

Understanding the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

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Introduction

This study on the Godhead seeks to understand the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as set forth in the Scripture. This is an advanced study. Some of the statements made, or explanations given might seem startling or non-traditional at first, but when the argument is read in its totality, all such reactions should be pacified. I have attempted to relate all of the relevant Biblical information concerning the subject at hand, and find a working theology to account for all of the data. I am persuaded that approaching the Scripture with an attitude of humility and openness, realizing that our present understanding may be in error or incomplete, is more important and more noble than merely trying to protect any particular viewpoint. If through this process one finds that their present understanding is the most adequate understanding, they will be all the better; if this process yields a better understanding or a different understanding, one will also be bettered. Either way, one will be bettered by critically analyzing their own views.

Milton Hall said, "Your ability to learn depends partly on your ability to relinquish what you've held." Although it is not possible to completely divorce one's prior understanding from influencing the reading of Scripture, the author has attempted to approach the Scripture from a non-biased position, not adhering to any theological system. Sometimes, when we receive or adopt a certain system of theology, we have the tendency to become intellectually dishonest with ourselves, explaining away all that does not fit our model instead of using it to seriously challenge our present understanding and paradigm. Rather than the theologian having a theology, the theology ends up having him, creating a stumblingblock or barrier to discovering truth. I have attempted to distinguish my beliefs from the teaching of the Scripture, not contending for my own personal theology, so that in the end, my theology does not speak more of who I am than of God, and what His truth is. In order to accomplish the above goal, this paper follows a specific theological method known as "integrative theology", *which is intended for the exploration and presentation of truth, not for the defending of an already established theology*. In order to understand the flow of this paper, a preliminary overview of the method and layout will be helpful.

The first stage states the problem under consideration. The second stage identifies the various influential solutions to the problem that have arisen throughout church history. The third stage explores all relevant Biblical data addressing the problem, in its order of development. Instead of taking a systematic approach to the Scripture that would combine all information regarding the problem into one package, irregardless of the time it was written in, or the author who penned the information, a biblical theology approach is used, taking into consideration the time in history at which the information was revealed, and the author who penned such information.

There are two underlying assumptions behind this approach. The first is that revelation is progressive. As time progressed, the content of revelation also progressed, God revealing more information to us concerning certain topics. The second assumption is that each author commonly has his own emphasis or special contribution to the furtherance of this revelation, and therefore each authors' writings should be explored separately from the others to see what particular contribution(s) he gives to the rest of the Biblical revelation.

The presentation of the Scripture is not biased so as to avoid problematic passages to a certain theological viewpoint. All relevant passages are referenced, but not necessarily exegeted. The purpose of this section is to do a Scriptural evaluation, constantly looking to see where the Scripture supports the various historical hypotheses, and where it contradicts the same. This section is not apologetic, defending any particular view and condemning any other, but is a simple exploration of the Scripture. There is no authorial statement of belief in this section.

The fourth stage flows from the third—a systematic formulation of the Biblical presentation. After examining the relevant data, a position is taken as to which proposed view is closest to the Biblical revelation, with the fewest number of difficulties. One of the views may be adopted in its totality, modified, or a number of views may be synthesized into one. It is also possible that none of the views are regarded as being faithful to the Biblical data, and a new model will be adopted. The fifth stage attempts to defend the position adopted above from the attacks leveled against it by those who hold to the other historical views. A critique is also performed on the other views to demonstrate their weaknesses, and to define why they must be rejected as inadequate. The sixth stage attempts to demonstrate the practical implications of the view adopted in the systematic formulation for life and ministry. Finally, although not considered a separate stage, there is a section of concluding thoughts, leaving the reader with something to reflect on along with the material presented in the paper.

The Problem

The center of any theistic religion is the god, or gods who are served. Understanding the nature and identity of the deity, or deities, is the heart of most religions. Judaism is no different. The basis of the Jewish faith is YHWH. Jews have always maintained that YHWH is one God, one being. With the advent of Jesus Christ and the subsequent inception of the Christian church, the Jewish understanding of monotheism was challenged. The teachings of Jesus and His apostles presented a complex problem to the young church, because they advocated that Jesus was God Himself, and yet maintained a distinction between Jesus and the Father. To add to the complication, the Holy Spirit was also spoken of as being distinct from the Father and the Son.

Any casual reading of Scripture presents the reader with an intricate dilemma. There are three points of seeming discrepancy that must be resolved. They are as follows: (1) The Bible clearly teaches strict monotheism. (2) The Bible also teaches that the Father is God, Jesus is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God. (3) Finally, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are commonly distinguished one from another. Christianity has been wrestling with the issue of reconciling these three Biblical teachings for two millennia. There have been several prominent views advocated throughout church-history, and many more obscure views that never gained a large adherence. Today, the church must continue to wrestle with the Biblical presentation of the identity of God, and attempt to make sense of the seeming paradox.

How are we to understand the ontological (the essence of being) and economic (function) nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Are there three Gods, or is there one God? What is the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit? Is there an ordering relationship of subordinationism among the three? These questions and many others will be addressed in this paper.

Alternative Interpretations in the Church

Several attempts have been made throughout church-history to reconcile the three difficult teachings of the Christian God into a working theology. We now turn our attention to these various theories and to the prominent historical figures who embraced them.

Dynamic Monarchianism

Also known as Adoptionistic Monarchianism, this view of the Godhead attempted to preserve monotheism by denying the absolute deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a mere man, but became endowed with the Holy Spirit in a special way at some point in His life (usually attributed to the time of His baptism). Jesus was the *logos* and was *homoousios* (of the same essence) with the Father, but in the same sense as a man's reason is *homoousios* to himself. The *logos* was not God in the strict sense however, for the same *logos* was present in all men in degree. The man Jesus merely experienced the operation of this power to such an extent that the *logos* penetrated the humanity of Christ progressively, resulting in eventual deification.¹ The Holy Spirit was an impersonal force like the *logos*, and was operative as the grace of God in the church.² The founder of this view was Theodotus of Byzantium. Its most famous proponent, however, was Paul of Samosota.

Modalistic Monarchianism

This form of monarchianism existed side-by-side Dynamic Monarchianism, but took a different route. This form of Monarchianism embraced a strict monotheism, and opposed the Subordination doctrine of the day, particularly the *logos* doctrine espoused by the Greek Apologists. It maintained that God is absolutely one in number, and not one in unity; He is one being, one person. The terms, "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" are three titles for the one God as He reveals Himself to mankind relationally and functionally. There is a three-fold mode of revelation of God, but not a tripersonality within His being.³ The Son is not eternal, but is the Father manifest in flesh for the purpose of redemption. The Holy Spirit is not another personality in the Godhead, nor is He an impersonal force, but is the Father as He works among men for the purpose of sanctification.

The major names attached with this teaching are Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius. The latter held to a form of Monarchianism which maintained that the divine monad projected Himself through expansion in successive modes.⁴ God was known as Father in creation, as Son in redemption, and as the Holy Spirit in bestowing grace on man. This form of Monarchianism became the prominent modalistic view, and thus the belief in Modalism became identified as Sabellianism.

Modalistic Monarchianism is sometimes referred to as Paterpassianism, meaning that the Father suffered, because the Modalists said that the Son was the Father, and since the Son suffered on the cross, the Father suffered likewise.

The historic position of Modalism is very similar to the doctrinal position of modern Oneness theology.

Arianism

Although this teaching had its origin in Lucian of Antioch, its most famous propagator and developer was Arius of Alexandria, from whence it bears its name. Arius taught that since God is immutable, His essence cannot be communicated to any other.⁵ This being so, the Son and Holy Spirit could not be considered to be God. Jesus was said to be the first creation of God. In turn, Jesus created everything else. The famous cry of the Arians concerning Jesus was, "There was once when he was not." He was divine, but not deity. The Spirit was also created, receiving "his being from the Father through the Son."⁶ Only the Father was eternal and immutable. The Son and Spirit were not consubstantial, coeternal, or coequal with the Father.

Trinitarianism

The Trinitarian doctrine states that there are three persons within one God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. According to this view monotheism is maintained by confessing God's one essence (*ousia*), but it is also said that this essence consists of three distinct persons (*hypostasis*), or subsistencies. "Trinity" simply means "triunity," expressing the nature of the three-in-one God. The Trinity is not viewed as three separate gods, but as one God with a three-fold personality.⁷ Each subsistence, or personality (person) is coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial with the other two. Each is fully God in His own right, yet God could not exist without the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in unity. God's one essence is ontologically three-fold. As Calvin Beisner has said, "...there is one God who is a being composed of three individuals, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all of who are to be worshipped as the same God, and who share in the same substance or essence."⁸ The Trinity is an inseparable, perfect union, in which each member shares in the work of the other, but there are some unique characteristics that belong to each member personally. The distinguishing characteristic of the Father is that He is unbegotten, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit is proceeding from the Father. Functionally, there is subordination in the Trinity, but only as God works among mankind for the purpose of redemption. The Father functions as the head. The Son is subject to the Father, and the Spirit is subject to the Son. Ontologically, however, the Trinity is coequal, with no one member of the Trinity being greater or less than the other two. Ultimately this triunity of God is said to be a mystery not fully comprehensible to man.

Tritheism

Tritheism understands the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be three separate Gods, not merely three distinct personalities within one God. There is not one essence in God's being, but there are three essences, unified in some manner. Each Person in the Trinity is similar to the other two, but are as radically separate as three individual men are separate one from another.

Biblical Teaching

In order to determine which of the above views is closest to the Biblical presentation, we will examine the Biblical data in its progressive revelation. Due to the plethora of Scriptures pertaining to the topic at hand, only the most relevant passages will be cited.

Pentateuch

The beginning of the Bible begins with God creating the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1). It is said that God's Spirit moved on the face of the waters. This is the first mention of the Spirit of God. Nothing much is said regarding the nature of God or the Spirit in this passage. The Book of Numbers speaks of God putting His Spirit on people so that they might prophesy the word of the Lord (11:29). The Spirit is spoken of as belonging to YHWH. The heart of the Jewish faith is the *Shema*, "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). YHWH was declared to be one, as opposed to the polytheism of the surrounding nations. The word translated "one" has given rise to serious debate. The Hebrew word is *echad*, appearing 977 times in the OT. The word can signify a unity, rather than an absolute numerical one. Trinitarians see this as an indication that God is not absolutely one in person, but only one in unity. There is only one essence, but the unity allowed by *echad* allows for three persons in unity. Of the 977 times this word appears, however, only a handful have the meaning of unity. One such example is when God said that man and woman would be *one* flesh (Genesis 2:24). It is

obvious that *one* cannot be referring to one physical body, but rather a unity between the two. Another example is found in Genesis 11:6, where it is said that the people (plural) are *echad*. Again, unity is being implied.

It is definitely true that *echad* can refer to one in unity, but the overwhelming majority of the time it is used to refer to something singular in number, not in unity. The mere fact that this is the majority use does not demand that *echad* mean singular in number here in Deuteronomy any more than the fact that it can mean unity would demand that it must mean unity. If it does refer to a unity of persons, it could easily imply a plurality of Gods in unity just like a committee. God stressed His oneness to Israel, however, to guard against the polytheism of the surrounding nations. *Echad*, being interpreted as a unity would lend itself to a polytheistic conception of God, which would defeat God's entire emphasis for His singularity.

Two things must be concluded. First, when *echad* is being used to mean unity of one, the context is clear that this meaning is demanded. Second, it must be confessed that understanding the nature of God from this one word alone is not conclusive (no pun intended). There is another Hebrew word for "one," namely *yachid*. This word is a strict numerical one. Had YHWH wanted to conclusively demonstrate that He is one in number, it is suggested that this word could have been used. Surely God could have used this word, but it should be noted that this word is used in a stricter sense for an only child, or for expressing the feelings of solitude, loneliness, and isolation (Genesis 22:16; Judges 11:34; Psalm 25:16; 68:7; Jeremiah 6:26).

The first commandment of the Ten Commandments plainly prohibited the worship of any other gods (Exodus 19:3; Deuteronomy 5:7). YHWH alone was to be worshipped as God. Again, monotheism was being emphasized.

The only other reference to God's Spirit in the Pentateuch is found in Genesis 6:3 where YHWH said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man...." Here again the Spirit is identified as belonging to YHWH.

Historical Books

There is much more mention of the Spirit in the historical books than there is in the Pentateuch. The Spirit continues to be mentioned as belonging to God (Judges 11:29; I Samuel 19:20, 23; I Kings 22:24). He is also directly connected to God. David said that the Spirit of YHWH spoke by him, and then goes on to say what *elohim* said (II Samuel 23:2-3). The Spirit is clearly said to be God.

The Historical books make often speak of the Spirit coming on men to prophesy the word of YHWH, anointing them for certain temporal utterances, just as the Spirit was given to men in the wilderness wandering for the building of the Tabernacle (Exodus 28:3; 31:3; Judges 14:6; I Samuel 10:6; II Chronicles 15:1).

The phrase, "the angel of the LORD" appears twenty-five times in the historical books, second in number only to the Pentateuch. Sometimes the angel seems to be YHWH Himself (Judges 6:22), while at other times he appears to only be an angel (Judges 13:3). The OT data concerning this one identified as the "Angel of YHWH" is unclear, and not much can be gleaned from it. It may simply be an angel, or a theophany of YHWH.

Poetry and Wisdom

As in the historical books, the poetry and wisdom literature speaks much more of the Spirit than does the Pentateuch. Job said that the Spirit of YHWH had made him, and the breath of the Almighty had given him life (33:4). This is an example of a Hebrew poetic form known as *parallelism*. Job was equating the Spirit of God and the breath of God. What is important is that the Spirit is seen as the creator. In Genesis 2:7 God is said to have breathed into man His breath, and man became a living soul. Job identified *elohim* as the Spirit of God.

The term "Spirit of God" appears many times in the OT, but the first appearance of "Holy Spirit" is in Psalm 51:11 when David pleaded with God to not take away His Holy Spirit from him, which was tantamount to being cast out of God's presence. This is one out of three occurrences of *qadosh ruach* in all of the OT. This Holy Spirit pertained to God, and was parallel to *elohim's* presence.

God is called the "Holy One of Israel" several times in the poetic books (Psalm 71:22; 78:41; 89:18). The context of these verses calls *elohim* this Holy One. This title for God arises out of the stress on God's oneness found in the Pentateuch.

The Prophets

Of all the prophets, Isaiah spoke the most concerning the person of God. Isaiah is famous for defending God's monotheism against the polytheistic idolatry of his day. YHWH said through Isaiah, "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (42:9). Again He said, "...before me there was no God formed, neither will there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no savior" (43:10c-11). Yet still YHWH said, "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. ... Is there a God beside me? Yes, there is no God; I know not any" (44:6b, 8c). YHWH made all things, having stretched forth the heaven alone, and spreading the earth abroad by Himself (44:24). God was making His point clear. He was the only true God, and He was alone. There was none else besides Him. He was unique in His singularity, for He said, "...I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me..." (46:9b). The language could not have been stronger. YHWH is unique, one, and alone in all that He does.

It was previously mentioned that the phrase "Holy Spirit" only occurs three times in the OT. One occurrence was in Psalm 51:11. The other two are found in Isaiah 63:10-11. Here it is said that the children of Israel, during the wilderness wandering, "vexed his [YHWH's] holy Spirit" through their rebellion against Him. It is then said that the people questioned, "Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?" This holy Spirit is none other than YHWH who brought the children of Israel out of bondage.

Isaiah did seem to distinguish YHWH from His Spirit when he said, "and now the Lord YHWH, and his Spirit, has sent me" (Isaiah 48:16). This seems to say that YHWH is different than His Spirit, and that the two sent Isaiah to the children of Jacob. It is important to notice, however, that the Hebrew verb for "sent" is singular. If YHWH was to be distinguished in person from His Spirit, the verb would need to be in the plural.

A famous prophecy of the coming Messiah is very revealing. It was said, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). The Son would be God. The author also identifies the Son as the everlasting Father, which is very telling as it pertains to the deity of the Messiah. Jesus was the Father of all creation. He was the source of origin from which all else has come. This view of Jesus is not conducive to Arianism who declare Jesus to be a creation of the Father, for Isaiah said the Son would be the everlasting Father Himself.

YHWH predicted a time, through the prophet Joel, when He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-29). This Spirit is identified as the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:4, when this Scripture was first fulfilled. The Spirit of the OT is the Holy Spirit of the NT, which is consistently identified as the Spirit of God in the OT.

Synoptic Gospels

Matthew began his gospel by speaking of the birth of Christ. To this he said that the child whom Mary carried in her womb was conceived by the Holy Ghost (1:20). This was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a child named Emmanuel, meaning "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). This child was Jesus, who is God among men.

Peter's bold declaration to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), demonstrates Peter's belief in the deity of Jesus. Jesus told Peter that flesh and blood had not revealed this truth to him, but the Father which was in heaven (v. 17). If "Son of God" here only refers to Jesus' humanity, no revelation from the Father would have been necessary. Anybody could have seen that Jesus was a human being by just looking at Him. Even the Jews understood that He was a genuine human being. It is what the Jews could not believe, that Peter understood by the revelation of God; Jesus was divine, being both God and man simultaneously.

Although Jesus never overtly proclaimed His deity, He did make certain statements and exercise certain prerogatives that clearly implied His deity. If Jesus was not God, indeed these statements and allusions He made concerning Himself would have been blasphemous. For example, Jesus forgave sins. He said to the paralytic who was lowered through the roof, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:15). The scribes present in the room thought Jesus' statement was blasphemous, saying "Who can forgive sin but God alone?" (v. 7). If Jesus truly did not have the power to forgive, and had not truly forgiven this man's sins (which only God can do), then He had the perfect opportunity to clear up the matter when the Jews inquired of His words. Instead of pointing out the scribes' misunderstanding of His words, Jesus said, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Your sins are forgiven you; or to say, Arise, and take up your bed, and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins, (he says to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto you, Arise, and take up your bed, and go your way into your house" (vs. 9-11).

Jesus claimed authority in respect to the Law of God. One such example is the law of the Sabbath. God established the Sabbath for Israel as one of the 613 commandments of the Law of Moses that they had to obey. Because God had made the Law, He alone had the power to alter or repeal it. We see Jesus, however, claiming the authority to alter the Sabbath when His disciples were questioned by the Pharisees for picking grain heads on the Sabbath. Jesus' response was to remind them of the time when David ate of the shewbread when fleeing from Saul (vs. 25-26). The shewbread was strictly for the priests. For anyone else to eat it was a violation of the Law of Moses, but God never punished David. In conclusion Jesus said, "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (vs. 27-28).. Jesus clearly claimed the right to redefine the Sabbath, or disregard it altogether if He found necessary, a right that clearly belonged to God alone.

When John the Baptist made inquiry as to Jesus' identity, Jesus quoted Isaiah 35:5-6 which spoke about the eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf being opened, etc. He was implying that He was fulfilling this Scripture. When examining that passage in Isaiah, it is to be noticed that the time of the fulfillment would be when Israel's God would come to them with a vengeance (Isaiah 35:4). Jesus, again, was claiming to be the *elohim* of the OT.

John the Baptist was preparing the way of YHWH God in fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy when He came to the wilderness preparing the hearts of the people to receive Christ Jesus (Matthew 3:3). Jesus is YHWH.

The Holy Spirit is not only seen to be the one who conceived Jesus, but He is also seen descending on Jesus at His baptism (Mark 1:10), revealing revelation to Simeon (Luke 2:26), leading Jesus into the wilderness (Luke 4:1), and teaching believers what to say when the occasion calls for it (Luke 12:12). This demonstrates a distinction in function of the Holy Spirit.

In the Great Commission, Jesus said that all power was given to him in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18). This would make Jesus the Almighty. The fact that it says it was *given* to Him however, implies that there is one who gives, and one who receives. This draws attention to a distinction between the Father and the Son. Because Jesus had all power, He commanded His disciples to "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). This verse is believed to reveal the Trinity by Trinitarians, and the oneness of God by the Modalists. Both emphasize the singularity of *name*. To the Trinitarians this shows that Father, Son, and Spirit are a singular essence. To Oneness believers, the significance of the singular *name* is that the Father, Son, and Spirit are referring to different self-revelations of the same person.

Acts

The Book of Acts is unique in that it is the only book in the NT that gives us the content of the message preached by the early church to the lost world. What is very interesting is that the apostles did not stress the deity of Christ, but rather, they stressed the humanity of Christ. There are numerous Scriptures which speak of the Father and the Son as being distinct. Peter said that Jesus was a "man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you..." (Acts 2:22). This is definitely relational language being employed to describe the Father/Son relationship. It is said that God raised Jesus from the dead (2:32), and made Him Lord and Christ (2:36). This also shows a distinction between one who makes and one who is made.

One clear reference to Christ's deity is Peter's attributing to Him the title, the Holy One (3:14). This was a name for YHWH in the OT, as has been stated previously. This Holy One was denied by the people, condemned to death, but raised again by His Father and sent to Israel again (3:26). (See also 9:20; 10:36 for other references to Christ's deity)

After suffering a beating by the Sanhedrin, the unified prayer of the apostles was addressed to God, saying, "For of a truth against your holy child Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever your hand and your counsel determined before to be done. And now Lord...grant to your servants, that with all boldness they may speak your word, by stretching forth your hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of your holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:27-30). The prayer was addressed to *theos* (God), and they spoke to God *about* His Son as though He were other than God. Jesus is referred to in the third person, not the first. They were not praying to Jesus, but to God, about Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is shown to be God when Peter said that Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, and then turned around in the same manner and said that he lied to God (5:3-4). There is no mention of the Son. If, according to Trinitarianism, each member of the Trinity partook in

the activity of each other member's activity, it would seem that Jesus should also be mentioned. The very fact that the Holy Spirit and God are used interchangeably seems to indicate that the Holy Spirit is God Himself.

In Paul's final conversation with the Ephesian elders at Miletus he commanded them to guard the flock, and "to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). God is said to have had blood. We know that a spirit is not flesh, and therefore does not have blood, so this must be referring to the humanity of Jesus; yet it can be said that God, through Christ, shed His blood for the church. This is a strong case for the absolute deity of Jesus Christ.

Pauline Corpus

There is no doubt that Paul upheld the monotheism of the OT when he said that "God is one" (Galatians 3:20). Later he told the Corinthians, "But 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 through him" (I Corinthians 8:6). The one God that Paul worshipped was the Father. He also said that there is one Jesus Christ. Grammatically Jesus is not identified with God. The one God was identified with the Father.. Paul completed that thought by speaking further of the Father, and then said that there is one Jesus Christ. Here we see a distinction between the Father and Son. This cannot be a distinction of deity, however, lest we have two gods, or an Arian demigod. It is referring to God as Father who is transcendent as Spirit, and God as He is known to us in the man Christ Jesus.

Jesus "is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15; See also II Corinthians 4:4). What did Paul mean when He declared Jesus to be God's image? We know that a physical likeness is not in view here because God is a Spirit and therefore cannot have a physical body.⁹ The Greek word translated "image" is *eikon*. Its root is *eiko*, meaning likeness, resemblance, or representation. *Eikon* denotes both the representation and manifestation of a substance. Notice that Paul contrasted Jesus' image to that of the *invisible* God. The point Paul was trying to convey to his readers was that Jesus is the visible representation of God to man. That is why Jesus could say, "he that has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9; See also 12:45).

For it to be said that Jesus is like God is to say that He is God. God is unique. What likeness could Jesus have had with God other than that of His divine essence? It cannot be speaking of the likeness in which all human beings bear of God (Genesis 2:7), because this would not have distinguished Jesus' likeness with God from ours. The likeness, then, must be that of divine essence. Because the divine essence of God cannot be changed, Jesus' deity cannot be any different than that of the Father's, because His divine essence cannot be fragmented.

Paul could have used other Greek words if he only meant to declare that Jesus was similar to God as Arianism contends. If Paul believed Jesus to possess a likeness to God, but not His very essence and being, being some sort of a different substance from Him, he could have used *homoioima*. This word indicates a "likeness," but stresses "the resemblance to an archetype, though the resemblance may not be derived..."¹⁰ Or Paul could have use *eidos*, meaning "a shape, or form." This word, however, is only an appearance, "not necessarily based on reality."¹¹ Paul used *eikon* instead, to express that Jesus was the exact representation of the Father in His essence and being.

In another place, Paul said, "For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9) The New International Version translates this verse as, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."¹² "Dwells" is the translation from the Greek word *katoikeo*, meaning "to permanently settle down in a dwelling." "Fullness" is from the Greek word *pleroma* indicating that which "is filled up." It is the fullness of the Godhead that dwells in Jesus, but what is the Godhead? The word is translated from *theotes*, meaning "divine essence, or the very person of God." Considering the Greek behind this verse, then, Paul said that the fullness of the divine essence has permanently settled in Jesus' body.

This verse gives us some very important truths concerning Christ's deity in relation to His humanity. First of all, we know the fullness of deity in Jesus consisted of a completeness of divine attributes and characteristics, lacking nothing. Jesus did not merely possess some divine attributes, but rather He possessed every aspect of deity. This verse also demonstrates the permanence of the incarnation.¹³ Lastly, this verse declares that the deity resident in Jesus was resident *bodily*. This indicates a specific and defined form.¹⁴

In I Corinthians 11:3 Paul said the head of Christ is God. Christ is subjected to the Father. This is a clear indication that the Father and the Son are distinct. If Christ is to be equated with the Father, there could be no way of speaking of Christ as being subject to God. This would seem to back up the Arian claims that Christ is God-like, but not absolute deity. It must be noted that by distinguishing Christ from God, Paul is either denying any divinity to Christ, or is simply referring to Christ's subjected role to God the Father because of His humanity. The latter seems to fit the Biblical context.

In his first letter to Timothy Paul declared that "God was manifest in the flesh" (I Timothy 3:16). This statement was reminiscent of his earlier statement to the Corinthians that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself..." (II Corinthians 5:19). Jesus was no ordinary man, but was God Himself, in the form of a man for the purpose of redemption.

Paul again affirmed that there is one God, adding that there is also "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 2:5). Here again we see Jesus being separated from God, as though He were not divine. He is not identified with God, but is the mediator between God and men. This must be referring to Jesus' role as redeemer in His humanity. If not, then we have one person of the Godhead mediating for another person of the Godhead. If one member of the Godhead, the Father, needed a mediator between He and His creation, why would the Son also not need a mediator? God needs a mediator. If Jesus, as God, does not need a mediator, then He could not be God. This Scripture is not denying Jesus' deity as God, but is distinguishing Him from God in His role as our mediator.

Johanine Corpus

John said that "in the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God. The same was in the beginning with God. ... And the *logos* was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-2, 14). The fact that John says that the *logos* was *with* God implies a distinction between God and His *logos*. If the *logos* was to be exactly identified as the same as God, "with" could not be used. It implies that something is being compared. One cannot be *with* someone if they are that someone. You cannot be with yourself! At the same time, however, the *logos* is identified as being the very essence of God Himself.

In the Johanine Corpus we find some of Jesus' own statements as to the nature of the relationship between He and His Father. They truly reveal who Jesus is. Jesus made some statements that overtly declared His deity.

Jesus made a very bold statement when He told the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Jesus did not say "I was," because He was referring to the name by which YHWH revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). By this statement Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the YHWH of the OT, confirming His preexistence as God.

On another occasion Jesus told the Jews, "He that sees me sees him that sent me" (John 12:45). A parallel to this statement occurred during Jesus' discourse with His apostles as found in John 14:5-9. Jesus declared to Thomas, "If you had known me, you should have known my Father also: and from henceforth you know him and have seen him" (v. 7). Philip could not understand this statement, so he asked Jesus to show the Father to all the disciples, and then they would be satisfied. Jesus responded, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father; and how do you say then, Show us the Father?" (v. 9). According to Jesus' own testimony, to see Him was to see the Father (God). One cannot get a much clearer statement than this as to who Jesus claimed to be. He was the Father in visible form.

It is particularly interesting to note the response of those to whom Jesus spoke these profound statements. After Jesus told the Jews, "My Father has been working, and I work" (John 5:17), the Jews sought to kill Him. John gave us their reasoning when he said, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his father, making himself equal with God" (v. 18). The Jews understood that Jesus was laying a claim to be God Himself. The Greek word *isos* is translated here as "equal." It means to be "the same as" something. Jesus put Himself on the same plane, or grounds of deity as the Father.

From our perspective, Jesus' terminology of "Son" and "Father" seem to imply some sort of subordination to God. It gives us the feeling that He is less than God. The Jews, however, did not view this terminology in the same manner. They believed that everything produced after its own kind, having the same nature as that which bore it.¹⁵ Jesus calling God His "Father" is tantamount to saying He is God. This is clearly witnessed in the above passage.

When speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus said that He gives His sheep eternal life, and no man could pluck the sheep out of His hand (John 10:28). Then Jesus said that His Father gave them to Him, and no one was able to pluck them out of His Father's hand (v. 29). Jesus had just claimed that the same sheep were in the Father's hand, and in His own. Jesus, knowing the apparent contradiction of this statement, confirmed the Jews' suppositions of the import of His statement, and immediately claimed that He and His Father were one (John 10:30). Immediately the Jews took up stones to stone Him (v. 31). When Jesus asked them for what good work they desired to kill Him, they responded, "For a good work we stone you not; but for blasphemy; and because that you, being a man, make yourself God" (v. 33). They understood that by Jesus claiming to have the Father's sheep in His hand, He was claiming to be God. The Jews did not understand Jesus' reference to God as His "Father" to mean that Jesus was less than God, or some sort of a second-rate god. Rather they understood His claim to be that of Yahweh God Himself. Their reasoning was that Jesus, who was a man, had made Himself God (v. 33). This was blasphemy to the Jews and was deserving of the death penalty. They understood perfectly what Jesus was claiming. If Jesus was not declaring equality with the Father, it would have been the perfect opportunity to explain what He really meant. Instead He continued to back up His claim (vs. 34-38).

Now that we have heard Jesus' own testimony concerning His deity, let us turn our attention to what did the apostles thought of Him. After Jesus' resurrection Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The Greek word *kurios*, translated "Lord," is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *adonai*; and the Greek *theos* translated "God" is the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew *elohim*. For Thomas, being a monotheistic Jew, to call Jesus his Lord and God, knowing that the only Lord God was YHWH (Deuteronomy 6:4), would have been blasphemy if Thomas had not believed that Jesus was YHWH Himself in flesh.

Although John has some of the most powerful testimonies to the absolute deity of Jesus Christ, he also makes many distinctions between the Father, Son, and Spirit. His gospel abounds with statements and terminologies that seem to imply an inferiority of Jesus to God, or the Son to the Father. Even Jesus Himself said that His Father was greater than He Himself was (John 14:28). On another occasion Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do; for whatever he does, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all things that he himself does" (John 5:19-20; See also 3:32). He plainly said of His own ability, "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30).

The Gospel of John abounds with statements like these. According to Jesus, even what He taught He received from His Father. The very words were taught to Him before He ever taught them to others (7:16; 8:26, 28, 38, 40; 12:48-50; 17:8). Jesus was the *recipient*, not the *author* of divine revelation. He spoke of the Father as being *with* Him (8:29), as proceeding from and being sent by Him (8:42; 14:24; 16:27-28; 17:8, 18), as returning to Him (16:5, 7, 10), and as being sanctified by Him (10:36). The Father is even said to honor the Son (8:55).

The Spirit is spoken of as being distinct from the Father and the Son. Jesus said that He would pray to the Father to give the disciples another Comforter. This Comforter was identified as the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17, 26). The Holy Spirit would be sent by the Father to teach the disciples. Then Jesus said that He was that Spirit that would come to them by saying, "At that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). He could not have been referring to being in them physically, for that would be impossible. He could only be referring to Himself as the Spirit.

The Scriptures commonly refer to God and Jesus as though they are two separate individuals. Jesus continually spoke *of* His Father, and *to* His Father as though they were separate from one another. He told the Pharisees, speaking of His Father, "Of whom you say, that He is your God" (8:54). Jesus also said, "He that has my commandments, and keeps them, it is he that loves me: and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. ... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:21, 23).

Jesus' lengthy prayer to God for His disciples found in John chapter 17 is overflowing with this type of terminology. In verse three He said, "That they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Here Jesus called the Father "God," and the only God at that. Even though Jesus was God, He acknowledged the Father as superior to Himself and spoke to Him in a manner like any human being would.

Jesus spoke of Himself in the third person. This gives us an indication of the way in which the Hebrews used language. It does not make any sense to us to speak of ourselves by using our own name as though we are speaking of someone else. This peculiar usage of words might help us to understand the peculiarities of these, and other Biblical statements.

Jesus also prayed that those who believed in Him would be one, even as He and the Father were one (John 17:11). The word translated one is the Greek neuter *hen*, which occurs as the predicate nominative to *eimi*, meaning "to be." In the neuter when *hen* does not modify a noun, the meaning is *one thing*, not one person. Jesus was not saying that He was one in person with the Father, but one in unity. Even the context displays that this was His meaning. Jesus not only said that He and His Father were one, but also prayed that the church would be one in the same manner as He and the Father were (again implying a distinction). It is impossible for the church to be one in any other way than a unified one. We are one when we have the mind of Christ. Jesus said that He wanted us to be one even as He and the Father are one. This must be one in unity, and not one in person.

Let it be remembered, however, that Jesus is praying. God does not need to pray, but men do. Jesus was praying because He was a man, albeit God manifest in flesh. He was unified with the mind of the Father. Jesus plainly declared that He always did that which pleased His Father, and that He only did that which the Father was doing, and said what the Father told Him to say" (John 8:29; 5:19; 8:26). Even Jesus said that His will was in unity with the Father's (Luke 22:42; John 4:34; 5:30). The fact that Jesus said He was in unity with the Father does not belittle or differentiate Christ's deity from the Father's, but shows the genuineness of Jesus' humanity.

Did John record all of these statements to show that Jesus' deity was in some way inferior to the Father or separate from Him? It would not seem likely since John's gospel also contains some of the most powerful assertions of Jesus' deity and equality with God. Such statements include "I and my Father are one," "Before Abraham was, I am," and "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

The book of Revelation sheds some interesting light on the relationship of the Father to the Son. It is said that in the New Jerusalem "there will be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it; and his servants shall serve him" (Revelation 22:3). God and the Lamb, Jesus Christ, are both mentioned, but the singular pronoun *he* is used, denoting that one individual is in view. It further says that "they will see *his* face; and *his* name will be in their foreheads" (v. 4, italics mine). Jesus is identified as God Himself.

Other New Testament Writings

The author of Hebrews said that Jesus is the "express image of his [God's] person" (1:3). The English phrase translated "express image" is from the Greek word *charakter*. It is this word from which we get our English word "character." This is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament. It means "to impress upon, or stamp." It denotes an engraving from a tool, which impresses an image into that which is being engraved. This impression, then, is a characteristic of the instrument used to do produce it. What is produced corresponds precisely with the instrument. The Greek word translated "person" is *hypostasis*. Although rendered as "person," it is more properly understood as "essence of being, or the substance of a thing." The etymology of this word has to do with "the sediment or foundation under a building."¹⁶ It is that which underlies, makes up, or supports something. In this context, we are talking about what underlies, or makes up God, i.e. God's subsistence.

Jesus, therefore, is not just a representation of God, but is the very visible impression of God's invisible substance and essence. He is God's very nature expressed in humanity. To say it another way, He is the corresponding engraving of God's essence of being, in human form. Liddon summed it up best when he said this verse implies that Jesus "is both personally distinct from, and yet literally equal to, Him of whose essence He is the adequate imprint."¹⁷

What is important to notice here is that Jesus is the image of God's *hypostasis*. In context, the God who spoke to us by His Son is the Father of the Son (1:1-2, 5). The author is declaring Jesus to be the image of the God the Father's subsistence. There is no mention of the Son having His own *hypostasis*, or there being more than one *hypostasis*. Nowhere in the Bible is God said to be three *hypostases*. Jesus, rather, is the image of the invisible subsistence of God.

Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes Psalm 45:6-7 saying, "But to the Son he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even your God, has anointed you with oil of gladness above your fellows." Psalm forty-five was a prophetic psalm concerning the Messiah. Here the Son is referred to as God, and yet He is also said to have a God ("even your God"). This verse clearly refers to the Son in His dual nature as both man and God, viewing Him as God, and as one who has a God.

James did not speak much of God, but he did reaffirm the monotheism of the OT saying, "You believe there is one God. You do well: the devils also believe and tremble" (James 2:19).

Peter references the Father, Son, and Spirit, attributing election to the Father; sanctification to the Spirit; and the sacrifice for redemption to Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:2). He also said that it was the Spirit of Christ that testified to the prophets the things they wrote about (I Peter 1:11). In his second epistle Peter attributed this role to the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:21). The Spirit of Christ is equated with the Holy Spirit.

Peter also used this same terminology when He said "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy..." (I Peter 1:3). In the Greek language, the definite article appears with "God," but not with "Father." This means that "Father" and "God" are two terms referring to the same individual. The Father of Jesus is also the God of Jesus. If Jesus was God manifest in flesh, how could it be said that He has a God? This seems contradictory. It seems to imply that Jesus is not divine at all, or His deity is inferior to the Father's, and thus the Father is Jesus' God. (See also II Corinthians 11:31; Ephesians 1:3)

Jude spoke of being loved by God the Father, kept by Jesus Christ, and praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1, 20). All three references are made, and different roles are attributed to each.

Systematic Formulation

The plethora of Scriptures which pertain to the problem at hand is exhausting. The above survey does not do justice to all the evidence that could be brought out. Looking at what has been presented, however, what are we to make of it? What is the ontological nature of God? What is the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? We now turn our attention to tying up the loose ends to the extent that this is possible.

The Spirit

First, we will summarize the nature of the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and Son. The OT speaks of the "Spirit of God" quite frequently. This simply means that the Spirit belongs to God. God is Spirit (John 4:24), and God is holy (Joshua 24:19), so it is no surprise that the Spirit is referred to as belonging to YHWH in the OT, or as being *the Holy Spirit* in the NT. God's very nature is a holy spirit.

We have seen that the Spirit is distinguished from the Father and the Son (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; Romans 8:26). We have also seen that the Spirit is equated with Jesus (John 14:20). The Spirit is also equated with the Father. It is said that the Holy Spirit caused Jesus' conception (Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:35), thus making the Holy Spirit the Father of Jesus. The Father, however, is spoken of as being Jesus' Father too. Jesus did not have two fathers, but one. It seems that the Holy Spirit was YHWH, *who is spoken of after the conception as being Jesus' Father.*

In Romans 9:9, 11, Paul said, "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of the God dwells in you. Now if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. ... But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also give life to your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you." In verse fifteen we are said to be filled with the Spirit. If the Spirit of God is the Father as contrasted with the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of adoption, then we are said to be filled with the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. These names are used interchangeably. It cannot be that we are filled with three Spirits, for there is only one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4). It seems that the Holy Spirit is the Father, and is the Spirit of Christ (See also II Corinthians 3:17; compare Acts 5:3 with 5:4; Romans 8:26 with 8:34; I Corinthians 3:16 with 6:19). Calvin, referring to Romans 8:9-11, said, "...the Son is said to be of the Father only; the Spirit of both the Father and the Son. This is done in many passages, but none more clearly than in the eighth chapter of Romans, where the same Spirit is called indiscriminately the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of him who raised up Christ from the dead."¹⁸

To this, McGrath also adds:

It is important to realize that the New Testament tends to think of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ as much as of God. The Spirit is understood to stand in the closest of possible relationships to Christ, so that his presence among the people of Christ is equivalent to the presence of Christ himself, just as the presence of Christ is treated as being that of God himself. In other words, to encounter the Son is to encounter the Father and not some demigod or surrogate. To encounter the Spirit is really to encounter the Son and hence the Father.¹⁹

There is a reason why the Scripture speaks of God as the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit is "just God himself in the innermost essence of his being."²⁰ The references to God's Holy Spirit often speak of God in activity. The term serves to signify a certain aspect of God's self-revelation to man. As a result, the term "Holy Spirit" should not be overlooked, or substituted with "Father" or "Jesus." There is a reason why God is called the Holy Spirit. If terminology was not important, God would not have called himself by this name, and associated the Holy Spirit with certain activities such as sanctification.

We must still ask then why the Holy Spirit is frequently distinguished from the Father (or God) and Son. We can make as much distinction between God and His Spirit as we can between a man and his spirit. Paul seemed to make this point when he said concerning the deep things of God: "But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (I Corinthians 2:12-13). I can distinguish my spirit from my flesh, and speak of my spirit as distinct from me, but my spirit is not a distinct person within me. I am one person, a unified whole, being both body and spirit. God's Spirit is no more distinct from Him than my spirit is from me.

The Father and Son

Concerning the relationship of the Father and Son, the Scriptures seem to teach that the relationship is one of Spirit to flesh. I say "seem," because the Bible never defines it in this way, but the evidence best supports such a conclusion. God in His transcendence, the One who fathered His unique Son when He overshadowed Mary, relates to Jesus Christ as a Father, Who is God immanent in the world, being the prophesied Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

As has already been shown, the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:21; Mark 10:18; 12:29; John 5:44; 17:3; Romans 3:30; I Corinthians 8:4, 6; Galatians 3:20; Ephesians 4:6; I Timothy 1:17; 2:5; James 2:19; Jude 25). One fact that is commonly overlooked in our attempt to demonstrate that Jesus is God, is that God is not *identified* with Jesus, as being identically the same.²¹ Jesus said to the Father, "...that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Jesus prayed to the Father as being the only God, referring to God as someone other than He Himself. In I Corinthians 8:4-6 the Father is again identified as the only God, and Jesus Christ is distinguished from Him.

Other Scriptures which portray Jesus as being other than God include Luke 2:52, where it is said of Jesus that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." How does one grow in a favor with God if one is God? Scripture also speaks of Jesus as having a God (Ephesians 1:3; Hebrews 1:9; I Peter 1:3). How does God have a God? Even Jesus Himself said He had a God: "I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17b). Jesus cried out to God on the cross saying, "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Again, this seems to present a picture of Jesus as though He is someone other than God.

Still another example is Jesus' statement, "But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you a truth, which I heard from God..." (John 8:40). Again Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe in me also" (John 14:1). In both of these statements Jesus is not spoken of as being God. The disciples were told to believe in God *and* Jesus. If the Scripture was trying to portray Jesus as God in this case, Jesus should have said to believe in Him because He was God. Other passages include Acts 2:22; 4:10; 7:55; 10:38; Romans 10:9).

What are we to make of these things? Should we conclude that Jesus is not God? No, for we have already demonstrated that the Bible teaches that He is God. What this demonstrates is that God was not centralized in the person of Christ, so that God could no longer be said to be in heaven. As Alister McGrath points out:

In one sense, Jesus is God; in another, he isn't. Thus Jesus is God incarnate-but he still prays to God, without giving the slightest indication that he is talking to himself! Jesus is not identical with God in that it is obvious that God continued to be in heaven during Jesus' lifetime, and yet Jesus may be *identified* with God in that the New Testament has no hesitation in ascribing functions to Jesus which, properly speaking, only God could do.²²

Jesus was very aware that God was someone other than Himself, existing in heaven. He was also very aware that He was God made known in the flesh. So in one sense Jesus is spoken of as God, and in another sense He is not. This is very important concept to be aware of in order to understand the relationship between the Father and the Son.

How can this be? It can be likened to the moon. When the Apollo team landed on the moon for the first time, they astonished the world. They walked on the moon that had been beyond man's grasp for as long as man has existed. When they returned to the earth, they brought a sample of *the* moon with them. Scientists studied this sample as the moon, yet it was not really the moon. It was only a portion of the moon.²³

In a similar sense, when we encounter Jesus Christ, we do not encounter all of God, because no man has seen God, nor can see God (John 1:18; I Timothy 6:16; I John 4:12). God is too great to be seen. Jesus Christ, however, was seen by multitudes. How could Jesus be God if He could be seen then? In John 1:18 and I John 4:12 *theos* appears without the article, which is emphasizing God's essence. It is God's essence that no man can see, because He is invisible by definition of being a spirit. When we see Jesus Christ, we encounter the image of the invisible God, but do not see the essence of God Himself. Though the *man* Jesus is not all of God contained in a body *to the exclusion of God existing beyond Jesus* (transcendent), He is God's image, and therefore can be said to be God Himself. This does not mean that Jesus only is a portion of God. As it pertains to Jesus' deity, it is said that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in His body (Colossians 1:19; 2:9). The Scripture presents Jesus as being God on the one hand, and as being other than God (a mere man) on the other. Thus we see the paradox of the Scripture, and its bilateral way of referring to Jesus Christ.

With this basis, let us examine the ontological and functional relationship of the Father and the Son.

The name *Jesus*, or the term *Son*, specifically refers to the incarnation. These appellations are never used of God before the incarnation. This is very clear in Luke 1:35 when the angel told Mary, "The Holy Ghost will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which will be born will be called the Son of God." Notice the future tense of *will*. Only after the conception would Jesus be called the Son of God, because God would father His existence; not the existence of His deity, but of His humanity. "Son" was not a name of God before the incarnation. It is a relational term between God in His transcendence apart from His existence as a man, and God in His immanence as a human being. The term *Father* also begins to be used for God after the incarnation. Although God was known as a Father before this (Malachi 3:10), the term was used between God and His creation, not between God and God. God's fatherhood to Jesus Christ was of a different nature than that spoken of in the OT. He was still *Father* in reference to His relationship to man, but His relationship to the man, Christ, was much different than His relationship to any other man. The Jews clearly recognized Jesus' special use of the term (John 5:17-18; 8:42, 54-59; 10:30-38), realizing that He claimed a special relationship to God that no one else could claim. God was Jesus' Father because it was God who caused Jesus' conception, i.e. His existence as a man. Jesus, the man, would have never existed without God's contribution to His humanity. We on the other hand, are born naturally, and only become the sons of God by adoption.

That the Son was not preexistent is evidenced by the fact that Paul said, "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law..." (Galatians 4:4). The Son came at a certain point in time, from a woman. The fact that Paul said the Son was sent does not imply that the Son preexisted the incarnation any more than that John the Baptist preexisted his physical birth, who is also said to have been sent by God (John 1:6). The sending of the Son was not the sending of a preexistent person of the Godhead, but rather YHWH making Himself known in the face of Jesus Christ.

The Son was not eternally generated from the Father. Many have claimed that the Son was eternally begotten by God based off of Psalm 2:7 which says, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." Charles Ryrie had this to say about the doctrine of eternal generation, which is connected with the idea of a preexistent son: "I agree with Buswell (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, pp. 105-12) that generation is not an exegetically based doctrine. ... The phrase 'eternal generation' is simply an attempt to describe the Father-Son relationship of the Trinity and, by using the word 'eternal,' protect it from any idea of inequality or temporality."²⁴ Though Ryrie most definitely believes the Son to be eternal, even he confesses that the doctrine of eternal generation is not found in Scripture. For the illegitimate use of Psalm 2:7, which speaks prophetically of the Son, Ryrie said, "Least of all should generation be based on Psalm 2:7."²⁵ The Psalm is a coronation psalm, referring to the day a king is coronated, not the day of birth or time of origin. It is used of Jesus' origin in Hebrews 1:5, as contrasted with the angels. Whereas they were created, the Son was begotten by God. This is referring to the incarnation as the context shows (vs. 4, 6). Psalm 2:7 is also used of Jesus' ascension in Acts 13:33, demonstrating that the verse is not strictly speaking of the conception of Jesus by God.

The only way in which the Son of God preexisted the incarnation was as the *logos*. In John 1:1 the *logos* is identified as being God Himself, but He is also said to be with God. It was the *logos* who was made flesh (John 1:14).

The *logos* is the self-expression, word, or thought (reason) of God. As David Bernard has said:

The Logos is God's self expression, "God's means of self disclosure," or "God uttering Himself." Before the Incarnation, the Logos was the unexpressed thought or plan in the mind of God, which had a reality no human thought can 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 fulness of time God...expressed Himself in flesh.²⁶

According to Philippians 2:6, Jesus was in "the form of God" before the incarnation. "Who being in the form of God" is translated from *hos en morphe theou huparchon*. *Huparchon*, translated as "being" is from two Greek words, *hupo*, "under," and *arche*, "a beginning." It involves existence both before and after conditions mentioned in connection with it. In this case it is speaking of the preexistence of the "form of God." *Morphe*, referring to the preexistent "form" of God speaks of "that external form that represents what is intrinsic and essential. It indicates not merely what may be perceived by others, but what is objectively there."²⁷ The emphasis is primarily upon the essence behind the form, but recognizes the visible form also.. *Theou* is in the genitive case, indicating possession. This form was God's form. The word is also anarthrous, thus emphasizing God's person. In this context, then, Paul was pointing out that this existing visible form of God was His essential deity.

What exactly this form that God possessed was, we are not told. Nevertheless, it was existing in eternity probably until the incarnation, or possibly the ascension, at which time Jesus' body would have replaced the need for the visible form of God. From John we might gather that this form of God was the *logos* that was with God.

This form was at least visible to the heavenly host, for they presented themselves before God in some manner (I Kings 22:19; Job 1:6). Since God is omnipresent, there could not be any specific location at which to gather, unless, that is, God appeared in some type of

visible, albeit spirit form. So the *logos* was the visible expression of God's invisible essence. "The Word was not merely an impersonal thought existing in the mind of God but was, in reality, the Eternal Spirit Himself clothed upon by a visible and personal form..."²⁸

God was always speaking His Word in the OT. It was through His Word that the worlds were created (Hebrews 11:3). Just as a man's words, or his reason are not a separate person from him, the *logos* is not a separate person from the Father (*theos*). We can distinguish between God and His Word in that the Word was the thought of God, and had a visible form, but there is no Biblical evidence that the *logos* is a distinct person or personality in the Godhead. Looking to John's first epistle helps shed some more light on John 1:1. John said, "That which was from the beginning...the *logos* of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show to you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us." This sounds very reminiscent of John 1. There is a reference to the beginning (John 1:1; I John 1:1), the *logos* (John 1:1, 14; I John 1:1), and an identification of the *logos* with life (John 1:4; I John 1:1-2). If John could say that the *life* was manifested, after being with the Father, and not mean that *life* is a distinct person in the Godhead, likewise there is no reason to view the *logos* of life as being a distinct person in the Godhead.

Not only is the life of God spoken of in distinction from Him, but so is wisdom. Proverbs 8 speaks of wisdom as being possessed by God, and present at creation (vs. 22, 29-30). Wisdom is being personified as a person, speaking of itself as though it is an entity (or person) apart from God. Does this indicate that God's wisdom is another person from Him?

Another Biblical example is that of God's voice. God's voice is said to have walked in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8). Psalm 29:3-8 attributes to God's voice the attributes of God Himself: power, majesty. Several times the author states a quality of the voice of YHWH, and then attributes the same to YHWH. This is another example of personification. The Hebrew people would not have understood the voice of YHWH to be a distinct person from Him. There is no reason to understand *logos* in any different manner. The *logos* can be said to be with God just as much as His wisdom and voice can be said to be with Him, and be spoken of as distinct from Him. The Aramaic Targums (Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Scriptures) also shed light on the way we are to understand *logos*. The Targums used the word *memra* to refer to God, especially when referring to God's appearance in a form. *Memra* is the Aramaic equivalent of *logos*. They did not believe that the word was another person other than YHWH, but was YHWH manifest in a visible appearance.

Jesus' functional relationship to the Father is made explicit by Jesus Himself. He commonly spoke of His relationship with the Father saying, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (John 10:38; 14:10-11; 17:21). It cannot be said that the Son is the same as the Father, or that the Father is the same as the Son. The Son by definition is both divine and human, while the Father is only divine. Although the deity of the Son is of the same essence as that of the Father, the deity of the Son is inextricably joined with the humanity to form an existence distinct from God's existence as a transcendent Spirit. The deity of the Father is in the Son, but the Son's existence is different from the Father's. There is, therefore, a distinction between the Son and the Father, but not a separation. The deity of the Son is none other than that of YHWH Himself, having come down in the form of a servant and in the likeness of men. This is why we find statements like, "He that believes on me, believes not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that sees me sees him that sent me" (John 12:44-45). On another occasion Jesus said, "He that receives me receives him that sent me" (John 13:20).

How is believing on Jesus tantamount to believing in God? Is it not possible to believe in Jesus, without believing in God? How is it possible to have seen God when one has, in reality, only seen Jesus' physical body? Can one not accept Jesus without accepting the Father? According to Jesus' words, the answer is a resounding "no."

Jesus made even more profound statements of this nature. Such include "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you should have known my Father also" (John 14:6-7). Not only is Jesus the way to the Father, but the Father can only be known through the Son. It would seem to us that the Father could be known apart from the Son, but according to Jesus this is not possible. To the Jews who hated Jesus because of what He said and did He cautioned them saying, "He that hates me hates my Father also" (John 15:23). Probably one of the best examples demonstrating this point is found in II John 9 where John said, "Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, does not have God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son." (See also I John 2:23-24) If you accept Christ's person you will have the Father and the Son. All of these Scriptures relay one common truth-knowing the Father is bound up in knowing the Son.

This can be compared to the father/son identities we experience. When a man is born he experiences the role of a son. Although He knows the role of father exists, he has no personal experience of it. Through the process of time he can *add* the role of fatherhood to his identity. Then he is both a son and a father. His added identity as a father does not negate his identity as a son, but simply adds a role with its corresponding characteristics to his existing role as a son. In the same way, but in reverse, God added another identity to Himself when He became a man. God has always been deity, but in the process of His plan to redeem man he *added* humanity to his deity. His deity was not compromised or mitigated by adding this role to His identity, but nevertheless, His existence as exclusive deity and Spirit was changed. God never gave up His eternal, unlimited deity when becoming the Son, just as a father does not give up His identity as a son when he becomes a father. There is no change in his essential person, but there is a change in his life as he now experiences the role he once only knew by concept. The role of father went from being *a priori* (prior to and independent of experience) to *a posteriori* (proceeding from and dependent upon experienced reality). That which was once an abstract concept became an objectively understood reality, empirical (knowledge gained by experience) in nature.

You may know a person as a son without knowing them in their role as father. When the identity of father is added to their identity as a son, knowing the person in their role of father assumes knowing them as a son also. In like manner, but in exactly the reverse order (God assumed Sonship whereas we assume fatherhood), knowing God in His incarnation (deity and humanity) assumes knowing Him in His deity. For His identity as a human was *added* to his identity as Spirit. Knowledge of the Father is bound up in the being of the Son because the Father's essential deity is in the Son. To know Jesus (God in His immanence) is to know the Father (God in His transcendence). Knowing the Son assumes knowing the Father also, but the opposite is not true. You cannot know Jesus by knowing the Father because Jesus' identity goes beyond that of the Father in that the Son has a component to His existence the Father (God in His transcendence) does not have, namely humanity. In a sense it can be said that Jesus was more than God; not more in His deity, but more with respect to the addendum of His human existence. It must be made clear that "the Son is *not* the same as the Father. The title *Father* never alludes to humanity, while *Son* does. ... We cannot say the Father is the Son."²⁹ Jesus, the man, is not the Father *per se*, but is the

Son of God.. But it was YHWH, who is the Father, who became flesh, and then related to Jesus as a Father to a Son, because of the subsequent limitation on His deity by the addendum of humanity to His previously unmitigated existence as exclusive Spirit.

It cannot be said that the Son is the Father, or that the Father is the Son. The Son by definition is both divine and human, while the Father is only divine. Although the deity of the Son is of the same essence as that of the Father, the deity of the Son is inextricably joined with the humanity to form an existence distinct from God's existence as a transcendent Spirit. The deity of the Father is in the Son, but the Son's existence is different from the Father's. There is, therefore, a distinction between the Son and the Father, but there is no separation. The deity of the Son is none other than that of Yahweh Himself, having come down in the form of a servant and in the likeness of men. This is why we find statements like, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me" (John 12:44-45).

Jesus is the person of the one unipersonal God, YHWH. But in the incarnation, the Spirit of YHWH became a human being, resulting in a union of the divine and human natures of Christ in such a way that makes Him a fully integrated and fully functioning person. Therefore, the distinction between Jesus and the Father is the union, which the Father lacks.

Sometimes we fall prey to using the terms *Father* and *Son* as though they were a mathematical equation. To this we must be careful lest we confuse the Biblical distinction between the two terms. To say that Jesus is the Father is legitimate if we use it in the right context. The Bible uses the term Father for God in three distinct ways: He is the Father of mankind in the sense that He is the Creator of all things (origins), He is the Father of believers in the sense that He has adopted them as His children (familial), and He is the Father of Jesus Christ in the sense of begetting Him (paternal). It is only in this last usage of the word that we must beware of calling Jesus the Father, lest we obliterate the distinction made between God and Jesus Christ in the NT (especially the gospels where we see Jesus relating to God as His Father).

There can be no doubt about it, that the deity of the one Jesus related to as His Father was the deity that was in Christ; however, there is a vast difference in saying that the deity of the Father is in the Son, and saying that the Son, who is God manifest in the flesh, is the Father. *Father* specifically refers to God transcendent, without a human body, as he fills the heavens, being unlimited by the incarnation. The *Son* specifically refers to God immanent in a human body, as He is temporally located in the person of Jesus Christ, being limited by the incarnation. *To confuse the terms is to confuse God's existence as exclusive Spirit, and God's existence as Spirit made flesh.* I emphasize *terms* because we are not speaking about two different Gods. Let there be no mistaking it that the deity of Jesus Christ is the Father. Ontologically then (pertaining to the nature and essential properties of existence), Jesus is the same God identified as the Father. Functionally, however, because of the addition of a genuine human existence to God's existence, Jesus is referred to as the Son of God. *Jesus is the Father, but the Father in flesh. In such an existence He is known as the Son of God, Jesus Christ.*

Old Testament Usage of "Father"

The Old Testament speaks of God as Father on several occasions. It most often speaks of God as Father in the sense of Creator, as a protector or comforter of His creation, and in a covenantal sense. Angels are called the sons of God because God created them (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). YHWH was Israel's Father because it was He who created them (Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 2:10).

It must be known that Father was not a special or revealed name for God. God never said, "My name is Father." Father was a mere appellation describing the way in which God related to man. God is Father, just as He is also our provider, our righteousness, our victory, and our peace. God's revealed name in the OT was YHWH, to which He is referred to over 6800 times. He is also referred to as *elohim* (God) over 2600 times, which is a generic term for YHWH. In comparison, God is only likened to a father, or calls Himself *Father* thirteen times in the OT (Numbers 11:12; II Samuel 7:14; I Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 68:4-5; 89:24-27; 103:13; Isaiah 9:6; 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4, 19; 31:9; Malachi 2:10). God's role as a father is portrayed when the Bible speaks about Israel as being His children in a covenantal sense (Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 1:31; 8:5; 14:1; Isaiah 64:8; Malachi 2:10), and of David and Solomon as being His sons like a suzerain to a vassal (Psalm 2:7; II Samuel 7:14). These OT uses of "Father" pertain to God's relationship to the created realm. This is important to understand because Trinitarians claim that God is eternally Father, and then argue that God cannot be eternally Father if there is not an eternal Son. This argument reads NT designations for God back into the OT as though God has eternally been Father. The OT never speaks of "God the Father.." This was not a name for God. We only see this prevalent usage for God in the NT with the advent of Jesus Christ. All of this is not to say that God is not identified as *Father* in the OT, but that *Father* was never a proper name for God in the OT, *and neither was it commonly used of God as it is in the NT.* While it is true that it became common for the Jews to refer to God as "Father" by the time of Jesus' day, this was a later development, and such frequency of usage is not found in the OT Scripture. Even so, their usage of the appellation is that of creator and/or covenant-maker.

New Testament Usage of "Father"

While the NT continues to use *Father* to designate God as the Creator and/or covenant-maker, the NT adds two other dimensions to *Father* that were not seen in the OT. The second usage of "Father" pertains to believers' adoption by God. Romans 8:15 speaks of us having received the spirit of adoption that makes us cry out to God, "Abba Father." Elsewhere Paul speaks of this same concept of adoption whereby we become the sons of God, and by implication, God becomes our Father. (Galatians 4:5; Ephesian 1:5). God makes us His children by faith, and we inherit all of His blessings for us.

The third use of *Father* is that used by Jesus Christ in the gospels, when He was speaking about His relationship to God. It is this use to which we center our attention.

Jesus continually spoke of God, and to God as the *Father*. In the Gospel of John, Jesus used the term "God" twenty-three times, while He called God His "Father" 109 times. To my knowledge, Jesus only called the Father, "God," in direct address a mere three times (Matthew 27:46; John 17:3; 20:17). He consistently spoke of God as *Father*.

It is legitimate to call Jesus the Father in the first two uses of the name. Jesus preexisted the incarnation as YHWH, and therefore can be called *Father* in the sense of Creator because the deity of Jesus is the God of the OT who created the worlds.³⁰ Jesus can be called Father in the sense of our Adopter because in the NT, the Spirit of Christ is the Holy Spirit who adopts us as God's children. It is in the statements where Jesus identifies God as being His Father that we need to be extremely careful. What I am specifically speaking to is the temptation to exchange the name "Jesus" for "Father" simply because we know that Jesus' deity is the deity of the Father. Jesus called

God *Father* for a reason, and the *Father* called Jesus His Son for a reason. The Biblical terminology is there for a reason. What we must do is understand why different terminology is employed of God; not change the terminology to fit our theology.

Why the distinct use of "Father" and "Son" if Jesus and the Father are the Same God?

We must ask ourselves why it is that Jesus is consistently identified as the Son of God, and Jesus consistently identified God as the His Father, *as though* the Father were someone other than Himself. God spoke down from heaven to earth and called Jesus His Son (Mark 1:11; 9:7). The Son spoke from the earth up to heaven and called God His Father (John 11:41; 17:1). We must ask ourselves, if Jesus is the Father, why didn't God call Him such when He spoke from heaven? If Jesus is the Father, why didn't He say that His name was the Father? He consistently called Himself the Son of God, the Son of man, the one sent from heaven, or some similar Messianic title.

If we maintain that when Jesus was speaking about His Father, or praying to the Father (as found in the gospel accounts), that He was speaking about *Himself*, or praying to *Himself* since He was the Father, we fall into error. Jesus never portrayed the idea that when He was speaking of the Father, that He was speaking of Himself, or when He prayed to the Father, that He was praying to Himself. Such an explanation is seriously lacking for Biblical support, and fails to explain the Biblical language.

All of the statements Jesus made about the Father would cease to make sense if we are to equate the Father and Son as being identically the same. Jesus said that His Father sent Him into the world. If it is argued that because Jesus is the Father we could just as easily say that the Father sent the Father into the world, then we have the Father sending Himself. If language means anything at all, this cannot be true. There is one sending, and one being sent. Jesus also spoke of His Father showing Him what to do (John 5:19-20), and telling Him what to speak (John 12:49-50). There is one showing, and one doing. There is one telling, and one being told. The Father in heaven did not tell the Father on earth; the Bible is very clear that the Father in heaven told the Son on earth. This is not implying two Gods. This phenomenon must be understood in light of the incarnation. With the assumption of humanity to God's deity, there arose a distinction between God in flesh, and God apart from flesh. This distinction is not in the Godhead, but is in, and due to the humanity. As a human being, God willingly limited the exercise of His divine attributes.

To demonstrate the Biblical distinction between the use of the terms Father and Son, we will explore the Gospel of John which presents the relationship of Jesus to the Father like no other book in the NT. Although the same kind of statements can be found elsewhere in the NT, John gives us some of the best attestations to Jesus' absolute deity, and portrays Jesus' relationship to the Father like no other author/book does. Jesus clearly portrayed Himself as being someone other than the Father. Concerning His doctrine Jesus said, "He that does not love me does not keep my sayings: and the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (John 14:24). Jesus' words did not belong to Him, but they belonged to the Father. How can this be if Jesus is to be identified as the Father? What is very interesting is that Jesus made this statement in the same discourse after He said that whoever had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:7, 9). After such a powerful statement, Jesus still maintained a clear distinction between He and the Father. (See also v. 10, 12, 20, 21, 23-24, 26, 28, 31) Jesus also said concerning His will: "...I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me" (John 5:30). The Father had a will, and Jesus had a will. Jesus sought the will of His Father, not His own will. If Jesus' will was not the same as the will of the Father, then how can Jesus be identical to the Father? If He was the Father, He would have had the Father's will, but instead He had His own will.

On another occasion Jesus said, "My Father has not left me alone; for I always do those things that please him" (John 8:29). How could the Father leave the Father? One cannot leave himself, yet Jesus said that the Father had not left Him. Jesus also said He always pleased the Father. Did He mean to say that He always pleased Himself, or that His human nature pleased His divine nature? It seems evident that Jesus was speaking of the Father as being someone other than Himself.

Jesus said that the Father was greater than He was (John 14:28). Did Jesus mean that He was greater than Himself? Jesus also said, "...even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10b). Did Jesus command Himself and keep His own commandments? Did Jesus abide in His own love? The examples could go on and on, but these are sufficient enough to demonstrate that Jesus thought of the Father as being someone other than He Himself, though He also realized that the deity of the Father was in Him (John 10:38; 14:10-11, 20), and that He preexisted the incarnation as YHWH (John 8:56-59). What is important to notice is the distinction in terminology. Jesus is called the Son of God, and the Spirit of God who fills the heavens is called the Father. We do not understand these statements to mean that Jesus is a different God than the Father, nor a distinct aspect of deity in the Godhead, but rather understand these statements to show the genuineness of Christ's humanity. Jesus is differentiated from the Father because of His humanity, not because He is a distinct or separate deity from Him. Jesus is the Father, but the Father made known in the flesh. In this existence, although the deity of God is unchanged, the way He is known to us is by the name Jesus, the Son of God.

Some find evidence for equating the names of "Jesus" and "Father" in Isaiah 9:6. Here it is said that the coming Messiah's name would be called "eternal Father." This is not decisive because this verse is describing the ontological identity of the Messiah, not the name by which He would be called in His human existence (remember, the issue I am tackling is the name by which the Messiah was identified, not the identity of His divine nature, for it is clear that Jesus' deity is the deity of the Father). We know that He was named "Jesus" at His birth. The Hebrew concept of a name is that it describes who a person is, their character, worth, and authority. Jesus would be the eternal Father. We must remember that this is in the OT context where the meaning of Father was that of Creator/covenant-maker. We have no reason to believe that Isaiah had any other concept in mind. The Messiah would be the everlasting Father who created the worlds. Isaiah was not envisioning the NT use of "Father" referring to God's fathering of a child by the Holy Ghost.

The closest Jesus came to calling Himself the Father was when He told Philip, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9; See also v. 7), or when He said, "He who has seen me has seen Him who sent me" (John 12:45). Jesus said time and time again that it was His Father who had sent Him, thus declaring that those who saw Him (Jesus) were seeing the Father. Notice, however, that in both of these verses, Jesus does not identify Himself as being identically the same as the Father. Elsewhere Jesus said the Father was in Him. If "Father" can be attributed to Christ's person, which includes humanity, then there was another human inside of the human Jesus. It is obvious that when Jesus said the Father was in Him that He understood the Father to be Spirit only.

If *Father* is the way the Scripture speaks of God apart from His human existence in Christ, then how could Jesus say that the disciples had seen the Father? God, as Spirit, is invisible. The Bible is clear that no man can see God (John 1:18; I Timothy 6:16; I John

4:12). Though Jesus' deity was that of the Father, all that was visible to man was His humanity. Everybody who met Jesus recognized Him as a man, but not everybody recognized Him as Father. Since God's essence cannot be seen, Jesus must have meant that those who have seen Him were seeing the Father's image (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He was not saying that in His flesh He was the Father, *but that the deity of the Father was in Him*, thus making Him the only visible image of the Father.

This claim is in stark contrast to the Trinitarian doctrine which says that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity made flesh. Jesus was clear that His deity was that of God the Father. One could not say that if you have seen them, you have also seen their spouse. The only way Jesus could say that those who had seen Him had seen the Father was if Jesus was the Father manifest in flesh, known to us as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The point that needs to be made clear is that the disciples were seeing the deity of the Father manifest in flesh, yet they still did not refer to Jesus as *Father*. This name was reserved for God as Spirit apart from flesh.

An analogy would be helpful here. This phenomenon could be compared to a balloon and air. Air permeates our atmosphere. This is likened to the Spirit of God who is invisible and omnipresent. Jesus is likened to the balloon that is filled with air. The air has no shape, but when it fills the balloon, it shapes the balloon into a certain size and appearance. When we look at the balloon, we are not viewing the air, but we are viewing that which contains the air. Without the balloon, we would not be able to see the invisible air; and without the air, the balloon would never have the shape and size that it does.

Just as the air in the balloon is no different than the air that is outside of the balloon, even so the deity in the man Christ Jesus is the same deity that exists as the omnipresent Spirit. We would not call the balloon the *air*, nor would we refer to the air outside of the balloon as the *balloon*. We realize that the material object (balloon) filled with air is distinct from the air itself, although the same air fills both the balloon and the atmosphere. Keeping with the analogy, if the balloon and air were conscious beings, we could say that because of the willing limitations placed on the air by the balloon, the balloon is thought of as being distinct from the air. *With any distinction, there arises the need to relate the distinctions to one another.* If I distinguish my body from my Spirit, though I am only one person, I speak of the way in which my body relates to my spirit and vice-versa. With the distinction of humanity from Spirit, the Son is distinguished from the Father, and a relational language is employed to describe the relationship of the Spirit transcendent to the Spirit made flesh. This does not indicate two Gods or two Spirits, but recognizes a distinction, and therefore a relationship, between God transcendent and unlimited, and God's existence as a man which is limited.

The distinction arises out of the humanity of Christ. The deity of the Son is in no way different than the deity of the Father. This is why Jesus could say that whosoever had seen Him had seen the Father (John 12:45; 14:9). This being so, Jesus still did not refer to Himself as being the Father, but always referred to Himself as being the Son, or the one whom was sent by the Father. We must maintain a distinction of terms because the Bible does so. Jesus is our Father in the sense of creation and adoption, but in His humanity, *as He relates to God transcendent without humanity*, He is called the Son of God, while the God in heaven is called the Father.³¹

The Reason For and Significance of the terms "Father" and "Son"

The Biblical distinctions between *Father* and *Son* do not imply that there are two gods, or that Jesus is not God. What it demonstrates is the genuineness of Jesus' humanity, and the subsequent relationship that He had with God because of the willing limitations imposed on the exercise of the Father's deity that was in Jesus. Jesus operated within the limits of any other human being in order to experience all that we experience, so that He could be a faithful High Priest for our redemption. Jesus, the God-man, who was immanent on this earth, bound by time and space, finite and without all knowledge, related to God who was in Heaven, who was not bound by space or time, being infinite and omniscient. Jesus' ontological deity as the Father is not being objected to. What is being objected to is the designation of "Father" for Jesus, because the Biblical authors seem to use "Father" to refer to God's existence apart from flesh, and "Jesus" or "Son" to refer to God's existence in flesh.

The terms *Father* and *Son* are relational terms that took on a new significance after God's incarnation in Mary. Although Jesus' deity was the deity of the Father, we cannot juxtapose the term *Son* with the *Father*, because *Father* is used of the Spirit alone, while *Son* is used of that Spirit made flesh. The Father is God apart from flesh, and the Son is that same God in flesh. *Father* is the appellation used by Jesus for God, because it was God who fathered Jesus' human existence. Jesus did not beget Himself, but was begotten of the Father, and therefore He is spoken of as being distinct from the Father; not in deity, but as it pertains to His assumption of humanity. It is because of the addition of humanity to God's existence as Spirit, that we cannot say that the Father and the Son are the same. The deity of the Father is in the Son, but the Son is a human being, and the Father, who is Spirit only, is not.

The reason many have insisted on equating the names "Jesus" and "God the Father" is because they are attempting to show that the deity of Jesus is no different than that of the Father, and that Jesus is not a different person in the Godhead, but is God Himself. Although it is true that Jesus' deity is the deity of the Father, we need not confuse the Biblical terminology in order to protect this truth. Jesus referred to God as Father because of the fact that God fathered His existence in the flesh. This does not mean that He never spoke of God as Father in the sense of Creator, but that when Jesus was speaking of His own personal relationship to the Father, He spoke of Him in a paternal sense. *If we understand that "Father" is a relational term that had a specialized use by Jesus because of the incarnation, which use it did not have before the incarnation, it is easy to preserve the truth that Jesus' deity is the same as the Father's without confusing the Biblical terms.* We do not need to show that Jesus' name is "God the Father" to show that Jesus preexisted the incarnation as YHWH. "Father" became attributed to the Spirit of God in a different way in the NT because of the paternal relationship between God and Jesus, and to distinguish between God's existence as a man, and His existence as the omnipresent Spirit. The deity of the Son of God is that of YHWH, but His name is "Jesus." YHWH's existence apart from humanity, as the Father of Jesus' human existence, is called the Father.

Subordination of the Son to the Father

We have just examined many Scriptures which *distinguish* between the Father and the Son, but now we will take this one step further in examining Scriptures which show the Son as being subordinate to the Father. How are we to understand the subordinistic language of the New Testament? Why did Jesus pray if He was God? How can the Scripture speak of Jesus having a God? How could Jesus not know certain things (Mark 13:32)? How could Jesus say that His Father was greater than He was (John 14:28)? How can it be said that Jesus has an authority over Him (I Corinthians 11:3). Why does the Scripture consistently distinguish between the Father and the

Son? Why is One sending, and One being sent? Why is One giving, and One receiving? The list of such Scriptural declarations could go on, but what are we to make of these statements and the employment of such language?

These types of statements cannot be ignored or denied, but we tend to do one of the either, or both. The solution to understanding these types of Scriptures will not be found in denying Jesus' deity, nor will they be solved by positing a Godhead which consists of three distinct beings who share equality of deity. The solution lies in the acknowledgment of Jesus' complete, authentic, and genuine humanity;³² a humanity which imposed limitations (accepted willingly and intentionally) upon His deity so that He could live on the same plane as any other human, sharing in all of their experiences, so that He could relate to man and be a sufficient high priest (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 5:1-9; 7:13-28).

When God assumed humanity, He acquired a consciousness and identity which He never possessed before the incarnation. He had a human psyche not overwhelmed or consumed by His deity. The exercise of Jesus' human nature (such as His consciousness, spirit, will, mind, emotions, and flesh) in such a way requires that in the incarnation, Jesus be spoken of as possessing an identity distinct from, but not separate from the Father.³³ Just as we find a distinction, but not a separation of Christ's two natures, we also find a distinction, but not a separation between God and Jesus; the Father and the Son. This view does not "compromise the deity of Christ or the radical monotheism of biblical theology. But it does give credit to the completeness and genuineness of His [Jesus'] human nature. Any other explanation compromises the completeness of His deity or His humanity."³⁴

All of the above Scriptures demonstrate the relationship between the genuine and complete humanity of Jesus (latent deity in genuine humanity), and the transcendent Spirit of the Father. Because Jesus would not rely upon His deity in order to experience the limitations of humanity, He needed a relationship with God. As pertaining to His humanity, Jesus could say that His Father was greater than He Himself. The Father was greater, not because His deity was greater than that of Jesus' (Jesus was YHWH become flesh), but in the respect that the Father (God as the all existing Spirit) was not subject to any of the limitations of human existence as was Jesus. In His willing limitation of His deity, living life as a man anointed by the Holy Ghost, Jesus could say that He could do nothing but what He saw the Father do. Jesus had to rely upon His Father to give Him what to teach and show Him what He wanted Him to do. In His humanity, Jesus' knowledge was limited so that He did not know the day and hour of the second coming. Finally, in his genuine humanity, it can even be said of Jesus that He had a God! Building on the above, we might ask why it is that usually only the Father and Jesus are mentioned in Paul's benedictions? It seems that Paul only mentioned the Father and Jesus because we now know God in two major manifestations: God transcendent as the all existing Spirit, and God immanent as He came in flesh to redeem our souls. Paul and others did not write in this manner to show a separation in the Godhead, but to show the distinction between the existence of Father and the Son because of the addendum of humanity, and yet at the same time the unity of the Godhead.

The fundamental difference between the Oneness concept of God, and the Trinitarian concept is where the Biblical distinctions are placed. Trinitarians place an *eternal* distinction in personhood between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Oneness theology maintains that there is no distinction of personality in the Godhead. Rather, the Holy Spirit has always been YHWH the Father of all creation. Since the Son of God did not come into being until the incarnation when YHWH became a man, there is no eternal distinction between the Father and the Son. The Scripture never distinguishes between the deity of the Son and the deity of the Father, but all distinctions are between God as He exists omnipresent and transcendent, and God as He exists as a genuine human being. The distinction is not in the Godhead, but in the humanity of Jesus Christ. There is a three-fold revelation of God to man, but not a tripersonality in the Godhead.³⁵

In conclusion, we can affirm the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost without referring to them as three persons, or composing monotheism. By no means would such an affirmation imply three gods, but would simply state that the one God of the Bible is experienced in three different ways, all of which are valid.³⁶ It could not be said much better than that expressed by McGrath:

A helpful way of looking at this is to say that *three essential models* must be used if the full depth of the Christian experience and understanding of God is to be expressed adequately. No one picture, image or model of God is good enough-and these three models [Father, Son, and Holy Ghost] are essential if the basic outlines of the Christian understanding of God is to be preserved. The first model is that of the transcendent God who lies beyond the world as its source and creator; the second is the human face of God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ; the third is that of the immanent God who is present and active throughout his creation.³⁷

Apologetic Interaction

Arianism Critique

Arius was right in saying that there was a time when the Son was not, but what he meant by it is wrong nonetheless. Since the Son is not eternal, but is God manifest in flesh, the Son "was not" until the incarnation. Arius attributed the beginning of the Son to be before the creation, maintaining that the Son was the first creation of God. This teaching is gathered from Colossians 1:15-16, where Jesus is called the "firstborn of every creature." The passage goes on to say that Jesus created everything. Arius took this to mean that Jesus was created by the Father, and then Jesus in turn created everything else.

The term *firstborn* is from the Greek *prototokos* (from *protos*, first, and *titko*, to beget). It can refer to first in order of origins, or first in the sense of preeminence or priority. The context of Colossians chapter one is emphasizing Christ's preeminence in His image (v. 15a), over every thing created (v. 15b-16), in His power to sustain the universe (v. 17), and his preeminence over the church (v. 18). In fact, verse eighteen says, "[Christ] who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Dynamic Monarchianism Critiqued

That Jesus was not born an average man is evidenced by many Scriptures. The prophet Micah said that the ruler of Israel (the Messiah) would come out of Bethlehem. This ruler's origins were from old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2). Also, the Son brought forth from Mary's womb was to be called Immanuel, being interpreted "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). These two verses demonstrate that Jesus was God before the incarnation, and that He was God even as a babe.

Tritheism Critiqued

The belief in three separate Gods is shown to be faulty by doing a comparative study of different Scriptures where the Father is said to have done something in one place, the Son the same in another, and the Holy Spirit in another. One such example, given previously is comparing the accounts of Who indwells believers. Romans 8:9-11 speaks of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and the Holy Spirit as filling the believers, yet there is only one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4). Another example involving only the Father and the Spirit is the

conception of Christ. The Holy Ghost is said to have caused the conception (Matthew 1:20), but the Father is consistently identified as the father of Jesus. If there are three separate Gods, the Scripture could not attribute one action to all three.

Trinitarianism Critiqued

One of the most obvious differences between Oneness theology and Trinitarianism is the language employed to describe the Godhead. It has been said by many honest individuals that the real barrier between Trinitarians and Oneness believers is not the concept of God they hold to, but the way in which they describe their concept. Although I must ultimately disagree that our concepts of God are identical (for it can vary greatly depending on which Trinitarian or Modalist you are speaking with), I do agree that terminology has been a barrier. What is the significance of terminology? How important is it? Calvin was insightful when he was rebutting those who argued against the Trinity based on the terms used to explain it. He said, "If they call it [the word "person"] a foreign term, because it cannot be pointed out in Scripture in so many syllables, they certainly impose an unjust law—a law which would condemn every interpretation of Scripture that is not composed of other words of Scripture."³⁸ Calvin realized the fact that the vocabulary of the Bible is not adequate to express the *meaning and interpretation* of the Bible's teaching. If all we used was the Bible's terminology to explain the Bible, ultimately we would not explain the meaning of the Bible, but would merely quote its pages. To understand the Bible, other words must be employed, whether they be in spoken-form, or in thought-form. To this B.B. Warfield had a truthful insight when he said, "...the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such un-Biblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture."³⁹ Most evangelicals use words such as "rapture" and "innerancy" and think nothing of it because the terms express a Biblical teaching. Though they are not found on the pages of the Bible, the Bible does teach the concepts that these unbiblical words represent.

The question ultimately boils down to what Warfield was speaking about—do the words used to explain the doctrine of the Trinity preserve the truth of the Biblical teaching on God? Certain words which have either been coined, or altered from their Biblical meaning include these: essence, three persons, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and eternally begotten. I maintain that the Son is God, and that He is the Son of God, but these words are Biblical, and they can convey a different concept of God than is presented in the NT. God the Son and God the Holy Ghost present the idea that they are separate Gods, although this is by no means what orthodox Trinitarianism is trying to convey; nevertheless, the terminology employed tends to make many people fall into some form of tritheism.

The danger of such terminology as employed in the creeds is not only that of possibly misunderstanding the concept of God as presented in the Bible without those words, but it is as Daniel Segraves said so succinctly: "Any time non-biblical words become benchmarks of orthodoxy, it is at least dangerously close to affirming extra-biblical revelation. If Christians cannot be saved by making their confession of faith using only biblical language, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the language that is required (e.g., "three persons") is equally authoritative with Scripture."⁴⁰

Oneness Theology Defended

Patripassianism

One of the charges that has always been brought against a Oneness view of God is that it holds to the idea that the Father suffered and died on the cross. This conclusion has been arrived at because Oneness believers insist that Jesus is the Father incarnate. This view is known as Patripassianism (Latin meaning "the Father suffers"). In fact, it was this concept which was one of the main reasons that Modalistic Monarchianism was declared to be heretical. As Millard Erickson notes, however, "It may well be that the chief reason for the repudiation of patripassianism was not its conflict with the biblical revelation, but with the Greek philosophical conception of impassibility."⁴¹

Oneness theology does not teach that the Father suffered in His essence, but that the Father suffered in the man Christ Jesus, the Son of God. The Father did not die, nor was He crucified.

Acts 20:28 says: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock...to feed the church of God, *which he has purchased with his own blood.*" (italics mine) The antecedent of "his" is "God." Paul declared that God shed His blood for the church. Three questions arise from this Scripture: 1. How can it be said that God has blood? 2. Jesus shed His blood by dying on the cross. If this blood is actually the blood of God, did God die? 3. If the blood of Jesus is identified as God's blood, then Jesus' physical humanity was God's. This being true, was Jesus' body still God when in the grave?

We know that it was actually Jesus who shed His blood on the cross, so calling Jesus' blood the blood of God demonstrates the deity of Jesus Christ; however, the implications of this verse do not stop here. If the human blood shed at Calvary can be said to be God's, this indicates that even the humanity of Christ can be said to be divine.⁴² When we understand the true nature of the hypostatic union we must confess that the humanity God assumed in the incarnation has now been permanently incorporated into His eternal existence as Spirit. The Scripture declares this when it says "the Word [God] was *made* flesh." The humanity of Jesus was not the essence of God's being, but because of the hypostatic union the deity was miraculously manifest in every aspect of Jesus' humanity. It is in this manner that the body of Jesus can be said to be the body of God. As a result it might be said that God was born of a virgin, suffered, died, and rose again. This is not to say that Jesus' death was any different than any other man's death. When Jesus died on the cross, He died like any other human being would die. His spirit separated from His body (Matthew 27:50; James 2:26).

If Jesus' humanity was permanently incorporated into the Godhead, becoming a part of God's existence, then was Jesus' deceased body the body of God? Daniel Segraves answered this question saying, "The fulness [sic] of deity continued to be expressed in His immaterial being even during the time of His death, and at His resurrection His immaterial and material parts were reunited permanently."⁴³ The body of Jesus was even God's body while in the grave.

When it is implied that God died, it must be understood that it is not being alleged that the Spirit of God died. A spirit cannot die. What is being referenced is God's existence as a human being. As a man God could, and did die. The way to lessen the impact of this hard-to-swallow truth might lie in the usage of terminology. The term "Son of God" is used in reference to God's existence as a human being throughout the New Testament. This term specifically refers to God's assumption of, and existence as humanity. It was in this state that God died. It seems better, then, to say that the Son of God died. This is consistent with the terminology of the New Testament, and in no way takes away from the truth of Acts 20:28.

Sabellianism

Another charge brought against Oneness believers is that they believe God exists in successive modes of existence. When we say that Jesus did not exist until Bethlehem, or that the Holy Spirit was given after Pentecost, we are not saying that God exists only in successive modes as Sabellius claimed, nor are we saying that Christ was a created deity as in Arianism, but we are saying that God's eternal *ousia* became flesh in 5/6 B.C., and that the unique experience of the Holy Ghost prophesied about in the OT (Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36:24-28) did not occur until after Jesus' ascension (Luke 24:49; John 7:37-39; 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; Acts 2:4). This does not mean that the Father ceased being the Father while in Jesus on the earth. It also does not mean that the Holy Spirit was first introduced on the day of Pentecost. Throughout the gospels we see references to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost simultaneously.

When such terms as "manifestation," "mode", or "role" are attributed to God by Oneness believers, it is perceived that our conception is that Jesus is only a role that God is existing in at this time, but He could cease existing in that role at some point in the future. What is meant by "role" is the way in which God reveals Himself to mankind. What we mean when we speak of "modes" or "roles" is the way in which God reveals Himself to mankind. Oneness believers maintain that God reveals Himself to humanity in three primary ways (I prefer this way of saying this over "roles" or "modes"): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These ways in which God reveals Himself, however, are not distinct persons or personalities within God. As a human being, God reveals Himself to man in redemption. The purpose of the Son was to accomplish our redemption, and subsequently stand in the place of a mediator between us and the Father (I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:14-16; 6:20; 7:24-8:2). Presently, one of the major revelations of the Spirit is sanctification.

As it pertains to Jesus, God will never discard His humanity. The humanity of Christ has been forever incorporated into the Godhead. The place of the Son as the mediator between God and man will cease (I Corinthians 15:24-28), but the Son of God will never cease to be. The Son had a beginning in the incarnation, but He will have no end, just as we will also live eternally.

The Preexistence of Jesus

There are many Scriptures which teach that Jesus preexisted the incarnation. Such include Jesus' statement, "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?" (John 6:62). Jesus plainly said that He was in heaven before coming to the earth. On another occasion He said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). One very telling statement is, "I came forth from the Father, and entered the world; now I am leaving the world, and am going to the Father" (John 16:28). Finally, Jesus said, "And now, O Father, glorify me with yourself with the glory I had with you before the world was" (John 17:5). There is not enough space to deal with each of these passages individually, but some general observations will be given to help shed some light on this topic. It is obvious that Jesus was not referring to His humanity previously having glory, or being in heaven, since His humanity did not exist until the incarnation. In John 17:5, Jesus' reference to "me" includes His humanity. That this must be so is due to the nature of the incarnation. Jesus' deity was not speaking here, but the God-man was speaking. Since Jesus' humanity did not preexist, He must be referring to His deity. The question is, in what way did Jesus' deity preexist the incarnation? Did He preexist as a distinct person from the Father and Spirit?

As has already been demonstrated, as it pertains to the deity of the Son, He was YHWH. The Bible never says that the *Son* of God preexisted the incarnation, but Jesus as the Spirit did preexist as the *logos*, both in the *morphe* of God (Philippians 2:6), and as the expression of God. Just as Jesus can be said to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), without having a physical body until the incarnation and having been slain in time, God can give glory to His *logos* before the *logos* is ever made flesh to actuate the plan. God does call those things which are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). Jesus could rightly say that He came forth from the Father. The *logos* was *with* God, and then was made flesh, coming to the earth (John 1:1, 14). Jesus did return to heaven. He ascended to the Father, from whence He came some thirty-seven years or so before. Since the *logos* was God, He did not come as one of the three personalities in the Godhead, but it was the deity of the Father Himself who came.

Who Jesus Prayed To

A common question asked to a Oneness believer is "Who was Jesus praying to?". Some Oneness believers have explained the phenomenon of Jesus' prayers to be that Jesus' human nature was praying to His divine nature. The result is that Jesus is divided up into two parts, one divine and one human (Nestorianism), and Jesus ends up praying to Himself. Another response is that Jesus did not need to pray; His prayers were only for our example. Neither of these responses are orthodox Oneness explanations.

The author of Hebrews attested to the genuineness of Jesus' prayers when He said, "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with *strong crying and tears* unto him that was able to save him from death, and was *heard* in that he feared" (Hebrews 5:7 italics mine). The author validated that Jesus did indeed pray, and those prayers were prayed to the One Who was able to save Him from death (God). Jesus did not pray to Himself, but He prayed to the Father. These prayers were with strong crying and tears. Clearly these adjectives and verbs demonstrate true action on the part of Jesus, and intense action at that. There would be no reason for such expressive language if Jesus' prayers were not real.

To explain the prayers of Jesus as the human nature of Jesus praying to the divine nature of Jesus poses problems. For one, natures do not pray, people do. Secondly, the Scripture declares that He prayed to God, not Himself. It would make no sense for Jesus to pray to Himself. Surely if this was the case, there would have been no need for verbal expressions of prayer because Jesus could have communicated to the deity within Him in some transferable, telepathic manner. This is not the view of Scripture.

To explain the prayers of Jesus as one divine person praying to another poses even greater problems. If this were the case, then there is a subordination of one divine person to another. Prayer is addressed to one who is superior in power and ability, or else there would be no need for prayer. If this is a case of deity praying to deity, then there is a hierarchy in the Godhead, and a ditheistic Godhead at best. It seems best to understand the prayers of Jesus in light of His humanity. Jesus possessed a complete human psyche through which He communicated with man and with God as all other human beings do.⁴⁴ The verse quoted above demonstrates this well when it explains Jesus' prayers as being prayed "in the days of his flesh." This doesn't mean that the body Jesus possessed during His earthly ministry was dissolved somehow upon His glorification and ascension, but was speaking of the days in which Jesus walked in this earth before His ascension into heaven. It was during that time that Jesus prayed in the manner the author described.

That Jesus' prayers were genuine is witnessed by the fact that Jesus prayed in solitary places and at night (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). Not only did Jesus pray alone, but He prayed all night long at times (Luke 6:12). For Peter, He prayed that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:31-32).

There is probably no greater example of the genuineness of Jesus' prayers than those recorded of in the Garden of Gethsemane before His betrayal and crucifixion. It was here that Jesus prayed so earnestly that it is said "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).⁴⁵

Jesus needed to pray as much as we do, and He did. He prayed because He needed a relationship with God, and depended upon God's strength and power that comes from His anointing to minister to the world and finish the works the Father gave Him to do (John 4:34; 5:36).

Oneness Theology Defended Against Claims of Heresy

As far as the orthodoxy of Oneness theology, most Trinitarians will admit that the differences between Oneness believers and Trinitarians is rather minute and not always so apparent.. Cal Beisner had this to say concerning the differences: "As the differences between modalism and pure trinitarianism are rather minute, it is not surprising that a great number of Christians in mainline denominations...hold a modalistic conception of the Trinity, at least unconsciously."⁴⁶

There is a great continuity between modern Oneness believers and Trinitarians. The following are quotes from some recent works by prominent Trinitarians that are congruent with Oneness teaching. In fact, there are some points that are now being made by modern Trinitarians that Oneness has contended for for years.

Frank Stagg had this to say regarding the person of Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ is God uniquely present in a truly human life, but he is not a second god nor only one third of God. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh (John 1:1). The Word which became flesh was God, not the second person of the trinity. John does not say, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was the Second Person of the Trinity" (1:1). He says that "the Word was God." Jesus Christ is more than "the Second person of the trinity"; He is Immanuel, God with us.⁴⁷

Likewise, concerning the Holy Spirit Stagg said:

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, not the Spirit of the third person of the trinity. The Holy Spirit is God in his nearness and power, anywhere and anytime, the very divine presence incarnated in Jesus Christ now present in His people. He is not a third God or one-third of God. He is God himself relating to us in judgment, guidance, strength, redemption, or otherwise.⁴⁸

Alister McGrath offered some insight pertaining to the word *persons* in reference to the Trinity that modern Oneness believers completely agree with:

The word "person" has changed its meaning since the third century when it began to be used in connection with the "threefoldness of God." When we talk about God as a person, we naturally think of God as being *one* person. But theologians such as Tertullian, writing in the third century, used the word "person" with a different meaning. The word "person" originally derives from the Latin word *persona*, meaning an actor's face mask-and, by extension, the role which he takes in a play. By stating that there were three persons but only one God, Tertullian was asserting that all three major roles in the great drama of human redemption are played by the one and the same God. The three great roles in this drama are all played by the same actor: God. Each of these roles may reveal God in a somewhat different way, but it is the same God in every case. So when we talk about God as one person, we mean one person in the *modern sense of the word*, and when we talk about God as three persons, we mean three persons *in the ancient sense of the word*. ... Confusing the word "person" inevitably leads to the idea that God is actually a committee....⁴⁹

By no means do the above quotes demonstrate that these men are unorthodox Trinitarians, nor do they demonstrate that they are orthodox Oneness believers. For other terminologies employed, and other explanations given by them are not plausible to Oneness believers. What these quotes do demonstrate is that Oneness believers and Trinitarians have more in common than what may have been previously realized.

Oneness (O) believers and Trinitarians (T) 1. both believe in one God; 2. both believe that the Father, Son, and Spirit are God; 3. both confess that the Scripture makes a distinction between the Father, Son, and Spirit; 4. both believe that the Son of God died on the cross, and not the Father; both believe that Jesus was praying to the Father, and not to Himself.

Oneness (O) believers and Trinitarians (T) differ in that 1. T believe that the one God consists of three eternal persons while O believes that the one God is one person; 2. T believe that the second person of the Trinity became incarnated while O believes that the Father, who is one person, became incarnated as the Son of God; 3. T believe that the Son is eternal while O believes that the Son did not exist until the incarnation, because the term refers to God as He exists as a man, and not as He exists in His essential deity; 4. T sees the Biblical distinctions between the Father and the Son to be a distinction in both personality and flesh while O believes that all distinctions are a result of the relationship of the Spirit of God to the incarnate God-man.

Relevance to Life and Ministry

As was mentioned in the beginning of this paper, one's view of God is central to most religions of the world. To the Christian, God is the source of all reality. The way we understand the ontological nature of God will affect the way we interpret the way we are to relate to Him. Having a Oneness view of the Godhead will affect the way we pray. A Trinitarian commonly struggles with the dilemma of who to pray to. Some only addresses one member of the Godhead at a time, or only pray to one. Some Trinitarians have confessed to me that they get confused as to who they should pray to for what, so they end up praying the same prayer three times, addressing it to each member of the Trinity. Oneness believers do not have this confusion. They know that when they pray, it does not matter whether the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit is addressed. Because God is one, and Father, Son, and Spirit are all manifestations of the same Person, we are assured that our prayers are heard.

This means that we can encounter God first-hand. We do not go to some Arian demigod, or to a man who is only adopted as deity by *the* God, nor do we encounter one part of God, but we encounter God Himself.

When ministering to this world, and they desire to see an example of love, we can show them that YHWH Himself became flesh, so that He could die on a cross to atone for our sins. He did not send somebody else. He did not send a second-person, but He came Himself. What a glorious and great God we serve.

Concluding Thoughts

After studying the Godhead so intently, and using such technical words to express the nature of God as precisely as possible, one could be left feeling that they have pinned the tail on the theological donkey. To leave this study with an over-confidence in one's

personal understanding of God is not good. The subject of the Godhead should not be thought of as so far beyond our comprehension that no claim can be made to understanding, but neither should the subject be thought of as so understandable that there is no element of mystery left to God. Our awe of God should increase in conjunction with our understanding of God, producing humility before His infinite presence.

God cannot be limited to our puny vocabulary and ways of explaining His existence. He is beyond us. Trying to grasp the way in which He exists is like trying to cut a tunnel through a mountain with a spoon--we may make some progress, but no matter how long we try or how hard we work, our progress is minute and barely noticeable.

We must always remember that God's revelation, the Bible, is a reduction of reality. God has attempted to express particular things about Himself using human language and material concepts. But God is beyond words, and is spiritual, not material. Let's be honest, how can we put God's infiniteness into words? How can we grasp the concept of an eternal God who has no beginning or ending? How can we understand how God could become a man? How can the infinite become finite, and yet still be infinite. There is so much of God that we do not know and cannot explain, but can only experience glimpses of. Such concepts are very difficult to grapple with. The answers which we come up with should always be held in a tentative manner, realizing that our understanding of God will progress in time. We attempt to fill in the gaps between the Biblical statements to make sense out of them, and unify them into one working theology, but the ways in which we fill in the gaps of the Scriptural facts should be held on a provisional status while we await more understanding. As Michael Bauman has said, "Sometimes our theological reach exceeds our grasp. We simply do not know much of what we think we know."⁵⁰ Who God is, and the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is not beyond some level of understanding, but truly, being able to put our finger on God and define His eternal majesty in any theology book is beyond our grasp. I choose rather to admit that I know what little I know, and to confess that I do not know that which I do not know, for this is the beginning of knowledge. I pray you will do the same.

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Footnotes

1. Louis Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1937), 78, quoted in David Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity: A.D. 100-300* (St. Louis, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1991), 137.
2. Gordon L. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 252.
3. David Bernard, *Oneness and Trinity: A.D. 100-300* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1991), 136.
4. Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 727.
5. Lewis and Demarest, 252.
6. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 259, quoting Basil of Ancyra, found in Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Weber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical & Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 169.
7. J. Hampton Keathley III, "The Trinity (Triunity) of God." <http://www.bible.org/docs/theology/proper/trinity.htm>
8. E. Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1978), 24.
9. All references to God's hands (Isaiah 48:13), nostrils (Exodus 15:8), or eyes (Proverbs 15:3) must be understood as anthropomorphic expressions trying to relate God to us in human terms. God is not one big body up in heaven. To have a body would indicate limitation in space, but God is omnipresent and is not limited by any form or body (I Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7-13). If we are to understand these Scriptures to be physical descriptions of God, we would also be forced to believe that God is part bird because the Scriptures speak of

God as having wings (Psalm 91:4). The Scripture declares that God is Spirit (John 4:24), and spirits by definition do not have physical bodies (Luke 24:36-39).

10. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, on PC Study Bible. Computer Software. Version 2.1. Biblesoft. Seattle, WA. 1993-1996.
11. Ibid.
12. The Bible. New International Version.
13. Paul penned the epistle to the Colossians around A.D. 64, about 34 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, yet at that time he said the fullness of the Godhead "dwells" in Jesus bodily. "Dwells" is in the present tense form in the Greek and English. This indicates that in A.D. 64, the fullness of the Godhead was still dwelling in Jesus Christ's physical body.
14. Daniel L. Segraves, Systematic Theology I (Stockton, CA: n.p., 1997), 31.
- Beisner, 14.
15. A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1932), 5:336.
16. A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1932), 5:336.
17. Liddon, as found in Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words on PC Study Bible.
18. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book I, ch. xiii, sec. xviii.
<http://www.bible.org/docs/history/calvin/institut/ci100014.htm>
19. Alister E. McGrath, Studies in Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 208.
20. Keathley.
21. McGrath, 202.
22. Ibid., 202-3.
23. Ibid., 204.
24. Charles Ryrie, Basic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), electronic media as found in <http://www.bible.org/docs/q&a/q&a-169.htm>
25. Ibid.
26. David K. Bernard, Essentials of Oneness Theology (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1985), 22.
27. Homer A. Kent Jr., The Expositor's Bible Commentary. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. Vol. 11. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 126, as found in Segraves, 11.
28. John Paterson, God in Christ Jesus (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1966), 29.
29. David K. Bernard, The Oneness of God (St. Louis, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983), 197.
30. The name Jesus is never used of God before the incarnation, so I do not mean here that the man Jesus Christ of Nazareth created the universe. Rather, the person we now know as Jesus Christ, as it pertains to His deity, is the Creator, seeing that He was YHWH before the incarnation.
31. Even Jesus confessed that the Father was not on earth, but in heaven when He said to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven...(Matthew 6:9). For the Son to be sent, He had to be sent from somewhere. Wherever He was sent from, that is where it is said that the Father dwells. There can be no doubt that Jesus believed the Father to be someone outside of Himself, who was in heaven, and that He Himself was distinct from the Father, on earth. Jesus said, "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me" (John 7:33b). Jesus ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:9-10). This is where the Father was, and this is where the Son dwells now too. This does not mean, of course, that the Father was not also on earth seeing that the Father is a Spirit who is omnipresent. What it shows us is that the Father was not thought to be centralized within the person of Jesus Christ, but was thought to be the transcendent Spirit of God that fills the heavens.
32. Segraves, 37.
33. Ibid., 38.
34. Ibid.
35. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 2:572-73, quoted in Bernard, Oneness and Trinity, 136.
36. McGrath, 208.
37. Ibid., 213.
38. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book I, ch. xiii, sec. iii.
<http://www.bible.org/docs/history/calvin/institut/ci100014.htm>
39. B.B. Warfield, The Works of B.B. Warfield, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1929), 2:133.
40. Daniel Segraves, Theology of the Church II (Stockton: n.p., 1995), 37-8.
41. Millard J. Erickson, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 335.
42. This doesn't mean that Jesus' humanity was different than ours in any way. The only way in which His humanity could be said to be different from ours is that His humanity only exists by its union with the Spirit of God, whereas our humanity exists by the union of two human parents. The difference between our flesh and His flesh is a matter of origin and subsistence. The origin and subsistence of His flesh is from the conception brought about by the miraculous conception of the Holy Ghost in Mary's womb, while ours is from the genetical influence of two natural parents brought about by a natural conception.
43. Segraves, Systematic Theology I, 7.
44. Segraves, 52.
45. It is not said that Jesus actually sweat blood. Luke said His sweat "was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." The Greek hosei means "nearly or similar to." Jesus' perspiration was so abundant that its drops fell to the ground as do drops of blood. Although it is medically possible to be in such agony as to burst the capillaries in the upper layers of skin, thereby "sweating blood," this doesn't seem to be what Luke intended to say Jesus experienced.
46. Beisner, 18.

47. Frank Stagg, *The Holy Spirit Today* (Nashville: Broadman Press, n.d.), 17-18, quoted in Segraves, *Theology of the Church II*, 14.
48. Stagg, 18, quoted in Segraves, *Theology of the Church II*, 15.
49. McGrath, 209.
50. Michael Bauman, *Pilgrim Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 96.