines than it is upon proclaiming the kingdom of God, a kingdom that dawns in and with the person of Jesus Christ. At the same time, however, there are in the New Testament the rudiments of a concept of God that was susceptible of further development and clarification,

along doctrinal lines [*his opinion*],... Speaking first of the person of Jesus Christ...In other passages of the New Testament the predicate "God" is without a doubt applied to Christ" (A Short History of Christian Doctrine, Bernard Lohse, 1966, p37-39).

"It is a good thing to examine the revelation that God made to the Jewish people in the Old Testament. We shall not find in it a lesson on the trinity—there is none [Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism, Vol. 20, What Is The Trinity, Bernard Pault],"

"In the book *A Statement of Reasons*, Andrews Norton says of the Trinity: 'We can trace the history of this doctrine, and discover its source, not in the Christian revelation, but in the Platonic philosophy... The Trinity is not a doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, but a fiction of the school of the later Platonists' (A Statement of Reasons, Andrews Norton, 1872, Fifth edition, American Unitarian Association, Boston, MA, p 94,104).

"What does the Old Testament tell us of God? It tells us there is one God, a wonderful God of life and love and righteousness and power and glory and mystery, who is the creator and lord of the Whole universe, who is intensely concerned with the tiny people of Israel. It tells us of his word, Wisdom. Spirit, of the Messiah He will send, of a Son of Man and a Suffering Servant to come. But it tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a Triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit." "But nowhere do we find any trinitarian doctrine of three distinct subjects of divine life and activity in the same Godhead" (The Triune God, Edmund Fortman, pp 6,15).

"The Bible does not teach the doctrine of the trinity. Neither the word trinity itself, nor such language as one in three, three in one, one essence or substance or three persons, is biblical language. The language of the doctrine is the language of the ancient Church, taken not from the Bible but from classical Greek philosophy [Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., Christian Doctrine, p 92]."

"There is no evidence the Apostles of Jesus ever heard of a trinity. (H.G. Wells Outline of History, 1920 Edition, p 499)."

"The word trinity is not found in the Bible [The Illustrated Bible Dictionary]."

"It was at this stage that Constantine made his momentous suggestion. Might not the relationship of Son to Father be expressed by the term homoousios ("of the same substance"). Its use, however, by the Sabellian Bishops of Libya had been condemned by Dionysius of Alexandria in the 260s, and, in a different sense, its use by Paul of Samosata had been condemned by the Council of Antioch in 268. It was thus a "loaded" word as well as being unscriptural. Why Constantine put it forward we do not know. The possibility is that once again he was prompted by Hosius, and he may have been using it as a "translation" of the traditional view held in the West, that the Trinity was composed of "Three Persons in one substance." without inquiring further into the meaning of these terms. The Emperor had spoken, and no one dared touch the creed during his lifetime. The great majority of the Eastern bishops found themselves in a false position" (The Rise of Christianity, 1985, W.H.C. Frend, p140-141).

"The doctrine of the Trinity is considered beyond the grasp of human reasoning [The Encyclopedia Americana]."

"Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine, it is striking that the term does not appear in the New Testament. Likewise, the developed concept of three coequal partners in the Godhead found in later creedal formulations cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon. Since the Christians have come to worship Jesus as a god... Matthew 28.19 ... Matthew records a special connection between God the Father and Jesus the Son (e.g.11:27), but he falls short of claiming Jesus is equal to God. It is John's gospel that suggests the idea of equality between Jesus and God...While there are other New Testament texts where God, Jesus, and the Spirit are referred to in the same passage (e.g. Jude 20,21), It is important to avoid reading the trinity into places where it does not appear, An example is 1 Peter 1:1,2 (Oxford Companion to the Bible, Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, Trinity, p 782).

"The trinity is not directly and immediately the Word of God [New Catholic Encyclopedia]."

"The Platonic trinity, itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity of attributes that gave birth to the three hypostases or divine persons taught by the Christian churches.... This Greek philosopher's conception of the divine trinity... can be found in all the ancient [pagan] religions" (French Nouveau Dictionnaire Universe! [New Universal Dictionary], Vol. 2, p. 1467).

"The doctrine of the holy trinity is not taught in the Old Testament [New Catholic Encyclopedia]."

"Without abandoning our principle that Egyptian influence made itself felt as an undercurrent throughout Hellenism, we may nevertheless claim pride of place for Alexandria and so consider Alexandrian theology as the intermediary between the Egyptian religious heritage and Christianity [*yet those who accept the Alexandria trinity infusion cry the loudest over Alexandrian manuscripts for the Bible?*]. The Trinity is not the only subject matter at issue here. Also Christology, which is closely linked to it - the doctrine concerning the nature of Christ and especially his pre-existence before the creation and time - revolves around questions which had been posed earlier by Egyptian theologians and which they solved in a strikingly similar way" (Egyptian Religion, Siegfried Morenz, p254-257).

"In Scripture there is as yet no single term by which the Three Divine Persons are denoted together. The word [tri'as] (of which the Latin trinitas is a translation) is first found in Theophilus of Antioch about A. D. 180 Shortly afterwards it appears in its Latin form of trinitas in Tertullian" (The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1912, Vol. 15, Trinity, p 47).

"The Old Testament tells us nothing explicitly or by necessary implication of a triune God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is no evidence that any sacred writer even suspected the existence of a trinity within the Godhead. Even to see in the Old Testament, suggestions or foreshadowing's or veiled signs of the trinity of persons, is to go beyond the words and intent of the sacred writers. The New Testament writers give us no formal or formulated doctrine of the trinity, no explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons. Nowhere do we find any trinitarian doctrine of three distinct subjects of divine life and activity in the same Godhead. [The Triune God, by Edmund Fortman, Jesuit].

"Neither the word trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament" [The New Encyclopedia Britannica]."

"Let us allow that the whole circle of doctrines, of which our Lord is the subject, was consistently and uniformly confessed by the Primitive Church... But it surely is otherwise with the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity. I do not see in what sense it can be said that there is a consensus of primitive [church authorities] in its favour... The Creeds of that early day make no mention... of the Trinity at all. They make mention indeed of a Three; but that there is any mystery in the doctrine, that the Three are One, that They are coequal, co-eternal, all increate, all omnipotent, all incomprehensible, is not stated, and never could be gathered from them" (Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, John Henry Newman, a cardinal by Pope Leo III in 1879,1878, P40).

"As Far as the New Testament is concerned, one does not find in it an actual doctrine of the trinity [A Short History of Christian Doctrine, by Bernard Lohse]."

"Although the notion of a divine Triad or Trinity is characteristic of the Christian religion, it is by no means peculiar to it. In Indian religion e.g., we meet with the trinitarian group of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu: and in Egyptian religion with the trinitarian group of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, constituting a divine family, like the Father, Mother, and Son in medieval Christian pictures. Nor is it only in historical religions that we find God viewed as a Trinity. One recalls in particular the Neo-Platonic view of the *Supreme or Ultimate Reality*, which was suggested by Plato in the Timmaeus; e.g., in the philosophy of Plotinus the primary or original Realities are triadically represented as the Good or (in numerical symbol) the One, the Intelligence or the One-Many, and the World-Soul or the One and Many. The religious Trinity associated, if somewhat loosely, with Comte's philosophy might also be cited here: the cultus of humanity as the Great Being, of space as the Great Medium, and of the earth as the Great Fetish, (c) What lends a special character to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is its close association with the distinctive Christian view of divine incarnation" *[still borrowed from paganism]...*" As Augustine said, "if in the books of the Platonists it was to be found that 'in the beginning was the Word,' it was not found there that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.'"... "None the less Christ is acknowledged as the eternal Son of God and the supreme revelation of the Father, and the quickening Spirit of life is acknowledged to be derived ' from on high." And so, when the early Christians would describe their conception of God, all the three elements-God, Christ, and the Spirit-enter into the description, and the one God is found to be revealed in a threefold way" *[revealed via Plato philosophy]* (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, James Hastings, Trinity, p 458).

"The New Testament does not contain the developed doctrine of the trinity [The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology]."

"The doctrine of the Trinity did not form part of the apostles' preaching, as this is reported in the New Testament" (Encyclopedia International, Ian Henderson, University of Glasgow, 1969, page 226).

"This sublime pronouncement of absolute monotheism was a declaration of war against all polytheism... In the same way, the Shema excludes the trinity of the Christian creed as a violation of the Unity of God" (The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, J. H. Hertz, 1941, Vol. 1, p. 215).

"Luther was uneasy with the term trinity, not the idea of Trinity, for Luther most certainly always was a trinitarian: "On the words persona, (etc.) Much has been said, about the time

of the Reformation, concerning the tendency of these terms to lead to tritheism [*believing in three gods*]; and among the advocates for their expulsion from theological disquisition, might be mentioned a number of the first divines of the age, not excepting Minnius and even Luther himself. Yet, to prevent the charge of Arianism or Socinianism, which he knew his enemies would eagerly seize the least pretext to prefer against them, Luther yielded to Melanchthon's wishes, and in the Augsburg Confession, the doctrine of the Trinity is couched in the old scholastic terms" [*scholastic, meaning borrowed paganism*] (G. C. Storr & Flatt's, Biblical Theology. S. S. Schmucker, trans., p. 301).

"The fanciful idea that [elohim] referred to the trinity of persons in the Godhead hardly finds now a supporter among scholars. It is either what grammarians call the plural of majesty, or it denotes the fullness of divine strength, the sum of powers displayed by God" (William Smith: A Dictionary of The Bible, p220).

"The doctrine of the trinity he [Michael Servetus] felt to be a Catholic perversion and himself to be a good New Testament Christian in combating it. According to his conception, a trinity composed of three distinct persons in one God is a rational impossibility" (Man's Religion, John B. Noss, 1968) [note: *John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian Church, had Servetus burned at the stake because of his anti-trinitarian views*].

"The doctrines of the Logos and the Trinity received their shape from Greek Fathers, who... were much influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Platonic philosophy ... That errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this source cannot be denied" (The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson, 1957, Vol. IX, p. 91)

"To Jesus and Paul the doctrine of the trinity was apparently never known. They say nothing about it." [Origin and Evolution of Religion, by Yale University Professor E. Washburn Hopkins]

"Christianity had conquered paganism, and paganism had corrupted Christianity" (Winwood Reade, Philosopher and historian, The Martyrdom of Man, p 183-84).

"Yet it is self-evident that Father, Son and Spirit are here linked in an indissoluble threefold relationship. On the other hand, the NT does not actually speak of trinity. We seek this in vain in the triadic formulae of the NT.... Early Christianity itself, however, does not yet have

the problem of the Trinity in view" (Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 3, p. 108).

"The Christian religion in the 3rd century made no compromise with any of the pagan religions and kept far away from the numerous intersections out of which, under the influence of the monotheistic philosophy of religion, a new religiousness developed itself. But the spirit of this religiousness entered into the Church and produced forms of expression in doctrine and cultus to correspond with itself. The testament of primitive Christianity--the Holy Scriptures--and the testament of antiquity--the New-Platonic speculation--were by the end of the 3rd century intimately and, as it seemed, inseparably united in the great churches of the East. Through the acceptance of the Logos- Christology as the central dogma of the Church, the Church doctrine was, even for the laity, firmly rooted in the soil of Hellenism. Thereby it became a mystery to the great majority of Christians" (Outlines of the History of Dogma, Adolf Harnack, p193).

"At first the Christian Faith was not trinitarian. It was not so in the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic ages, as reflected in the New Testament and of the early Christian writings [Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics]."

"The doctrine of the trinity was of gradual and comparatively late formation. It had its origin in a source entirely foreign from that of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. It grew up, and was engrafted on Christianity, through the hands of the Platonizing Fathers. [The Church of the First Three Centuries]."

"Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it... From Egypt came the ideas of a divine trinity" (The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ, Will Durant, Part III, 1944, p. 595).

"Precisely what the doctrine is, or precisely how it is to be explained, Trinitarians are not agreed among themselves" (A Dictionary of Religious Knowledge" (Lyman Abbott, 1875, p. 944).

"The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, and, though used by Tertullian in the last decade of the 2nd century, it did not find a place formally in the theology of the Church till the 4th century" (New Bible Dictionary, J. D. Douglas & F. F. Bruce, Trinity, p 1298).

"Theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity ... theologians agree that the New Testament also does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity. In the immediate post New Testament period of the Apostolic Fathers no attempt was made to work out the God-Christ (Father-Son) relationship in ontological terms" (The Encyclopedia of Religion, Mircea Eliade, Trinity, Vol 15, p53-57).

"Neither the word Trinity, nor the explicit doctrine as such, appears in the New Testament, nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the Shema in the Old Testament: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4)... Thus, the New Testament established the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies" (Encyclopedia Britannica, Trinity, Vol. X, p.126,1979).

"The New Testament does not contain a formalized explanation of the trinity that uses such words as trinity, three persons, one substance, and the like." (Why You Should Believe In The Trinity, 1989, Robert M. Bowman Jr.).

"The Trinity. The NT does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. "The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are of equal essence and therefore in an equal sense God himself" (New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Brown, Colin, 1932, God, vol 2, p84, J. Schneider).

"When we turn to the problem of the doctrine of the Trinity, we are confronted by a peculiarly contradictory situation. On the one hand, the history of Christian theology and of dogma teaches us to regard the dogma of the Trinity as the distinctive element in the Christian idea of God, that which distinguishes it from the idea of God in Judaism and in Islam, and indeed, in all forms of rational Theism. Judaism, Islam, and rational Theism are Unitarian. On the other hand, we must honestly admit that the doctrine of the Trinity did NOT form part of the early Christian-New Testament-message. Certainly, it cannot be denied that not only the word "Trinity", but even the EXPLICIT IDEA of the Trinity is absent from the apostolic witness of the faith. The doctrine of the Trinity itself, however, is not a Biblical Doctrine" (Emil Brunner, "The Christian Doctrine of God", Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949, pp. 205 & 236).

"All this underlines the point that primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds of the early church" (James L. Barker, "Apostasy From the Divine Church", Salt Lake City UT, 1960, p. 44).

"Thus the New Testament itself is far from any doctrine of the Trinity or of a triune God who is three co-equal Persons of One Nature" (William J. Hill, "The Three-Personed God", Washington DC, The Catholic University of America Press, 1982, p. 27).

"These passages give no doctrine of the Trinity... Paul has no formal Trinitarian doctrine and no clear-cut realization of a Trinitarian problem there is no trinitarian doctrine in the Synoptics or Acts... nowhere do we find any trinitarian doctrine of three distinct subjects of divine life and activity in the same Godhead" (Fortman, "Triune God", pp. 22-23).

"In order to argue successfully for the unconditionality and permanence of the ancient Trinitarian Creeds, it is necessary to make a distinction between doctrines, on the one hand, and on the terminology and conceptually in which they were formulated on the other... Some of the crucial concepts employed by these creeds, such as "substance", "person", and "in two natures" are postbiblical novelties. If these particular notions are essential, the doctrines of these creeds are clearly conditional, dependent on the LATE HELLENISTIC MILIEU" (George A. Lindbeck, Professor of Historical Theology, Yale University, "The Nature of Doctrine", Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984, p. 92).

Trinitarian discussion, Roman Catholic as well as others, presents a somewhat unsteady silhouette. Two things have happened. There is the recognition on the part of exegetes and Biblical theologians, including a constantly growing number of Roman Catholics, that one should not speak of Trinitarianism in the New Testament without serious qualification. There is also the closely parallel recognition on the part of historians of dogma and systematic theologians that when one does speak of an unqualified Trinitarianism, one has moved from the period of Christian origins to, say, the last quadrant of the 4th century." (R.L.Richard, "Trinity, Holy", in New Catholic Encyclopedia, 15 vols)

## Historical References Regarding First Century Baptisms

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Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (1951), II, 384, 389 'The formula used was 'in the name of the Lord Jesus [Christ] or some synonymous phrase.'

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), I, 351 The evidence . . . suggests that baptism in early Christianity was administered not in the threefold name, but 'in the name of Jesus Christ' or 'in the name of the Lord Jesus.'

Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible (1898), I, 241: "[One could conclude that] the original form of words was 'into the name of Jesus Christ' or 'the Lord Jesus.'"

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (1957), I, 435 "The New Testament knows only baptism in the name of Jesus."

Canney's Encyclopedia of Religions (1970), page 53i : "Persons were baptized at first 'in the name of Jesus Christ' . . . or 'in the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

**JAMES HASTINGS:** "It has been customary to trace the institution of the practice to the words of Christ in Matthew 28:19, but the authenticity of this passage has been challenged on historical as well as textual grounds. It must be acknowledged that the formula of the threefold name, which is here enjoined, does not appear to have been used by the primitive church, which so far as our information goes, baptized 'in<sup>1</sup> or 'into' the Name of Jesus, or Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus, without any reference to the Father or the Spirit" (DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE, Page 88).

**BRITANNICA ENCYCLOPAEDIA:** "The triune and trinity formula was not uniformly used from the beginning, and up until the third century, baptism in the Name of Christ only was so widespread that Pope Stephen, in opposition to St. Cyprian, said that baptism in the Name of Christ was valid. But Catholic missionaries, by omitting one or more persons of the Trinity when they were baptized, were anathematized by the Roman church. Now the formula of Rome is, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son and in the name of the Holy Ghost" (11th Ed., Vol. 3, Pages 365-366).

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIONS:** "Persons were baptized at first in the Name of Jesus Christ, or 'in the Name of the Lord Jesus.' Afterwards, with the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, they were baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Page 53).

**HASTINGS ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION:** "Christian baptism was administered by using the words 'in the Name of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The use of a Trinity formula of any sort was not suggested in the early Church history. Baptism was always in the Name of the Lord Jesus until the time of Justin Martyr when the Triune formula was used" (Vol. 2, Pages 377-378, 389)

"NAME was an ancient synonym for "Person." Payment was always made in the name of some person referring to ownership. Therefore one being baptized in Jesus' Name became His personal property. "*Ye are Christ's.*" (Acts 1:15; Revelation 3:4; I Corinthians 3:23).

**NEW CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA:** "With regard to the form used for Baptism in the early church, there is the difficulty that although Matthew (28:19) speaks of the Trinitarian formula, which is now used, the Acts of the Apostles (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5) and Paul (I Corinthians 1:13; 6:11; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3) speak only of Baptism 'in the Name of Jesus.' Baptism in titles cannot be found in the first centuries..." (McGraw Hill Publishing, Page 59).

## About the Author

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