

# Oneness Pentecostalism: Refuting its Soteriology, Christology, and Theology

E. Calvin Beisner

## I. Historical Background

- A. Offshoot of American Pentecostal movement of early 1900s
- B. Prompted in 1913-1916 by adoption of a “Jesus’ name” baptismal formula
- C. Opposed by Assemblies of God (main Pentecostal denomination) in 1915 and 1916.
- D. Ministers banned from AG formed General Assembly of Apostolic Assemblies in 1916; merged in 1918 with Pentecostal Assemblies of the World in 1918; split over racial tensions in early 1920s; many mergers and splits ensued during the next two decades; the leading denomination now is the United Pentecostal Church, International, founded in 1945 by the merger of the Pentecostal Church International and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ.
- E. UPCI is now headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri, claims about 1 to 1.3 million members, and operates the Pentecostal Publishing House, which publishes under the name Word Aflame Press, about nine Bible colleges in the United States, and the Harvestime radio program.
- F. There are many other, smaller Oneness Pentecostal denominations.
- G. In 1990 Oneness Pentecostals numbered about 1.4 million in ninety denominations worldwide, or about 0.8 percent of all Pentecostals and 0.09 percent of all professing Christians.
- H. Oneness Pentecostalism’s leading theological defenders, through books and taped lectures, are David K. Bernard, William B. Chalfant, and Robert Brent Graves, though others have also published defenses of Oneness doctrines.
- I. Oneness Pentecostalism is distinguished by its Christology, theology (doctrine of God), and soteriology (doctrine of salvation).
  1. Christology: Jesus is God; is the Son of God only in His incarnation; and can have the “fullness of the Deity” (Colossians 2:9) dwelling in Him only because He is the Father and the Holy Spirit.
  2. Theology: The doctrine of the Trinity is false and pagan; Jesus = the Father = the Holy Spirit. The view is called *modalism* because it interprets Father, Word, and Spirit not as distinct Persons but as varying *modes* in which God relates to His creatures. It is a revival of ancient Sabellianism, a heresy condemned in the early Church.
  3. Soteriology: Justification is by grace through faith, but not by grace alone through faith alone, rather through a new birth achieved by a combination of faith, repentance, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit, the last essential to salvation and never lacking the “initial evidence” of speaking in tongues.

## II. Christology: Refuting Oneness Theology’s Threat to the Unity of Christ

- A. We shall save the discussion of whether Christ is or is distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit for our discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity.
- B. Oneness Pentecostalism teaches that Jesus is the Son of God only in His humanity.

1. Jesus' Sonship "began at Bethlehem" and "the humanity of the Lord Jesus is the Son," according to Oneness writer Gordon Magee.
  2. According to David Bernard, "The Word had pre-existence and the Word was God (the Father), so we can use [the title *Word*] without reference to humanity. However, the Son always refers to the Incarnation and we cannot use it in the absence of the human element."
  3. Bible verses that appear to reveal a distinction between Jesus and either the Father or the Holy Spirit actually reveal only the distinction between the divine and human natures of Jesus.
- C. Orthodox Christianity teaches instead
1. that the Word is a Person eternally distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit (a topic we shall save for discussion under the doctrine of the Trinity); and
  2. that though His human sonship had a beginning, His divine sonship is not a mere temporary role with beginning and end. Instead, His sonship is eternal and the term *Son* properly applies to the preincarnate Word.
- D. Refutation of arguments for Oneness Christology
1. Arguments that Jesus' sonship is temporal:
    - a. *Luke 1:35* says that the holy One to be born of Mary "will be called the Son of God." But this only affirms that He will be called the Son of God after the incarnation; it does not deny that He was or should have been called the Son of God before the incarnation. If He was the Son before the incarnation, and then became incarnate, He remained the Son.
    - b. *Matthew 1:20* and other verses call the Son "begotten," which implies a beginning in time. But the Bible refers Christ's begetting to His conception in the womb of Mary (*Matthew 1:20*; *Luke 1:31* [and perhaps 35]; *2:21*), His birth from Mary (*Matthew 2:1-2, 4*; *Luke 2:11* [and perhaps 1:35]), and His resurrection (*Acts 13:33* and probably *Hebrews 1:5* and *5:5*). If having been "begotten" at birth and resurrection did not prevent His existence as the Son before both, having been "begotten" at conception in the womb of Mary did not prevent His existence as the Son before that.
  2. Arguments that distinctions between Jesus and the Father are simply distinctions between Jesus' human and divine natures:
    - a. *Bernard asserts that plurals in reference to Jesus and the Father merely denote this distinction between two natures in Jesus.* But asserting it doesn't make it so, and there are verses in which that explanation cannot work.
    - b. For example, when he explains Jesus' prayers to the Father by saying that this is Jesus' human nature praying to His divine nature, he either
      - (1) implies that Jesus was not fully man by making his divine Spirit substitute for the human spirit as the animating principle in the body, thus depriving the human side of Christ of that element of humanity, following the ancient heresy of Apollinarianism, rejected at the Council of Constantinople in 381, or
      - (2) implies that Jesus was two persons by enabling each to talk to the other using first- and second-person pronouns.

- (3) Both of these views entail an anti-Biblical view of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, for the first implies that the sacrifice was not made by a fully human person and therefore not made by a proper representative of sinful men, and the second implies that the sacrifice was made *only* by a man and not by God and therefore was not sufficient to pay the infinite debt of sin.
- (4) By denying that Christ died for men's sins *as God* (not merely as man), Oneness theology implies an atonement that cannot fully save, because
  - (a) Psalm 49:7-9, 15 teach that it is impossible for a mere man to make full atonement and ransom for sin.
  - (b) Yet 1 Timothy 2:5 and Romans 5:12-19 teach that the sacrifice for man's sin had to be made by a man.
  - (c) Thus only One who died as both fully God and fully man could properly pay the penalty for man's sin and accomplish man's salvation.
  - (d) Note how doctrine all hangs together.

E. Arguments for orthodox Christology

1. Definition, based on the *Symbol of Chalcedon* (A.D. 451):
  - a. The Word, who at the incarnation was named Jesus, is very God.
  - b. The Word is the eternal Son of God, eternally distinct from the Father.
  - c. The Word became truly man.
  - d. Although the Word is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" in the incarnate Jesus (Colossians 2:9).
  - e. Jesus Christ is one Person who, since, the incarnation, subsists in two distinct natures and made atonement for sin as both God and man.
2. Oneness Pentecostalism agrees that the Word is God, as taught, e.g., in John 1:1 and Titus 2:13.
3. The Word is eternally distinct from the Father.
  - a. John 1:1b, "the Word was *with* God," denotes personal relationship that is not identity.
  - b. Colossians 1:13-17 clearly reveals a distinction between Father and Son that predates the incarnation. The Father "brought us into the kingdom of *the Son* he loves, in *whom* [the Son] we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. *He* [the Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by *him* [the Son] all things were created . . . ; all things were created by *him* [the Son] and for *him* [the Son]. *He* [the Son] is before all things, and in *him* [the Son] all things hold together."
  - c. John 17:1, 4-5 likewise reveals a personal distinction between Father and Son before the incarnation, for there Jesus prays, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. . . . I have brought you glory *on earth* by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory *I had with you before the world began.*"
4. The Word became truly man. John 1:14, "The Word became flesh," the term *flesh* there denoting, as it often does, according to Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon*, the whole man, the human being.
5. Although the Word is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, "all the fullness of the

- deity lives in bodily form” in Him (Colossians 2:9).
- a. John 15:9-10 reveals that Jesus is not the Father: “As *the Father* has loved *me*, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as *I* have obeyed *my Father’s* commands and remain in his love. . . .” Compare the whole Upper Room Discourse of Jesus, reported in John 14-17, for His constant expressions of distinction between Himself and the Father.
  - b. John 15:26 reveals a distinction between Jesus and the Holy Spirit: “When *the Counselor* comes, whom *I will send* to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, *he* will testify about *me*.” See also John 14:16, 26; 16:7, 13-15.
  - c. Nonetheless it remains true, as Colossians 2:9 states, that “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” in Him.
6. Jesus Christ is one Person who, since, the incarnation, subsists in two distinct natures and made atonement for sin as both God and man.
- a. Jesus is one Person (a single thinking, feeling, and choosing agent).
    - (1) Ephesians 4:5 says of Him that there is “one Lord.”
    - (2) 1 Corinthians 1:13 demands a negative answer to the question, “Is Christ divided?”
  - b. Since the incarnation Jesus exists in two distinct natures, without confusion or separation, so that the one Person is fully God and fully man.
    - (1) Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1, 1 John 5:20, John 1:1, and John 20:28 all call Jesus God.
    - (2) 1 Timothy 2:5 says that the one Mediator between God and men is “the man Christ Jesus.”
    - (3) Romans 5:17 and 19 also call Jesus a man.
    - (4) The two natures remain distinct, not mixed or confused, for:
      - (a) God is by nature infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, while
      - (b) man is by nature finite, temporal, and changeable, and
      - (c) the same nature cannot be simultaneously infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, unchangeable and changeable.

### III. Theology: Oneness vs. the Trinity

#### A. Oneness Pentecostalism teaches that

1. there is only one God,
2. the Father is God, Jesus is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and
3. Jesus = the Father = the Holy Spirit.
  - a. Jesus = the Father. According to Bernard:
    - (1) “Isaiah 9:6 calls the Son the everlasting Father. Jesus is the Son prophesied about and there is only one Father (Malachi 2:10; Ephesians 4:6), so Jesus must be God the Father.”
    - (2) In John 8:19, 24-25, and 27 “. . . Jesus Himself taught that He was the Father.”
    - (3) “In another place Jesus said, ‘I and my Father are one’ (John 10:30).”
    - (4) “Jesus promised to be the Father of all overcomers (Revelation 21:6-7).”

- (5) In John 14:7-11, Jesus claimed to be the Father. “This statement . . . can be viewed as nothing less tha[n] the claim of Christ to be the Father manifested in the flesh.”
  - b. Jesus = the Holy Spirit. According to Bernard, John 14:16-18, Romans 8:9-11, Philippians 1:19, and Colossians 1:27 all reveal that “The Holy Spirit is the Spirit that was incarnated in Jesus and is Jesus in Spirit form . . . .”
  - c. Arguing a technical point of Greek grammar, Robert Brent Graves claims that “when two nouns (of the same case) are connected by ‘and,’ the nouns always refer to *one* person, place, or thing if only the first noun has the Greek definite article before it,” and consequently
    - (1) 1 Corinthians 1:3 should be translated “from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ” or “from God our Father, even the Lord Jesus Christ”;
    - (2) Colossians 2:2 should be translated “the mystery of God—even of the Father—even of Christ”;
    - (3) 2 Corinthians 1:2 should be translated “from God our Father, even the Lord Jesus Christ.”
  - d. Oneness writers also claim that the doctrine of the Trinity
    - (1) is illogical,
    - (2) uses unbiblical terminology,
    - (3) is a pagan belief, and
    - (4) was opposed by the early Church, which instead taught Oneness.
- B. Orthodox Christianity teaches instead that
- 1. there is only one God,
  - 2. the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is each God, and
  - 3. the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is each a distinct Person.
- C. Refutation of arguments for Oneness theology.
- 1. We agree that there is only one God.
  - 2. We agree that the Father is God, Jesus is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.
  - 3. We deny that Jesus = the Father = the Holy Spirit.
    - a. Oneness arguments do not prove that Jesus is the God the Father.
      - (1) Simply finding Jesus (the Son) called “father” (Isaiah 9:6) does not prove that He is God the Father, since *father* is a relational term, its sense determined by the relationship in mind. I am a father, but I am not *my* father. Oneness writers must prove that Jesus is called specifically the Father of the Son of God (i.e., His own Father); this they cannot do. In Isaiah 9:6, “Father of eternity” is a Hebraism for originator or creator of eternity, not the name of God the Father.
      - (2) Jesus did not teach “that He was the Father” in John 8:19, 24-25, 27. By leaving out verse 26, Bernard makes it look as if John’s explanation (“He was telling them about his father,” verse 27) applied to Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees’ question in verse 25 (“Who are You?”), but in verse 26 Jesus said, “I have much to say in judgment of you. But *he who sent me* is reliable, and what I have heard from *him* I tell the world,” and so the explanation in verse 27 is clear: *the One who sent Him* and from whom He had heard was His

Father.

- (3) John 10:30 does not show that Jesus is the Father, for Jesus did not say “I am the Father” but “I and the Father *are* one”—the plural verb indicating that the subjects (“I” and “Father”) denote distinct Persons.
- (4) Revelation 21:6-7 does not mean that Jesus is the Father. It is not Jesus but “He who was seated on the throne” (21:5) who says of him who overcomes, “I will be his God and he will be my son.” “He who was seated on the throne” is the Father (according to Revelation 3:21; 4:2-3, 9-11; 5:1, 6-7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 14-15; 19:4; 20:11) and is distinguished from the Lamb (5:13; 6:16; 7:10), who has His own throne (3:21) and “came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne” (5:7).
- (5) Jesus did not claim to be the Father in John 14:7-11.
  - (a) Jesus distinguishes Himself from the Father by using prepositions to show a relationship between them: “No one comes *to* the Father except *through* me” (14:6); “I am *in* the Father, and . . . the Father is *in* me” (14:10-11); the Father is “living *in* me” (14:10); “I am going *to* the Father” (14:12).
  - (b) He explicitly contrasts Himself with the Father when He says, “The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (14:10).
  - (c) Oneness arguments focus on Jesus’ saying, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (verse 9). But the only thing people could *see* of Jesus was His Body, which Oneness Christology (like Trinitarian Christology) denies was divine. Thus he cannot have spoken literally when he said that whoever *saw* him *saw* the Father.
- b. Oneness arguments do not prove that Jesus is the Holy Spirit.
  - (1) In John 14:16-18, Jesus expressly distinguishes Himself from the Holy Spirit by calling Him “another Counselor” and using third-person pronouns to denote Him but first-person pronouns to denote Himself.
  - (2) Romans 8:9-11, Philippians 1:19, and Colossians 1:27 do not say that Jesus is the Holy Spirit.
- c. Robert Brent Graves was wrong about Greek grammar. He purports to be representing “Granville Sharp’s rule” for the use of the article *ho* (“the”) with the conjunction *kai* (“and”), but in reality Sharp described six rules, not one, and none of them implies the translations Graves claims for the verses he cites. Graves writes as if only the first of Sharp’s six rules existed, and then he misapplies that to the verses. As a result, all of his translations are wrong.
  - (1) 1 Corinthians 1:3 exemplifies not the first but the fifth of Sharp’s rules, and according to the fifth rule, the nouns denote distinct Persons because the first noun *lacks* the article.
  - (2) Colossians 2:2 exemplifies not the first but the sixth of Sharp’s rules, and according to the sixth rule, the nouns denote distinct Persons because the article is repeated before “Christ.”
  - (3) 2 Corinthians 1:2 exemplifies not the first but the fifth of Sharp’s rules, and

therefore “God our Father” is distinct from “the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- d. Oneness writers’ other four types of anti-Trinitarian arguments also fail.
  - (1) The doctrine of the Trinity is not illogical. It asserts that God is one in nature or substance and three in Person, but not either that He is both one and three in nature or substance or that He is both one and three in Person. Nature and person are distinct categories of things; some natures (electricity, graphite, quartz) are not persons at all, while some natures (deity, humanity) are persons. Therefore there is nothing illogical about asserting that something is one in nature but three in Person.
  - (2) That the doctrine of the Trinity uses unbiblical terminology is irrelevant.
    - (a) What is important is what the terminology means and whether what it means is consistent with what is taught in Scripture, not whether the terminology itself is found in Scripture.
    - (b) Oneness writers are biased, since they object to *Trinity* because it is not found in Scripture, but not to *Oneness*, which also is not found in Scripture.
  - (3) The doctrine of the Trinity is not pagan.
    - (a) The various “trinities” of pagan religions are not analogous to the Christian Trinity but are tritheistic, modalistic (actually more like Oneness’s doctrine of God), or emanational and impersonal.
    - (b) Even if there were a pagan equivalent of the doctrine of the Trinity (and there is not), that would not prove that the Trinity was false, since some pagans also believe that God created the universe, and their doing so does not prove that belief false.
  - (4) The early Church did not oppose the doctrine of the Trinity but taught it and opposed Oneness.
    - (a) Bernard and other Oneness writers present many quotations from early Christians that they claim support Oneness, but a thorough examination of those quotations in their original contexts shows otherwise. See my book for treatment.
    - (b) Some of those quotations do show that some early Christian writers fell short of a properly Biblical doctrine of the Trinity, but they also reveal that they taught things about God that Oneness denies.
    - (c) Besides, what is most important is not what the early Church taught but what Scripture teaches.

D. Arguments for orthodox Trinitarianism

1. Definition, based on the *Athanasian Creed* (ca. late fifth or early sixth century):
  - a. There is only one God.
  - b. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is each God.
  - c. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is each a distinct Person.
2. Oneness theology agrees that there is only one God and that the Father, the Word (but not the Son, which as we saw denotes only Christ’s humanity), and the Holy Spirit is each God.
3. The Father and the Son are distinct Persons.

- a. They glorify each other both before and after the incarnation (John 17:1, 4-5).
  - b. They are distinct as judge and judged in the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46).
  - c. They are distinguished as two witnesses (John 8:14-18): “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.”
    - (1) Jesus cannot be speaking here merely as human, for He claims to have come from heaven.
    - (2) So the distinction is between the Father and the Son as divine, not merely between the Father and Jesus’ human nature.
    - (3) If Jesus and the Father were the same person, there would be only one witness, not two.
4. The Father and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons.
    - a. The Father will “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Luke 11:13).
    - b. The Father *sends* the Holy Spirit (John 14:25-26).
  5. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons.
    - a. Jesus said in Matthew 12:28 that He drove out demons *not* by Himself *but* “by the Spirit of God.”
    - b. Blasphemy against the Son of Man (a title for Jesus) can be forgiven, but not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-33).
    - c. Jesus sends the Spirit as Someone distinct from Himself (John 15:26; 16:7-11).
  6. Specific passages denote Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct from each other. For example, in John 14:16, Jesus says, “And *I* [the Son] will ask the Father, and *he* will give you *another Counselor* [the Holy Spirit] to be with you forever.”
  7. The fifth and sixth of Sharp’s rules for the use of the article with the conjunction with personal nouns require that certain verses be understood to indicate that Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct Persons.
    - a. The fifth rule is that when the first noun lacks the article, each noun must denote a distinct person, according to which Romans 1:7 (“God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”) and Galatians 1:1 (“Jesus Christ and God the Father”) both show that the Father and the Son are distinct Persons.
    - b. The sixth rule is that when each noun is preceded by the article, each noun must denote a distinct person, according to which
      - (1) Matthew 28:19 (“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”) shows that Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct Persons; and
      - (2) 1 Thessalonians 3:11 (“our God and Father . . . and our Lord Jesus Christ”) and 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (“our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and God our Father”) shows that Father and Son are distinct Persons.
  8. The early Church taught the doctrine of the Trinity and condemned modalism. Time doesn’t permit quotations proving this, but see my book.

IV. Soteriology: Salvation by Grace Alone through Faith Alone or By Grace and Debt through Faith and Works?

A. Oneness Pentecostalism teaches that

1. In Adam all men fell into sin, guilt, and spiritual death, and therefore no one can satisfy God's requirements of perfect righteousness or atone for his own sin.
2. Justification is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who died as a substitutionary sacrifice to satisfy the penalty for the sins of all men.
3. Salvation requires a new birth.
4. New birth is achieved by four steps: faith, repentance, water baptism (which *must* be by immersion and in the name of Jesus only and is the indispensable means of regeneration and remission of sins), and baptism in the Holy Spirit (always accompanied by the gift of tongues).

B. Orthodox Christianity

1. Agrees that all men are born guilty and dead sinners because of Adam's sin.
2. Agrees that justification is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who died as a substitutionary sacrifice to satisfy the penalty for sin.
3. Agrees that salvation requires a new birth.
4. Denies that new birth is the result of faith, repentance, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.

C. Arguments for Oneness soteriology

1. Since Oneness and orthodoxy agree that man is born sinful, we can ignore that.
2. Since Oneness and orthodoxy agree that justification is by grace through faith in Christ, who died as a substitutionary sacrifice to satisfy the penalty for sin, we can ignore that, though we must caution that Oneness soteriology becomes self-contradictory regarding whether justification is truly through faith.
3. Since Oneness and orthodoxy agree that regeneration (new birth) is necessary for salvation, we can ignore that, though we shall argue that the new birth is not achieved through faith, repentance, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.
4. New birth is achieved by faith, repentance, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.
  - a. Oneness writers have not provided arguments that regeneration is achieved through faith, but seem to have assumed it, as do many evangelical Christians.
  - b. Oneness writers have not provided arguments that regeneration is achieved through repentance, but seem to have assumed it, as do many evangelical Christians.
  - c. Water baptism is the indispensable means of regeneration.
    - (1) According to the authors of the UPCI publication *Bible Doctrines: Foundation of the Church*, John 3:5, by saying that a man must "be born of water and of the Spirit," proves that "Water baptism is a part of that process by which a man is born into, or made a part of, the kingdom of God."
    - (2) Similarly, Titus 3:5 says that we are saved "through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" and therefore shows that water baptism is necessary for salvation.
    - (3) The same authors claim that Romans 6:4 shows that we are buried with

Christ in baptism.

- d. Water baptism is the indispensable means of remission of sins. The same authors claim that
    - (1) Acts 10:43 shows that “Baptism is where the sins are officially remitted through the name of the Lord Jesus.”
    - (2) Acts 22:16, where Ananias tells Paul to “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord,” shows that “Those who have repented and believed upon Christ can be cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”
    - (3) Acts 2:38 shows that “Water baptism is ‘for the remission of sins.’”
  - e. Water baptism must be by immersion to be effective.
    - (1) Oneness writer D. L. Welch claims, “The word *baptize* comes from the Greek words *bapto* and *baptizo*, which mean to plunge, dip, or immerse. . . . Thus, to baptize anyone correctly, we must immerse him into water.”
    - (2) Oneness writers claim that Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12 say we are buried with Christ by baptism into death. Therefore, “Any other mode of baptism is incomplete and contrary to the teaching of the Bible.”
  - f. Water baptism must be administered with a Jesus’ name formula to be effective. Bernard and other Oneness authors argue:
    - (1) “Since water baptism is ‘for the remission of sins’ and since the name of Jesus is the only name that saves from sin (Acts 4:12), it is needful for the name of Jesus to be spoken in water baptism.”
    - (2) “. . . the early church administered water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11-12).”
    - (3) Historical evidence shows that the Jesus’ name formula, not the triune formula, was used by the early Church.
  - g. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is essential to salvation and never occurs without the “initial evidence” of speaking in unknown tongues. According to Bernard
    - (1) “The baptism with, by, in, or of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) is part of New Testament salvation, not an optional, postconversional experience (John 3:5; Romans 8:1-16; Ephesians 1:13-14; Titus 3:5).
    - (2) “The Bible records five historical accounts of receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church: the Jews, the Samaritans, the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul, and the disciples of John at Ephesus. This record establishes that
      - (a) The baptism of the Spirit is indeed for everyone (Luke 11:13; Acts 2:39)
      - (b) And is accompanied by the sign of tongues (Mark 16:17). . . .
      - (c) Three of the accounts explicitly describe speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of receiving the Spirit [Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48; 19:1-7]. . . . Tongues are implicit in the other two accounts [Acts 8:8, 12-19; 9:17, compare 1 Corinthians 14:18].”
- D. Refutation of arguments for Oneness soteriology
- 1. Orthodoxy agrees that in Adam all humankind fell into sin, guilt, and spiritual death and therefore no one can satisfy God’s requirements of perfect righteousness or atone

- for his own sin.
2. Orthodoxy agrees that justification is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who died as a substitutionary sacrifice to satisfy the penalty for sin. However, the Oneness makes obedience a condition of justification rather than the fruit of the faith that is the real condition of justification, and therefore undermines its own doctrine of justification through faith.
  3. Orthodoxy agrees that salvation requires a new birth.
  4. Orthodoxy denies that the new birth is achieved by faith, repentance, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.
    - a. Some orthodox Christian denominations teach that the new birth is the result of faith, but Reformed theology teaches that faith is the result of new birth, arguing, for example, from John 1:12-13: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who *were born* [note the past tense; the rebirth precedes the faith], not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," and John 5:24: "Most assuredly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but *has passed* [note the past tense; rebirth precedes faith] from death into life.
    - b. Orthodox Christianity recognizes that repentance (a "change of mind") is simply an aspect of faith, so that real faith must include repentance.
    - c. Water baptism is *not* the indispensable means of regeneration.
      - (1) In John 3:5, "born of water" may denote either natural birth (in which case the statement means that a man "must be born not only naturally but also of the Spirit") or being born of the Spirit (in which case the statement means that a man "must be born of water, that is, of the Spirit").
        - (a) Either of these interpretations is grammatically possible, and neither can be ruled out simply by one's preference for water baptism. Oneness arguments therefore argue in a circle at this point, assuming what is to be proven.
        - (b) If "born of water" denotes neither natural birth nor being born of the Spirit but water baptism, then verse 5 requires both baptism and being born of the Spirit while verse 8 requires only being born of the Spirit, while if "born of water" means being "born of the Spirit" then verses 5 and 8 require the same thing.
      - (2) Similarly, "washing of regeneration" in Titus 3:5 need not be understood as denoting water baptism, and using it as an argument for the Oneness position involves arguing in a circle.
        - (a) "Washing of regeneration" may allude to spiritual rebirth.
        - (b) Seeing it as denoting baptism instead creates a contradiction within verse 5, for
          - i) Water baptism, commanded by God, is a righteous thing we do.
          - ii) But God "saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."
          - iii) So if "washing of rebirth" is water baptism, then God saved us "not

- because of righteous things we had done . . . but through baptism [i.e., a righteous thing we do],” which is contradictory.
- (3) Romans 6:4 does not state that baptism is indispensable to our burial with Christ, only that we are buried through it; it does not follow that we cannot be so buried apart from it. (Analogy: “Tom arrived by train” does not imply that had Tom not taken the train he could not have arrived by car or plane. The Oneness argument here is an example of the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent.)
  - (4) Not only do these passages not prove that water baptism is indispensable to regeneration, but also Scripture teaches that regeneration sometimes occurs before water baptism (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 30-33; 18:8).
- d. Water baptism is *not* the indispensable means of remission of sin.
- (1) Acts 10:43 does not mention baptism, much less say it is “where sins are officially remitted.” Instead, it says, “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
  - (2) Acts 22:16 does not prove that water baptism is indispensable to washing away sins.
    - (a) Assuming that Ananias’s words to Paul really meant that Paul’s sins were to be washed away in water baptism, the verse would not prove that baptism is *indispensable* to remission.
      - i) A cause may be sufficient but not necessary; necessary and sufficient; necessary but not sufficient; or neither necessary nor sufficient but elective.
      - ii) Baptism here cannot be a *sufficient* cause (whether necessary or not) of remission or regeneration, because it is ineffective apart from faith (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
      - iii) It cannot be a *necessary but insufficient* cause because remission can occur before it (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 30-33; 18:8; Luke 23:39-43; Romans 4:9-12; Colossians 2:11-14).
      - iv) Therefore water baptism, even if it were a cause of remission or regeneration, would have to be neither necessary nor sufficient but *elective*; God, the agent of regeneration, may elect to use it or not.
    - (b) Scripture sometimes refers to a symbol as if it were the thing symbolized, yet, like bread in communion (John 6:51, 56), symbol and thing are not confused; Christ’s death, not broken bread, saves. Similarly, water baptism symbolizes our purification from sin (Acts 22:16) and union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-7), yet Christ’s blood, not water, washes away our sins (Hebrews 9:13-14, 22; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 7:14; 1 Peter 3:21). Therefore, neither water nor water baptism, but the blood of Christ and its application to us, *symbolized* in baptism, are the real cause of our regeneration and remission of sins.
  - (3) Acts 2:38 does not prove that baptism is indispensable to remission of sins.
    - (a) Grammatically, the command to be baptized is not connected with the

- promise of remission of sins.
- i) The command to repent is in second person plural and active voice.
  - ii) The command to be baptized is in third person singular and passive voice.
  - iii) The possessive pronoun *your* modifying the sins that are remitted is in second person plural.
  - iv) Therefore, the grammatical connection is between *repent* and *for the remission of your sins*, not between *be baptized* and *for the remission of your sins*.
  - v) The best translation of the verse, therefore, is: “Repent for the remission of your sins, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ . . . .”
- (b) The phrase *for the remission of your sins* need not mean “in order to obtain the remission of your sins.”
- i) The Greek word translated *for*, the word *eis*, has many meanings.
  - ii) One denotes “reference to a person or thing *for, to, with respect or reference to*.”
  - iii) Another means *because of*.
  - iv) If either of these is the case here, then even if the command to be baptized were linked with “for the remission of your sins” it would not prove that baptism was “in order to obtain” but would mean that it was “in reference to” or “because of” the remission of your sins.
  - v) For Oneness proponents to insist otherwise is for them to argue in a circle, assuming as their interpretive principle in this verse the very point they seek to prove by this verse.
- e. Water baptism *need not* be by immersion to be effective.
- (1) The most exhaustive study ever done of the Greek words *bapto* and *baptizo*, James Wilkinson Dale’s four-volume study, demonstrated that they often denote actions having little or nothing to do with immersion.
  - (2) No verse or verses in the Bible prove that baptism must be by immersion.
- f. Water baptism *need not* be administered with a Jesus’ name formula to be effective.
- (1) Scripture nowhere *instructs* recitation of Jesus’ name during water baptism.
  - (2) None of the verses the Oneness writers cite proves that water baptism must be administered in Jesus’ name.
    - (a) None introduces the words of a quotation.
    - (b) Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:27, and Colossians 2:11-12 don’t even use *in the name*.
    - (c) None of the remaining verses represents a consistent formula used in water baptism, the Greek words varying among them.
  - (3) Historical evidence does not show that the Jesus’ name formula was preferred by the early Church.
    - (a) Oneness authors Thomas Weisser and David Bernard claim that historical evidence supports a Jesus’ name formula and condemns a triune formula.

- (b) Yet of the 47 citations they offer, 10 clearly and 3 possibly present no evidence for any formula; 11 clearly and 4 possibly accept either formula; and only 4 clearly (including the second-century gnostic Marcionites, who called the Father a false demigod, and two fourth-century Arians and the sixteenth-century Polish Brethren, all of whom denied the deity of Christ) and 3 possibly (including a seventeenth-century Anabaptist who might have denied the deity of Christ; a nineteenth-century Oneness believer; and another nineteenth-century writer who denied the Trinity and may have been Oneness) require a Jesus' name formula. Of the 23 they cite from the first four centuries, only 3 (the Marcionites and two Arians) require a Jesus' name formula; only 2 clearly and 6 possibly permitted either formula; 6 clearly and 4 possibly required a triune formula; and 6 clearly and 2 possibly present no evidence for any formula.
- g. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is *not* essential to salvation, and speaking in tongues is *not* the indispensable initial evidence of being baptized in the Spirit.
  - (1) None of the verses cited by Oneness writers says baptism in the Spirit is essential to salvation.
  - (2) The five accounts in Acts, taken singly or together, do not prove that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of baptism in the Spirit.
    - (a) Acts 2:1-4 does not report the disciples' having received the Spirit, for they had received Him seven weeks before (John 20:22-23).
    - (b) Even if tongues occurred in all five events, this would not prove that tongues were the invariable evidence of being baptized in the Spirit, because to take them so is to confuse descriptive (narrative) with prescriptive (command) writing.
    - (c) Other passages in Acts tell of conversions or of people being baptized or filled with the Spirit but do *not* mention tongues (Acts 2:37-41; 4:31; 6:3-6; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52). So while three passages mentioning people being filled with the Spirit explicitly mention tongues, and one may imply it, it is a highly debatable inference in one other, and six do not mention it.
    - (d) Other New Testament and many Old Testament figures were filled with (= baptized in) the Holy Spirit, of whom we are never told that they spoke in tongues.
    - (e) Of at least forty distinct passages in the Bible that mention people being filled with (= baptized in) the Spirit, only three explicitly mention tongues, in only one other can tongues reasonably be inferred, in only one other can tongues tentatively be inferred, and thirty-five do not mention tongues.
- E. Arguments for orthodox soteriology
  - 1. New birth is a gift of God's sovereign grace, independent of the sinner's action (Romans 9:15-21).
    - a. It comes about "through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).
    - b. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell

where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

2. New birth makes God’s call effectual. It is a precondition of faith (John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5; 5:24; 1 John 5:1).
3. Faith and repentance follow new birth (John 5:24; Acts 2:37-38), and faith and repentance are both gifts from God (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19; Jeremiah 31:18; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:46-48; 18:27; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:25).
4. Faith results in justification (Romans 3:28), which is not by works (Romans 3:21-30; 4:3-5), though works are the natural result of faith (James 2:14-26).
5. The believer’s perseverance in the faith is assured by God’s work in him through His Word (John 6:37-40; 10:28-29; Romans 5:8b-10; 8:30-39; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; 3:15; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 1:5).
6. In this saving process, water baptism is a sign and seal (outward stamp of God’s ownership of the believer), made effectual as such through faith, of the believer’s union with Christ and his cleansing from sin; its absence cannot condemn the believer; its mode is flexible; its proper formula is triune.
  - a. Water baptism is a sign and seal of the believer’s union with Christ, but also with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 10:2; 1:13; 12:13; Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 3:27-28; Colossians 2:11-12).
  - b. Water baptism signifies and seals the believer’s purification from sin (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Colossians 2:11-12; Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
  - c. Water baptism is made effectual as a sign only through faith (John 3:18; Hebrews 11:6).
  - d. Its absence does not condemn the believer, for “Whoever believes in him is not condemned” (John 3:18) and “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
  - e. The mode of baptism is flexible.
    - (1) The word itself does not imply any mode.
    - (2) The reference to a ritual washing of the hands as a baptism shows that it sometimes involved pouring (Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:2-5; Luke 11:38).
    - (3) The fact that various OT ritual sprinklings are called baptisms (Hebrews 9:10, 13, 19, 21) shows that it sometimes involved sprinkling.
    - (4) That it might sometimes have involved immersion is seen from the use of *baptizo* to translate the Hebrew *tabal* in 2 Kings 5:14, which says that Naaman “dipped himself in the Jordan seven times.”
    - (5) The early Church was flexible in its mode of baptism. (See my book for quotations.)
  - f. The proper formula for baptism is triune.
    - (1) Jesus prescribed it in Matthew 28:19, its rhythmic form making it idea for memorization and ritual use.
    - (2) The early Church used a triune formula. (See my book for quotations.)

## V. Witnessing tips

- A. Demonstrate love and concern.

- B. Show common ground (e.g., against antinomianism).
  - C. Focus on their weakest points:
    - 1. Speaking in tongues as necessary for salvation.
    - 2. Denying that Jesus existed as the Son of God before the incarnation.
    - 3. Identifying Jesus Himself as the Father and the Holy Spirit.
    - 4. Insisting that baptism is necessary for salvation and must be by immersion and with a Jesus' name formula.
  - D. Focus on major issues of Christology, theology, and soteriology. Don't get sidetracked onto strange practices common to Oneness and other Pentecostal holiness movements.
  - E. Correct their false notions of evangelical Trinitarianism.
    - 1. Express orthodox beliefs accurately.
    - 2. Correct false notions of evangelical Christology, e.g., that we don't believe Jesus is God or that we don't believe all the fullness of Deity lives in Him in bodily form.
    - 3. Correct their false notions of the Trinity, e.g., that we believe in three Gods.
    - 4. Correct their false notions of evangelical soteriology, e.g., that we are antinomian or careless about water baptism.
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E. Calvin Beisner is national spokesman of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation ([www.CornwallAlliance.org](http://www.CornwallAlliance.org)) and a former associate professor of interdisciplinary studies at Covenant College (1992-2000) and Knox Theological Seminary (2000-2008). He is the author of *"Jesus Only" Churches* (1998) and ten other books.