

Oneness Pentecostals (Jesus Only)

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Oneness Pentecostalism derives its distinctive name from its teaching on the Godhead, which is popularly referred to as the *Oneness doctrine*. This doctrine states that there is one God who manifests himself in many ways, sometimes as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This stands in sharp contrast to the doctrine of three distinct and eternal "persons" in Trinitarian theology. Oneness believers baptize in the name of Jesus Christ, commonly referred to as Jesus-name baptism, rather than using the Trinitarian formula.

This Pentecostal movement first emerged in America around 1914 as the result of doctrinal disputes within the Pentecostal movement and claims an estimated 24 million adherents today.

Their Trinity Error

The Bible teaches there is one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5, 6, 22; Deut. 4:35, 39; Mark 12:29; John 10:30; 1 Cor. 8:4; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 2:5) that exists in three persons (the Trinity). The Trinity is the doctrine that there is one God who exists as three distinct, simultaneous persons. The term: "Tri" meaning three, and "Unity" meaning one means Tri+Unity = Trinity. It is a way of acknowledging what the Bible reveals to us about God, that God is yet three "Persons" who have the same essence of deity.

The exact word "Trinity" (like incarnation, Bible, omniscience, omnipresence, or Rapture) is not found in the Bible, but it is a Scriptural teaching. The name Elohim is plural (Gen. 1:1) and the Trinity is alluded to in the OT (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 2:3 – "us"). The Trinity consists of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:32-33; 2 Cor. 13:14). Each is fully divine – sharing God's existence (Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:2; John 6:27; Acts 5:1-4; Rom. 9:5; 1 Cor. 2:11; 2 Cor. 3:17; Matt. 1:23; Heb. 1:3, 8; 1 John 5:20), each is distinct from the others (Matt. 3:16-17; 26:39; John 14:26; Gal. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:2), and each is a person (Gal. 1:4; 1 John 4:2; 16:7, 13; Eph. 4:30; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

God is but one essence (one substance or entity); yet He exists in three Persons that share this same essence or being. The three Persons are co-equal (sharing the same position as God), but they are still distinct

Persons. Although God exists in three persons (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4–6; Jude 20–21) and each Member of the Trinity exists in the one divine essence (all share God’s existence), it’s also true that each Member is capable of relating individually to the others (Matt. 3:16-17). These three persons have existed in unity and fellowship for all eternity (John 1:18; Heb. 9:14). The common illustrations used to teach the Trinity are not perfect but they can be effectively used to teach people and children. Some examples are the egg (consisting of shell, egg white, and egg yolk), a three leaf clover, and the triangle (sharing the same center but possessing different points).

We must reject the unorthodox belief of modalism (also called Sabellianism) which denies that God is three separate persons that exist in a Trinity. This heresy (Matt. 3:16-17; Heb. 1:8; 1 John 5:7) states that God is only one person who has revealed Himself in three forms or *modes* of personal existence (not three separate persons) in contrast to the Biblical and Trinitarian doctrine which states that God is one being *eternally existing in three persons* (God exists in three simultaneous persons). In other words, modalism is the belief that God is one God who shows himself in three different ways, sometimes as the Father, sometimes the Son, and sometimes the Holy Spirit, but that God never reveals Himself in all these ways at the same time. This is because according to “oneness” theology God is not three separate persons.

This error is taught by the Oneness Pentecostal Movement (“Jesus Only”) and concludes that God does not exist as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the same time, but that He is only one person and has merely manifested himself in three modes of existence at various times throughout history. Modalism is probably the most common theological error concerning the nature of God (who God is). I also reject a similar teaching to modalism which is Swedenborgianism (the New Church Movement) which claims that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are only three essentials or aspects of one God like body, soul, and spirit make up one man. These views are outside orthodox Christianity and are heretical.

The Bible teaches trinitarianism (three persons in one God) but not tritheism (three Gods). The Bible teaches the unity of God (there is only one God) while at the same time maintaining distinctions of persons in the Godhead (Acts 17:23; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9 - “three in one and one in three”). The Athanasian Creed says: “We worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity,

neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.” God in three persons, blessed Trinity! However, the denial that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternally distinct ‘persons’ in the Godhead indirectly undermines the Christian view of God’s character, God’s revelation of Himself to mankind, and God’s salvation by grace.

Their Baptism Error

The “oneness Pentecostals” also deny the Trinity baptism formula which Jesus Himself gave: “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19).

While correctly asserting the Biblical truth that there is only one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4), the Oneness Pentecostals fail to recognize the plurality of the Godhead – there are three person’s in the Trinity that share God’s existence (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; John 1:1; 8:17-18; 14:16; 15:26; 16:13-15:2; Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Revelation 1:4-6). The Trinity formula in baptism, which was given by Jesus, clearly acknowledges this distinction.

This cultic teaching claims that God is only one person and can only manifests Himself as one person at any given time throughout history (modalism or Sabellianism). Therefore, the Oneness Pentecostals declare that there was a “Jesus Only” baptism formula which demonstrates that only Jesus was revealed as God, while He lived during His earthly ministry. The Father and the Holy Spirit could not be God at the same time Jesus was expressing God to humanity. As a result, the claim is made that the names of the “Father” and “Holy Spirit” were not to be used in the baptism formula since at the present time they were not revealing themselves as God. However, the Great Commission formula (Matt. 28:19) is a strong affirmation of Trinitarianism. To conclude anything else about the Godhead, the Trinity, and the names associated with baptism is blatant apostasy and a devilish diversion from the clear teaching of Christ.

The oneness Pentecostals cling to Acts 19:5 which states:
“When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Singling out the name of Christ in the Acts record (Acts 2:38, 10:48, 19:5), at the time of a person’s baptism, is not referring to a different baptism formula. Rather, it is a testimonial emphasizing the *authority* of Jesus Christ over the

lives of those being baptized. The “name” has to do with what these people affirmed and spoke about Jesus Christ at the time of their baptism. It has nothing to do with a different formula (invoking only the name of Jesus) but what they said about Jesus Christ. They were affirming by way of testimony that they had placed their faith in Him for salvation and were now His loyal followers. Confessing His name at the time of their baptism would mean a new relationship of surrender and commitment to Him (Acts 9:6).

We can understand all of these verses in a simple way. The people were “baptized” with the testimony and center of their faith being “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Acts 19:5, “When they heard *this*, they were baptized (the traditional Trinity formula as instructed by Christ – Matthew 28:19) in the name of the Lord Jesus” (by acknowledging outwardly through verbal confession that Jesus Christ was now their Savior and Lord). The new converts and people were “baptized” (what they did) “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (what they affirmed and said).

In other words, these people were baptized realizing the salvation Jesus has provided for them and the authority that Christ now had over their lives in the dawning of the new dispensation. The “name of the Lord Jesus” has reference to the faith and testimony that the people shared about Jesus Christ at the time of their baptism, announcing that He was Lord over their lives (“calling on the name of the Lord” - Acts 22:16).

John’s old baptism, which was a baptism that was connected with repentance and preparation for the coming earthly kingdom (Matt. 3:2, 6), was now being replaced with a baptism for the new Church Dispensation. It was a baptism based upon Jesus Christ having full authority over the lives of His followers. In short, in one unique situation the people were rebaptized (Acts 19:5) as they passed from the Old Covenant into the New Covenant and the new baptism centered upon the authoritative name of Jesus Christ for both salvation and sanctification.

In summary, in Acts 2:38, 10:48 and 19:5 (a time of transition between the Old and New Covenants), we see the name of Jesus singled out and associated with baptism *to indicate the salvation and authority Christ had over the lives of those being baptized*. It was not a different baptizing formula from what Jesus Christ had previously instructed His disciples to perform (Matt. 28:19) but a new outward testimonial of the “name” of Jesus Christ who was now Savior and Lord over the lives of His New Covenant followers.

Their Works Salvation Error

Most Pentecostals and evangelicals believe that only faith in Jesus Christ and repentance from sin are essential elements for salvation, Oneness Pentecostalism defines salvation as repentance + baptism (in Jesus' name) + receiving the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues in order for a person to be saved. Oneness theology maintains that baptism is a necessary part of salvation, that is, in order to be saved, one must be baptized and by immersion. If you are not baptized, you cannot be saved. The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9) without the need of baptism. Consider the Biblical facts stated below.

- Baptism is not part of salvation (Acts 16:31; John 1:12, 3:15-16, 36, 5:24, 6:47; Romans 10:9; Eph. 2:8-9). No apparent contradictory verse could ever destroy this overwhelming evidence of truth. Baptism is not necessary for salvation. It is necessary for obedience.
- Baptism follows salvation (Acts 2:41, 8:35-38, 10:44-48, 16:14-15; 18:8, 12). This is important to understand. Since faith precedes salvation this would mean that faith and baptism should never be construed together. The analogy looks like this: faith – salvation – baptism. The two (faith and baptism) are not linked together to bring salvation into a person's life but are separated from the salvation experience. *Baptism is not part of a person's response of faith in Christ but actually comes after faith has been placed in Christ.* In other words, baptism occurs after a person has already responded to Christ through faith alone. To construe baptism with a person's faith is to bring great confusion of what it means to place faith alone in Christ for salvation.
- Baptism is for those who are already believers (Acts 8:12-13, 36-37, 16:14-15, 18:8, 19:5).
- There are dozens of New Testament passages where salvation is said to be by faith alone in Christ (John 1:12, 3:16, 36, 6:47; Acts 16:31; 20:21; Romans 10:9; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:8). Let us always remember that the Bible is consistent with itself. No verse or two could ever contradict the plain and clear teaching of the Scriptures on this matter. There are no contradictions in the Bible. One should always interpret the Bible in the light of clearly revealed truth, which is easy and unmistakable to understand. All other obscure verses should be

interpreted in light of the clear passages. Although there are those who teach that without the ritual of baptism no one will ever be saved, our salvation is not dependent upon baptism. It is dependent upon grace (Eph. 2:8-9).

- The thief on the cross had the assurance of salvation apart from baptism (Luke 23:43). Likewise, Cornelius and his household, as well as Martha, all had the assurance of salvation apart from baptism (Acts 10:43-48; John 11:25-27).
- The Savior is not stated to have baptized anyone, a strange omission if baptism is essential to salvation!
- The apostle Paul was thankful that he baptized only a few of the Corinthians. This is a strange cause for thankfulness if baptism is to be an expression of our faith in Christ or if baptism has saving merit (I Cor. 1:14-17).
- To include baptism as part of salvation would contradict the Gospel (I Cor. 15:3-4) and would make “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9). There is no mention of baptism in the clear statement about the Gospel. The Gospel is what saves a person. The Gospel message is free from baptism (1 Cor. 1:17).
- If baptism saves, then a man on his deathbed, taking his last few breaths of air, could not be saved.
- Baptism is an outward testimony of a believer’s faith that he has already placed in Christ for salvation (Acts 2:41; 8:35-38, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 18:8, 19:5; I Cor. 1:12-17).
- It’s the blood of Jesus Christ that washes away our sins – not baptism (1 John 1:7).

Oneness churches also teach that speaking in tongues is a necessary manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Since a person cannot be saved without the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), it follows that only those who have spoken in tongues are really saved. There is, therefore, an emphasis that Oneness church members speak in tongues to "demonstrate" that they are saved and have

the truth. However, the Bible gives no Biblical mandate that we must evidence the sign of speaking in tongues in order to be saved. This is also a grievous error taught by the Pentecostal Movement.

Where in the book of Acts and the epistles does the Bible actually teach this? We know that speaking in different languages (actual languages) was part of the early apostolic period of Christianity, which was a miraculous sign that confirmed the apostle's ministry, as they were giving out new revelation (Mark 16:20). It was never taught in the Bible that speaking in tongues was a sign confirming one's salvation or even a lasting sign of one's spirituality. The Corinthians spoke in tongues but were carnal (1 Cor. 3:3). The Bible also teaches that the need for tongues would cease with the passing away of new revelation and the completion of the Bible (1 Cor. 13:10).

Of course, any group that teaches one needs to do certain things in order to be saved (baptism, speaking in tongues, etc.) also teach that a person can lose their salvation. The Oneness Pentecostals are no exception to this rule. They also teach that a person can lose their salvation if they do not live according to a certain holy standard, follow certain prescribed rules, and allow sin to invade their life. This too is a grievous error since Jesus Christ had paid the penalty for every one of our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), finished His work of redemption (John 19:30), and intercedes before God's throne declaring our eternal salvation and justification (Heb. 7:25), so we can never be condemned in God's presence again (Rom. 8:33-39).

The Oneness Pentecostal Movement should be rejected and not associated with because of these serious doctrinal errors. God has called us to embrace sound or healthy doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2:1) and not follow any teaching or movement "that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:10).