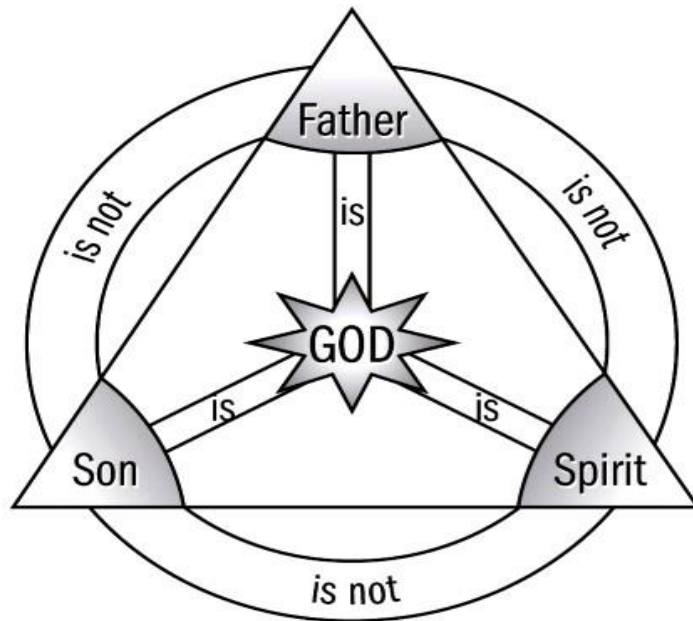


PENTECOSTAL CHURCH ANTI-TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

By David Lee Burris



"My Echo, My Shadow, & Me" ?



The Theanthropic Debate Continues

Modalism: An Attempt to Explain Christ

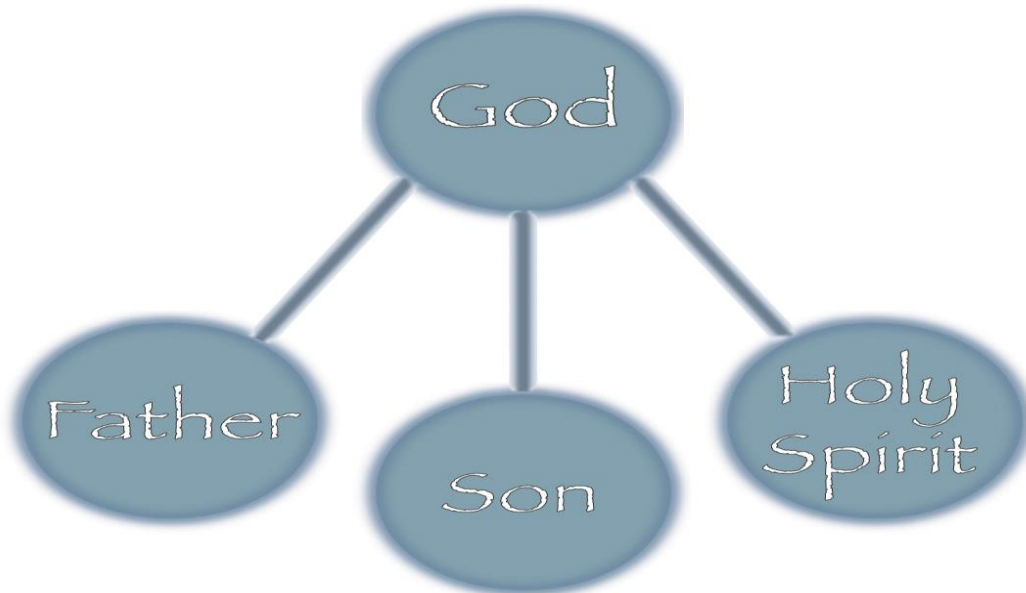


Chart 59

The Apologists and Their Understanding of Christ

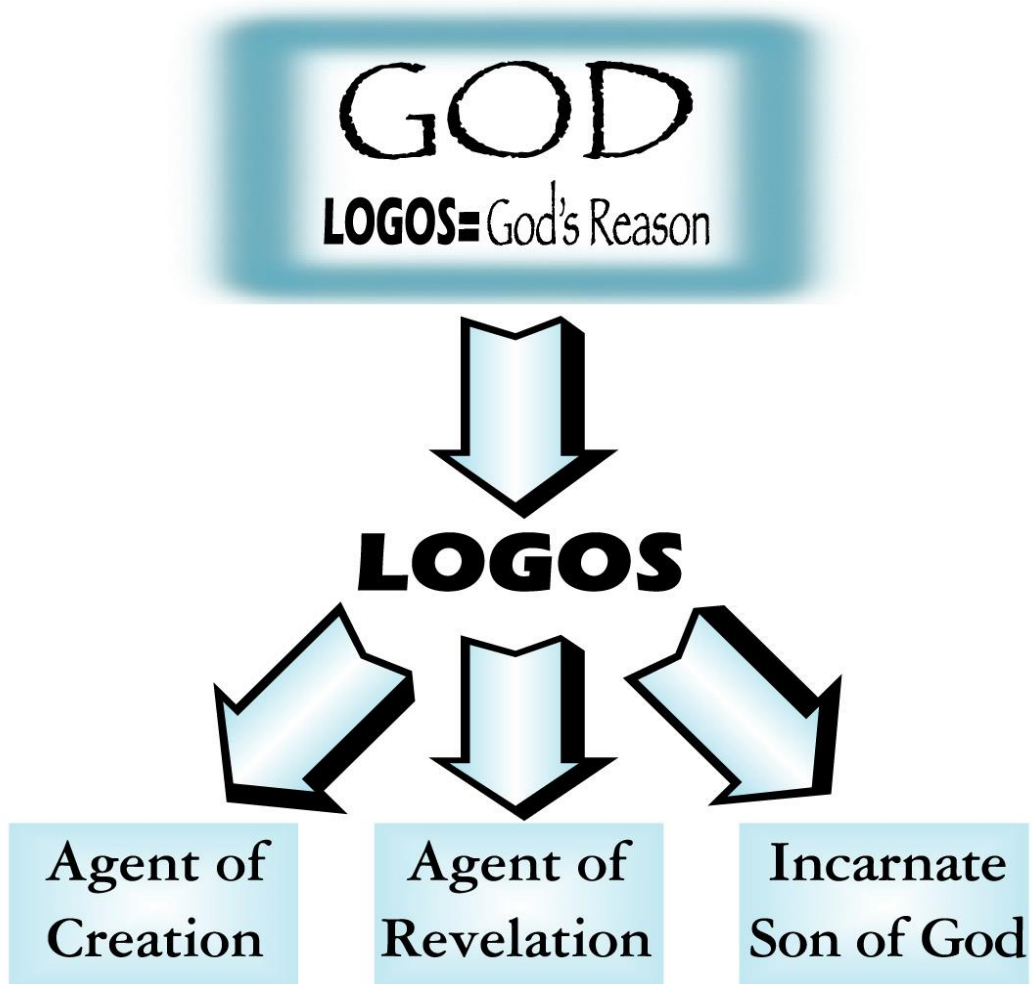


Chart 36

PROCESSION

❖ “A term in Christian trinitarian thought that designates the way the Son and Spirit originate from the Father. The Son’s procession from Father is called generation, or filiation, whereas procession of the Spirit from Father is called spiration.”

* Dictionary Of Theological Terms, Grenz & Guretzki

SUBORDINATIONISM

❖ “A second and third century heresy that held that because the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father, they are not equal to the Father and are thus not fully divine.”

* Dictionary Of Theological Terms, Grenz & Guretzki

ADOPTIONISM

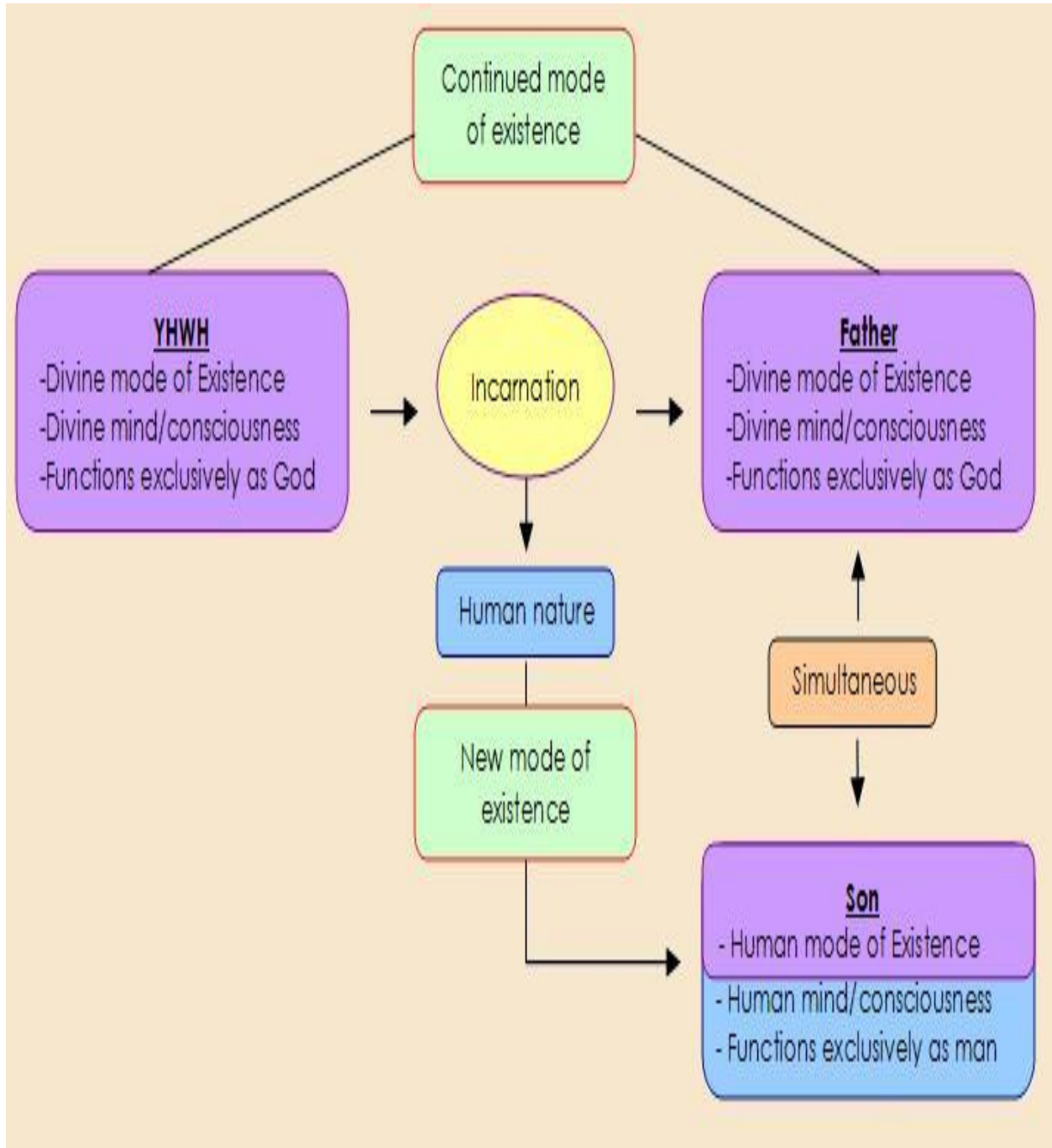
❖ “The theory that asserts that God adopted Jesus of Nazareth as his Son. In other words, Jesus was born human but became God’s Son at a particular point in his life.”

* Dictionary Of Theological Terms, Grenz & Guretzki

MODALISM

❖ “Also called ‘Sabellianism,’ the trinitarian heresy that does not view as three ‘persons in relation’ but merely as three modes or manifestations of the one divine person of God. Thus God comes in salvation history as Father to create and give the law, as Son to redeem and as Spirit to impart grace.”

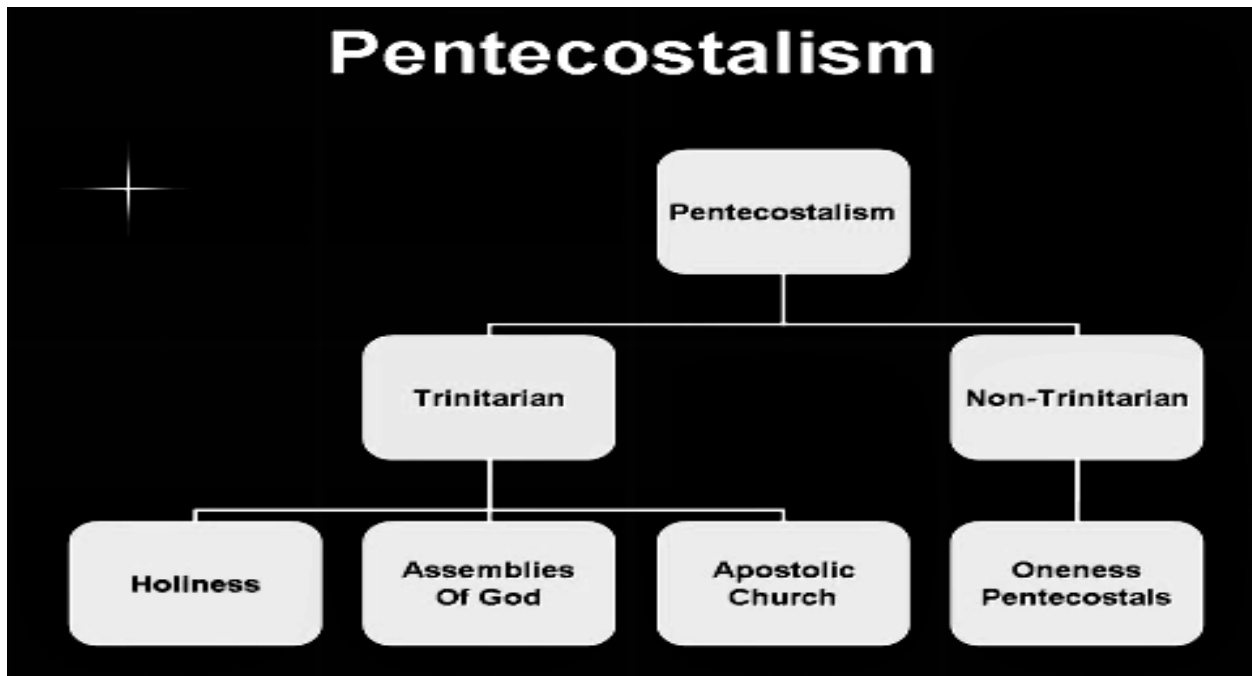
* Dictionary Of Theological Terms, Grenz & Guretzki



Adoptionism and Modalism Compared

ADOPTIONISM (Dynamic Modalism)	MODALISM (Modalistic Monarchianism, Sabellianism, Patripassionism)
Stress Oneness of God	Stress Oneness of God
Deny Deity of Christ	Affirm Deity of Christ
Affirm Humanity of Christ	Deny Humanity of Christ
Holy Spirit = a power	Holy Spirit = a mode of God's existence

Chart 60



The Heresy of Oneness Pentecostalism

ONENESS PENTECOSTALISM EXPOSED

Modalism is the heretical belief where the Persons of the Godhead are merely transitory and temporal “modes,” or expressions, of the one true God, such as in the “Oneness Pentecostal” or “Jesus only” movements. They believe this one true Person of the Godhead is Jesus. They believe it is Jesus who had expressed Himself by the scriptures designations Father, Son, and Spirit. In other words, this view states that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit never all exist at the same time--only one after another. Much like Jehovah’s Witnesses, Oneness Pentecostals often misrepresent the doctrine of the Trinity by saying it teaches a belief in three Gods or that it is a doctrine formulated exclusively by the Roman Catholics Church.

The Trinity is one God in three eternal coexistent persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If the Trinity is not true, many great biblical doctrines are rejected, such as Jesus’ preexistence and intercession (Heb. 7:24-25; 1 John 2:1). Oneness Pentecostals also believe in baptismal regeneration, water baptism in the name of Jesus only, and other unbiblical doctrines.

United Pentecostalism

The “Oneness Holiness” heresy alleges that “the Father,” “the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit” all represent the same divine Person. They make no distinction between the personalities within the sacred Godhead.

Their doctrine is erroneous, though, for the Bible makes a clear case that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are **separate** in identity. The Father is not the Son as evidenced by the fact that the Father knew when the end of time would be, but the Son did not (Mt. 24:36).

The Son is not the Spirit for one could blaspheme the Son and obtain forgiveness, but such was not the case with reference to the Spirit (Mt. 12:32).

The fact is, one partakes of the nature of anti-Christ when he refuses to acknowledge the difference between “the Father and the Son” (see 1 Jn. 2:22).

Baptism in the Name of Jesus Only

Before concluding, we need to address the Oneness Pentecostal idea that only certain words may be spoken during a baptismal ceremony (e.g., “I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ”). Oneness clergymen contend that should the statement be made, “I baptize you into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” it would be a violation of Scripture, and thus negate the validity of the immersion. This exhibits a lack of biblical information on this theme.

First, let us note the illogical consequences of such a doctrine. If a specific set of words is to be pronounced at the time of a baptism, **exactly what are those words?** A brief look at the New Testament will reveal that a variety of expressions are employed when the terms “baptize” and “name” are connected. Observe the following:

- “baptizing them into (eis) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).
- “be baptized . . . in (epi) the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).
- “baptized into (eis) the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16).
- “baptized in (en) the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48).
- “baptized into (eis) the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

These passages contain five **variant** phrases. Which one is to be pronounced at the time of the baptism, to the exclusion of the others?

The truth of the matter is **none of them has reference to any set of words to be pronounced at the time of baptism.**

Second, the language is designed to express certain truths, not prescribe a ritualistic set of words.

If the phrase “in the name of Christ” implies the saying of those words in connection with the act to which they are enjoined, what would Colossians 3:17 require?—“And **whatsoever** ye do, in word or in deed, do all **in the name of the Lord Jesus.**”

Accordingly, one would have to preface every word and act with the phrase “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Such highlights the absurdity of the Oneness position.

Not Paradoxical But Illogical

Did the Son of God Exist Before His Birth?

Christ's Preexistence in the Gospel of John

The One Who is "With" God and Who "Is" God

New Testament scholarship is in substantial agreement that the first eighteen verses of John are intended to function as a prologue to the rest of John's Gospel, setting the backdrop for all that is to subsequently come. This means that if this passage teaches the actual *personal* preexistence of the Word (as almost everyone except Oneness adherents recognizes), we may expect this to be a central theme throughout John's Gospel (as I shall subsequently argue is in fact the case).

The Gospel begins in eternity past by the author saying: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:1–2).

Modalistic antitrinitarians maintain that here "the Word" (*logos*) is not "a person," but "an expression" or "a concept." Hence the verse simply means that "with God was his thought, concept, envisaging" (Sabin, V, 1; see Bernard, Oneness, 232f.). The Word here, then, is for Oneness believers a thing, not a who. That this depersonalized interpretation of Logos is mistaken, however, is clear from reading the entire context.

First, the Word is explicitly said to be himself God, and God, of course, is not a mere impersonal concept. The Word is *all* that God is, including God's personhood.

Second, the preposition *pros*, translated "with" here (though it has the connotation of "toward" or "facing"), is most frequently used to describe personal relationships. The burden of proof certainly lies on anyone who would wish to argue the contrary. But this is especially difficult to do in this instance since it is most difficult to see what John could have meant by saying that a "concept" or "envisagement" was "with" or "facing" God—and was itself God!

And third, the personhood of the Word is clearly manifested in the fact that personalistic activities are ascribed to him. This Word is said to be the one through whom the world was created (1:3), the one who is the life and light of all men (1:4–5), and the one who came to, but was rejected by, his own creation (1:5, 10–11). He is thus described in strongly personal terms that could not have been said of a mere "thought."

The presupposed personalistic nature of the Logos who always existed "with" God and who was himself God is then rendered as explicit as possible in verse 14, which reads: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

This verse is, of course, referring to Jesus Christ and is identifying the Word the author has been speaking of thus far in the prologue with the Son of God who is the subject of the rest of the book. It is important to note that the verse does not say, or even remotely suggest, that the Word became personal or distinct from the Father only when he “became flesh.”

The Word is spoken of as divine, personal and yet distinct from the Father from the beginning of this chapter on through the end of John’s Gospel. John is in verse 14 talking about the same one Logos he has been talking about all along (vv. 1–13) when he says, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only...” It is this same Word, Jesus Christ, who John in this verse says came “*from* the Father” (not *as* the Father). Indeed, verse 14 really only repeats what John has already told us of the Word in verses 5, 9–11: the Word came to, but was rejected by, his own creation. John says this in reference to the *preincarnate* Word, showing that he does not bifurcate between a post-incarnate personal Word who is Jesus Christ and a supposedly preincarnate impersonal Word, as the Oneness interpretation requires.

The conclusion that John understood Jesus actually and personally to preexist with God and as God prior to his becoming flesh seems unavoidable. Therefore, the Oneness attempt to explain Christ’s preexistence as an existence either as the actual Father or as the idealized envisaged Son cannot succeed in this passage.

Christ’s Preexistence in Paul’s Writings

“Ideal” Preexistence in Paul

The Oneness exponents’ argument that the preexistence of Christ is a preexistence of foreknowledge and of purpose fits several passages in Paul; and, in fact, their interpretation of these verses fits well with some of the scholarly opinion on the matter. When, for example, Paul places the preexistence of Christ on the same level as the preexistence of the church, as he does in Ephesians 1:4–5 (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9), there is no reason to assume that Paul has an actual preexistence in mind with one (Christ) but only an ideal preexistence in mind with the other (church), though this possibility cannot be entirely ruled out. But it seems most likely that in this context Paul is conceiving of the man Jesus Christ in whom the Word was enfleshed along the same lines as the first-century Rabbis conceived of the Torah. To say that it existed “in the beginning” was one way of saying that it had the preeminence in God’s plan for the world.

The mistake that Oneness exegetes make is in supposing that, because certain passages can be interpreted this way, this is the way all such passages speaking of the distinct preexistence of Christ should be interpreted. This is similar to the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ futile argument that because “spirit” means only “breath” in many passages of Scripture, it must mean this in every passage of Scripture that mentions it. This is simply extremely bad exegesis. We must take each passage on its own merits. When we do this, we find that the Oneness interpretation of preexistence doesn’t fit with most of what Paul says on the matter, even if it does fit with some of what Paul says on other matters.

The Descending and Ascending Christ

We have dealt with those passages that are generally taken to be the most important texts showing that Paul believed that Jesus Christ existed, distinct from God the Father, prior to his Incarnation. But there are two other passages that add to the cumulative case for preexistence in Paul's theology and hence warrant our brief attention.

In Romans 10:6–7, Paul is arguing against any notion of salvation by self-effort, then, Paul maintains that “the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” ’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the deep?” ’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

The point Paul is making as he here quotes Deuteronomy 30:12–13 is that no amount of human striving could have brought Christ down from heaven or have risen Christ up from the dead. Christ, in other words, came down from heaven on his own. The passage is in some respects similar to John 3:13, and both passages clearly presuppose that Christ existed before he came to earth.

In Ephesians 4:7–10, Paul is celebrating the victory Christ achieved on the cross and the benefit this has for the church. He writes:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

Predictably, the standard Oneness explanation of this passage is that it refers to Christ as the Father. This, however, can easily be dismissed by observing that the verses immediately preceding clearly distinguish, in Paul's customary fashion, between God the Father and the Lord (vv. 5–6; cf. 1:2–3; 2:18; 3:9–11, 14; 5:20), and by noting that Christ is called the Son of God several verses after this passage (vv. 12–13). Nor could it here be argued that this “descent” is figurative, since the ascent with which it is paralleled is clearly literal. Hence this verse most likely is to be taken as yet another testimony to the distinct preexistence of Christ in Paul's thought.

Christ's Preexistence in Hebrews

Hebrews 1:2–3

As we saw was the case with Colossians 1:16–17, 1 Corinthians 8:6, and John 1:3, Hebrews 1:2 teaches that it was through the Son, “the radiance of God's glory” (v. 3), that God made the universe. The standard Oneness reply, we should by now expect, is that this verse means that all things were created “with a view towards” or “for the sake of” the Son. God made the world with the Son in mind. But this interpretation is rendered most unlikely for the same reason the Oneness explanation of the other creation passages is unlikely; namely, the Greek simply doesn't say this. The author here again uses *dia* followed by a genitive, indicating the instrumental sense of the preposition. Hence, all things were created *through* the Son—implying that the Son was there at the time!

This interpretation is further substantiated by the fact that the author has just previously said that the Son had been appointed “heir of all things,” which says almost the same thing as that the world was created “for the sake of” the Son. So why would the author simply repeat himself?

What is more, the author quickly reiterates his opinion that the Son was actually involved in creation when he attributes to the Son as God (see v. 8) the Psalm that reads: “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Heb. 1:10; cf. Ps. 8). Hence it can, I think, be taken as established that Hebrews 1:2 teaches that the Son of God was instrumentally involved in the work of creation.

Hebrews 7:1–3

In this passage the author is utilizing a Rabbinic method of interpretation to maintain that the priesthood of Christ has superseded the Levitical priesthood. He attempts to establish his point by noting that the priesthood of Christ is after the order of Melchizedek, while the priesthood of the Levites is after the order of Abraham, and Melchizedek was superior to Abraham (Heb. 7:2–3). At any rate, in the course of this Rabbinic argument he describes Melchizedek as being “without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever” (v. 3).

While there are a number of issues that surround the interpretation of this difficult passage, one thing at least is clear: The author believes that the Son of God has always existed and will always exist. Melchizedek is Jesus’ prototype because, at least as far as the Old Testament describes him, he is “without beginning of days.”

Hebrews 10:5

As a means of discussing the atoning significance of Jesus’ sacrificed body, the author of this verse records Jesus as saying, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.” This, clearly, cannot be the Father talking, since the one talking is talking to the Father and is talking in the passive voice. But just as clear is the fact that the one talking existed before “the body” was prepared for him. The most obvious conclusion, it seems, is to admit that Jesus Christ existed before he existed as a human being.

One possible out for the Oneness adherent is to maintain that what we have here is the ideal Son speaking to the real Father (Sabin, Battle). God is, as it were, conversing with himself and thus attributing personality to what is really simply yet an idea in his mind.

While this interpretation is not unprecedented in New Testament scholarship, I think there is very little to be said for it. There is certainly nothing in the text itself to suggest such a reading. Indeed, it seems that the only thing that can be said on its behalf is that it does not violate Oneness doctrine. But this is hardly a good reason for maintaining it.

Is Jesus’ Sonship Tied to His Humanity?

I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter that the New Testament teaches that Jesus existed as God prior to creation, and that he did so in a manner personally distinct from the Father. But we have not yet explicitly addressed the several texts used by Oneness exegetes to argue that Jesus’ sonship is temporal, and the refutation of the Oneness position is not complete until this is accomplished. To this task, therefore, I now turn.

Luke 1:35

In this passage the angel proclaims to Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” From this, Oneness believers argue that the reason Jesus is the Son of God is because, quite literally, he had no human father. His fleshly existence was directly “fathered” by God. Hence, the sonship of Christ, they argue, is a temporal, earthly affair.

This interpretation of the passage is, in my estimation, too narrowly focused and quite anthropomorphic. I find nothing to suggest that Luke was thinking in primarily biological terms when he records the angel as connecting Jesus’ divine conception with his title of Son of God. The title “Son of God” was primarily a moral and theological title throughout the ancient Semitic world, and throughout Scripture. And, heard in this context, it is clear that the angel was simply telling Mary that she was going to miraculously conceive a supremely holy child who will be called the Son of God. Nothing more can be read into this.

Still, even if one persists in this biologically orientated interpretation of the verse, this could only be shown to give us *one* of the New Testament reasons Jesus is called the Son of God. It cannot be used to prove the *only* reason Jesus is the Son of God.

Hebrews 1:5–6

This passage is frequently cited by Oneness apologists in their attempt to argue that there is no eternal Son of God (Magee, 33; Bernard, Oneness, 105). Here the author applies the coronation hymns of Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 to Christ as he compares his divinity to that of the angels by asking, “To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’? Or again, ‘I will be his Father, and he will be my Son’ ” (Heb. 5:5).

What Oneness exegetes find most significant about this passage is its temporal claims. “Today”—not eternally—“I have become your Father.” And again, God “will be” the Messiah’s Father, and the Messiah the Father’s Son. Such language, it is argued, positively excludes the eternal sonship of Christ. It locates the sonship of Christ as beginning with his human birth.

One does not have to look far, however, to see that something is askew with this interpretation. After all, the same author who penned verse 5 also penned verse 2 of this chapter, in which, we have seen, he declares that the Son was in some instrumental sense involved in creation. This same author, moreover, penned verses 8 and 10, in which he calls the Son “God” and “Lord” and says that “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth....” Hence whatever meaning verse 5 has, it cannot legitimately be used to date the beginning of the Son’s existence at Bethlehem.

The correct meaning of this verse, however, is not difficult to discern. The Old Testament passages the author is quoting speak of an ideal king’s relationship to the God of Israel and have nothing whatsoever to do with the biological birth of the king. Rather, they simply speak of God’s openly declaring (probably during the coronation ceremony) his special covenant relationship to the king, and through the king, to all of Israel.

That is why this very same Old Testament passage can be applied to Jesus after his resurrection (see Acts 13:33). The logic that would use Psalm 2 to date the beginning of Christ's sonship at Bethlehem would thus also have to date it as beginning at his resurrection. Indeed, this sort of logic would also require that we date Christ's sonship at his baptism and/or transfiguration (Matt. 3:17 and parallels, and 2 Peter 1:17–18). However, if these later conclusions are unacceptable (as they certainly are for both trinitarian and Oneness believers), then so is the former.

On the other hand, when we understand the text in its proper context, no difficulty is created by any New Testament application of this verse. Christ began to be known (not was initially *constituted*) as the Son of God at his birth, and he was openly declared to be such at his baptism, transfiguration, and resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4; Acts 2:36). But just as Acts 13:33 does not rule out Jesus' being the Son of God before his resurrection, so Hebrews 1:5–6 does not rule out his being God's Son before his birth.

Jesus as a Begotten Son

The remaining texts that Oneness exegetes attempt to utilize to show that the title of "Son" refers only to the temporal humanity of Christ speak of Christ as "the only begotten" Son of God (KJV—John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) who was "born of a woman, born under law" (Gal. 4:4). The fact that the Son is "begotten," it is argued, rules out his being eternal.

Two considerations quickly dismiss these arguments, however. First, as is widely recognized by contemporary biblical scholarship, the Johannine Semitic phrase "only begotten" (*monogenes*) is not a biological term. Rather, the term specifies uniqueness. *Mono* means "one," and *genos* means "kind." Jesus is, therefore, not God's only born Son (in contrast to all of his nonbegotten sons?); rather, he is, as the NIV rightly translates it, God's "one and only" Son.

Concerning Paul's statement that God sent his Son "born of a woman," we need only point out that this clause most readily refers to the conditions of the Son's sending, not to the nature of the Son himself. The verse does not say that God "created" his Son by having him be born of a woman. It merely says that God sent his Son, born of a woman.

There is nothing in this that is at all in tension with the truth of Christ's real preexistence—something we have already seen Paul elsewhere affirm. The human birth of Christ is simply an aspect of "the very nature of a servant" he voluntarily assumed in "being made in human likeness" (Phil. 2:7). "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14; cf. 1 Tim. 3:16), but he did not begin to exist with this enfleshment.¹

¹ Boyd, G. A. (1992). [*Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*](#) (pp. 93–114). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Is Jesus His Own Father?

Oneness Cross-Referencing Arguments

Having dispelled the notion that there are any passages of Scripture that explicitly identify Jesus as the Father, let us turn to the scriptural parallels that Oneness exegetes construct in their attempt to find some sort of biblical basis for their doctrine.

Beware of Cross-Referencing Arguments!

We ought first to make a preliminary point regarding the Oneness adherents' hermeneutical methodology itself, when used as an attempt to establish their doctrine on this basis. While it is, as an exegetical rule, permissible and sometimes valuable to cross-reference one passage of Scripture with another to illustrate a point, it must also be said that the points made through this method of exegesis are only as strong as the explicit and general teachings of Scripture that back them up. **Cross-referencing, we might say, can illustrate a point that can be proven on other grounds, but it cannot itself provide the sole grounds for proving the point being illustrated.**

Used alone, in other words, the "paralleling" method of proof-texting, which is so popular among Oneness exegetes, has next to no value. It constitutes fundamentally bad exegesis. Among other faults, this method can really be used to prove almost anything from Scripture, as we shall see (and for this reason is a method frequently used by cults).

As examples, consider two arguments. First, Paul expresses the divinity of Christ in one passage by saying that the fullness of God's being (*theotetos*) dwells in Christ (Col. 2:9). But in another passage Paul also prays in even stronger terms that all believers would be "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19 κτν). Hence, some New Age exponents argue, Paul regards each believer as being (at least potentially) God incarnate, equal to Jesus Christ.

If these were the only two verses in the Bible, or at least the only two verses on the subject of the nature of Christ and the believer, this argument might look half impressive. But, of course, there exists a great abundance of scriptural teaching that demonstrates that "the fullness of God" in Christ is fundamentally and qualitatively different from "the fullness of God" in the believer. Christ was God manifested in the flesh. We are not and never shall be.

Note that this point holds true on the basis of the general testimony of Scripture, whether or not we can actually spell out what the difference between "the fullness of God" in each of these two verses is. One simply cannot legitimately overturn well-grounded scriptural teachings because two verses, when patched together, seem to imply something different.

This **patchwork exegesis** becomes even more precarious when we are drawing parallels between different authors, for different authors often use words in very different and apparently contradictory ways, without their actual meanings being contradictory. Consider, as our second illustration, this classic problem: Paul argues, as explicitly as can be, that believers are "justified by faith apart from works," and he uses Abraham to illustrate this point (Rom. 4:1–16).

James, however, is equally as explicit in arguing that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone,” and he, too, refers to Abraham to illustrate his point (James 2:21–23).

If we assume, with our Lord, that Scripture cannot contradict itself (cf., for example, John 10:35) and if we also assume that we can, without further ado, cross-reference otherwise unrelated passages to produce “biblical” teaching, we have a real problem—for the “biblical” teaching here appears to be contradictory! The problem lies with the method of exegesis.

Hence, even when it looks like two otherwise unrelated passages are talking about the same things and doing so with exactly the same language and even using the same illustrations, one must be extremely cautious in basing anything on “paralleling” such passages together. In no case can the lesson derived from such “cross-referencing” be different from the teaching of either verse taken individually. Moreover, never can such a method be used to prove a doctrine that is not elsewhere explicitly taught in Scripture. And, most emphatically, never can such a method be used to overturn a teaching that is explicitly taught elsewhere in Scripture.

The Oneness attempt to prove that Jesus is the Father by utilizing this patchwork exegesis flagrantly violates all three of these rules.

Jesus and the Works of the Father

Oneness cross-reference arguments in support of the belief that Jesus is the Father basically reason in this fashion: Text “1” here says the Father does this divine work “D”; text “2” over there says that Jesus does the same divine work “D”; therefore, Jesus must be the Father.

For example, it is the general teaching of Scripture that God, or sometimes explicitly God the Father, raised Jesus, the Son of God, from the dead (Rom. 6:4; Acts 2:24; Gal. 1:1). But in John 2:19 Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” Verse 21 explains that he was speaking about his body. Does this mean that Jesus is the Father, as Oneness exegetes maintain? A number of considerations count decisively against such a suggestion.

First, since Scripture everywhere explicitly teaches that Jesus is the Son of God, distinct from God the Father, and since it nowhere reverses this teaching by explicitly teaching that Jesus is also his own Father, the very attempt to establish such a notion on a cross-referencing argument such as this must be judged as misguided. Whatever John 2:19 means, therefore, one cannot legitimately use an argument such as this to make it mean what Oneness believers want it to mean.

Second, it is perfectly clear that it is not the intent of John 2:19 to teach that Jesus is the Father, nor is this the intent of those passages that say that the Father raised Jesus from the dead. That is, nowhere in Scripture is the fact that Jesus raises himself from the dead used to prove that Jesus is the Father. Hence, it constitutes fundamentally bad exegesis to derive such a teaching by splicing together such passages.

Third, this interpretation of John 2:19 makes Jesus out to be someone with a multiple-personality disorder. It requires that we view Jesus as switching back and forth between his supposed identities of Father and Son—and doing so between sentences. In 2:19 Jesus is supposedly speaking “as the Father.” Yet in his previous sentence (2:16) he clearly spoke “as Son,” for he referred to his Father as distinct from himself.

Nothing in the text itself, of course, gives any indication of such a psychological alteration. Nor is there any reason to suspect that Jesus' audience had any clue of such theological subtleties. Finally, to suppose that Jesus could and did switch between identities in this manner has the consequence, as we have seen, of undermining the reality of the Incarnation itself. It thereby transforms the revelation of God into an illusory charade.

How, then, are we to explain that Jesus in this verse attributes to himself an activity elsewhere attributed to the Father? There really is no difficulty here. It is perfectly consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that **all three persons of the triune God are involved in every work of God in the world**. All acts of God proceed *from* the transcendent Father, *through* his Son or Word or Image, *in the power of* his immanent Holy Spirit. And this is true both during the Incarnation and at all other times, since the way God is and acts while Christ is incarnate reveals the way God is and acts at all times. Hence, the creation itself, for example, also arises from God the Father (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9), proceeds through the Son (John 1:1–3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:2–10), and was accomplished by the power of God's Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30). As such, the act can, in different senses, be attributed to any of the three.

Thus, without attempting to psychologize what it was like for the divine Word to experience a human death—a fruitless question if ever there was one—we may confidently say that the miracle of the resurrection involved something like the same divine operation as all the other miracles surrounding Christ's life. While this and all miracles were ultimately performed through the Son incarnated as the man Jesus, it is also true that the miracle of the resurrection came from the mind and plan of the transcendent Father and was accomplished in the power of the immanent Holy Spirit. Therefore, one can with Scripture say that either the Father, or the Spirit, or even the Son himself, raised Jesus from the dead without thereby collapsing the three into some secret identity.

This response to the Oneness argument for the "Fatherhood of Jesus" on the basis of John 2:19 can be applied to the host of other patchwork arguments the Oneness groups use to buttress their position. We can therefore consider these arguments much more briefly.

We saw that Oneness writers argue that since Jesus said he answered prayer (John 14:14), while the Father is said to answer prayer (John 15:16), Jesus must be the Father. Even a cursory reading of John 14:13–14, however, reveals the absurdity of this argument. Throughout the immediate context where Jesus supposedly identifies himself as Father, Jesus clearly distinguishes the Father as someone really distinct from himself (e.g., John 14:13, 20, 21, 23). We are again asked by Oneness exegetes to believe that in the midst of all this, for one verse and out of nowhere, Jesus supposedly reversed everything and spoke "from the Father's perspective" by saying, in effect, "This Father I'm always talking about and who I have said will answer your prayer—well, I am really he." And then suddenly in the next breath he is talking from the perspective of the Son again (without telling anyone of his transition) and "asking the Father" (who he himself supposedly is!) to "send the Spirit" (who he also is!) (v. 16)! Rather strained exegesis, is it not? A much more biblical approach to the question of who answers prayer is simply to point out that both the Father and the Son, in distinct capacities, answer prayer.

What was true of the incarnate Son on earth is true of the incarnate Son in heaven; namely, the Father performs all activity through and in him (John 14:10). Just as Jesus could say both that “I work” and “my Father works” (John 5:17–19), so Scripture can say both that “Jesus answers prayer” and “the Father answers prayer.” No contradiction whatsoever is created by this.

We find the same straining exegesis accompanying the Oneness argument that because Jesus says at one point that the Father will send the Spirit (John 14:16), he must be speaking as the Father when he attributes this activity to himself (15:26). Oneness converts delight in baffling trinitarian opponents with such tricky maneuvers as this! But [are often] stumped once one of these “opponents” simply read John 15:26 in its entirety and point out that the verse says that Jesus will indeed send the Spirit, but it adds that he will do this “*from the Father*” and innocently inquire, if Jesus is in this verse speaking *as* the Father, which the Oneness interpretation requires, why does it yet say that he will send the Spirit *from* the Father?

As awkward as the Oneness adherents’ exegesis is, however, they really are forced into it by their theology. Once the Oneness position assumes that the Holy Spirit can only proceed from one, then if it in fact genuinely appears that two are sending the Spirit, these two must “really” be one. (Indeed, even the distinctness of the Spirit himself is only an “appearance,” according to Oneness teaching). But from whence do they get this unique revelation? Certainly not from Scripture, which, as we have seen, frequently ascribes the same activity, in different senses, to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Hence, there is no reason not to take Scripture at face value when it says both that the Father will send the Spirit and that the Son will send the Spirit “from the Father”—or even when it speaks of the Holy Spirit as acting as a personally distinct agent (e.g., John 16:7–13; Acts 8:29; 15:28; 16:7, 9). All of this fits perfectly into a trinitarian framework, whereas it does not fit at all into a Oneness framework.

Exactly the same answer can be given to two other patchwork arguments that Oneness groups customarily use to prove Jesus’ identity as the Father. Jesus in one spot says the Father draws people unto him (John 6:44), while elsewhere he says he himself draws people unto himself (John 12:32). Hence, they argue, Jesus is the Father. But it certainly is not the intention of either passage to teach that Jesus is the Father, and this is itself enough to dismiss the argument. **One simply cannot legitimately splice together texts and get them to mean something neither intends to mean independently.**

In keeping with what has already been said, the act of drawing sinners to Jesus Christ is an act that involves all three of the personal ways God is God, and there is nothing terribly contradictory about this. Jesus is in 12:32 referring to himself when he is “lifted up” at his crucifixion. What he is saying is that it is through this loving deed that people will be drawn to him. The love of God manifested on the cross has throughout all time functioned as a sort of magnet to lure individuals lovingly into a relationship with the Father.

All of this is summed up in the beautiful trinitarian passage of Ephesians 2:18, where Paul writes that “through him [Christ] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.” The trinitarian process by which the Father is revealed to us in the Son by the power of the Spirit is, we see, reversed in the process of salvation as we go to the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Spirit. Hence there is no reason to suspect that Jesus is making an esoteric reference to himself as Father when he says that he will draw all people unto himself.

A very similar response may be given to the Oneness argument that Jesus is the Father who shall raise believers from the dead. How clever I once thought it was to point out to trinitarians that both Jesus and the Father (and the Spirit) are, at different times, said to raise believers from the dead (John 6:40; cf. Rom. 4:17; 8:9–11). I sincerely believed that this clearly proved that Jesus was the Father (and the Spirit). I now see how completely misguided this argument is. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in the resurrection act, in just the senses outlined above. There is nothing incoherent about this suggestion, and one has only to take all Scripture at face value (not twist it in unnatural directions) to accept it.

It is informative to observe how completely selective the Oneness reading of the New Testament has to be in order to argue on this basis. In John 6:40, where Jesus says he shall raise the dead (and thus is speaking “as the Father”), he also says, *in the very same sentence*, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.” Hence, we must, on the Oneness interpretation, believe that Jesus switched from speaking as a human Son to speaking as the divine Father, all in one sentence.

So, too, we should observe four verses later that Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”—clearly manifesting the “human” (Son) voice—but he immediately adds, “and I will raise him up at the last day”—clearly manifesting the “divine” (Father) voice. This multiple-personality Jesus again (we are to believe) switches voices in the middle of a sentence. And, of course, the audience (we are to believe) picked up on all of these smooth mid-sentence transitions. And well they should, for salvation itself depends on this!

We can conclude, therefore, that the cross-referencing arguments furnish no proof for the Oneness position that Jesus is the Father. They do support in a powerful way the conclusion that Jesus is *God*, since they show that Jesus does what only God can do (raise the dead, answer prayer, and the like). But this is exactly what the doctrine of the Trinity has always maintained. Only the trinitarian understanding of God can affirm both that Jesus is God and that he is personally distinct from the Father. And both of these affirmations are demanded by the Scripture texts quoted by Oneness Pentecostals mistakenly in support of the notion that Jesus is the Father.²

² Boyd, G. A. (1992). [*Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*](#) (pp. 67–92). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

TERTULLIAN FOUGHT AGAINST DOCTRINE AMPLIFICATION & SIMPLIFICATION!

An examination of the teachings of the earliest post-apostolic Fathers, therefore, should provide for us very relevant information as to whether or not the Oneness Pentecostals are correct in claiming that the original apostolic teaching was that Jesus is himself the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For, if the apostles did teach this, it is virtually inconceivable that Christian leaders in the two following generations would have, or could have, intentionally or unintentionally failed to teach this. Yet that is exactly what one is required to believe if one is to accept the Oneness adherents' claim that they possess the "original" New Testament teaching on the Godhead. For, I shall show, it is indisputable that none of the earliest Fathers were at all close to holding the Oneness doctrine.

Indeed, what is perhaps even more damaging to the Oneness view is that there is not even a trace of anyone's arguing for or against modalism until the late second or early third century. Hence, to accept the Oneness claim, one must accept that not only was this doctrine lost (or overthrown) within one or two generations after the apostolic church, but that this occurred *without anyone's noticing it or raising one objecting voice against it!* If this conclusion is unacceptable—and it certainly is—this provides yet one more proof that the Oneness view of God is in error.

The Early Church on Genesis 1:26

The Early Church on the Preexistence of Christ

This trinitarian exegesis of Genesis 1:26 is not at all surprising, since all the evidence indicates that the notion of Christ's distinct preexistence was a widespread notion in the early church from the start. No one disputes the fact that the concept is to be everywhere found expounded upon in Justin the second-century apologist, Theophilus, and Athenagoras.

Again, the question that cries out for an explanation by the Oneness exponents is how these ordinary Christians and all these ordinary Christian churches, which immediately succeeded the apostolic community, could so easily and non-polemically advocate this very trinitarian concept of Christ and think they were simply "handing down" the truth they received from the apostles—if in fact the apostles had ever held to the Oneness view of the Godhead.

How did the “trinitarian heresy” take over so quickly, so thoroughly, and so quietly as to go entirely unnoticed by the generations of Christians immediately following the apostles?

One might simply note, by way of contrast, the tremendous uproar that the “Oneness” or modalist doctrine caused when *it* was (for the first time) advocated around the beginning of the third century, in the face of the church’s traditional trinitarianism. We find a significant amount of vigorous writing against it, as we would expect to find against any tampering with “the rule of faith.” The debate this caused in the third and fourth centuries is the well-known “modalistic monarchian” or “Sabellian” controversy.

The obvious question, however, is this: Why didn’t the supposedly novel and heretical trinitarian doctrine cause a similar uproar in the second century when it was (supposedly) proposed against the “original” Oneness doctrine? Or, to state it in slightly different terms, if the Oneness doctrine was in fact the original apostolic doctrine, why didn’t it cause so much as a whimper “fading away” (in one generation!) while it caused such an incredible uproar “coming back”?

There is, I submit, simply no good answer unless we assume, as all recognized church historians do, that the Oneness doctrine in fact never “faded away” at all. It did not exist as a significant movement until the late second century!

Amazingly, though, Oneness writers claim that Oneness was the *majority* viewpoint in the second-century church. So, David Bernard writes, “Oneness was the only significant belief in the early second century with regard to the Godhead. Even when forms of binitarianism and trinitarianism began to develop they did not gain dominance until the latter part of the third century” (Bernard, *Oneness*, 238, 47, 70; see also Weisser, *Heresy*, 16–21; Chalfant, chs. 1–4).

The only evidence that can be cited in favor of this position is a passage found in Tertullian’s writing *Against Praxeas* (ch. 3) in which he remarks, “All the **simple people** ... who are always the majority of the faithful ... shy at the economy....” By “economy” here Tertullian is referring to the trinitarian distinctions in “persons” amidst the unity of God.

Several items need to be kept in mind concerning this passage, however. It is a well-known fact that Tertullian’s rhetoric is frequently hyperbolic and ironic. One must then be cautious in taking him as always providing us with accurate history. Moreover, to the extent that his statement does reflect the popularity of Praxeas’s teaching, it can only be taken as referring to his province, Rome. We do know from Hippolytus and others that modalism did flourish for about a generation in Rome.

Finally, Tertullian explicitly states that “Praxeas ... was *the first* to import to Rome out of Asia this kind of wrong headedness” (ch. 1, my emphasis), and he defends the faith in the distinctness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as part of the “Rule [which] ... has come down from the beginning of the Gospel, even before all former heretics, not to speak of Praxeas of yesterday.” This is important, for it is Tertullian’s assumption that “whatever is earliest is true and whatever is later is counterfeit” (ch. 2). Praxeas is thus an innovator and does not represent what the majority have traditionally believed.

Whence the “Apostasy”?

Were it necessary, we could easily carry our analysis of the trinitarian foundation of the early church’s faith through the latter part of the second century and into the third and fourth centuries. But we would only find an increasing sophistication in articulating the sort of trinitarianism we have already found.

Hence one finds in such figures as Origen, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus an unqualified trinitarianism that structured everything about their faith. And each of these figures understood himself to be simply passing on the faith that had been handed down by the apostles from the beginning. When anything “new” was proposed—such as the modalistic teachings of Praxeas or the teachings of the Gnostics—they were the first to stand up behind the church tradition.

We can therefore close this brief investigation by reiterating the question that has throughout our exposition been hounding us: If the apostolic community was originally Oneness, as the Oneness historians must maintain, where on earth did this thoroughgoing second-century trinitarianism come from? And how could this trinitarian language and the trinitarian nature of the Christian faith have taken such a foundational and permanent root in the church so quickly and so decisively? Finally, even if such an overhaul of apostolic doctrine were possible, how could it occur without leaving one shred of evidence of anyone’s objecting or even questioning it?

The only conclusion that is possible, I submit, is that the original apostolic doctrine of God was not at all the same as what Oneness groups now claim it to be.³

³ Boyd, G. A. (1992). [*Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*](#) (pp. 147–162). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Seeing things through the lens of narrative can lend our lives meaning and texture. And heuristics are necessary for navigating the world; we can't reinvent the wheel every time we examine something or make a decision.

It's simply important not to misuse narratives, to apply them where they don't fit the facts and don't accurately interpret what's going on, and thus lead us down the wrong path.

Narratives are emotionally and cognitively satisfying, but the truth is usually in-between the extremes that make for good stories.

What is causing what, and how things are connected, is usually more complex than we wish to admit & sometimes outright random.

- Beware Overly Simplistic Narrative

12 Questions for “Jesus Only” or “Oneness” Teachers

- ✚ **How could Jesus be the Father of Himself (Matthew 16:17)?**
- ✚ **If Jesus is alone, why did He say He was not alone (John 8:16)?**
- ✚ **If Jesus is alone, why did He use the plural pronouns “we” and “our” (John 14:23)?**
- ✚ **If Jesus is alone, why did John say that those who abide in the teaching of Christ have “both” the Father and the Son (2nd John 9)?**
- ✚ **How could Jesus stand at His own right hand (Acts 7:55)?**
- ✚ **Jesus said that He always pleased the Father (John 8:29), Paul said that Jesus never pleased Himself (Romans 15:3). How could that be so if Jesus is the Father?**
- ✚ **How could Jesus come (or be sent) from Himself (John 8:42)?**
- ✚ **If Jesus is alone, is He going to deliver the kingdom up to Himself (1st Corinthians 15:24)?**
- ✚ **How could Jesus be greater than Himself (John 14:28)?**
- ✚ **How could Jesus offer Himself to Himself (Hebrews 9:14)?**
- ✚ **How could the Father and Jesus be the same person when the disciples saw Jesus but no man has seen the Father (John 1:18)?**
- ✚ **If Jesus and the Holy Spirit are only one person, why is the sin against the Holy Spirit more grievous than the sin against the Son (Matthew 12:32)?**

