

The following is Dan Gill's testimony. The only thing different about Dan's story is that he was a Oneness Pentecostal. The difference between Oneness Pentecostals and Trinitarians is that Oneness believes God to be three manifestations of the one God, whereas, the Trinitarians believe there are three persons in one God. When all is said and done, both basically use the same scriptures to try and prove Jesus is God. The following is his story.

I was reminiscing recently about the mid-1970s. As a young man, I had not been married long. I had a beautiful wife and two young daughters. I particularly remember the sense of confidence I felt in those years. It seemed that life was well and the world was before me.

I recall mine and Sharon's dedication to our church in Nashville. Each week we would make our way to our usual seats: two pews from the front and to the far left. It was an inconspicuous location I think - yet one close enough to be assured of not missing anything. I still remember how the building at times seemed transformed by the sunlight beaming through the stained glass windows. Easily my favorite part of the meetings was the teaching. I wrote lesson notes in my wide margin King James Version Bible to the point that there was little space left. Yet, I continued adding to those notes each passing week.

Sharon and I was a young couple confidently devoted to our faith. Both of us were children and grandchildren of wonderful "Oneness" people: people who had suffered various humiliations in their lives for the belief that God is one. A humiliation meted out by those equally dedicated to the thought that God is not one. Our Oneness heritage was something for which we were, and still are, very thankful.

In those days, we would never have thought that God had another plan for us. Can you imagine sitting in church being taught by capable Oneness teachers and, as they teach, finding yourself coming to a very different understanding of God? I don't think that is what my teachers intended to happen. Yet, sitting in those meetings, as the Scriptures were read; as my teachers would teach, I found my understanding of God and Jesus Christ being completely transformed. Week by week my understanding of God changed from Oneness to One.

What is Oneness?

In Oneness is found the belief that only one is God. That is a laudable conviction to which I am totally devoted to this day. Oneness presents us with the understanding that the spirit of God is not a separate "person" in its own right. Matthew 1:20 tells us that Jesus was begotten in Mary by Holy Spirit. Hence, in Oneness, the spirit of God and the Father himself are one and the same. That is a thought that I believe is certainly in the right direction.

In Oneness theology, however, Jesus is God. And, he is thought to be all of God there is. "Jesus" is the Father; "Jesus" is the Holy Spirit; "Jesus" is the son. For this reason, Oneness theology is sometimes referred to as the "Jesus Only" doctrine. While Oneness concepts may seem somewhat confusing to the balance of the Christian world, my teachers would have been quick to point out that their perspectives are drawn from the Scriptures.

For example, Jesus states in John 14:9: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

Thus, to the Oneness believer, Jesus is "one for one" the Father. Again, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says in John 14:18: "I will not leave you as orphans - I will come to you." From the Oneness point of view this means that Jesus is "one for one" the Holy Spirit. It is of course abundantly clear that Jesus is the son. Thus, Jesus is God in every respect.

Likewise, Jesus says in John 5:43: "I have come in my Father's name." And, he says in John 14:26 that the Father will send the comforter, the counselor, in "his" name. Hence, in Oneness theology, the Father's name and the name of the Holy Spirit are in fact "Jesus."

Thus, the overarching principle of Oneness faith is that Jesus is God and he alone. Consequently, even as a very young person, I knew many syllogisms and scriptures from every part of the Bible which I thought to conclusively demonstrate that Jesus is the eternal God of the universe.

A Time of Change

As a young man of Oneness faith, there was no personal incentive to change my views. Quite to the contrary! It is often thought in Oneness circles that the single most egregious of sins is to deny the crucial tenant that Jesus is the one all encompassing deity. That perhaps, is the sin for which one will never be forgiven! It is against this backdrop of fear that I found myself sitting in my Oneness church, happily minding my own business, hearing exceptional Oneness teachers, but then finding myself questioning my Oneness faith.

To me, the Trinity was simply an untenable idea. I think it is what results from the clashing together of two very opposing thoughts. Those thoughts are that there is only one God - and, that there are multiple "persons" who are God. The mental and verbal contortions necessary to try to make these two opposing concepts work together are foreboding. I am in agreement with many Trinitarian theologians who themselves recognize that the developed doctrine of the Trinity is a "construct" and clearly evolved in post-biblical times.

Yet, in my world in the 1970s, I knew of only two choices. Either you believed in the Trinity or in Oneness. Still, week by week I found myself drawn to a realization that while the Trinity was clearly a "construct," that our Oneness views were also somehow lacking.

It seems that all errors are easy to see through and dismiss, except those we ourselves may be in. I certainly did not want to be wrong in these critical matters. Yet, I reasoned - "What if I am already wrong?" Maintaining our spiritual status quo may be psychologically comforting. However, we must come to draw our comfort from something better. Comfort must be drawn from the value we place on the truth itself - whatever it may be.

So, I did what I have learned to do through my life when faced with that which seems impossible to me. I prayed and began to seek God in these matters. I recall walking at night and telling God that I wanted to know the truth. Above all I wanted to know him as he really is.

As I continued to listen to the teachings each week, I only the more perceived a compelling new understanding of Scripture. Among other things, I began to realize that for Jesus to be in the image of God did not make him God. In fact, it meant he was not God. The image of a thing is not the actual thing itself - it is a representation. Again, I discovered that David too had said in 1 Samuel 17:45 that he came "in the name of the LORD." Did that mean that God's name was David? And, I discovered that the fourth "man" Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fire really wasn't Jesus Christ after all. These were becoming truly wonderful -

enlightening - times for me.

The tide of truth once begun in the heart of a person is not easily stopped. I think that I can rightfully say that I did not so much find the truth of these matters, as truth found me. And in the process, I more wonderfully found God! I more wonderfully found his son Jesus!

Yet, no one knew that I was thinking about these things. Not even my dear, dedicated, devout, Oneness wife. So it was against that same backdrop of fear I mentioned earlier that I sat in our kitchen one afternoon and suggested to Sharon: "Perhaps we could be wrong." As I recall she said: "About what?" I said: "Perhaps we could be wrong about Jesus being God."

It was at that point in my life that I learned what a wonderful woman of faith that I had married. To her credit, she neither immediately embraced the things that I said to her about these matters, nor did she dismiss them out of hand. Sharon genuinely felt that if somehow we were wrong – that Jesus and God are not one and the same - she wanted to know the truth. Sharon and I decided to begin reading through the New Testament together and to let the Scriptures speak to us as they would. We both worked in downtown Nashville at the time. Each day I would drive us to and from work while Sharon would read successive chapters of the New Testament aloud. It was a reading that over the months illuminated us. We had truly launched a journey of faith from Oneness to the One God of the Bible.

What Was I Learning?

What was it that I had been learning during those days? What was it that was so compelling that it led me from Oneness to embrace the One God that I celebrate here today? I was discovering some very fundamental / systemic problems with the Oneness view that Jesus is God. I began to realize that in that view, I really did not have a clear understanding of the one who alone truly is God. And, interestingly enough, my Oneness' views had also caused someone else to be lost to my faith. That someone was the "real" man Jesus, the Messiah. During those years, I began to realize that it is not possible to proclaim that Jesus is God or that God is Jesus without effectively losing much about both of them.

It is an ironic tragedy of theology and faith that the determination to make Jesus a "super-being" ultimately demeans him. The Oneness view takes a similar perspective as other "super-being" theologies and in the process declares the "man" Jesus to be the "flesh part" or simply a "robe of flesh" that God took upon himself. This corresponds to the unfortunate Trinitarian view of Jesus having an "impersonal human nature" (anhypostasia).

We here today do not devalue Jesus Christ by recognizing him for who and what he really is: the true - sinless - virginally begotten – human son of God. It is "super being" theologies that devastate the man Christ Jesus by often making him less than those he saves. Can you imagine the angel saying to Mary: "And you shall conceive in your womb and bring forth an impersonal human nature"? Or, can you picture Gabriel saying to her: "you will bring forth a robe of flesh for God to wear"? The awkward augmentation in the non-scriptural phrase "fully man" highlights a telling weakness in "super-being" theologies. Those in the Bible who genuinely believed that he was a man found it quite sufficient to say: "Jesus Christ a man" (Acts 2:22, 13:38).

I began to realize that in all of the "super-being" theologies, Jesus loses the honor that is rightly his as the only begotten human son of God. Oddly, any theology that makes Jesus more than God's human son diminishes the glory of the "man" Christ Jesus. That is the glory that he should receive as a "true" human being for trusting and obeying God and

setting the matter of our disobedience aright. The man Christ Jesus deserves the credit for undoing what Adam did against us. When we say that Jesus "had to be God" or a pre-existent "angel-like" being to purchase our salvation - we are saying that the only begotten son of God - the man Jesus was not good enough. In Oneness theology degradation of the son of God begins with his being theologically reduced to a "body of flesh." This depravity often finds its ultimate sting in the thought that in the end, the son, will be the no longer needed "part" that will be "done away with." Imagine that the one that died so that we could have unending life will himself not enjoy an unending life. He, being "no longer needed," will be dispatched into non-existence.

And yet the theological tragedy goes on. In "super-being" theologies such as Oneness, Binitarianism, Trinitarianism and Arianism, God loses glory that is due him. Think of all that he did for and through the man Christ Jesus. It was God who caused him to be conceived. It was God who nurtured Jesus and blessed him so that he might become the savior of the rest of us. It was God who answered his prayers and empowered him to do all that he did. It was God who raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand. It was God who had the plans for all of these amazing things - from before all time. God deserves all of the glory for what he has accomplished for us through the man Christ Jesus. When we say that Jesus himself did these things because "he" was God or some form of "super-being" - we have robbed God of glory due only him.

Oneness and other "super-being" ideologies are all theological paradigms that perpetuate this terrible diminishing of the man Christ Jesus while at the same time robbing his Father of glory: the same Father whom Jesus describes in John 17:3 as "the only true God." Clearly, it did not take a "God-man" to accomplish the work of salvation. Rather it took God and a man - his only begotten son. It did not take an "angel-man" to bring humanity hope. It took God and his true human son to bring grace to human beings.

These realizations are the kinds of things that were amazing me as I sat in those Oneness meetings so many years ago. God by his kindness was changing me forever. I now found myself loving and honoring his son in ways I had never done before and honoring God with a clarity which I had been missing.

Finding the "Lost Verses" of Acts the Second Chapter

Allow me to share with you a key passage that reshaped my thinking in those days. Interestingly enough, the passage is from the second chapter of the Book of Acts. I say interestingly because this was a favored passage in my Oneness theology. Most Oneness children know Acts 2:1-4. It is that passage which brings to us the mighty and wonderful account of the receiving of the spirit by the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Likewise, every Oneness person can relate to Peter's quoting of the amazing prophecy of Joel and those incredible words in Acts 2:16: "This is that!" Even as a young child, I was readily able to quote Act 2:38: "Then Peter said to them..."

However, sitting in my Oneness church in the 1970s, I began to realize something odd about our reading and expositions of the second chapter of Acts. It dawned on me that between Peter's completing of his quotation of Joel in verse 21, and the remarks of the crowd which prompted his landmark directives in verse 38, that for us as Oneness people, there was somewhat of a theological "black hole."

I have often tried to recall if I had ever heard even one sermon text taken from any of the verses found from Acts 2:22 through Acts 2:36. Somehow those 15 verses tend to be rather absent from mainline Oneness thought and preaching. Sitting in church in those

days, I began to rediscover the 15 missing verses of Acts the second chapter. Suddenly they had a profound influence on my faith. I found myself reading them again and again.

It also soon became evident to me why as Oneness people we had not been drawn to that part of the 2nd chapter of Acts. The things said in those verses were at the least confusing for the Oneness mind-set and in actuality devastating to our entire way of thinking about God and Jesus. I also find in those verses the virtual dismantling of the other super-being theologies.

It has been well said by Oneness folks that everyone should read Acts. In fact there is an old song in Oneness circles that says, "In Acts the second chapter - you can read it for yourself - you won't have to ask anybody else." I agree. In fact, I think that the Book of Acts is a gift of God for testing our theological ideas. Acts is rather much a "laboratory" in which we can put our theological views on trial. Here, we can set our thoughts along side actual "in the field" teachings and activities of the first Christians. What did their message sound like? What did their faith look like in action? Do our theological ideas match what they actually said and did? If not, then we should revisit our theologies. That is what I began to do. I laid my Oneness theology down along side those 15 "Middle- Acts 2" verses. I found that it failed the test of the laboratory of Acts. Let me highlight some key "lost" verses from "Middle-Acts 2."

Lost Verse No. 1: Acts 2:22 - "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know."

This verse brings us two amazing statements neither of which was congruent with my Oneness teachings. 1st - Jesus is announced to be "a man." This is hardly the declaration that I as a Oneness person would have anticipated Peter would make to those Jews gathered together from "every nation under heaven." It seems inescapable to me that if Peter was Oneness, the proclamation would needed to have been: "Listen O' house of Israel, Jesus was your God - come down to you in human flesh!" Or, at the very least: "he was the God-man." Peter's announcement - "Jesus, a man attested by God" was both accurate and sufficient. Those words launched the apostle's exposition on that day.

The second incongruence was - "by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him." My Oneness faith directed me to believe that Jesus had to be God because of the extra-ordinary miracles that he did. Again, if Peter was Oneness, wouldn't I expect him to declare: by "miracles, wonders and signs that he did - thus proving himself to be your God"?

Lost Verse No. 2: Acts 2:23 - "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."

Again, it is Jesus of Nazareth - a "man" handed over to them. It is a man that they had put to death. There was no message that day about them putting their "God" to death. There was no message that day about having crucified the "man part" of Jesus. It was a "man" from Nazareth that they killed. That is what the crowd heard. It is exactly what Peter meant for them to hear.

Lost Verse No. 3: Acts 2:24 - "But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power."

This verse was particularly difficult for my Oneness mind-set. As a Oneness person I was

straightly to believe that Jesus raised himself from the dead. And why not? Any of the "super-being" theologies would logically draw us to that conclusion. However, if he raised himself would not the most powerful statement Peter could make be that Jesus raised himself from the dead - thus proving that he was God. But, twice in this chapter alone, Peter affirms that God raised "Jesus" - the man from Nazareth - from the dead.

Lost Verses 4 and 5: Acts 2:34,35 - "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' "

To my Oneness faith when one spoke the word Lord it was in itself a reference to "deity" or "God". Here then was an insurmountable difficulty: the LORD (God) is speaking to another who is "lord". And, by the context of Peter's proclamation, this second "lord" is the man Jesus. Clearly Peter's words separate Jesus and God.

Of course Peter is quoting David from Ps. 110:1. This passage from the Old Testament is the single most quoted and referenced in the New Testament. Yet, this "flagship passage" of our brothers in New Testament times was all but hidden from my Oneness faith. I cannot recall a single occasion when this most quoted of all verses by God's people in the New Testament was selected to be the "text" for a message by any of my Oneness ministers.

And this is also wonderful: Peter is not telling the people on the day of Pentecost a story of "God" or an "angel-like" being coming to earth. There is no one "coming down" in Acts 2 to become a "God-man" or an "angel-man." There is, however, someone "taken up." There is no story of God or an "angel-like" being who voluntary debases himself by coming to earth. There is the story of a man who has - by God - been exalted to the right hand of God in heaven.

Lost Verse No. 6: Acts 2:36 - "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Incredible! Jesus is "Lord" - because God has made him Lord. He is the "Christ" - because God has made him to be the Christ. It is short of the mark to honor Jesus Christ as "lord," without also honoring God for making him lord. And notice again, it is not just a "flesh-part" that is made lord. It is "Jesus" himself who is made lord by God. Likewise, God has made Jesus to be the Christ - his anointed one. God has no need to be anointed by anyone. It is he who anoints Jesus (Acts 10:38). Jesus is Lord and Messiah only because God has made him to be these things.

Hence this rhetorical refrain:

If God had not made Jesus to be lord - would he be Lord?

If God had not made Jesus to be Christ - would he be the Christ?

If God had not raised Jesus from the dead - where would he be?

Lost Verse No. 7: Acts 2:38 - (with v. 37) "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do'? Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Acts 2:38 - our cardinal Oneness verse. Verse of verses! Why would I categorize this verse as one of those lost to Oneness theology? It is because, if we fail to grasp the underpinnings of faith in Peter's declarations leading up to Acts 2:38; if we divorce verse 38 from its context, then this verse is also effectively lost. How shall we rightly preach or obey

from the heart, words we don't truly understand?

Let us take a look at what Peter was saying in this landmark verse in light of the things that we now know formed the basis for his directions in Acts 2:38. Peter directs people to do two things. And, he gives the order in which they are to do them.

First: Repent - (Grk. - metanoeo) - In Greek this is a compound word meaning quite literally "change your mind."¹⁵ Peter is telling people that day to change their minds regarding Jesus of Nazareth. They were to believe everything that Peter has just said regarding him.

Thus, true repentance was to embrace:

Acts 2:22 - Jesus was a man approved by God

That God did miracles / wonders and signs through that man.

Acts 2:23 - That they had been complicit in that man's death.

Not the death of "a body" or a "human nature," but of a human being.

Acts 2:24 - That God raised him from the dead.

Acts 2:34, 35 - That God has glorified this man from Nazareth,

and set him at his own right hand.

Acts 2:36 - That God has made Jesus to be Lord / God has made him Christ.

This was true repentance. Is not this exactly the same repentance that we should be proclaiming today? It is Peter's immediate and right answer to the question: "What shall we do?"

By proclaiming that message, people can bring forth that repentance. Then and only then are we ready to approach the second of Peter's two commands: "And be baptized every one of you..." Notice that Peter directs that this will be a baptism in the name of that same man - the anointed Jesus. In this baptism, we as men now fully and wholly identify ourselves with this man - the son of God (Romans 5:17-19). In baptism in his name, we are disciples of "this man" who died for us and whom we now embrace as Lord and Messiah. In this baptism, God views us as companions of his son Jesus and as being in relationship with his death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). Here, our hope and salvation is clearly and wholly appended to Jesus as the true son of God (1 John 4:15; 5:10-12).

And notice Peter's emphatic: "every one of you." The command to be baptized in Jesus' name carries the exact same weight as the command to repent. Everyone who fully repents regarding Jesus is to be baptized in his name. It is the same one they "rejected" and "hanged on a tree." Now they will be immersed into him. And indeed it is the name of Jesus the "Christ" - not Jesus your God; not Jesus the God-man; not Jesus the "angel-man." Rather, it is Jesus the man whom God has anointed: the one he has made Lord, the one he has made Christ.

This immersion was the pivotal moment for the receiving of Peter's message that day. It is synonymous with the acceptance of Jesus himself. It was the consummation of the people's faith in all that they had heard. This repentance is something that we as people can do. Receiving baptism in water in the name of the Messiah is something that we can do. These are directives from Peter. They are imperatives.

And then... you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

About three thousand people became disciples of Jesus Christ that day. Thousands of names were added to the Lamb's book of life. But, as I would read the words of Acts during those meetings years ago, it became inescapable to me that those three thousand people knew nothing of my Oneness view of God and Jesus. It became equally inescapable that Peter was not a Oneness preacher. No Oneness preacher I had ever heard would have proclaimed that message as Peter did that day.

It is also equally clear that Peter was not of any of the "super-being" theologies. By the test of Acts, he was not a Binitarian; a Trinitarian, nor was he an Arian. Peter was not proclaiming any of those theologies on the day of Pentecost. Also remember that the other apostles were present and obviously assenting to Peter's words.

Three thousand people became disciples of Jesus Christ that day by believing exactly what I am preaching about God and Jesus. I am not very original - I just took it directly from Peter. If by this message and these commands three thousand people were "saved," why would not that same message bring forth the same results today?

Three thousand souls were added to the Lord's people based on the hearing and obeying of exactly what we as "One God" people are saying about Jesus and God. No other theology fits that occasion. The theology that I now hold fits it exactly! Clearly, people can be saved "without" embracing the Trinity, Binitarianism, Oneness or Arianism. Can they be saved, however, without believing and embracing the things that Peter spoke in Acts 2:22-36? This is a question for all to consider!

If Peter were here today, I can hear him saying exactly the same things that he was saying in those wonderful verses of "Middle-Acts Chapter 2." I can hear him saying to us that God has made Jesus Lord, and that God has made him Christ. I can hear him saying on the basis of that message: "change your minds and be baptized - every one of you - in the name of Jesus the anointed one for the forgiveness of sins." And how great are this repentance and this baptism? They are the basis upon which people in the Bible anticipated receiving the Holy Spirit.

~Dan Gill

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