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## **Bible Doctrine III**

### **Radical, Biblical, Apostolic, Christianity**



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# Was it Possible for Jesus to Sin?

### Introduction

Was it possible for Jesus to sin? Some might contend, that such a question is pointless to ask, in light of the fact that Jesus did not sin. Although it is not the most pressing of questions we might need to consider, nevertheless, it is important for our understanding of the person of Christ, specifically to what extent He identified with us in our humanity.

It must be pointed out that we are approaching this issue from a theoretical perspective, not a Biblical perspective. This is not to say that our examination of the issue ignores the Biblical data, but it is to say that the Bible does not address this question. Understanding these limitations, let us proceed with an examination of the question.

### The Reality of Christ's Temptations

We can be sure that Jesus was tempted, and that His temptations, were genuine. It is said, that Jesus "has suffered being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18), and He "was in all points, tempted like as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). When considering His death, Jesus is said to have been "troubled" and "distressed" (John 12:27; Luke 12:50). Truly, Jesus' human mind was feeling the weight of the impending doom and desired to do other than the Will of God. The ultimate expression of this was Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36). Jesus was tempted to not go to the cross.

The Gospel of Matthew records, that Jesus was "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1). Jesus' encounter with Satan was not some facade or charade that was not necessary, or did not truly affect Jesus. There would

have been no point for the Spirit to lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, if Jesus could not have been truly tempted to sin. The Spirit led Him there, so that He could overcome the temptation, through reliance upon God. God was preparing Jesus to be our High Priest; a Priest who stood in solidarity with the people He represented. Because Jesus felt the power of temptation, He can sympathize with those who feel its power and lose the battle.

### Temptation is not Sin

Some believe, that to feel temptation is sin, and thus, conclude that Jesus did not really experience temptation. This is a misunderstanding of temptation. Temptation is not sin. Sin only occurs, when we act on a temptation. James made it clear, that temptation only becomes sin, when the lust that brought the temptation, is conceived (James 1:15-16). It is possible to be tempted and not sin, as many godly individuals can testify. Through reliance on the Holy Spirit, we can overcome temptation. When we overcome temptation, not submitting to its luring power, this does not make that temptation powerless or not real. It was strong, but not as strong as the power that resides in us. If godly people can face temptation without sinning, then surely, Jesus can do the same. But, this still does not answer the question, as to whether or not, it was possible for Jesus to sin.

### Could Jesus Have Sinned?

Jesus was sinless (John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). In this respect, Jesus differs from all other humans. This does not make Him less than human, however, for Adam was also sinless, at one point, and he was fully human. As such, Adam is the closest parallel to Jesus. Even in his sinless condition, it was possible for Adam to sin, and indeed, he did sin. This demonstrates the fact, that sinlessness does not preclude the possibility of sinning. Does it follow, then, that Jesus possessed this same ability?

On the one hand, to say that Jesus could not sin seems to deny the reality of His complete and genuine humanity, because real humans not only can be tempted, but also the ability to succumb to the temptations. It could also be argued, that if Jesus could not sin, temptations were meaningless. What point was there in Satan tempting Christ, if He could not sin? It would seem to turn Christ's temptation into a mere charade. On the other hand, if it was possible for Jesus to sin, then it was also possible, that the eternal plan of God could have been thwarted. If Jesus had sinned, we realize that He could not have been the perfect sacrifice for our sins, and hence, no one would be saved. This gives us little assurance, as to God's ability, to ensure that His Divine plan was accomplished.

In desiring to affirm the authenticity of Christ's temptations, many believers maintain that it was theoretically possible for Christ to have sinned, but acknowledge, that He never did. When asked how it would have been possible for Christ to have sinned if He was truly God, it will often be answered, that Christ could have only sinned in His human nature, not His Divine nature.

This theory is attractive, because it avoids the absurd notion, that God was tempted (James 1:13). Those who explain Christ's temptations, in this way, recognize that if it was not for Christ's human nature, He could not have been tempted. The desire, then, is to assign Jesus' temptations to His human nature, excluding them from His Divine nature altogether, so that we do not have God being tempted. The problem with such an explanation is threefold:

1. It separates Christ into two "parts," where one of His parts is doing one thing, while the other is not. It is no longer the person, Jesus, being tempted, but one of His *parts*.
2. It gives Christ's humanity, independent personhood from God. Jesus' human *nature* is mistaken for a human *person*. Jesus, rather than being *God* existing as man,

is reduced to a Divine person and a human person, sharing one body.

3. It denies the unity of Christ's person, and ultimately, His deity. To say that Jesus or His human nature could have sinned, but not God, suggests that Jesus' humanity has a separate existence from God. Jesus, then, is not God. He is just a man, indwelt, by God, in a special way, differing from us, only quantitatively, not qualitatively.

### Why Jesus Could not Have Sinned

I believe we must conclude that while Jesus' temptations were genuine, ultimately, He could not have sinned. Such a conclusion is based on Christ's identity. While Christ is true Man, He is more than just a Man -- He is also God. The difference between Jesus and all other men lies in the fact, that we are *man* existing as man, while Jesus is *God*, existing as Man. Both the reality of Jesus' temptations and His ultimate inability to succumb to those temptations are clear, when we understand, that the incarnation is not a mere indwelling of God in a man, but God coming to *be* Man. The incarnation did not bring into being a separate human person, but rather, it was God Himself, taking on a new manner of existence as Man.

### Jesus is More than a Conglomeration of Parts

To say that Jesus could have sinned in His human nature, but not in His Divine nature, mistakenly views Jesus, as a conglomeration of parts. Jesus' "Divine side," is perceived as doing one thing, while His "human side," does another. It is always God, knowing and acting as God, man knowing and acting as man, or God and man knowing and acting in conjunction, but never *Jesus* as *Jesus*, acting and knowing. But Christ's two natures are not two parts, one Divine and one human, simply joined together in locale and external appearance, each performing their own actions, independently of the other. Jesus is one person, who performs His own actions, through His human mode of existence. When we reduce Christ's actions to His natures, rather than His person, we

lose the unity of His person and end up with a Nestorian Christ.

### There is Only One Person in Christ

To say Jesus' human nature could sin, but not His Divine nature, also suggests that there are two persons in Christ, one who is God and one who is Man. This is impossible in light of a true incarnation of God. Jesus is God, existing as Man, not God and a man, existing together in one geographical locale; not a Divine person and a human person, coexisting side-by-side. Because Jesus is God, existing as Man, of necessity, there can only be one personal subject in Christ, not two. God, is that personal subject. Just as we are the subject of all our acts, likewise, God is the subject of all Christ's acts. Jesus is not God, acting and knowing as God, and man, acting and knowing as man, in conjunction with one another, but *God*, acting and knowing, as *man through His human mode of existence*.

### A Nature is not a Person

To say that Christ could have sinned, in His human nature, but not in His Divine nature, falsely assumes that Christ's human *nature*, is a separate human *person*. There can be no equivocation of a nature and a person, however. A nature is the generic substance, that is common to all men, being that which makes humanity what it is; a nature is a set of essential characteristics or properties, which mark off what sort of thing an individual is. A person, however, is immaterial conscious substance, a personality, a self; a person is an individual, who consists of a certain nature, or the particularization of a generic substance. The nature/person distinction, might be compared to a cookie cutter and a cookie. A nature, is a cookie cutter, before it has cut anything out (generic substance), while a person, is the cookie, that has been cut out of the dough, by the cookie cutter (particular self).

God came to exist as Man, by assuming human *nature*, into His Divine person, not by uniting Himself, to an existing human *individual person*. Because He assumed a human nature and not a human person, Jesus' humanity, is not a person in itself.

It should be obvious enough, that *natures cannot be tempted - people are tempted*. It requires a personal subject to be tempted, and the only personal subject, in Christ, is God. It would be impossible for Christ's temptations to be explained, as only occurring in His human nature, for such an explanation assumes that Christ's human nature has individual personhood, apart from God, able to perform the functions of a person. When we can grasp the fact, that there is only one personal subject in Christ, God, and that the humanity God assumed, is not a person, we will understand why it is impossible for only Christ's human nature to be tempted.

### Was God Tempted?

If God is the lone personal subject in Christ, and only persons are tempted, is this not to say that God is tempted? Not exactly. Because God came to exist and be conscious, as Man, in the incarnation, Jesus' temptations, are not God being tempted, as God, but God being tempted, as Man, through His human mode of existence. God was tempted, insofar, as He is Man, not insofar, as He is God, for God is the subject of Christ's acts, only insofar, as He is Man, not insofar, as He is God.

As God came to exist as a genuine Man, complete with a genuine human consciousness/mind, He had the ability to experience temptation. He experienced the same temptations, all men experience (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus was not tempted, *because* He was God, but *because* He was Man. If it was not for Christ's genuine human existence, He could not have experienced temptation, for God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). In His Divine mode of existence, God cannot be tempted, but in His human mode of existence, He can be and was tempted. *In a human way, and in a genuine human existence, Jesus was tempted, as are all men.* Christ's temptations are rooted in His human existence, not His Divine existence.

While God cannot be tempted as He exists in Himself as God, God can be tempted in

His human mode of existence as man. If God can be tempted, in His human mode of existence, could He also sin in His human mode of existence? No. God cannot sin, in His existence as God or in His existence as Man, because of His Holy nature. It is because, Jesus is God, existing as Man, that ultimately, we must conclude, that Jesus could not have sinned. Jesus, being God Himself, could not go against His own Holy nature. If Jesus would have sinned, then God would have sinned, in His human mode of existence, not just a man.

This might be compared to a righteous man or woman, who is so opposed to a certain sin that, though they may be tempted by it, from time to time, they will never submit to that temptation, because it goes against their Holy Spirit. In the same manner, the God-Man's nature was Holy, and as such, would not go against His own Holy nature. The temptations were real, and were considered by Christ, but ultimately, He overcame them, because of His Holy hatred for sin, and complete reliance on the Holy Spirit. Had Jesus ever reached the point that He was willing to succumb to a particular temptation and commit sin, His Divine identity would have intervened, not permitting Him to do so.

### Does the Inability to Sin Lessen the Force of Temptation?

The question we must ask, then, is whether Jesus' ultimate inability to succumb to temptation, lessens the force of His temptations, or makes them void, altogether? This does not seem to be the case. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. When one resists temptation without succumbing to it, they feel the full force of it. Jesus successfully resisted temptation, and thus, felt its full force. We, on the other hand, often give into temptation prematurely, and thus, do not feel its full force.

### Conclusion

Regardless of Jesus' capacity to sin, the fact remains that He did not. That is what is most important. Adam sinned, because He allowed His human will to stray from the Will of God, pondered the temptation, and gave in to its influence. Jesus succeeded, where Adam failed. Jesus did not sin, because His human will and mind, was perfectly

submitted to the Will and mind of God. He always did those things that pleased the Father (John 8:29), thereby accomplishing salvation, on our behalf.

## An Exegesis of Philippians 2:6-11

The purpose of this section of the Book of Philippians, was not to expound the logistics of the incarnation, but it was to serve as an example to the Church, at Philippi, of true humility, so that they would not strive with one another, but look to the needs of one another (Philippians 2:1-4).

The structure of verses 6:11, is as follows: verses 6-8, speak of Christ's activity; verses 9-11, speak of God's activity. God's activity is in response to Christ's.

There is a general literary pattern found in this passage. It is one of humiliation, then exaltation; loss, then compensation; descent, then ascension.

There are many interpretive issues in this short little passage. The primary debate, is over a two-stage, or three-stage Christology. The former presents Adoptionistic Christology (born an ordinary man - exaltation), while the latter presents an Incarnational Christology (was God - incarnated as a man - exalted). This is an issue of Christ's ontological (pertaining to the nature and essential properties of existence) deity.

Those who see an Adoptionistic Christology, being presented here, see the passage as a parallel between Adam and Christ. Christ, was merely a Man, like Adam. Whereas Adam tried to seize equality with God, Christ did not consider this seizing of equality to be right, and thus, emptied Himself of His aspirations, to be like God. In-stead, He took on Himself, the form of a servant, dedicating His life to obedience to God, even to the point of death. For this reason, God exalted Him. Adam tried exalting himself, so was abased... Christ willingly abased Himself, not trying to seize equality with God, and therefore, was exalted.

This argument, is based primarily, from the Greek phrase, *en morphē|/| qeou/*. It is argued, that this is a reference to Genesis 2, when man was made in the image of God. The LXX, when translating the Hebrew of Genesis 2, uses the Greek work *eikw/n*, not *morphē*, although in the LXX, these words are often used, interchangeably.

One of the reasons for rejecting this idea, is that the LXX not only uses a different noun, but even uses a different preposition, *kata*, for its translation. It is fairly evident, that Paul is not alluding to Genesis 2, and that he is not drawing this phrase, from the LXX of Genesis 2.

If an Adam/Christ parallel was intended in Philippians 2, it would seem, that Paul would indicate such, in the context. Instead, Adam's name is never mentioned, and no allusion is made to Genesis 2. If anything at all, the OT referent to the kenosis passage, is the Suffering Servant passages, in Isaiah 43-54.

That this passage cannot be teaching a two-stage Christology, is evident from the phrase, *en morphē theou huparchon*. *Huparchon*, is a present active participle, indicating that Christ was existing in the form of God, before He submitted to His humiliation. He was already in the form of God. This is clear evidence for His ontological deity.

The phrase, "thought it not robbery" comes from the Greek *ouc a`rpagmon h`ghsato*. The word, *a`rpagmon*, occurs only here, in the NT. Outside of Biblical Greek, it is still rare, but has the basic meaning of "robbery" or "take advantage of." The latter fits the context better, here. The point is, that it has to do with Christ, who was already existing in the form of God, and did not consider equality with God, something to be taken advantage of.

Instead of continuing to exist in the form of God, Christ "made Himself of no reputation." The Greek word behind this phrase, is *kenō*. This word has two different senses. Used in a metaphorical sense, it means, "of no reputation" or "nothing." Used in a

metaphysical sense, it means, “to empty.” The NT usage, and Paul’s usage, in particular, favors the metaphorical sense, although the metaphysical sense is used in the LXX of things, being literally emptied out (like a jar or chest). Though either sense could be used here, the metaphorical sense, is probably to be preferred, because Paul is using the incarnation of Christ for an example of humiliation. The idea would be, that “Christ made Himself nothing.” This would fit well with Paul’s mention of the “empty pride,” that the Philippians were asserting, just a few verses earlier.

The question arises, then, as to what Christ emptied Himself of, or in what way He made Himself nothing? Some have suggested, that He emptied Himself of the “form of God.” This cannot be so from a logical basis, nor a grammatical basis. Grammatically, *en morfē* (ἐν μορφῇ), is a prepositional phrase, modifying the relative pronoun *o`j* (who), which begins verse six. Logically speaking, how could Jesus empty Himself of His deity, and still be God?

The answer to the question of what Jesus emptied Himself from, is to be found in the modal participial phrases following the kenosis phrase, which says, that Jesus took on Himself the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of a man. These participles describe the manner, in which, Christ emptied Himself. He emptied Himself, by adding to His existence as Deity, an existence of humanity. Whereas, He was existing in the *morfē* of God, now He has taken on Himself, the *morfē* of a servant. Being found in the fashion of a Man, Christ humbled Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

As a result of this willing humiliation of Christ’s part, going from glory to the form of a servant, God highly exalted Him, giving Him a name, that is above every other name. Grammatically, the name above every other name, could be “Jesus” or “Lord.” Both views have much to commend them, but that the latter is probably the name in view, is due to the fact, that Paul, a Jew, would not have considered the name, Jesus, to be above all names, considering it was a common name, in his day. YHWH, the name of God, was said, by the Greeks, as *kurioj* (Lord). Although this word could be used for

someone out of respect, not implying deity, the context makes it apparent, that kurioj, here, is being used to designate YHWH. When this is compounded by the literary point that Paul was making, it becomes even more clear, that kurioj, is the name above all names. Paul, in giving an example of the humiliation that the Philippians should demonstrate, showed the ultimate humiliation that God underwent, in the incarnation. God came, in the form of a servant (douloj). This is the lowest position, a human being can occupy. In stark contrast to this, is one who is called, 'Lord.' A servant is never a Lord. The two are as different as night and day. These two diametrically opposed positions are used, by Paul, to show the extent to which God will exalt someone, who will first humble themselves. Christ took the ultimate humiliation, as a douloj, but was then exalted to the place of kurioj, over all. The one who was a servant, will now be called 'Lord,' by every human tongue. The one in the form of God, takes on the form of a servant, suffers death by the cross, and then is exalted, being called, Lord.

The literary point of this passage, is that even as Christ, who did not need to humble Himself, did humble Himself, and as a result, was exalted, likewise, the Philippian believers should humble themselves, so that they too, might be exalted.

## Justification and Sanctification: The Theological and Practical Relationship Between the Two Doctrines

Introduction - Justification - Sanctification - Relationship Between Justification and Sanctification

### Introduction

Many Christians struggle between two seemingly contradictory teachings of the Scripture. On the one hand, the Scripture clearly affirms the grace and forgiveness of God, toward those who believe, and on the other hand, affirms the absolute need for Holy living. Some have come to the conclusion, that grace and Holiness, or justification and sanctification, are antithetical. Holiness, is either viewed negatively, as mere suggestions, that can be disregarded, in the face of grace, or grace is viewed

negatively, as an open door to irresponsible, sinful behavior, taking God's forgiveness to mean, that believers can sin as they please, with no consequences. Both of these views are un-Biblical and will cause Spiritual, practical, and possibly even, eternal problems.

Is there a balanced understanding that one can take between an insistence on grace and good works? Is there a way to insist on justification and sanctification, simultaneously? The author is convinced, that there is. All theologies, which create a dichotomy between justification and good works, are the result of a misguided reading of Scripture. Not only is the believer justified, but he is also commanded to live right, and given the power to do so. In this course, we will examine the doctrines of justification and sanctification, and then demonstrate how the two doctrines can be synthesized, both theologically, and practically, in the everyday experience of the believer.

### Importance of Doctrine

Christian Faith involves, both an objective and a subjective element. Faith involves, both the head and the heart. Not only does it have an object (Jesus Christ), but it also has a content (doctrine). The doctrine of justification and sanctification, are extremely important, for the faith and experience of the believer. Christianity is a truth that is experienced, and believed/confessed, with the hearth/mouth. Truth and doctrine, are not mere abstract propositions, to be known or confessed. Truth and error, both effect the Christian life; the former for the better and the latter, for the worse.

Understanding the functional importance of doctrine, to the Christian life, will allow one to see the practical importance of a theological study such as this. Doctrine is not abstract conceptual truths that are to be believed apart from experience, but the attempt to preserve the experience of Christianity from being twisted through a twisted misunderstanding of the experience. Doctrine has a living reality and experience

behind it. It tells us about the Spiritual realities, that are the basis of our faith/life.

Doctrine and experience are connected. Doctrine gives us the bounds, for which, to interpret experience. Doctrine captures and explains the essence of our experience. Most of Paul's Epistles were taken up with explaining what happened to believers when they experienced redemption in Christ, and what that meant to them on a practical level. The doctrine of justification and sanctification are important to set bounds for interpreting our experience of salvation. The doctrines answer the questions, "What does it mean to be saved?" and "How does my salvation affect my everyday walk with God?" ...If these doctrines are not understood, our perception of our salvation, and the way we approach God, could be severely distorted, to our Spiritual detriment.

Justification and sanctification are not just doctrines, but doctrines with an existential effect. The doctrine of justification by faith, is not a mere formula or treatise, but is an attempt to put a Spiritual experience and reality into human words. It is an attempt to encase our experience in a transmittable form, and in a way, that is conceivable in a physical world. It is a picture of what happened Spiritually, when we believed on Christ. The doctrine of justification, in particular, explains the 'how' and 'what' of salvation. It tells us what happened to us at salvation, and how this encounter with Jesus Christ, could transform our lives. When we understand these doctrines, our lives will be changed. Paul noted that our justification brings us peace with God (Romans 5:1). The examination of these doctrines is to produce the fruit of understanding, in regards to God's disposition towards us, and our disposition towards Him.

## Justification

### Definition of Terms/Concepts

The doctrine of justification by faith, has lost much of its relevance to our American culture, not because the doctrine itself has become irrelevant, but because the Biblical language used to describe the doctrine, is foreign to modern ears. The Biblical doctrine

is encased with legal language (forensic) such as, “justify,” “righteous,” and “imputation.” As a result, an examination of the key terms, of this doctrine, are in order.

In our culture, ‘righteousness’ implies absolute and perfect moral perfection. The Biblical concept of righteousness, while recognizing this aspect, has primary reference to relationship.

In the OT, the Hebrew word translated, “righteous” or “just” is *saddiq*, which originally carried the idea “to be straight,” and came to refer to “conformity to an ethical standard.” In the hiphil form, the word was used in a forensic sense, meaning “to declare righteous” or “to justify.” This righteousness is not an earned or imparted ethical righteousness, but a declaratory judgment of God on the believing sinner. Many OT references confirm the forensic nature of righteousness (See Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32; Job 32:2; Psalm 51:4;

Isaiah 1:18; 5:23; 53:11; Zechariah 3:1-5). Just as a judge’s verdict of guilt does not *make* an individual guilty, God’s pronouncement of innocence on the believer does not *make* them ethically righteous, but only affects their standing before the law and the law-giver.

Although the concept of righteousness in our culture has come to refer, almost strictly, to ethical and moral conduct, this is not the primary referent, in the OT. Righteousness does produce ethical and moral conduct, and can be found in such, but the OT concept of righteousness, is essentially the “fulfillment of the demands and obligations of a relationship between two persons.” Under the Mosaic covenant, Israel related to God, on the basis of Moses’ Law. One’s righteousness was judged upon their conformity to this Law, through which they related to YHWH. If they kept the Law, which consisted of many non-moral commands, they were considered righteous (in right relationship) before YHWH. When one broke God’s Law, they were in essence, betraying the relationship between them and YHWH. This is the essence of sin.

To demonstrate that the OT concept of righteousness has more to do with relationship than with morality, two examples will be cited. In Genesis 38, we find the story of Judah and Tamar. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law. She was married to Judah's eldest son, Er, but he was killed by the Lord (Genesis 38:7). Tamar, was then given, to the second eldest brother, Onan, to wed. He too, was killed by the Lord (Genesis 38:10). The only son left was Shelah, but he was too young to be given to Tamar, in marriage. Judah told Tamar to go to her father's house until Shelah was of age, and promised, that at that time, Shelah would be given to her, in marriage (Genesis 38:11). When Shelah became of age, Judah did not keep his promise to give him to Tamar, in marriage, so Tamar devised a scheme to get back at Judah. She dressed herself as a harlot in a nearby city and her ex-father-in-law, not knowing who she was, had sexual relations with her. Since he did not have any payment with him for her services, he gave her his signet ring, staff, and bracelets, until he could come back with payment. After Judah left, Tamar took off her harlot clothes and left the city. Judah did send back payment, but Tamar (unbeknownst to Judah) had fled. Three months later, it was told to Judah, that Tamar was with child. Judah's fury was full and demanded that she be burnt for playing the harlot. When she arrived, she claimed that she knew the father of the child, publicly displaying Judah's ring, bracelets, and staff. Judah, realizing his error, said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah, my son." (Genesis 38:26).

If we were judging righteousness purely on moral grounds, neither Judah nor Tamar, could be said to be righteous. When it is understood that righteousness refers to relationship, however, this story makes sense. Tamar's righteousness was not in her act of harlotry, but in the fact that she met the demands and obligations of the relationship between Judah and herself, whereas Judah went back on his word.

The second example, is that of Abraham. God promised Abraham, that his seed would be as innumerable as the stars and the sand of the sea. Abraham believed God's Word, and God counted this toward Abraham, as righteousness (Genesis 15:1-6). Abraham did no righteous act, but was considered righteous, because he entered into a

relationship with God, based on his trust in God's Word.

In the NT, the terms, "righteousness" and "justify" are all derived from the same root word, *dikaio*. The former is the translation of the noun form, while the latter is the translation of the verbal form. The meaning of the various forms of *dikaio* are similar to the meaning of their Hebrew counterpart - they all pertain to the concept of declaring someone to be right, or of being in a right relationship with another party.

A similar meaning is to be found in the etymology of the English word, righteousness. It originally meant, right-wise-ness, or "to be right," with someone or something. One who is righteous, is one who is in a right relationship with someone, or to something else.

Righteousness and justification, in the NT, also refer to a forensic reckoning of God on the account of the believer. The forensic nature of righteousness, shines forth, in several NT passages (Matthew 11:19; 12:37; Luke 7:29; 10:29; 16:15; 18:9-14; Acts 13:39; Romans 2:13; 3:20; 4:3). In Romans 4, Paul uses the term, *logizomai*, eleven times, in connection with righteousness. This Greek word, is an accounting term, which refers to the crediting of something to an account. It means to consider, to count towards, or to credit to one's account. The believer has God's righteousness credited to his account, and thus, is considered to be in a right relationship to God's law. God is portrayed, as the King, who oversees the righteous conduct of the land. Instead of receiving the wrath of the Law-giver for not keeping the law of the kingdom, the believer is acquitted from all guilt and condemnation. Even this forensic aspect of righteousness, pertains to relationship. A believer is considered to be in right standing with the law; a decision handed down by the Law-giver Himself.

In a wider sense, the NT concept of righteousness, is that of relationship, and attempts to explain how human beings can enter into a right relationship, with God. Like *saddiq*, the root *dikaio*, does not have its primary referent as ethical and moral conduct, but such is implied in various contexts. It could be said, that moral conduct is the logical outflow of a right relationship, with God and His law.

## The Need For Justification

Our understanding of the justification, is highly dependent on our understanding of God and the nature of sin. Before we can truly examine the doctrine of justification, we must first understand the human need for God's justification, as it pertains to God's Holiness and man's sinfulness.

God is a Holy and just God, who cannot tolerate sin (Leviticus 11:45; Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Kings 23:26; Isaiah 30:27-31; Lamentations 3:42). His Holiness sets the standard of the law, while his justness demands that His law be obeyed. If His law is not obeyed, punishment must be meted out. God cannot excuse evil, because such an action, would be tantamount to the approval of evil, which is contrary to His Holy character. In order to preserve justice from being mocked, our sin must be objectively punished. God cannot simply, change our verdict from "Guilty" to "Not guilty."

God's law is not some arbitrary list of do's and don'ts, that are inflicted upon people, for law's sake. God's zeal for His law, is due to the nature of the Lawgiver. He does not simply, decide to approve this and condemn that. Rather, God's law flows from His nature. It is a portrait of His person. When we obey God's law, we are not merely keeping a code of conduct, but relating to God Himself. The law has no inherent value or dignity, apart from God. When we keep or break God's law, we are relating to God Himself. Sin, is not merely the breaking of a law, but transgressing against the very nature of God, thus creating a personal attack on God Himself. Breaking God's law, then, hinders the relationship between us and Him.

Because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, mankind is in a place of Spiritual separation from God. As a result of Adam, all of mankind is in a state of Spiritual death, condemnation, and judgment (Romans 5:12-21). Isaiah testified, that our iniquities have separated us from God, and our sins cause Him to hide His face from us (Isaiah 59:2). Paul demonstrated the utter sinfulness of all men, declaring that there are none

who are righteous who will seek after God, but all men have turned aside from Him (Romans 3:1-12).

The natural result of our Spiritual state, is death (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-3). The only deliverance from this condition, is the Grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Apart from God's manifestation of love in Christ's death, the only manifestation of God we would expect from God, is the manifestation of His wrath. In order to avoid this wrath of God, our relationship with God, must be changed. We have a need to be reconciled to God, i.e., brought back into a right relationship with God, that we lost in Adam.

### *Nature of Justification*

Justification involves a change in our status and relationship with God. There is both, a forensic pronouncement of God's righteousness on the believer, which changes his status before God and His Law, and a relational change, between God and the believer.

From the forensic perspective, justification is a divine acquittal from the guilt of sin. The Pauline concept of justification, is characteristically forensic, in nature. Paul depicts sinners, as those who have not lived up to the standards of God's law, and are therefore, subject to the Judge's Holy and just wrath. In justification, God changes the believer's status before God and His Law, from guilty to innocent. The believer is justified, in the sight of the Law. They are no longer the objects of God's wrath, but the recipient of a right-standing, before the law.

God's righteousness is an alien righteousness, imputed to the believer, not imparted. It is an *external* righteousness, not an *internal* righteousness. God imputes to us Christ's righteousness; thus, our righteousness is something which happens outside of us. It cannot be gained by any external human work, however. It does not come from an external obedience to a set of laws, but by faith in Christ. Paul declared his desire to be

found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which came by the Law, but the righteousness which comes from God and is received by faith (Philippians 3:9). Such a righteousness is not an inherent righteousness, earned by the saint, but an alien righteousness, that is credited to our account.

Justification, is something which we *obtain*, not something which we must *attain*. It is a past, completed reality. We do not strive to continue to be justified. God has made a legal pronouncement of innocence, on our behalf. Justification is a *declaration* of the Christian's righteousness, not the process of becoming righteous. It speaks of our status before God, not our nature.

According to Paul, God justifies the ungodly:

For when we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. ...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ...Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath, through Him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God, through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved, by His life (Romans 5:6, 8-10).

This Pauline concept, is in stark contrast to the Jewish concept of justification. To the Jew, one would be justified, if at the end of his life, his good works were more numerous, than his evil works. Paul's insistence, that God justifies the ungodly, would have been quite shocking to his Jewish audience. It would seem, that the guilty should get what they deserve, i.e., wrath. Instead, God declares the ungodly to be innocent of their ungodly deeds, through their faith in Christ's work, on their behalf. Paul, to defend God's justness in acquitting the guilty, argued that one can never be justified on the basis of their good works, because all humanity's works are imperfect (Romans 3:9-18). Neither can humanity be acquitted, based on the obedience to certain laws, because law serves to define sin and guilt (Romans 3:19-20). God's righteousness comes apart from law, through faith in Christ's atoning death (Romans 3:21-22, 24). It is Christ's

atonement, which allows God to be just, in forgiving the sins of the ungodly. God made Christ, a propitiation for sin (Romans 3:25). The Greek word for “propitiation,” *hilasterios*, means “the place of atonement.” The propitiation was the God-Man. Christ turned away God’s wrath from humanity, appeasing His Holy and just anger against sin. Having dealt with the legal and just punishment for sin, in Christ, God was shown to be just, in declaring the ungodly to be righteous, through their faith (Romans 3:26).

Earlier, it was noted, that the Biblical concept of righteousness, is not merely forensic in nature, but pertains to meeting the demands of a relationship between two parties. Part of the work of justification, then, involves the rectification of a personal relationship with God. Our sins have separated us from this fellowship, but His righteousness is given to us, so that we can, once again, have communion together. Justification, is that which establishes our relationship, with God. It gives us an assurance of our acceptance before Him. Being justified, we do not need to wonder if God has rejected us, because of our evil works. We know, that God accepts Christ and his works, and by virtue of our union with Christ, He accepts us also.

In Romans 4:1-8, Paul emulated two OT characters to explain the nature of justifying faith: Abraham, David. Abraham believed God and He credited (*logizomai*) it to Abraham for righteousness (Romans 4:3; c.f. Genesis 15:6). This righteousness was not gained by human works, but by God’s Grace: “Now to him that works, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:4-5). Only when we cease working for our justification, can we truly receive justification. Paul made a similar point, when speaking of the reason the Jews did not attain to righteousness, but the Gentiles did. He said the reason was, “because they [Jews] did not seek it by faith, but by the works of the law” (Romans 9:32).

David also described the kind of righteousness, which God imputes to people, apart from law observance (Romans 4:6). He said, “Blessed are they, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man, to whom the Lord will not

impute sin” (Romans 4:7-8; Psalm 32:1-2). Justification, then, involves both a positive and negative aspect. Negatively, God does not hold our sin against us, but forgives us from our wrong-doing. Positively, God imputes Christ’s righteousness, to our account.

Romans 10:1-4, also elucidates to us, the nature of justification. Paul speaks of a lack of faith on the part of Israel. They had a zeal for God and wanted to be Holy before Him, but their understanding of the relationship between faith and works, was misconstrued. They were ignorant of the righteousness, that God gives by faith, in Him, and thus, they went about trying to establish their own righteousness. This righteousness, was based on strict law-keeping. In doing so, they failed to submit to the righteousness of God. They were very righteous, in terms of moral conduct, but they did not attain to God’s righteousness, because their faith was in their conduct, rather than in God Himself.

There have been two primary and competing views of justification: Catholic, Protestant. These two views will be explained, compared, and contrasted below.

### Catholic View

The Catholic view of justification, is derived primarily, from Augustine. Augustine, not knowing Hebrew or Greek, only had the Latin translation, at his disposal. The Latin term for the Greek root, *dikaio*, is *iustificare*. This is a compound word, from *iustus* = righteous, and *facare* = to do or to make. Augustine took the word, at face value and falsely concluded, that it meant, “to make righteous.”

Catholics see justification, as beginning at baptism and being fully given, by means of the sacraments throughout one’s life, and one’s good works. To the Catholic, righteousness is intrinsic (imparted) to the believer. Good works are not motivated by the self, but by the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic conception of justification contains, both the Protestant understanding of

justification and sanctification, combined together. Although justification is seen to be contingent upon, and merited by good works, Catholic theology does not believe, that God, is obligated to reward good works (*condign merit*), but rather, that it is appropriate for Him, to do so (*congruous merit*).

### Protestant View

The Catholic view of justification, reigned supreme, until the fall of Constantinople in A.D., 1453. It was at this time, that the Greek monks fled from the East for the West, bringing hundreds of Greek texts with them. This was the time of the Renaissance, in which, the cry of the scholars was *ad fontus*, i.e., back to the sources. As Greek and Hebrew revived their importance in the West, students of the Bible were able to read the Bible in its original languages, for the first time. It then became evident, that Augustine misunderstood the Biblical concept of righteousness and justification. The Hebrew, *saddiq* and Greek root, *dikaio* did not mean “to *make* righteous,” but “to *consider* one to be right.” This discovery, was part of the catalyst for the Reformation movement, which would change the course of history, some sixty years later.

The Protestant view of justification, derived from Hebraic and Greek terminology, is that the sinner is considered to be righteous, based on the substitutionary death of Christ. Christ’s righteousness, is counted as though, it was the believer’s righteousness. In this view, justification is external to the believer, being a mere legal pronouncement of a right relationship with God. The believer’s righteousness, is an alien righteousness, i.e., it does arise from within the believer, but is external to him. The believer is not made righteous in justification, but has Christ’s righteousness imputed to his/her account, as though it was truly his/hers. The internal aspect of salvation, is left to the work of regeneration and sanctification, being conceptually distinct, from justification.

One of the hallmarks of Protestant orthodoxy, was Luther’s teaching, that the believer was *simul iustus et peccator*, or righteous and a sinner, at one and the same time. Because the believer’s righteousness is not an inherent righteousness, or an ethical

righteousness, but an external pronouncement of God's approval of the sinner which brings Him into a right relationship to God, the sinner remains a sinner. At the same time, however, because the sinner is also justified in the sight of God, he is also a saint. The believer is not made righteous, so he will still struggle with his sinful nature. Believers, are both sinners and saints, simultaneously.

### Compared/Contrasted

The Catholic and Protestant conceptions of justification have many differences, but also have some similarities. Both believe, that justification is provided by God, and based solely on the substitutionary death of Christ. Where they disagree is, on how righteousness is appropriated to the believer (means of conferral).

Catholics see righteousness, as an inherent possession of the believer, while Protestants understand justification, to be an external legal pronouncement of God on the believer, which has no bearing on the nature of His Spirit. In Protestant thought, righteousness is imputed, not imparted; alien, not internal (Philippians 3:9). Catholics see God, accepting them because He sees righteousness, in them. Protestants see God accepting them, because He sees Christ's righteousness, in them. Christ's righteousness is considered theirs, and God sees them, as He sees Christ.

While many of the differences between Catholics and Protestants were genuine conceptual differences, some were the result of misunderstanding the language both parties were using. Alister McGrath explains this, saying:

It will, therefore be obvious, that the Roman Catholic understands, by "justification" what the Protestant understands, by "justification" *and* "sanctification" linked together. The same word is used, by both - but, it has a different meaning, in each case. This has led to enormous confusion. Consider the following two statements.

- A. We are justified by faith alone.
- B. We are justified by faith and works.

...For the Protestant, statement A means, that the Christian life is begun through faith, and faith alone.... For the Roman Catholic, however...statement A means the Christian life, *as a whole*, is begun and continued by faith alone, which seems to exclude any reference to regeneration or obedience.

For the Roman Catholic, statement B means, that the Christian life is begun in faith, but is continued and developed through obedience and good works.... But the Protestant - who understands "justification" to refer only to the *beginning* of the Christian life - would regard this as, a totally unacceptable doctrine of justification, by works. In fact, there is general agreement between Protestant and Roman Catholics, that the Christian life, is *begun* through faith and *continued and developed* through obedience and good works....

Both Catholics and Protestants are in agreement, that justification is something, that God does for us. It is not something that can be earned or merited apart from God's grace and motivating power within us. It is the nature of this justification and the means, by which, one receives Christ's righteousness, which continues to be disagreed on.

### Basis and Means of Justification

How is it, that a believer is justified? When a person is acquitted by the law, he is acquitted on certain grounds and in a certain manner. What is the basis of the Christian's acquittal from sin?

Romans 3:19-25, is the most definitive passage, on this subject. Here, it will be seen, that the *source* of our justification, is God's *grace*; the *grounds* of our justification, is *Christ's sacrificial death*; and we *receive* justification, by means of *faith*.

Our justification has its origin, in nothing other, than the Grace of God. It does not flow from any good work of our own, but from His favor towards us. We are “justified freely, by His Grace” (Romans 3:24).

The grounds of our justification, is none other, than the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. We are justified by God’s Grace, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Without Christ’s sacrificial death, on our behalf, there would be no justification for humanity. We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9). Jesus’ sinless life, freely given up in death, on our behalf, provided the basis for our righteousness with God. Now, whether one stands before or after the cross, the basis for their justification is secure, and God is shown to be righteous, because He visited on sin the judgment it deserved.

While the grounds of our justification is Christ’s death, and the source is God’s Grace, God’s justification, judicially becomes ours, through our faith.

It must not be conceived, that God justifies us, *because* of our faith in Him. He justifies us, *by means of*, our faith. The difference between these two phrases, may seem to be a mere striving over words, but the conceptual difference between the two, is as stark as night and day. The former, teaches that faith is a work of man that God rewards. God looks at the faith, that we have mustered up and justifies us, accordingly. This is a distortion of the Biblical idea of saving faith. God does not reward our decision to believe, or accept us on the basis of our faith. Faith is a gift of God’s Grace. Biblically speaking, justifying faith is passive, not active, in nature. Justifying faith does not *do* anything, but passively *accepts*, what Christ has done for us. We are not justified, *on account* of our faith, but *by means* of our faith. To believe in the former, is to make faith the grounds of our justification, rather than Christ and His atoning work at Calvary. For justification, we simply believe what God has done for us, and receive Christ’s righteousness. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. This justification did not come, because Abraham believed, but was received, through

his faith (Romans 4:1-5). It can be said, then, that our justification is “by faith on account of Christ,” not “on account of faith, through Christ.”

The idea of accepting what Christ did for us, by faith, is at the heart of our justification. True faith in Christ, is an acceptance of His work, on our behalf. If we are to receive Jesus’ righteousness, we must *renounce* any confidence in our righteousness, and *rely* entirely, upon the perfect righteousness and death of Jesus Christ, on our behalf. Renouncing and relying, are the two aspects, of justifying faith.

Paul was very clear, that our righteousness does not come via obedience to the Law of Moses, but by faith, in Christ. In Galatians, he boldly declared, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, even as we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faithfulness of Christ, and not by the works of the Law: for by the works of the Law, shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16; See also 3:11). The Law could not give eternal life or right-standing, with God. If it could, then righteousness would have come through the Law (Galatians 3:21). Instead, the Scripture has concluded, that everyone is a sinner and stands in need of Christ. Christ’s promises, are only given to them, who have faith (v. 22).

Paul’s argument, in Romans, is very persuasive. After demonstrating, that all men are sinners (Romans 1:1 - 3:18), Paul argued, that the Law serves to define sinners as who they are, thus bringing them, condemnation.

The Law serves to demonstrate the guilt and sin of every man (Romans 3:19-20), and is unable to justify humanity before a Holy God (v. 20). God’s righteousness was demonstrated apart from the Law (v.22), based on Christ’s atoning death, and faith in Him (vs. 24-26). This being so, Paul concluded, “that a man is justified, by faith, without the deeds of the Law” (Romans 3:28). Law, only serves, to define us as sinners and separate us from fellowship, with a Holy God. Faith is superior to Law, because only faith, can bring us into a right relationship to God.

## Justified “In Christ”

Justification is a changing of our relationship with God. We receive a new position or status before Him. All of our humanity has one of two positions in the sight of God. They are, either unrighteous or righteous; condemned or justified; guilty or innocent. Which position one stands in before the sight of God, is determined by their relationship with one of two individuals. Those who are, *in Adam*, are the unrighteous, condemned, and guilty, and thus, have spiritual death working in them. Those who are, *in Christ*, are those who are the righteous, justified, and innocent, which have Spiritual life, working in them. It is by virtue of being in Christ, that we are declared, righteous. He has become “to us God’s...righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). We are the righteousness of God, in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This change of our status, before God, happens by virtue of our connection with the righteous Christ. When we are united with Christ, we receive whatever is Christ’s, and are considered to have performed, what Christ performed. Whatever can be said of Christ, can be said of us. Because Christ’s work and merit is accrued to us by virtue of our being in Christ, God sees us as He sees Christ. He no longer sees us, in Adam, or even in our own personal sin, but in Christ’s righteousness and life. By virtue of our union with Christ, we have been made acceptable to God, and can now rest in this fact.

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul argued, that through Adam’s sin, humanity experienced Spiritual death (Romans 5:12). Although the many died through Adam’s transgression, the many also had the Grace and gift of God, multiplied to them, through Christ (Romans 5:15). Whereas, Adam brought the human race into a position of judgment, condemnation, and death, Christ brought to us, justification, righteousness, and Spiritual life (Romans 5:16-17). Just as Adam’s one transgression brought all of humanity into a place of condemnation, before God, so through Christ’s one righteous act, at Calvary, He brought Spiritual life for all people (Romans 5:18). Through Adam, all were made sinners, and his sin reigned in death over all, but through Christ, Grace reigns through righteousness, and many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19-21).

Christ's obedience secured righteousness and eternal life for all of those who would put their faith in Him. When we are born into Christ, we become legally one with Christ in God's sight, partaking of Christ's obedience. All our responsibilities rest upon Him and all of His merit is accrued to us. Just as Adam's sin is charged to us without us having actually committed it in the flesh, so Christ's righteousness is as much ours as had we performed it ourselves. It is as though we were the ones who died on the cross. God sees the believer in Christ's merit, not one's own merit. This is so eloquently stated in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where Paul said, "For He made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God, in Him." Jesus takes our sin upon Himself, even though He did not commit the sin, while we take His righteousness upon ourselves, even though we did not perform it.

God accepts us, not for who we are or what we have done or abstained from doing, but for who Christ is and our relationship with Him. Our justification is not based off of our goodness, but our relationship to Christ and His righteousness. Now, we live *from* our approval, by God, not *for* approval from the same.

### Eschatological Aspects of Justification

Justification is threefold, in that, the Bible speaks of it as having already occurred, as though it is presently occurring, and a future time, at which, we will be justified (glorification). It is a past event, a present reality, and a future hope. Our justification happened historically, when we initially trusted in Christ's atonement for our sins and applied it to our lives (1 Corinthians 6:11). Based on the historical reality of justification, Paul declared, that we have *already* been saved from God's wrath, and have a subsequent peace with God (Romans 5:1, 9). In one sense, justification is a completed reality.

God continues to count us as righteous in the present, atoning for our current sins (Romans 3:26). Our justification is not forfeited, when we sin. We remain in a right

standing with God, because of our union with Christ and His righteousness. Although God is displeased with our sin, all we must do to maintain a right relationship with God, is repent of that sin, which displeased Him. It is in this way, that we continue to show, our faith in God. It is this kind of faith, that justifies. Our repentance does not earn us justification, but rather gives evidence of our faith, in God's ability and purpose to forgive us (1 John 1:9).

There is also a future aspect of justification. There is coming a day, when we will be made righteous in our very nature. This will occur at our glorification (Romans 5:19; Galatians 5:5). Paul had this future acquittal of the believer in mind when he said, "Who will lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is He that condemns? It is Christ that died, and furthermore, was raised again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:33-34). These three aspects of justification provide for the whole spectrum of our lives. We need not worry about our standing with God. We are the righteousness of God, in Christ.

What was so startling to Jews about the NT concept of justification, is that it does not limit justification to the future, but speaks of it, as a past and present reality. The Jews, understanding the eschatological aspect of justification to it, to such an extent, that they believed that one is not justified in this life, but only in the life to come. If one's good deeds outweighed their bad deeds at the end of their life, God would pronounce them just. Paul's theology changed the Jewish believer's conception of justification, by moving it from a strictly futuristic verdict to a present reality. What God does with us, then, is pronounce us as just during this life, before the judgment. He imputes to us presently, the status that we will enjoy eschatologically, as though it were already an objective reality. We are now enjoying the status, which God has ordained for us, in the future. Ladd explained this Pauline emphasis, in the following manner:

An essential element in the salvation of the future age, is the divine acquittal and the pronouncement of righteousness; this acquittal, justification, which consists of the divine absolution of sin, has already been affected by the death of Christ and may be

received, by faith, here and now. The future judgment, has thus, become essentially a present experience. God, in Christ, has acquitted the believer; therefore he or she is certain of deliverance, from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9) and no longer stands under condemnation (Romans 8:1).

The triune eschatological nature of justification, is one of the primary differences between the Catholic and Protestant conception of justification. Protestants look back on the verdict, as a completed historical reality (while recognizing the past and present aspects, as well), while Catholics look forward to the completion of justification in the future, with a certain lack of security of their standing, before God, in this present life.

### Paul and James on Justification

Some see a contradiction between Paul and James on the teaching of justification. Paul, emphatically taught, that a man is justified, by faith, apart from the deeds of the Law, while James argued, that a man is justified by faith and works (James 2:14-26). Luther is such an individual, who saw the two prophets' teachings to be in opposition. Insisting that Paul's view was correct, Luther belittled James's Epistle, calling it an 'epistle of straw.' Such an approach to the two authors is not necessary. When the literary context of each other is examined, it can be demonstrated, that there is no contradiction. The key to understanding these two, seemingly contradictory authors, is to understand how each uses the terms *justified*, *faith*, and *works*. These words must be defined by their respective contexts.

Paul emphasized, that we are saved by faith in Jesus, and not by our good works. James emphasized, that the kind of faith that results, in salvation, will necessarily produce works, that show evidence of that faith. Paul was concerned about people adding anything to faith, that they believe is meritorious for their salvation. James was concerned about people professing to have faith, which is not really faith at all, but rather a lifeless mental-assent to Christ. It seems that James was attacking a distortion of Paul's teaching on justification, wherein, faith is some dead orthodoxy, with no

corresponding behavioral changes. Even Paul, found it necessary to fight against this distortion of his teaching, on justification (Romans 3:8; 6:1, 15). James pointed out, that if a person has genuine saving faith, works will follow after him, showing evidence of that faith. Abraham really did believe God, and his works evidenced, that fact. If Abraham would have refused to offer Isaac upon the altar, it would have demonstrated a lack of faith, in God's promises to him (James 2:21-24).

### Justification is Not Legal Fiction

Some argue against forensic justification, on the basis that such a "justification," is nothing more than legal fiction. Such an argument, misunderstands the basis of our justification, and the nature of our righteousness. Surely, God did not pardon us of our sins, but rather justified us, from our sins. The difference is, that a pardon bypasses justice, but justification involves meeting the demands of the Law, for sin.

If justification was based on the works of man, then truly we could say, that God's pronouncement of us as righteousness, is a false and misleading pronouncement, because we are not righteous in and of ourselves. But God's forgiveness, in justification, is based on the redemption of Christ. Christ paid for the penalty of sins. Justice has not been bypassed, but has been met, by Christ's willing sacrifice of Himself, in our stead for our sins. Jesus bore our judgment, at Calvary, so we can be righteous in God's sight. In Christ, God's wrath against sin has been appeased, turning away the wrath, we should have borne. When God declares us to be righteous, He is not calling us something we really are not. He declares us righteous upon the real, accomplished righteousness of Jesus, which has been credited to our account, by faith in Him.

The second reason one may view the Protestant concept of justification as legal fiction, is because they confuse justification as an ethical quality, rather than a legal pronouncement of God, on the sinner. Second Corinthians 5:21, teaches us, that God made Christ to be sin for us, even though He did not know sin, so that we could be

made the righteousness of God in Christ. God did not just treat Christ as if He was a sinner (ethically), but *made Him* to be sin for us forensically. Likewise, then, God does not merely treat us as though we were righteous, but makes us righteous in terms of our relationship with God (forensically). This is no legal fiction, but a legal righteousness. We are not given an ethical righteousness, any more than Christ was made an ethical sinner. The righteousness we receive in justification is not an ethical quality, but a forensic pronouncement on the sinner, because of his faith in Christ and his righteousness. Ethical righteousness comes, via sanctification, not justification.

### When the Doctrine of Justification is Lost

The average Christian is often ignorant of, misunderstands, or does not live out the doctrine of justification on a daily, practical level. Many who do understand the doctrine do not see a practical need for it to be lived out on a daily basis, because they have minimized God's utter Holiness and the severity of human sinfulness, or because their commitment to the doctrine is in intellectual profession only. While they confess to believe the doctrine, on the daily level, they rely on their level of sanctification to inform their position before God, drawing their assurance of God's acceptance of them from their sincerity, past experiences, or relatively good obedience record. Relying on human achievement causes difficulty, in regards to the human conscience which will not be pacified by these good works, continuing to cry out, "Guilty, guilty, guilty," realizing that even the best of our good works, fall short of God's perfection. Without a thorough understanding and application of the doctrine of justification to our daily lives, the conscience will be forced into self-deception, by either manufacturing a "fictitious righteousness in heroic works of ascetic piety," or by redefining "sin in shallow terms, so that it can lose the consciousness of its presence." The only way to avoid such self-deception, is to confess our utter sinfulness, God's utter Holiness, and our need for His Spirit to save us, and make us righteous.

### Sanctification

The doctrine of justification states, that we possess Christ's righteousness. Although

this righteousness, which we possess is a true righteousness, it is an alien righteousness. God has willed for us to be given this judicial standing of righteousness, but He has also willed for us, to be made righteous in our nature. Millard Erickson said, “sanctification is a process, by which, one’s moral condition is brought into conformity with one’s legal status before God.” Sanctification is becoming, in actuality, what we have already been declared to be in justification. Such a description is befitting of the Biblical data.

Sanctification and Holiness are near equivalents, theologically. Both words, in their various forms, are translated from the same Hebrew root, meaning to “cut” or “separate,” and the Greek word, *hagiasmos*, meaning “consecration.” The core concept of Holiness, then, is separation and consecration to God (Leviticus 11:44). In our culture, sanctification has come to mean, the pursuit of moral perfection. Although the latter is included in the Biblical concept of sanctification, it is a corollary, to the idea of separation. Sanctification results in morality, but sanctification is not tantamount to morality. God is said to be Holy, because He is separate from creation and is morally pure in contradistinction to sin.

That the Biblical concept of Holiness, is not primarily morality, is evident. The use of the Hebrew word, *qadash* in 2 Kings 23:7, demonstrates the true nature of the Hebrew root. It is said, that Josiah “broke down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD....” The word translated “sodomites,” is *qadash*. The sodomites that lived beside the temple, were for the purpose of sexual intercourse, with those who came to worship. They are said to be Holy, because they were separated to the service of temple prostitution.

Sanctification has both, a negative and positive aspect. Negatively, it is separation from evil, and positively it is consecration to God and His Holy character. It might be said, that sanctification is the “growing emancipation from all evil, growing enrichment in all good.” Often, in Holiness movements, the negative aspect of Holiness is stressed over the positive aspect, or to its near exclusion. The Holiness and wrath of God are

stressed, along with the need for personal Holiness and piety, through prayer, Bible reading, witnessing, obedience to God's commands, and avoiding the socially unacceptable behaviors on the master-sin-list of the local Church. When sanctification is approached from this perspective, Holiness is changed from the pursuit of the character of God, to mere avoidance behavior. Sanctification goes from being a responsible joy of the believer to a necessary precaution to avoid the wrath of God and the condemnation of the Church. Such a perspective of sanctification turns redemption into control and legalism.

The Scriptures clearly indicate, that believers are to pursue Holiness, which involves moral uprightness. Peter urged the Church to Holiness, quoting God's own command, "Be Holy, for I am Holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16; cf., Leviticus 20:7). Paul urged the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1). We were chosen to be Holy (Ephesians 1:4). The author of Hebrews, sternly warned, his Jewish audience, that Holiness is an essential requirement for those who wish to see God (Hebrews 12:14). We are not to love the world: the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16). Holiness, not only concerns our outward actions, but also affects our Spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1), mind (Romans 12:1-2), and thoughts (Philippians 4:8-9).

The goal of the Christian life, is to be transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18), into His likeness (Romans 8:29), to the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness (Ephesians 4:13), to put on the new man, created in righteousness and Holiness (Ephesians 4:24), and be partakers of God's Holiness (Hebrews 12:10). Sanctification is the process of restoring of the image of God, in man (Colossians 3:10).

### Various Views

There have been several views of sanctification propagated during the history of the Church. Here is a brief description of the more prominent views.

### *Pelagianism*

The doctrine of Pelagianism is derived from Pelagius, an astute ascetic, who lived during the late fourth century and early fifth centuries. Pelagius's view of sanctification/salvation arose from his particular view of hamartiology. Based on his belief in the special creation of each soul, by God, he did not believe that man was born inherently sinful through Adam, but that each person was created free from sin and guilt, just as Adam was created in righteousness. We only become sinners when we commit our first sin, but still will not possess a natural bias toward sin. Because we are morally responsible, any sin committed by the Christian is committed by free choice, apart from any unbridled evil passions of the will.

Although Pelagius confessed, that sanctification must come by the Grace of God, his definition of grace was that of an external aid, given by God, to illuminate to us our need for Holiness, not an internal working of God's Spirit. Sanctification, then comes by the effort of men and their will, unaided by a Divine inner-working of God's Spirit.

### *Purgatorial View*

Catholicism maintains, that it is possible to be entirely sanctified, in this life. One is sanctified by obedience to God's law, coupled with grace/faith. If one passes out of this life with sins still on their account, they must pass through the purifying fires of purgatory, to complete their sanctification. Purgatory, then, is an intermediate place between earth and heaven, where the saved dead go, to purify their souls from venial sins before entering the Holy presence of God. The duration and severity of the purifying, depends on the severity of one's sins. Time in purgatory can be lessened by special masses, prayers, and alms of the Church.

The purgatorial view does not have much to commend it, seeing that there is no real Biblical warrant for such a belief in purgatory. The belief is drawn from weak Scriptural statements, the Apocrypha, and the writings of Origen (2 Maccabees 12:46; Matthew 5:26; 12:32; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15). The Scriptures indicate, that at death, one's Spirit

goes to heaven or to hell, depending on their relationship with God at the point of death, not an intermediate place of torment, to cleanse them from all sin (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:20-23).

### *Lutheran*

Luther understood sanctification to be getting used to our justification. One of the hallmarks of the Lutheran theology of sanctification is his teaching, that man is both, sinner and saint, simultaneously. There is always a dual tension in the life of the believer between these two identities. The law of God and the Grace of God, are dichotomies, opposed to one another. The law of God, reveals God's Holiness and our sinfulness, while the Grace of God, saves us.

### *Reformed*

Sanctification is viewed, as both, a past reality and present progress. In Reformed theology, the basis of our sanctification is our union with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). We draw our sanctification from Christ's perfect sanctification, and our union with His person. When we are joined to Christ, the dominion of sin is broken (Romans 6:6), and our status to sin, is changed. Reformed theology does not see a dichotomy between law and grace, as did Luther, but sees the law of God, as the guide for the justified.

### *Wesleyan/Keswickian*

Although conceptually distinct, the Wesleyan and Keswickian models of sanctification are so compatible, that both shall be dealt with together.

Wesleyan sanctification teaches, that there is a second work of grace, that comes to the believer through a crisis experience, perfecting sanctification (entire sanctification). This grace will perfect the believer in love. John Wesley did not believe that a perfected believer could no longer sin, but rather, that they not sin. Although Wesley recognized that there were sins of ignorance and omission, on a practical level, he defined sin

purely in terms of volition. Sin is any voluntary act, against a known law of God (1 John 3:4). Perfection is not sinlessness, but an all encompassing change of life. It is a relative perfection, which frees the Christian from willful transgressions against God's law, impure intentions, and pride, by eradicating our sinful desires.

Wesley did not see sanctification as a once-for-all status, but in terms of an acquired attribute, subsequent to conversion (thus, a second work of grace). As did the Catholic Church, Wesley blended the concepts of justification and sanctification into one, and thus, taught that, in order to keep one's justification, they must continue in sanctification.

The Keswickian model is hybrid between Reformed and Wesleyan theology. It borrows its view of man's inherent sinfulness and the necessity of Holiness, growing out of our union, with Christ from the former, and the idea of perfection, from the latter. Keswick distinguishes between the normal, or carnal Christian and the victorious, or Spiritual Christian. The former, fail to live by the power of the Spirit, but are being controlled by the lusts of the flesh. The latter, is the Christian, who has a post-conversion crisis experience which catapults them into a life of victory over the sins of the flesh. Believers are responsible to appropriate Christ's victory to their lives, but many Christians live below the dignity of the Christ-filled life.

Keswickian theology, although it also defines a believer's sinlessness, in terms of voluntary disobedience to a known law of God, also recognizes that there are sins of the heart and sins of omission. We will never attain sinless perfection until our death/glorification, because we are inherent sinners. The sin nature will never be eradicated in this life, but it is overwhelmed by the influence of the indwelling Spirit of God. There are, then, two levels of sin in Keswickian theology: theoretical, practical. When we do commit sin, we are thrown out of fellowship with God. Since we can never please God in and of ourselves, we must allow Christ to take over in our lives.

*Evangelical*

Evangelicals see a relationship between justification and sanctification, but distinguish them conceptually, so that one's justification, before God, is not seen to be dependent on one's level of sanctification. Sanctification is positional and progressive. Borrowing from Luther, evangelicals maintain that man is both, righteous and a sinner, simultaneously. Man works with God to grow in Holiness, by the Grace of God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) provides the following answer to the nature of sanctification, which succinctly defines, the evangelical view: "Sanctification is the work of God's free Grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more, to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

### Eschatological Aspects of Sanctification

Sanctification is both, a completed action and an ongoing process; positional and progressive. The Scripture speaks of us as having been sanctified in the past (1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Hebrews 10:10, 29; 1 Peter 1:1-2), and even calls us saints (Holy ones). Christ is said to have become our sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30).

When we placed our faith, in Him, we were sanctified, or set apart to Him and from those who do not believe (Acts 26:18). Sanctification, like justification, is not a work of human merit, but comes by faith in God.

That sanctification, is also progressive, is evident from several passages. We are currently being sanctified by the Lord (Hebrews 2:11; 10:14). Believers are to follow after Holiness (Hebrews 12:14), and continually cleanse themselves of the filthiness of the flesh and Spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1). Believers are being made perfect in every good work by the Lord (Hebrews 13:21). Paul prayed, that the Thessalonians would be sanctified completely and preserved blameless, at the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and assured the Philippian Church, that God would finish the work that He had begun, in them (Philippians 1:6). Thus, sanctification is an eschatological work, as is justification, concerning our past, present, and future.

## The Agent of Sanctification

What is the relationship between the activity of the Spirit and the activity of man, in developing sanctification? Is sanctification received purely, by faith, or is their human effort involved? The Scripture indicates that both, grace and effort work together, in sanctification. It is neither entirely passive, nor entirely active, but both active and passive.

The Scripture is clear, that sanctification is something we receive from God. The Church is being sanctified by Jesus Christ so that He can present it to Himself, a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:26-27). It is the God of Peace, that sanctifies us (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and by His Grace, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, living godly and sober lives (Titus 2:14). It is Christ, which works in us, that which pleases Him (Hebrews 13:20-21; See also 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Colossians 1:21). Paul told the Romans, that they were to be transformed by the renewing of their mind. "Transformed" is a present passive, indicating that this was an action they were to passively receive, not one in which they were to actively pursue. Yet, in the previous verse, they were beseeched to present their bodies to God, as a living sacrifice in Holiness (Romans 12:1), and a few verses later, were enjoined to hate evil and cling to that, which is good (Romans 12:9). Believers are instructed to mortify the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13), and to yield ourselves to God, in righteousness (Romans 6:13). These two Biblical perspectives are not contradictory, but rather, complimentary. God puts the desire to live right, within man, and gives Him the ability to do so, but man must act upon God's inner working, to make it effective.

Many believers have attempted to make themselves Holy, purely in terms of human effort, self-denial, or the exercising of the human will. While these human elements are part of the process of sanctification, those who practice such, have mistaken morality for true Holiness, divorcing the work of the Spirit from the works of man. Such, is the essence of legalism.

Holiness is not achieved, merely by the exercising of the human will, self-denial, or self-discipline, for even unregenerate people can do such; but Holiness is achieved as the Spirit of God works His character and Holiness into our lives, giving us the right desires and abilities, so that we may be conformed to His image.

Too often, sanctification fails to be a cooperative effort between God and men, and the believer begins to work for his/her sanctification. Thus, many Christian's Holiness is not Holiness in the true sense of the word, but mere dead works, because they do not have God's Holy Spirit working in them, to accomplish the end goal. This form of "Holiness" is little more than a dead, religious goodness, which has an ethical, moral, and social respectability, motivated by the flesh, and not by the Spirit. It is often manifested in the unspoken doctrine of many Church groups, which says, if you follow all the rules properly, you will be O.K.

### Is Perfection Possible?

Much of the debate in sanctification surrounds the idea of perfection. Is it possible to be entirely sanctified in this life, living completely above sin? The answer to this question has divided the Catholic, Wesleyan,

Keswickian, and Pelagian theologies from Lutheranism, Reformed, and evangelical theologies. The Scripture seems to give conflicting viewpoints. On the one hand, we are told by Jesus, "Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven, is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Paul said, the ministry was given until we come to a perfect man (Ephesians 4:13), and even prayed, that the Thessalonians would be sanctified wholly (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Although one is tempted when drawn away by their own lusts (James 1:14-15), God always makes a way for us to escape falling into the sin, which temptation brings before us (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Apostle John even declared, that the one abiding in Christ, does not sin (1 John 3:6), and indeed, cannot sin (1 John 3:9).

While John boldly declared, that believers do not sin, he also declared in the same Epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10). Jesus, in the Lord’s Prayer, told His disciples to pray, “Forgive us our sins” (Luke 11:4). In Romans 7, Paul used present tense verbs, to describe his struggle with sinful desires, and even noted that he is, at times, overcome by them. He confessed, that he is carnal and sold under sin (7:14), sin dwells in him (7:17, 20), no good thing dwells in his flesh (7:18), and, that there is still a law of sin working in his members, which wars against his mind which desires the good (7:21-23). Finally, Paul confessed, that he had not yet attained to that which God had apprehended him for, but continued to strive toward the prize (Philippians 3:12-14).

Are these two viewpoints of Scripture antithetical? No. When the “perfection” Scriptures are understood in their context, it can be seen, that absolute moral perfection is not envisioned. Immediately after confessing that he had not yet attained (Philippians 3:12-14), Paul speaks of himself, as being perfect (Philippians 3:15). The Greek *teleios*, translated as “perfect,” refers to an end, completion, or maturity, not absolute perfection. When Jesus said to be perfect, He was not referring to moral perfection, but Spiritual maturity. John’s statement, that believers do not, and indeed cannot sin, must also be understood, in its context. The Greek word, *poieo*, translated “commit,” is in the present tense. This is a customary, or habitual use of the present, stressing a state of action, that is regular and ongoing. Believers are not characterized by continual sinful behavior, but this does not mean that they never exhibit sinful behavior.

Romans 3:23, teaches us that not only have all sinned, but that all (including saints) fall short of God’s Glory. “Fall short,” or “come short,” is also being used, as a habitual present. Its syntactical force, is that every human being, continually falls short of God’s Glory. This does not mean, that we continually sin, but that none of us ever match up to God’s perfect standards. Our only hope, is to stand in Christ’s perfect sanctification.

We must conclude, that the goal of the Christian life, is Spiritual maturity in this life, and moral perfection, in the next. Although moral perfection, is something to which, we strive by the Grace of God, we shall never attain sinless perfection, in this life.

### The Nature of Man's Sinfulness

One's view of hamartiology heavily influences, if not nearly determining, one's view of sanctification and Christian perfection. That this is so, is evidenced by various views of sanctification, discussed above. The Pelagian view of sanctification follows from the view, that man's nature is not inherently sinful, but only follows the bad example of sinfulness, set by Adam. Wesley's view of the human nature led him to believe, that it was possible to live above breaking any known command of God.

The Pelagian, Wesleyan, and Keswickian models of sanctification maintain, that sanctification primarily concerns, the volition of man. While sanctification, most assuredly involves the will of man, sanctification is not the mere changing of our wills, from evil to good. The roots of human sinfulness are imbedded far deeper than the level of the will. It was Wesley, who defined sin almost purely, in the terms of willing or deliberate disobedience to known commands, not the Scripture. Our wills are changed in sanctification, but our wills, are yet, influenced by the sinful nature of man, which is imbedded into the very core of our being, only to be purged upon our glorification.

The essence of sin is not just a perversion of our will, but of our whole being. If all that was needed for our salvation, was a change in our will, then we would conclude, that only our will is fallen. But, the law of the mind (the will) can never overcome the law of sin and death (Romans 7:21-25). Sin, is not merely a mind issue, but a Spirit issue.

Romans 5:12-21, connects human sinfulness with Adam's sin, not just our personal sin. Sin entered the world, through one man, Adam, and as a result of this one man's sin, all have sinned and experience Spiritual death (v. 12). How can it be said, that all have

sinned through one man's sin? No matter how it is explained, we cannot escape the conclusion, that our sinfulness is the direct result of Adam's sin. His sin affected us, so that it can be said, that all sinned in Adam. This does not demand, that we are held responsible for Adam's sin, but it does explain the origin of our sinfulness. Sin is something we are born with, by virtue of being in Adam, not just something we do. Death reigned over all, from Adam to Moses, even though they did not sin like Adam had sinned (v. 14). That Adam's one sin affected all of humanity, is evident when Paul said:

“For if through the offense of one, many be dead...” (v. 15), and again, “For if by one man's offense, death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, (Jesus Christ). 18 Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so, by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous” (v. 17-19).

If our connection with Adam's sin, is denied on the grounds that we cannot be personally affected by a sin which we did not personally commit, then we must also deny the grounds on which we have been made righteous. Jesus' righteousness and obedience, is not ours, yet, God imputes it to us as though it was truly ours (Romans vs. 15:19, 21). If we cannot suffer consequences from Adam's sin, in any way, then neither can we be blessed from Christ's righteousness, in any way. If it is not fair, that we suffer in condemnation and death, because of our connection with Adam, then neither is it fair, that we be blessed with Christ's righteousness and life. Such an argument, would destroy the entire basis of our salvation, from sin.

That sin is not just a matter of the will, is evident, from an abundance of passages. The Scriptures teach, that sin is universal, in nature. If sin were only a matter of the will, with no natural inherent tendency toward sin, why would there not be at least one person among the billions, who have lived on the earth who would have never sinned (besides

Christ, of course)? Ecclesiastes 7:20 declares, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and does not sin.” Proverbs 20:9 says, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” Why is the heart dirty with sin? The clearest of all texts, is Romans 3:9-23. In the previous chapters, Paul argued that both, Gentiles and Jews fall short of God’s Glory. He culminates his argument, by pointing out that all have sinned, there is none righteous, none that seeks after God, none profitable. Our mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. We are quick to do evil. Truly, all have sinned and fall short of God’s Glory.

There is within humanity, a natural tendency toward evil. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Why is the heart desperately wicked, if sin is just a matter of the will? Ezekiel sees a need for a changing of man’s heart and Spirit, in order for him to serve God (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:24-28; See also Jeremiah 31:31-34). David was shaped in iniquity, from his conception (Psalm 51:5). Paul said, “But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart, that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Romans 6:17). How can we be the servants of sin, if sin does not have the mastery over us? How can sin have the mastery over us, if sin is only a matter of the will? We would not be the servant of sin, but sin would be the servant of our will. Only when our will allowed sin to take hold of us, could we be considered sinners.

No passage is clearer, in this regard, than is Romans 7:12-25. Here, Paul said, that the Law of God is Holy (v. 12), but it actually irritated the sin problem that he already struggled with, making his sin increasingly sinful (vs. 13). Then Paul said, “For we know that the law is Spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (v. 14). In what way can it be said, that we are sold under sin, if sin is not a principle in us that exerts great influence over our will? Paul went on to speak of the internal struggle he faced. Things that he wanted to do (the will), he did not find the ability to do (v. 15). If sin was only a matter of the will, then Paul should have been able to do what he willed. It is obvious, however, that there is an internal struggle, that did not always permit him, to do what he knew was right. Paul explained this phenomenon by saying, “Now then, it is no more I that do

it, but sin that dwells in me” (v. 17). Sin was something that was in him, and not some particular violation of the law. It is a principle, not just a particular act of sin. Paul pointedly said, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwells no good thing: for to will, is present with me; but, how to perform that which is good, I find not” (v. 18). Here again, we find a conflict between the will and being able to perform, that will. Verses 19-20, further explain the conflict between what Paul wanted to do, and what he really did. Again, his reason for this, is because of the sin that dwells in him. Finally, Paul said:

For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man: 23 But, I see another law in my members, waring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members [The mind can never overcome the desires of the flesh. Paul goes on to say later, that the only way we can live Holy, is through Christ’s Spirit]. 24 O wretched man, that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind, I myself, serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin (Romans 7:22-25).

Many object that Paul is describing his pre-conversion experience in Romans 7, but that this cannot be, is evident, from the use of the present tense that Paul utilizes to explain his predicament. Paul is describing a present reality, not a past reality. Paul’s literary point, in the context of Romans 6-8, is that when he fails to rely on the Holy Spirit to overcome his sinfulness, he is doomed to failure.

Sanctification does incur in a moral change in us, but not moral perfection, and not a perfection of the will. Those who advocate the perfection of the will, in Holiness, fall into the trap of basing salvation on the will of man in conforming to the law of God, and not in the Grace of God and our union with Christ. The Scripture is very clear, that our salvation comes as a result of our union with Christ, whereby, we receive His righteousness and life. Salvation is not based off of works, although good works, will necessarily flow, from salvation. If salvation is a matter of our will, always obeying God’s moral character, then none of us, are saved.

The problem with Pelagianism is its teaching, that salvation is only a matter of the will. Scripture teaches, that all of humanity is lost in sin and could not find a way of escape. If all we had to do was change our will, what was the purpose of Calvary? God would have only needed to give us the proper motivation to change our will toward the good and we would have been saved. Such could not be done, however. God's law is weak, because of the flesh (Romans 8:3). It gives us the right requirements, but mankind does not have the ability to keep it (Romans 7). We may have the right desire to do so, but cannot apart from the Spirit (Romans 7:18 - 8:17). The human will can never accomplish our sanctification. Only by the incarnation, could sin be condemned, and we could be given power over it (Romans 8:3). Our Holiness is rooted in Christ's Holiness, our union with Him, and our cooperation with His, leading to become, in practice, what we were declared to be in justification.

### The Relationship of Justification and Sanctification in the Life of the Believer

Now that we have discussed, both the doctrine of justification and sanctification, how do the two correlates with one another? What is the relationship between the two?

As mentioned in the introduction to this course, many people see justification and sanctification, as antithetical. This dichotomy is held on either, the theological level, the practical level, or both. Some cannot find a way to put the two together theologically, while others cannot find a way to live out the theological truth, of both doctrines, simultaneously.

The fact of the matter is, that justification and sanctification are perfect compliments, not diametric opposites. To hold the two, as conceptual opposites, is to do injustice to the Biblical data. Both, are necessary for the development of the Christian life. That there is a relationship between grace and effort, is evidenced by several NT passages. The same grace, which brings salvation, is the same grace, which teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present

age (Titus 2:11-12). Our Holy living is derived from, and dependent on, the same grace that saved us. Only with grace, can we serve God, with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28). Ephesians 2:1-10, marvelously demonstrates, the proper relationship between grace and works: “For by grace, you have been saved, through faith; and this, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (italics mine). Although good works cannot save us, good works, will necessarily flow, from salvation.

The faith which saves/justifies, will necessarily result, in obedience/good works. Luke and Paul, both spoke of obedience to the faith (Acts 6:7, Romans 1:5; 16:26). Paul told Timothy, to constantly affirm, that those “which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). Probably, the greatest didactic passage regarding the relationship of faith and works, is that found in the Epistle of James. James made it clear, that pure religion is not just the confession of belief, but the acting out of the belief, which is professed. Faith without the corresponding works, is useless, but faith, coupled with corresponding “faith-works,” is perfect, bringing salvation (James 2:14, 17-24, 26).

God’s Grace and sanctification, are both necessary, for a healthy Christian life. These two components can be conceptually labeled, as dependence and discipline; reliance and effort. We depend on God’s Grace for our justification and sanctification, yet, we also work together with God, exerting personal effort to accomplish the goal of sanctification. God’s Grace is not just God’s unmerited favor towards us, in justification, but an impartation of ability, whereby we are able to perform His Will (Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 3:10; 15:10; Galatians 2:8; 1 Peter 4:10-11). God enables us to work, but He does not do the work for us. Justifying faith is passive, but sanctifying faith is active, working together with God’s Grace. God does not make our effort unnecessary, but rather, makes it effective.

To demonstrate this Scripturally, notice that the Psalmist said, “Unless the LORD builds

the house, those who build it, labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps. 127:1, RSV). There is a sense, in which, both the Lord and man is building and watching. We are laborers together, with God (1Corinthians 3:9). Our part is needed, but is ineffective, without God’s working, in the same. Paul commanded the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (personal responsibility), but also noted, that it was God’s enabling of them, to do so (Philippians 2:13-14). Later, he commented, regarding his own relationship with God, “I can *do* all things *through Christ*, who strengthens *me*” (Philippians 4:13, italics mine). Paul said, that he himself, would do all things, but that his efforts were dependent on the strength of the Lord. Again, in the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul noted, that he labored in the work of the Gospel, according to God’s working in him (Colossians 1:28-29). Apart from God’s working, we can do nothing (John 15:1-6), but when we combine our effort with God’s gracious enabling, we can perfect Holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

As much as we should see justification and sanctification as working together, we must maintain a conceptual distinction between the two. Each serves a different purpose in our salvation experience, and each has its own defining characteristics. Sanctification is in degrees and is progressive; justification is a fixed standing, which is given to the believing individual. One cannot be more justified, but one can be more sanctified. Justification is objective, affecting our standing before God and His Law; sanctification is subjective, affecting our inner man. As Gordon Lewis noted:

Although justification changes one’s legal status, it does not transform the heart; regeneration and sanctification do that. ...The basic issue is not whether sanctification inevitably follows from and is continually rooted in justification, but whether sanctification is to be included in the concept of justification.

Justification is distinct from sanctification, although the former leads to the latter. Justification is a complete provision of Jesus Christ’s atonement; sanctification is a progressive, enabling by the Spirit’s ministries. That is, justification is once-and-for-

all; sanctification is continuous.

A failure to distinguish between justification and sanctification lends to the practical theology of a works-based salvation, as we have seen in the Catholic Church. In fact, the human tendency, is to combine the concepts of justification and sanctification into one, assuming that our justification, before God, is based on the level of our sanctification. Paul's frequent attacks on legalism demonstrate this fact. Richard Lovelace had tremendous insight to this phenomenon, when he said:

We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption, that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted, it inevitably focuses our attention, not on Christ, but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security, resting not on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ, but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christian life.

Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved, either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness, which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace.

When we relate to God, based on our level of sanctification, we tend to feel that we cannot come before Him. Understanding that our acceptance in God's sight, has been secured, when we were initially justified, gives us freedom to come before His throne of Grace. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, by faith, even before we begin to mortify the deeds of the body and separate ourselves, to God, and from sinful attitudes and behaviors.

Understanding the acceptance, we were given in justification, apart from sanctification, should not lead one to see the latter as optional, in the Christian life. It is not enough to know, that we are accepted through faith in Christ, but we must also realize, that we are delivered from the dominion and bondage of sin, through Christ. We cannot claim the

power of justification, unless we also confess the delivering power of sanctification.

Paul warned the Galatians of using their liberty in the Gospel and standing before God, as an occasion of the flesh (Galatians 5:13). To the Romans, Paul said, “The night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then, cast off the works of darkness....Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, in quarreling and jealousy. But, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:12-14 RSV). We are to put on the new man, which is created in righteousness and true Holiness (Ephesians 4:24). One who is righteous will do deeds of righteousness and grow in righteousness (Ephesians 4:24; 5:9; Philippians 1:11). There is a fine line between using Grace, as an excuse for sin and for a remedy for sin. God’s Grace can be abused (Jude 1:4). The way to ensure that we are not misusing Grace, is through repentance. One can hardly abuse Grace, while at the same time, experiencing genuine godly sorrow, for sin (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Some may question the motivation or need Christians have to live right if they are indeed accepted, before God, based on their faith in Him. This question, although it may be asked by a sincere individual, is the wrong question to ask. It embodies the “what must I do to get by?” attitude. This is not the Biblical perspective. The answer to this question, however, is found, in Jesus’ statement to His disciples: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Love for the one who died and rose again for us, is our motivation to live right. We do not live right, merely because we fear God, but because we love God. Paul emulated this attitude, when he said, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live, should live no longer for themselves, but for Him, who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

We might compare this to a marriage relationship. There is a legal pronouncement of relationship, between the husband and wife, but this legal pronouncement does not guarantee the quality of the relationship. There is a status change between the two

parties, but this status change is not meant to be the end-goal of the marriage. There is to be a growth in relationship. Any married couple will confess, that in order to make a marriage work, there will be an alteration of behavior. If one refuses to change their behavior so as to please their lover, although one may be in a legal relationship with their lover, they are not in a good relationship, with the same.

When we truly love someone, we desire to do that, which pleases them. In our relationship with God, we should naturally desire to live our lives in accordance with His will and character, pleasing Him, in all that we do.

Sanctification, then, is not the prerequisite of our salvation and relationship with God, but the outflow of it (Ephesians 2:8-10). Grace and good works, must both be emphasized, if we are to have a Biblical and practical Christianity. We must insist on Grace, not as the *alternative* to good works, but as the *means* to good works. Conversely, we must insist on good works, not as the *alternative* to Grace, but as the result of Grace. Justification, is only one element in our Spiritual vitality, not the totality. It alone, does not cause complete Spiritual health. We also need, a revelation of God's Holiness and personal progress in sanctification, to escape suffering in other areas. As Martin Luther has said, "We are saved, by faith alone, but the faith that saves, is never alone." Although our relationship with God is established by faith/justification, it is furthered by sanctification. Let us pursue Holiness, in light of our acceptance before God, not for our acceptance.

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## A Oneness View of Jesus' Prayers

### Why Some Object to a Uni-Personal God

Oneness theology maintains, that God is uni-personal, in nature. This uni-personal God Himself, became a man, and yet, continued to exist beyond the incarnation, as the

transcendent and exclusive Spirit as He always had, prior to the incarnation. The deity of the Son and the deity of the Father, then, are not two distinct Divine persons in the Godhead, as in Trinitarian theology, but the same person in two distinct modes of existence. God now exists as a genuine Man, in the incarnation (Son), and yet, continues to exist, as God, beyond the incarnation (Father). The Father is deity alone, while the Son, is that same personal deity in metaphysical union with human nature, and thus, a real human being.

Such an understanding is no different in principle than the Trinitarian understanding of the incarnation, wherein God the Son comes to exist as Man, and yet, continues to exist as God the Son beyond the incarnation, all the while without becoming two persons. Where Oneness and Trinitarian theologies differ, is not in our confession of a dual existence for one personal Divine Being, but on the identity of that one Being. Trinitarian theology maintains, that Being, to be the second person of a tri-personal God, whereas Oneness theology maintains, that Being, to be the one uni-personal God, YHWH (Jehovah).

Some object to the Oneness understanding of God, on the grounds that such an understanding cannot account for a real distinction or genuine relationship between Father and Son, at least not without resorting to a Nestorian Christology, wherein Jesus' human nature communicates to His Divine nature. Trinitarians reason that since the deity of the Father and the deity of the Son, are the same personal deity in Oneness theology, all communications/relations between the Father and Son, are nothing more than, God talking to Himself, and only schizophrenics have relationships with themselves! This makes the Oneness view appear illogical, and a denial of the genuine relationship, we find in Scripture, between Father and Son. With such a conception of Oneness theology, it is understandable why some have concluded, that the Oneness view is illogical and untrue to the Biblical data! This conception of Oneness theology, and of the person of Christ, however, is inaccurate.

Oneness theology can and does maintain a genuine relationship between the Father

and Son, without resorting to a Nestorian understanding of Christ. We need only avoid viewing the Father-Son distinction, as a distinction between Christ's two natures, and recognize the genuineness of Christ's humanity, both of which, we do. Any claim of a real relationship between Father and Son, would be artificial and meaningless, if it does not take the incarnation seriously, giving full weight to Jesus' humanity, recognizing a real union of His Divine and human natures, and a true kenosis.

### A Genuine Distinction Between "Father" and "Son"

There are several foundational truths, that must be grasped in order to understand the nature and origin of Jesus' prayers/communication with the Father. The first truth relates to the Biblical distinction between Father and the reason for such a distinction.

The Bible is clear that Jesus, the Son of God, prayed to the Father. By portraying the Son, as praying to the Father, the Bible is making a distinction between the Father and Son. The Bible makes a distinction between the Father and Son hundreds of times, so this should be no surprise. We cannot and should not deny these distinctions. To recognize and affirm them, is not an affirmation of Trinitarianism, for both Trinitarians and Oneness believers alike, confess these distinctions, but understand their nature and origin, differently.

It is, both possible and necessary, to maintain the uni-personal nature of God's eternal essence (rather than tri-personal, as in Trinitarian dogma) and a genuine distinction between Father and Son, if we wish to adequately explain Scripture. We can avoid, both Trinitarianism and Tritheism, by placing the distinctions in their proper place. The proper place for these distinctions, is not in an eternal distinction of three persons within one essence (Trinitarianism), or an internal distinction between Jesus' Divine and human natures (Nestorianism), but an existential distinction arising in the incarnation, due to God's newly acquired human existence.

While there is only one person in the Godhead, YHWH, Jehovah, this uni-personal God,

has come to *exist* in two ways: in the incarnation as Man, and in His continued existence, as exclusive deity, beyond the incarnation. It is the same personal God, but existing in a new way (as Man). The distinction between Father and Son, then, is a distinction between God's dual manner of *existence*. Jesus' deity is the deity of the Father (the same "He"), but in human mode of existence. In God's human mode of existence, He has made Himself known to us as the Son; in God's continued mode of existence, beyond the incarnation, He has made Himself known, as the Father.

Jesus' existence is distinct from the Father's, not in the identity of His deity, but in the personal union of His deity and humanity, in one new existence - an existence which is distinct from God's manner of existence, beyond the incarnation. Because the distinction is bound up in the incarnation, it is not eternal, and neither is it rooted in God's essential deity, as in Trinitarian theology. The deity of the Son and the deity of the Father are not two distinct Divine persons in the Godhead, but the same person in two distinct modes of existence. There is a distinction, then, between God, as He exists in Himself, and God, as He has come to exist as Man. The distinction is not between God and God (Trinitarianism), or God and an individual man (Nestorianism, Adoptionism), or a divine nature and a human nature (Nestorianism), but between God's two modes of existence (Oneness).

The incarnation is God's one Person, coming to exist in a new way. God did not change, but His manner of existence did. When God became a Man, in the incarnation, He *began* to exist as Man, *in addition* to His existence, as exclusive Spirit. God did not come to exist as another "he," however. There was no creation of another person. Rather YHWH, Jehovah, the only Divine "He," came to exist in another manner than He had existed for all eternity. Because God is the only personal subject in Christ, the "He" in Christ, is the same "He" as the "He" of the Father, but existing in a new manner. The Father and Son, then, is the same "He," but "He" is existing in two distinct ways. As Father "He" exists as God, while as Son, the same "He" has come to exist, as Man.

After the incarnation, then, we know God in two ways: beyond the incarnation as

“Father,” and in the incarnation as “Son.” The former is beyond His human existence as exclusive deity, while the latter is in His human existence as a genuine Man. The Father-Son distinction is not indicative of two distinct persons in the eternal Godhead, but of one personal deity in two distinct modes of existence: as Man, as God.

The Son is truly distinct from the Father, because in the incarnation God brought human nature into metaphysical union with Himself, and began to exist, as Man. The ontological union of the Divine and human natures, in Christ, brought into being a mode of existence distinct from God’s normal and continued manner of existence, beyond the incarnation as the transcendent, unlimited Spirit. The Son is distinct from the Father, not in the identity of His deity, but in the mode of His existence. The Son is distinct from the Father, due to the addition of humanity to God’s Divine Person. Jesus’ deity is the deity of the one uni-personal God, YHWH, Jehovah, but in the incarnation, the Spirit of YHWH, Jehovah, assumed human nature, incorporating humanity into His Being, and began to personally exist as Man. The union of Christ’s Divine and human natures in one person makes His manner of existence, distinct from the Father’s manner of existence, and thus, Jesus can be, and is spoken of, as being distinct from the Father.

This distinction between Father and Son arises, *because* of Christ’s humanity, not *between* His deity and the deity of the Father (Trinitarianism), or between His Divine and human natures (Nestorianism). With the assumption of a genuine human nature, complete with a human psyche, will emotions, and consciousness, Jesus’ existence is distinct from the Father’s existence. By virtue of the fact, that Jesus’ consciousness is human, it is distinct from God’s unlimited Divine consciousness, beyond the incarnation. Such a distinction in consciousness demands that we speak of the Father and Jesus as being distinct both, metaphysically and psychologically. This distinction is not a distinction between eternal persons within the Godhead, but rather between God’s existence in the incarnation and His continued existence beyond the incarnation.

### Similarities and Dissimilarities to Trinitarianism

For the uni-personal God of Oneness theology to assume a dual existence in the incarnation without becoming two persons, is no different in principle from the Trinitarian teaching, that the second person of the Trinity came to have a dual existence in the incarnation, without becoming two persons. After the incarnation, with the assumption of a genuine human existence, God the Son is said to have assumed a human existence and yet, continues to exist as the unlimited Divine Son beyond the incarnation, all the while without becoming two persons. If God the Son can come to exist in a two-fold manner (as Man in the incarnation, and as God beyond the incarnation) in Trinitarian dogma without becoming two persons (producing a fourth person in the Godhead), then the uni-personal God of Oneness theology can become Man, and yet, continue to exist beyond the incarnation without becoming two persons (producing a second person in the Godhead). Any charge that the Oneness view is nonsensical, is equally applicable, to Trinitarianism, and any charge that Oneness theology subtly introduces another person into the Godhead, is unfounded.

To demonstrate, that the assertion, being made here, is not comparable to the Trinitarianism, let me elaborate on the difference between the manner in which Oneness believers and Trinitarians make a distinction between Father and Son.

1. Trinitarianism teaches three eternal distinctions of persons within the one essence of the Godhead. Oneness theology, however, only admits a distinction between the Father and Son, not between the Father, Son, and Spirit, and this distinction, is neither personal, nor eternal.

2. Whereas, in Trinitarian theology, the Father-Son distinction, is between one divine person and another divine person, in Oneness theology, the distinction is between the one uni-personal God's existence, beyond the incarnation, and the same uni-personal God's existence as Man in the incarnation.

3. The Oneness understanding of the distinction between Father and Son is not an eternal distinction of persons, prior to the incarnation. Oneness theology

understands the distinction, as arising *only after* the incarnation, when the one uni-personal God, YHWH, Jehovah, Himself, became a Man, acquiring a genuine human existence/consciousness. Whereas the Trinitarian distinction is eternal and unrelated to the incarnation. In Oneness theology, the distinction is temporal and exclusively bound up, in the incarnation.

In light of the above, to confess a distinction between Father and Son, is not a Trinitarian confession of an internal division of persons within God's nature. Rather, it is a recognition, that when God took to Himself, a human identity/existence, a distinction between the Father and Jesus (Son) arose. Such a distinction is not a distinction between divine persons in the Godhead (Trinitarianism), but between God's existence beyond the incarnation and God's existence in the incarnation (Oneness theology).

In summation, Jesus' existence is different from the Father's, not in the identity of His deity, but in the personal union of His deity and humanity, in one new existence - an existence, which differs from God's continued manner of existence, beyond the incarnation. Jesus possesses a consciousness differing from God's unlimited Divine consciousness, beyond the incarnation. This distinction of consciousness between Father and Son, arising because of Christ's genuine human existence, demands that we consider the Son to have a distinct existence from the Father in His incarnate existence, but not in the eternal Godhead, itself. While we must reject an eternal, personal distinction within God's very essence, we cannot reject the genuine distinction between Father and Son, that arose because of the incarnation, distinguishing God's existence beyond the incarnation, from God's existence, in the incarnation.

## Why Jesus Needed to Pray

The fundamental confusion, regarding Jesus' prayers, is not the nature of His prayers (i.e., if they were genuine, or only for an example), but the reason for His prayers. The testimony of Scripture, is clear as to the genuineness of His prayers, but it is not so clear as to why Jesus had need of prayer, to begin with. If Jesus is God, why did He

need to pray? Surely, God does not need to pray.

The reason for Jesus' prayers, becomes clear, when we understand that the incarnation is not a mere indwelling of God in a human shell, but God coming to *be* a genuine man. God did not pretend to be Man, but came to be Man. God now exists, as a Man, in addition to His continued existence, as God, because He incorporated human nature into His One Divine Person, utilizing the human nature, to personally exist, as Man. As God came to exist as a genuine Man, complete with a genuine human consciousness/mind, Jesus had the capacity for, and the need for relationships. Because of the reality and genuineness of His humanity, Jesus even had need of a relationship with God. As Man, Jesus experienced the same limitations all humans experience, occasioning His dependence on God, as all men have need of such. Surely, Jesus did not pray, *because* He was God, but *because* He was Man. Only humans have need of prayer. If it was not for Christ's genuine human existence, He would have had no reason to pray.

Trinitarians and Oneness believers, are in agreement, that Jesus' prayers are due to the incarnation. Trinitarians confess, that God the Son, did not pray to God the Father, prior to, or apart, from His incarnate existence. It is understood, that Jesus' prayers are rooted in His *human* existence, not His *Divine* existence. Even with this acknowledgement, however, some Trinitarians still conceive of Christ's prayers, as one person in the Godhead, praying to another person in the Godhead. In fact, Christ's prayers are a primary argument for the distinct Divine Personhood of the Son. It is argued, that for Jesus to pray to, and have a relationship with the Father, requires that, Jesus be a distinct Divine person from the Father.

This conclusion is only fitting, if Christ's prayers are understood to exude forth from a divine consciousness, for only then, would Christ's prayers inform us, as to the number of persons in God. If Christ prayed according to a divine consciousness, it would clearly demonstrate the existence of two distinct divine consciousnesses (one of the Father, and one of the Son), and thus, two divine persons. If Christ's prayers are understood to

exude forth from a genuine human consciousness, however, they would give us no indication whatsoever, as to whether or not, Jesus' deity is personally distinct from the deity of the Father, because there would only be one divine consciousness involved in the communication, not two. If Trinitarians truly believed, that Christ was praying according to a genuine human consciousness, they would not use His prayers to argue for the distinct divine person-hood of the Son, because the Divine person, in Christ, would be praying as man, not as God. The fact that Trinitarians understand Jesus' prayers as necessitating that the Son be a distinct divine person from the Father, demonstrates that they root Jesus' prayers, in the divine consciousness.

Christ's prayers are understood to be God the Son, as God, praying to the Father according to His divine consciousness, rather than God the Son, as Man, praying to the Father according to a genuine human consciousness. Such an understanding grounds Christ's prayers in His deity, rather than His humanity, positing the notion, that God as God, is praying to God. *If God the Son is praying to God according to His divine consciousness (as God), then we must ask, What does the incarnation have to do with Christ's prayers?* An incarnation is not necessary for God, as God to pray to God, if indeed, that is what Jesus' prayers really were. So, while Trinitarianism confesses that the Son's prayers are wholly rooted in His incarnational existence, some Trinitarians are inconsistent, in that, they simultaneously hold to the notion, that Christ's prayers are rooted in His Divine consciousness, which would not require an incarnation.

This inconsistency is devastating to the Trinitarian dogma. To conceive of Christ's prayers, as God the Son (as God) praying to the Father, is to say, God is praying. Only an inferior person would have need of prayer, however. To say God the Son, as God prayed, is to admit, that God the Son is inferior to God the Father. Trinitarians, however claim, God the Son, is coequal to God the Father. The Trinity crumbles, if the second person of the Trinity prays to the first person, from a divine consciousness. Jesus is reduced to the Christ of Arianism, for it was the ancient Arian heresy that asserted Jesus' deity to be inferior to the Father's deity, occasioning His need of prayer. If we understand Christ's prayers as rooted in the incarnation, and hence, in God's human

existence/consciousness, we eliminate such pitfalls and no longer need to posit multiple persons in the Godhead, to explain Christ's prayers.

## Christ's Consciousness

A casual reading of the NT reveals that there was a genuine relationship between the Father and Son. The Father is said to love the Son (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9-10; 17:24), and the Son is said to love the Father (John 14:31). Love is based on relationship. How do we explain such a relationship if God is uni-personal as Oneness theology maintains? Is God having a relationship with Himself?

Trinitarians have long accused Oneness theology of rendering Jesus' relationship to the Father meaningless, and reducing His prayers to schizophrenia, because we understand the deity of the Son and the deity of the Father to be the same personal deity. It is reasoned, that if the deity of the Father and the deity of the Son is the same uni-personal God, existing in two ways (in the incarnation and beyond the incarnation), rather than two distinct persons in the Godhead, then the "Father-Son" relationship is little more than God having a relationship with Himself, or praying to Himself from a different perspective of sorts. Any "relationship" between Father and Son is reduced to fiction, calling for a rejection of the Oneness view, as inadequate to explain Jesus' prayers.

*I would argue that Oneness theology is being rejected by Trinitarians, because it is being misunderstood, and it is being misunderstood because it is being viewed through the eyes of a flawed Christology. One could only perceive the Oneness view in the manner explicated above, if they presuppose that Christ's experiences, actions, thoughts, desires, will, etc., are rooted in His Divine consciousness, rather than a real human consciousness. This is not an Orthodox view, however, even by Trinitarian standards. The theological problems, associated with this view, will be expounded on, in the next section.*

The Orthodox understand the communication (relationship) between Father and Son to arise out of Christ's human consciousness, not His Divine consciousness, and thus, it could never be conceived, as God having a relationship with Himself, or praying to Himself. Rather, it is the Man whom God came to be, having a relationship with God. God came to exist as a real and limited Man with a real and limited human consciousness. *In a human way, and from a genuine human existence, He had a real relationship with God, as do all men who possess a real human consciousness.* There is no need to posit multiple persons, in the Godhead, to explain Christ's prayers, and neither must we resort to a Nestorian understanding of Christ, wherein one "half" of Jesus (His human nature) is praying to the other "half" (His divine nature). We need only recognize the genuineness of Christ's humanity, and the implications of such, on Christ's acts and experiences.

### The Origin of Jesus' Prayers

Pursuing an understanding of Christ's prayers requires further attention to the issue of His consciousness. Whatever Jesus thinks, says, or does flows from some sort of conscious existence. What is the nature of that conscious existence? Our understanding of Christ's consciousness will impact our understanding of Christ's relationship to the Father.

We know Christ is both, God and Man, simultaneously. The question we are posed with, then, is Did Christ's relationship with the Father arise out of a Divine consciousness, a human consciousness, or both? Another way of phrasing the question, would be to ask, In what manner is God consciously experiencing and acting, in Christ? Is God experiencing and acting as God, or is God experiencing and acting as Man, or both (whether at different times or simultaneously)? Are Christ's acts and experiences rooted in a divine consciousness, a human consciousness, or both? The following is an examination of each option:

### Divine Consciousness Only

To understand Christ's experiences, as rooted in the divine consciousness, rings of the ancient Apollinarian heresy, wherein Jesus is reduced to a mere body, devoid of a human psychology and personality. Christ is belittled to a human shell, through which, God acts and experiences as God, not as a genuine and complete human being, through which, God acts and experiences as Man. The incarnation, then, is not God's coming to be (exist as) man, but God coming to be *in* and vivify, a vacant mass of human flesh. Jesus' thoughts are not those of a genuine man with a human consciousness, but are God's thoughts, expressed through an empty human body. Jesus, as Man, has no mind, consciousness, thoughts, or will. All such capacities are rooted in the Divine person, who is acting *through* the human body.

There are grave consequences to confessing Christ's experiences and acts to be God experiencing and acting as God, rather than God experiencing and acting as Man. It denies Christ a human consciousness, and hence, human knowledge, rendering many Scriptures meaningless, such as those that speak of Jesus growing in wisdom and lacking in knowledge (Luke 2:52; Mark 5:30; 9:21; 13:32). God is omniscient and perfect in wisdom, and thus, could not grow in wisdom or lack knowledge. If we suggest that Jesus only pretended to experience mental development, we are forced to claim, that God merely pretended to be human and pretended to experience human limitations, but really was not a genuine human being, with genuine human limitations.

This is what I call the "God in a costume" view of the incarnation. It turns the incarnation into a divine costume party, in which, God wears a human mask, pretending to be human, but is really just God, in human disguise. This would make the incarnation, the greatest forgery in the history of creation. If the incarnation is God as God merely acting *through* an empty human vessel with no real human mind/consciousness, then Jesus is nothing more than a mindless bag of flesh, animated and controlled by the divine mind, not a genuine human. For these reasons, we must reject the notion, that Christ's experiences and acts are rooted in His divine consciousness.

While an Apollinarian Christology is inconsistent with Trinitarian dogma, many confessing Trinitarians unwittingly assume an Apollinarian Christology in their understanding of Jesus' prayers. Supposing that Christ's prayers arose out of His divine consciousness (as God the Son), Trinitarians make unnecessary conclusions about the nature of God, and unnecessarily conclude, that Oneness theology is nonsensical. Trinitarians reason, that since Jesus is God, and Jesus prays to God, the Divine person praying, in Christ, must be distinct from the Divine person He is praying to, lest Jesus be found praying to Himself. It is believed, that in order to make sense of Jesus' prayers, giving validity to the genuineness of His relationship with the Father, and avoid the absurd conclusion, that Jesus' prayers are nothing more than God praying to Himself, we must confess Jesus' deity, as personally distinct from the Father's deity, which in turn, necessitates multiple persons in the Godhead. The underlying assumption behind this line of reasoning, is that in Christ, God as God, is praying to God (thus, denying a genuine human psychology), which assumption we have already shown, to be false. *Because this assumption is false, there is no reason to conclude that God's one essence subsists in multiple persons, based on Jesus' prayers*

*A Trinitarian understanding of God cannot make sense of Jesus' relationship to the Father, anymore than can a Oneness understanding if their Christology assumes, that Christ's acts are rooted in His divine consciousness.* Starting from an Apollinarian view of Christ's Trinitarian theology would be forced to concede, that Jesus' deity is inferior to the Father's deity (Arianism). An ontological Trinity of divine persons would be destroyed, if the Son communicated to God the Father, according to His divine consciousness, because "God the Son" made many statements that would indicate the inferiority of His deity to the Father's. Trinitarianism, how-ever, asserts that Christ's deity is *homoousion*, with the Father. Jesus said, the Father was greater than Himself (John 14:28), and even confessed that He had a God (John 20:17). If these statements were uttered, by God, as God from His divine consciousness, then God the Son confessed to be an inferior deity to the Father, and even claimed to have a God Himself. One cannot be God and have a God at the same time, unless they are an inferior deity

(as in Arian theology).

Such statements are consistent with Christ's full deity, only if we understand them, as rooted in His human consciousness, not the divine consciousness. As a genuine Man, Jesus was truly inferior to the Father, and had a God, and from a genuine human consciousness, Jesus could confess this to be so. This is why Orthodox Trinitarians, as well as Oneness believers, do not understand Jesus' prayers and experiences, to have their focus in Christ's divine consciousness, but in His human consciousness. For Trinitarians to claim, that Jesus' relationship with the Father was between two divine persons, only complicates matters; it does not alleviate them.

Seeing that most Trinitarians assume an Apollinarian-type Christology when they explain Christ's prayers, we ought to seriously question Trinitarianism, as the best explanation for Christ's prayers. Not only should Trinitarianism be rejected as the best explanation of Christ's prayers, but seeing that the Trinitarian objection to the Oneness view, assumes an Apollinarian Christology at its base, their objection to Oneness theology, must also be rejected, as invalid.

Starting from an Apollinarian view of Christ, however, it is no wonder that Trinitarians object to Oneness theology. If God is uni-personal, and Jesus' prayers are rooted in His Divine consciousness, then most assuredly, when Jesus prayed, *God* was praying to Himself. Oneness believers do not start with an Apollinarian Christology, however, and thus, would never understand Jesus' prayers, in this manner.

There is no absurdity in confessing both, the uni-personal nature of God and the genuineness of Christ's prayers, if we understand Christ's prayers to be rooted in His human consciousness. Once Trinitarians come to see the error of rooting Jesus' prayers in His Divine consciousness, Jesus' prayers can no longer be thought of, as God praying to Himself, or one Divine person, praying to another. Jesus' prayers are due to the fact, that God came to exist as a real Man, and from a genuine human consciousness/existence, prayed to God, as do all men.

There is no absurdity in a real man praying to a real God, but there is absurdity in denying Jesus, a real human psychology in His prayers, and yet at the same time, wanting to confess that He is truly and completely Man. Real humans have a real human psychology. But, if Jesus' prayers were merely God speaking and acting through a human body without a human mind/consciousness, then Jesus is not a man, but a divine puppet of flesh, devoid of any real humanness.

In summary, for the Trinitarian objection to Oneness theology to carry any force demands, that they assert Christ's experiences and acts to be rooted in His Divine consciousness, for only then could it be conceived, that God is praying to Himself. Without presupposing an Apollinarian view of Christ, the Trinitarian objection to Oneness theology, based on Christ's prayers, loses substance. If Jesus' prayers are rooted in a genuine human psychology, being human in origin, then the argument against Oneness theology, that "God is praying to Himself," is without meaning. A Trinitarian theology, is not necessary, to give validity to Christ's prayers and genuine relationship with the Father. All that is necessary, is that we understand Christ's consciousness to be truly human, and His acts to be rooted in this human existence/consciousness. Once this is understood, it is no longer necessary to posit multiple persons in the Godhead, to explain Christ's prayers, and indeed would be theologically disastrous, to do so. The same Christology that some Trinitarians use to argue against Oneness theology, is the same Christology, that destroys any ontological Trinity of coequal, consubstantial persons.

### Sometimes Divine Consciousness, Sometimes Human Consciousness

Some believe Jesus accessed His Divine consciousness, at times, His human consciousness, at times, or both, His Divine and human consciousness, simultaneously. Sometimes, He knows and acts as God according to His Divine nature, while at other times, He knows and acts as Man according to His human nature, and still at other times, He knows and acts as both, God and Man, simultaneously, according to both natures.

With such a conception of Christ, the unity of His person disappears. Christ is split in two, creating a dual consciousness for a single person (divine schizophrenia). It is always God, knowing and acting as God, man knowing and acting as man, or God and man, knowing and acting in conjunction, but never Jesus as Jesus, acting and knowing. When reading the Gospels, we are forced to ask ourselves, Who is speaking or acting here? Is it God or man, or both? Such a conception, fails to take the incarnation seriously. Jesus is mistakenly viewed, as two independent natures, joined together in locale and external appearance, each of which perform their own actions independently of the other, rather than as one person who performs His own actions, through both natures. When we reduce Christ's actions to His natures, rather than His person, we lose the unity of His person, and end up with a Nestorian Christ.

While I disagree with explaining Christ's prayers, as His human nature praying to His Divine nature, this explanation is attractive, because it avoids the absurd notion, that God needs to pray. Those who explain Christ's prayers, in this way, recognize that if it was not for Christ's human nature, He would have had no need of prayer. The desire, then, is to assign Jesus' prayers to His human nature, excluding them from any connection to deity, so that we do not have God praying. But, by excluding Christ's Divine nature from His prayers, Christ is separated into two "parts," where one of His parts is doing one thing, while the other is not. It is no longer the person, Jesus, praying, but one of Jesus' parts.

When viewing Christ's prayers, as acts of His natures, rather than an act of His person, we get ourselves into a quandary. On the one hand, if Christ's human nature prayed to His Divine nature, then we separate the natures and destroy the unity of Christ's person. On the other hand, if Christ's Divine nature prayed to another Divine person, again we separate the natures, but worse yet, we make Christ an inferior deity to the Father, for only an inferior deity would have need of praying to another deity. *The solution to this dilemma is to avoid assigning Jesus' prayers to either of His natures altogether, and confess that Jesus, the person, prayed.*

The reason we cannot explain Christ's prayers, as His human nature praying to His Divine nature, becomes clear, when we understand the nature of the incarnation. The incarnation is not a mere indwelling of God in a man, but God Himself, coming to *be* Man. The incarnation is not the bringing into being of a separate human person, but rather, it was God Himself, taking on a new manner of existence, as Man. Jesus is God Himself, existing as Man. Jesus' humanity was not that of a distinct human person, but was genuine human nature, individualized (made personal) by God Himself. Because Jesus is God Himself, existing as Man, of necessity, there can only be one personal subject in Christ, not two. God is that personal subject. Just as we are the subject of all our acts, likewise God is the subject of all Christ's acts. Yet, in Christ, God is not acting as God, but as Man.

### A Nature is Not a Person

The "nature-praying" theory will not work, because it falsely assumes, that Christ's human *nature* is a separate human *person*. There can be no equivocation of a nature and a person, however. A nature is the generic substance that is common to all men, being that which makes humanity what it is; a nature is a set of essential characteristics or properties which mark off what sort of thing an individual is. A person, however, is immaterial conscious substance, a personality; a person is a particular individual who consists of a certain nature, or the particularization of a generic substance. A person is the concrete conscious self, the ego, defining who it is, who is of a particular substance. It takes a concrete person (hypostasis) to actualize the generic nature (*physis*). In the case of Christ, the person who actualizes the human nature, is God, not a separate human person.

God came to exist as Man, by uniting human *nature* to His Divine person, acquiring a human existence, complete with all the properties inherent to human nature (human soul, Spirit, mind, consciousness, etc.), not by assuming a human *person*. Because He assumed a human nature and not a human person, Jesus' humanity is not an individual

person in itself, but is human nature individualized (*hypostasized*) by the divine person.

It should be obvious enough, that *natures do not pray - people pray*. It would be impossible for Christ's prayers to be explained as His human nature praying to His divine nature, for such an explanation assumes, that Christ's human nature has individual personhood apart from God, able to perform the functions of a person. When we can grasp the fact, that there is only one personal subject in Christ-God-and that the humanity God assumed is not a distinct human person, we will understand why it is impossible for Christ's human nature to pray to His Divine nature. Prayer requires a personal subject to administer the act, and the only personal subject in Christ, is God. It is God, then, who is the personal subject of Christ's prayers. Are we to conclude, therefore, that God was praying? No. Because God came to exist and be conscious, as Man, in the incarnation, the prayers of Christ are necessarily human in nature, not divine. We must confess, that God prayed, in Christ only insofar as He is Man, not insofar as He is God, for God is the subject of Christ's acts, only insofar as He is Man, not insofar as He is God. Jesus' prayers ought not to be understood to be God praying as God, but as Man, from a genuine *human* consciousness.

As God came to exist as Man, complete with a genuine human consciousness/mind, He had the ability to pray in a human manner. God did not merely pretend to pray, but utilized the human attributes inherent to the assumed human nature, so that He Himself, could pray in a human manner. Jesus' prayers should not be understood to be God praying as God, or Man praying as Man, but *God praying as man through His human mode of existence*.

### Two Means, One Causer

While an act (such as prayer) is the work of a person, not a nature, the nature is the action's means of actualization, execution, or implementation. Normally, there is one *hypostasis* for each *physis*. In the case of Christ, however, there are two *physeis* (natures) for one *hypostasis* (person). There are two distinct means of implementation for all of Christ's acts, yet, only one person to actualize them. Since the natures remain

distinct, the means to God's acts remain distinct, and yet, because of the union of the natures in the one person, all the acts ensuing through the natures, have God, as their personal subject.

Christ's prayers do not flow from, either of His natures, but from His one person. The Divine person utilizes each nature to perform the functions peculiar to each, but both natures are motivated by the one and selfsame person. The one person, of Christ, carries out His activities in, through, and with, both natures. The natures do not act; the person acts. The one Divine person "does by means of each nature, the acts that are appropriate to it," deciding the actions, made possible, by the natures.

While Christ's experiences have a duality of *origin* because of His duality of natures, His acts and experiences all exude forth, from a single person. Jesus may be able to perform certain acts, because of His Divine identity, and others, because of His human identity, "but, ultimately, it is He Himself and not ... His natures, who ... is the subject of them." Jesus' human nature does not act, but God, the person, utilizes the human attributes inherent to the human nature to be and act as Man.

Christ's prayers were truly human, but not the prayers of a human person. The humanness of Christ's prayers does not necessitate that He be a separate human person, but only that, He possess a genuine human nature. When God assumed a human existence, He assumed all that pertained to human existence. He came to exist as Man, and therefore, came to think as a Man, know as a Man, be limited as a Man, and yes, even pray as a Man.

But, who was praying in Christ? Was it a separate human person? No. It was God Himself praying in a human manner. Jesus' human nature does not pray, but God, the person, utilizes the human attributes inherent to the human nature, to pray, in the manner allowed by that nature. God prayed as Man, in and through His human existence, via the human properties that were His, by virtue of the hypostatic union. In Christ, *God* was praying as Man, through His assumed human nature, not a human

person.

### A Single Divine-Human Consciousness

Some, seeing the necessity of confessing a single consciousness for Christ, and wishing to maintain, that Christ possesses both, the Divine and human consciousnesses, by virtue of His identity as God and Man, may posit a single “Divine-human” consciousness. This Divine-human consciousness has both, Divine and human aspects to it, but the two are united in some way, into one single consciousness.

While this solution is attractive, because it preserves the unity of Christ’s person, it falls short on both, a rational and theological level. The Divine consciousness is unlimited, while the human consciousness, is limited. From a rational perspective, it is impossible for a single consciousness to be both, limited and unlimited, simultaneously. It would have to be either, one or the other.

From the theological perspective, the theory is problematic, because a single Divine-human consciousness would require a mixing of the natures, producing a tertium quid (third something) sort of consciousness, that is neither fully Divine nor fully human, but something else. Once the Divine and human consciences were mixed into a single consciousness, each would cease to be what it was in itself in order to become a common, third something, with the other. This is similar to the Eutychean heresy, and must be rejected.

### Human Consciousness Only

The only other option, in light of the hypostatic union, is to confess that Christ was intuitively aware, only of His human consciousness. This is not to say, that God forfeited His Divine consciousness when becoming incarnate, but it is to say, that in God’s human manner of existence, there is a willing limitation of the Divine consciousness, so that functionally, Jesus could operate according to a normal human consciousness. In God’s incarnate existence, He chose to be conscious of Himself as

Man, experiencing human existence, in a human way.

This is evident from the Gospels, which portray Jesus' knowledge, as limited. If Jesus' consciousness is Divine, there could be no limitation of His knowledge, and we would be forced to concede, that Christ's knowledge is not truly human, but is Divine knowledge. Such a conclusion is not compatible with the Biblical data.

In the incarnation, God took up a human existence. He did not merely come to be *in* a man, but He came to *be* Man, and exist *as* Man. By assuming a human existence, God assumed all that pertains to a human existence, including a human psychology: consciousness, will, emotions, volition, etc. In His incarnate existence, then, God came to be conscious *as* Man, and to know and act *as* Man, because God *is* Man. He came to experience and live, according to all the limitations and realities all human beings are subject to. God experienced life in a human way, not merely *in* His human nature, but *through* His human mode of existence, because Christ's humanity was God's humanity, by virtue of the hypostatic union. Because God has come to be Man, the actions, thoughts, and history of the human Christ are the actions and history of God Himself.

In God's human mode of existence, He always acts and knows as Man. There is no dichotomy between His Divine and human consciousness. Only a Nestorian conception of the incarnation can create such a dichotomy, because the incarnation is viewed as a functional union of two independent natures/consciousnesses *within* Christ. When we understand, that God became Man, in an ontological way, the Divine and human natures can no longer be viewed independently, and thus, we are never forced to decide whether Jesus is acting according to one nature or the other, because Jesus' natures are not acting, Jesus is. His natures, do not act independently, of His one person.

It should be made clear, that we are not postulating some sort of diluted Divine consciousness, truncated and tailored to a human level, taking the place of a human consciousness. Christ's consciousness was truly human. The Divine consciousness

and Divine prerogatives, were necessarily limited, when God came to exist as Man, being limited, by virtue of His human nature, so that He could function according to a normal human consciousness. Jesus' knowledge came via normal human processes. He developed human memories, and experienced human perceptions in the same way we do. He had human thoughts, human emotions, and experienced mental development (Luke 2:52). *All these things were done in a human way, according to a human consciousness, not in a Divine way, according to the Divine consciousness.*

If Jesus' consciousness is a single consciousness, and we recognize from the Biblical text, that we cannot make sense of Jesus' sayings without confessing that they arose from a genuine human consciousness, then we must confess, that Christ's single consciousness is human, always! As stated earlier, because Jesus is God, existing as Man, there must, of necessity, be only one personal subject in Christ, not two. And because, the one personal subject, in Christ (God) is always existing as Man, He (Christ) is always conscious, as Man, not as God.

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this section, then, Christ's acts and experiences are rooted solely, in His human consciousness. Christ is only conscious of Himself, as God, *in His Divine mode of existence* beyond the incarnation. How can Christ be conscious of Himself, as God, beyond the incarnation, if "Christ" specifically refers to human existence? As discussed earlier, the Son and the Father is the same "He," but in two distinct modes of existence. The one "He," in Christ, is the same "He," that has existed eternally, as God. Jesus transcends His human mode of existence, because of His eternal deity. Jesus is conscious of Himself, as God, in His continued mode of existence *beyond* the incarnation, but not as "He" exists as Man, *in* the incarnation. In His human mode of existence, Christ is always conscious of Himself, as Man.

In summation, we cannot maintain, that Christ's actions, experiences, and Words are rooted in His Divine consciousness without falling into the error of Apollinarianism or Arianism. We cannot avoid the error of Nestorianism, if we allege, that they sometimes

exude forth, from His Divine consciousness, and sometimes, from His human consciousness, or sometimes from both, simultaneously. But, if we allege, that Jesus' actions, experiences, and Words are rooted in a single Divine-human consciousness, we fall into Eutycheanism. Only by acknowledging all of Christ's acts and experiences as being rooted in His genuine human consciousness, can we maintain Christ's full deity, avoid the aforementioned heresies, and make sense of Christ's limitations, as portrayed in the Gospels.

### Does God Have Two Consciousnesses Now?

We have already established the fact, that the one uni-personal God exists in two distinct modes: as a limited Man in the incarnation and as the unlimited God beyond the incarnation, as He always has. We have also established the fact, that in God's incarnate existence, He is conscious of Himself as Man, not as God. God also continues to be conscious of Himself, as God, because He continues to exist beyond the incarnation. *God then, is both conscious of Himself, as God, and conscious of Himself, as Man.* Does this mean, then, that God has two consciousnesses? Yes, and no, depending on how we understand such a statement.

Indeed, God has acquired another consciousness in the incarnation, so in a sense, we might say, that God now has two consciousnesses. While God has acquired another consciousness in the incarnation, it is a *human* consciousness, not a *second Divine* consciousness. There is no duality of consciousness *within God's Being*, after the incarnation, so we cannot say, that God as God, has two consciousnesses. God as God, has only one consciousness, but God as Man, has a human consciousness, as well. God's newly acquired human consciousness is not internal to His Divine essence, but is externally His, by virtue of His assumed human nature. This is in contradistinction to Trinitarianism, which posits three personal consciousnesses, within God's very essence.

Trinitarians may object, that the Oneness explanation of Father and Son, as a dual

consciousness/existence for one person is nonsensical, and implies the existence of more than one person, within God (“Trinitarianism in dis-guise”). Some may even claim, that this is just another novel attempt from Oneness believers to maintain their strict monotheistic view of God, even in the face of compelling evidence for the Trinity. All such claims are bankrupt, however.

The Oneness explanation is not a novel concept, for it does not differ in principle from the Trinitarian explanation of the incarnation. Both claim, that one Divine person has come to exist in two distinct ways, without becoming two persons.

### The Solution: Kenosis

The only solution to understanding Jesus’ prayers without splitting up His person or diminishing His deity, is to acknowledge the kenosis, as set forth in Philippians 2:5-11.

The kenosis refers to the willing limitation God placed on the exercise of His Divine attributes and prerogatives (such as, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence) in the incarnation, so that He could function in a genuine human existence with all the limitations, such an existence entails. While Jesus was God in the flesh, functionally He lived as any human would. He did not rely on His deity, but limited Himself to the constraints of any man, being anointed by the Spirit for ministry (Luke 4:18; Matthew 12:18; Acts 2:22; 4:27; 10:38). Christ’s deity is latent within Him, and thus, Christ’s consciousness is like that of other human beings. Any knowledge Jesus possessed that superseded normal human knowledge, came to Him, via Divine revelation (John 5:30; 8:28, 38, 40; 12:49-50; 17:8). Jesus shared in our limitations and weaknesses, not because God ceased being God in the incarnation, but because God, determined to limit the exercise of His deity in His human mode of existence.

The kenosis could be compared to running in a sack race. While in the sack, one runs much slower because of the restraints they willingly placed on themselves, when agreeing to get in the sack. Their ability is not truly diminished, but because of the

limitations they have placed on themselves, the exercise of those abilities, are constrained. So, it is with God, in the incarnation.

Because of the willing limitation on the exercise of the Divine prerogatives in God's human existence, the Divine consciousness is not intuitively known, by Christ. He is only conscious of Himself, as God, beyond His incarnate existence, as Man. We might say, that while the Divine consciousness is "there" by virtue of Christ's Divine identity, it is not *accessible*, because of the kenosis. On an ontological level, we must confess, that Jesus possesses the Divine psyche, but epistemologically, Jesus is not *self-conscious* of it, because God came to exist and function as Man.

Because of the limitations of human existence, God willingly restrained the exercise of the Divine attributes (such as omniscience), so that on a functional level, God could truly act and experience, as Man. This limitation does not indicate an obliteration of the Divine consciousness in the incarnation, but does suggest, that there was a willing contraction of the Divine consciousness in God's *incarnate existence*, because in God's coming to be Man, He chose to exist as Man, and be conscious, as Man.

This phenomenon might be compared to human memory. We store millions of things in our brain, that we do not retain in our conscious mind. They are there, but lie in our subconscious mind, and we are not consciously aware of them. In order to "know" them, we must bring them to our consciousness, but we can never bring all things stored in our subconscious to our conscious mind, yet alone, all at the same time. In a similar way, all of God's knowledge/will, is "in" Jesus, but is not accessible; i.e., Jesus is not consciously aware of the Divine mind, that is His, by nature. Whatever knowledge He has of the Divine mind, must come from revelation. The will and knowledge of God was something revealed to Jesus, by the Father, not something known intuitively, simply because He was God (John 5:19-20).

[Does Trinitarian or Oneness Theology Best Explain Christ's Prayer?](#)

## An Examination of the Data

I have already demonstrated that the Oneness view of Christ's prayers, is neither contradictory nor nonsensical, but is in complete harmony with an incarnational theology, wherein, God truly comes to exist and function, as Man. I would like to further demonstrate that the Oneness view of Jesus' prayers, is more sensible, than the Trinitarian view of the same.

Trinitarians believe that Jesus' communication with the Father compels us to conclude, that the deity of the Father and the deity of the Son, are distinct persons in the Godhead. As stated previously, it is reasoned, that if the deity of the Son and the deity of the Father are the same personal deity, then Jesus' communication to the Father, was simply God, talking to Himself. The simple fact that Jesus communicates with the Father and has a relationship with the Father, does not *de facto* indicate, that God is a Trinity of persons. We have to understand *why* Jesus communicates with the Father. While it could be due to the fact that God is tri-personal, the evidence on a foundational and macro-level, is against such a view.

There are several reasons why Jesus' communication, with the Father, should not be understood to indicate that God is a Trinity. We need to ask a few questions about the Biblical data, before we can conclude why Jesus communicated with the Father.

First, why do we not read of any communication between the Father and Son, until after the incarnation? If God is eternally Father, and eternally Son, we would expect to find the Father and Son communicating with one another, *prior* to the incarnation. Interestingly, however, we only find such communication *after* the incarnation. If the communication between Father and Son is a key reason why Trinitarians feel compelled to conclude that the Father and Son are two distinct and eternal persons, and yet, the communication only begins after the incarnation, when God became Man, what compelling evidence is there to conclude that God is *eternally* Father and *eternally* Son? If the communication began at a certain point in time, maybe the Son is not an eternal

person in the Godhead. Maybe there is a better explanation for the Father-Son distinction, and a better explanation for the Son's communication with the Father.

Secondly, why is it that Jesus never communicated with any person of the Trinity, besides the Father? Why did He not communicate with the Holy Spirit? Why did He not communicate with God the Son? It seems odd, that Jesus would only communicate with one person of the Trinity. Are we more justified in believing that the Son simply chose not to communicate with any person besides the Father, or are we more justified in believing that Jesus communicated only with the Father, because there is only one person in the Godhead to communicate with, in the first place? The lack of communication to the other two persons of the Triune God, may just indicate, that there are no "two other persons" in the Godhead, for Jesus to communicate with.

I would suggest that Jesus only communicated with the Father, because the Father is the only "person" in the "Godhead." Maybe we do not find any communication between Father and Son, prior to the incarnation, because the Son did not exist before the incarnation because the Son is simply, the uni-personal God's existence, as Man. Maybe the communication and relationship between the Son and Father, is due to the fact, that God assumed a real, limited, human, consciousness in the incarnation, and with such a consciousness, Jesus had need of a relationship with God, as does any other human being. Just maybe!

Jesus' prayers do not hurt Oneness theology and bolster Trinitarian theology. The opposite is true. Oneness theology, can easily explain why we do not find the Son in the OT, why we do not find any communication between the Father and Son, prior to the incarnation, and why the Son, only prayed to the Father.

### An Examination of the Argument

According to the Oneness position, there is only one Divine person, and since Jesus is that one Divine person Himself, become Man, the Father and Jesus are the same

person, albeit in two distinct modes of existence. Seeing that Jesus' humanity is not a human person, but rather human nature, through which, the Divine person came to be/exist/function as Man, ultimately Jesus' prayers must be attributed to the Divine person, not a distinct human person. The action of prayer, initiated by the Divine person and mediated/expressed through the attributes of the human nature, is due to the genuineness of God's human existence. Now we understand that Jesus' prayers were not God praying as God, but rather God praying as Man, from a genuine human existence/consciousness, as do all other genuine human beings, but nonetheless since there is only one Divine person, and Jesus is that Divine person, there is a sense, in which, *God was praying to Himself*. To leave it at that, without further qualification and explanation, does sound absurd. Of course, I do not think it is absurd at all, when we get into the reality of the incarnation and just how much it affected God.

It all boils down to the issue of consciousness. There is a distinction, in the way God is conscious of Himself, after the incarnation. He is both, conscious of Himself, as God, and as Man, in Christ. After the incarnation, the One Divine person, came to be conscious of Himself in two distinct ways, simultaneously. If we understand just how human God became, and the extent to which God was conscious of Himself, as Man, we can understand how such communication was possible, without requiring two persons to achieve it.

A phenomenon often overlooked in Scripture is the many times, in which, Jesus not only distinguished Himself from the Father, but from God Himself. 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 1 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; 1 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. See also, John 8:40; 14:1; 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 other passages of Scripture are clear, that He is God Himself, incarnate. What this demonstrates is, that God was not central-ized 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.

We know that when Christ spoke, it was the Divine person Himself speaking, albeit in His human manner of existence, and thus, from a genuine human consciousness. So, when Jesus said, “I ascend to My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God,” admittedly, it was God Himself saying that He had a God, and would ascend to that God. If the conscious self, in Christ, is the Divine person, how can the Divine person distinguish Himself from Himself to say that He, the Divine person, will ascend to God when He is God? While Trinitarians are so fond of throwing around the accusation, that the God of Oneness theology is found, praying to Himself, they ought to ask themselves, why the God of Trinitarian theology is found, ascending to Himself? Jesus' Words must be attributed to the second Divine person, because there is only one personal subject, in Christ, from whom all of Christ's acts proceed, and that person, is the Divine person. There is no distinct human person, from which, Christ could speak, because Christ is not two persons. Christ is the one Divine person Himself, incarnate

as Man, in genuine human existence.

The import of the above, is that while incarnate, God could distinguish Himself from Himself, pray to God, ascend to God, grow in favor with God, all the while, being very God! How is this possible? It is possible because of the incarnation. When God became a Man and assumed a genuine human consciousness, He began to be conscious of Himself as Man. He was so conscious of Himself as Man, that He could truly function, as Man, and be Man. He so identified with the human race, that He could distinguish Himself from God, even though His person, was that of God Himself. When God became incarnate, taking upon Himself genuine human consciousness, He did not cease being conscious of Himself, as God. He continued to be conscious of Himself as God, because He did not cease being who He is in order to be incarnate. God remained who He was, but became something He was not, as well: Man. God's human manner of consciousness is distinct from His normal Divine manner of consciousness. Without such a distinction in consciousness, it would be impossible for the Divine person, in Christ, to distinguish Himself from God, because Christ is God. *Now if the genuineness of God's human consciousness, in Christ, allows Him to distinguish Himself from God, even though He is God, should we be surprised if Jesus distinguishes Himself from the One Divine person (Father), even though He is that One Divine person, incarnate?* God's human manner of consciousness is so genuine, that it is (and must be) distinguished from God's continued Divine consciousness, to the point, that it *appears to be a distinction of personal identity.*

We know that this is not the case, however, for if it were, we must conclude that Jesus is not God, because Jesus distinguished Himself from God. This would make Jesus personally distinct from God Himself, not just the Father. That is very problematic, if the one personal subject of Christ, is the Divine person (as is required by a true incarnation of God), because the Divine personal subject could not be personally distinct from Himself. It is better to understand the distinction, then, to be a distinction of the One Divine person's personal manner of consciousness, not two distinct person's consciousnesses. The genuineness of God's human manner of consciousness, is

distinct from His normal and continued Divine manner consciousness to the extent, that God can communicate from one manner of conscious existence, to the other (not two Divine consciousnesses, but one Divine and one human).

Now if the genuineness of God's human consciousness, in Christ, allows Him to distinguish Himself from God, even though He is God, should we be surprised if Jesus prays to the Father from such a consciousness, even though He is that One Divine person, incarnate? *It is no more contradictory for Jesus to pray to the One Divine person, even though He is that One Divine person, than it is for Jesus to distinguish Himself from God, even though He is God.* In both cases, it is the Divine person, saying or doing things, that seem to make or require a personal distinction, when in all reality, no such distinction exists. When Jesus made statements that distinguished Himself from God, it seems as though Jesus is not God at all, but rather, a distinct person from God. And yet, we know this cannot be so, because an orthodox Chalcedonian Christology prohibits Jesus from being a distinct human *person*. Indeed, we must confess that the *person* who is distinguishing Himself, from God, is that very God Himself. In the same manner, when the One Divine person prays, as Man, from His human manner of existence to the One Divine person, it seems as though we must conclude, that Jesus is either a distinct human person, or a distinct Divine person from the Father, but such is not the case (or should I say, such does not have to be the case, because there are ways of explaining it that do not violate reason).

What allows God to do both of these things without them being reduced to meaningless charades, is the genuine human consciousness He obtained in the incarnation. The human consciousness God acquired in the incarnation is distinct from His Divine manner of consciousness, and such a distinction in consciousness, can account for Jesus' prayers. It was the genuineness of the human nature that allowed God to speak as a genuine human being from a genuine human consciousness, rather than from a Divine consciousness, so that the Divine person (the only person in Christ), as Man, could pray to God, even though He was God. The incarnation allowed God to be conscious of Himself in a new manner, distinct from His normal Divine manner of

consciousness. This consciousness was so distinct from His normal Divine manner of consciousness, that He could pray to God and distinguish Himself from God, even though He was God Himself, in the flesh. Ultimately, God's new manner of existence, as Man, and His new consciousness, as Man, was so distinct from His normal Divine manner of consciousness, that He could distinguish Himself from Himself, and pray to God, as if He was not God.

## Conclusion

In summation, we can conclude the following:

1. The distinction between the Father and Son, is not a nominal distinction with no real referent, but, is a genuine distinction, arising in the incarnation, distinguishing between God's existence in the incarnation, as Man and His continued existence beyond the incarnation as God.

2. The humanity of Christ is genuine and complete, including a real human consciousness. Because Jesus is a single person, He has a single consciousness. The Biblical testimony concerning Christ's Words and actions, only make sense, if we understand Christ's single consciousness to be a human consciousness.

3. The incarnation of God, in a human existence required, that God, as Man, limit the exercise of His Divine prerogatives, so that He could truly exist as, and be conscious, as Man. This self-limitation (kenosis) did not diminish His deity, but allowed God to truly experience human existence.

4. The dilemma of Jesus' prayers cannot be solved by saying Jesus' human nature prayed to His Divine nature (Nestorianism), or by saying, that Jesus' prayers were One Divine person, praying to to another equally Divine, but distinct person (Trinitarianism, Apollinarianism). Nestorianism splits Christ in two; Trinitarianism splits God in two; Apollinarianism makes God, pray to God, subordinates the Son's deity to

the Father's deity, and denies Christ's genuine humanity.

If we wish to make sense of Jesus' prayers, we must understand the incarnation as God coming to exist as Man, and thus, experiencing and acting according to a single, human consciousness. When we understand Christ's consciousness, as human, it becomes wholly unnecessary to posit multiple persons in the Godhead (Trinitarianism), or one nature praying to another nature (Nestorianism), to give reality to Jesus' prayers and relationship with God. While Jesus was God, because God came to be Man and operate according to real human limitations with a real human mind and consciousness, Jesus had need of a relationship, with God. Jesus' prayers were not the prayers of God, praying to Himself, or One Divine person praying to another Divine person, but a genuine Man, praying to the eternal and unlimited God, as He continued to exist beyond the incarnation.

### Jesus' Prayers

Why?! This is one of the first questions raised in the minds of those who begin to realize that Jesus not only prayed, but He also led a religious life with God. Why did Jesus pray? If He was God, He would not need to pray, would He? Yes, He would! He would, because He was also flesh.

Under the discussion of Jesus' humanity, we saw Him as *growing* "in favour with God" (Luke 2:52). This means He had a progressive and ongoing relationship with God. This was a relationship He acquired. He did not bypass the need for a relationship with God, because He was God, in the flesh. His deity was Divinely limited, so that His human life might be lived in the same manner, as ours. Jesus had to grow into a relationship with God, and of the many things this included, prayer was one of them.

That Jesus had a relationship with God, is evidenced by statements He made such as, "For I do always, those things that please Him," and "I know Him, and keep His saying"

(John 8:29, 55). This need for a relationship with God, arose out of the genuineness of His humanity. Truly, Jesus learned to love, obey, and know God (John 8:55; 10:15; 10:17; 15:10; Hebrews 5:7-9).

Jesus prayed, because He was human. If He would not have had need for prayer, indeed we would be justified in doubting the genuineness of His humanity, because it is said in the Psalms, “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come” (Psalm 65:2).

Some attempt to “play off” or even deny the genuineness of Jesus’ prayers to protect His deity. This camp relegates Jesus’ prayers to a mere moral example, given by Jesus, for us to follow. They contend that Jesus had no real need for prayer. Is this Scriptural?

If Jesus was not praying because He truly needed Divine assistance, then His prayers were deceptive, because He made them seem like genuine prayers. Jesus was nothing more than a good actor, a hypocrite. If He faked His prayers for the sake of being an example, then did He fake His love and compassion toward those who came to Him, seeking help for their souls? Jesus was not deceptive, and neither were His prayers.

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 the Father, 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. The verse quoted above, demonstrates this well, when it explains Jesus' prayers as being prayed "in the days of His flesh." This does not 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.

The best place to demonstrate the genuineness and sincerity of Christ's prayers, and His real need for prayer is in His own personal prayer life. One of the first indications given that Jesus' prayers were genuine and sincere, is that they were prayed in solitary places in the midst of the night or at other times (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). John chapter seventeen, is the prayer Jesus prayed to the Father, just before His betrayal and subsequent suffering. The prayer is filled with personal and intimate statements, made by a Man to His God. If Jesus' prayers were mere moral examples He performed for our benefit, there would have been no need for Him to pray alone.

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).

Those who contend that Jesus' prayers were only for an example to others, often cite John 11:41-42, for support. Jesus prayed, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard Me. And I knew that thou hearest Me always: but, because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent Me." This prayer was just prior to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The mourners and family members around the tomb were the audience of this prayer (vs. 19,31-32, 39, 41).

I do not believe that the prayer at Lazarus' tomb, gives evidence to the idea, that Jesus prayed as an example for others. This is not to say, that Jesus never intended to be an example of a praying Man to His disciples, but this would only be a secondary, not a primary purpose. It might be compared to a prayer leader in a Church, who prays before the Church, as an example. The purpose of this, is to help the Church/newcomers know how to pray, and/or to help them pray. Even so, however, the prayer leader's prayers are sincere and genuine. They are directed first to God, and only secondarily, to the people.

If Jesus' primary purpose for praying at Lazarus' tomb was for an example to the people, then Jesus' prayer was a deceptive charade. He addressed the prayer to the Father as though He was actually praying to Him. If Jesus was not sincerely praying to the Father, then He was only acting. The Scriptures do not portray Jesus' prayers in this light. I confess that Jesus may have had secondary purposes for His prayers, but His prayers were genuine, nonetheless.

At first glance, the Lazarus episode does seem to indicate, that Jesus' prayer was for an example. Looking more closely at the passage, however, it indicates otherwise. There are two probable interpretations of this prayer. The first sees the prayer as consisting of two parts. Although the text does not make this distinction, it appears to be possible, that the prayer was broken up into public and private portions. Jesus spoke the phrase, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard Me," where those gathered around could hear Him. The second phrase, "And I knew that thou hearest Me always: but, because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent Me," was spoken privately, to the Father. If the latter part of the prayer was spoken publicly, it might lay Jesus open to the charge, of being a shallow phony. In modern vernacular, Jesus said: "Dad, I am really glad that you always hear and answer every prayer I pray, this one being no exception. I did not pray it because I do not believe you are going to answer it, but because of the people standing around Me. I want them to believe that you have truly sent Me, and that I am here doing Your will." If we were to hear a minister pray a prayer like this, we would be turned off. Our response would be, "Does he think his faith is so big that he does not need to pray?" It seems that Jesus might have spoken this last part quietly to the Father, saying, "I am not doubting you, just reassuring the people," whereas, the first part He prayed, so that all could hear. It was a prayer of honesty and intimacy with God, private in its very nature.

The other interpretation, and more likely of the two, understands the purpose of Jesus' prayer, to be a genuine prayer of thanksgiving to the Father, but that it also served as a confirmation of Jesus' identity, as the Son of God. This view sees Jesus, as praying the entire prayer publicly, so that the onlookers would hear Jesus praying to the same Father that they prayed to, thanking Him for what He was about to do, and when the Father did do what Jesus had just thanked Him for, it would serve to confirm the message and person of Christ, that He was truly sent by the Father. The purpose of Jesus' prayer was not for an example to the onlookers, but to serve as confirmation to the message of Jesus, and bolster faith in Him, that He was indeed, the Son of God.

Jesus had no reason to pray for the raising of Lazarus. This was due to the fact, that

He already knew it was the Will of God, to raise him from the dead. When Jesus received word of Lazarus' condition, He purposely lingered around in the place where He was at, for two days (John 11:6, 15). After two days, He decided to journey to Bethany with His disciples, knowing through the Word of Knowledge, that Lazarus had died two days previous (vs. 11-15). It must have been a two-day journey to Bethany from where Jesus was at, because Lazarus had been dead for four days, when Jesus arrived (v. 17).

Jesus purposely allowed Lazarus to die (John v. 11) and waited to arrive in Bethany, until four days had expired since His death, so that He might raise him from the dead. He specifically waited for four days, because the Jews believed it was possible for a man to be resurrected from the dead, during the first three days after His death, but impossible thereafter, because the body starts to decompose after three days. Jesus wanted to demonstrate the power of God to them, by raising a decomposing body from the dead, thereby confounding the Jews' wisdom and glorifying God, through those who would believe on Jesus, through the miracle.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, He did not have to pray to get the Father to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus knew that it was, His purpose, for being there. He was being obedient to God's direction, not seeking after it. This can be the only reason, why Jesus said what He did, in His prayer to the Father.

Since Jesus knew it was the Lord's Will to raise Lazarus from the dead, there was no real purpose in praying for it to happen. Just as with us, the Lord knows what we have need of before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). Maybe Jesus prayed, simply because it is a Scriptural principle, that we will receive an answer when we *ask* for it (James 4:2). Jesus demonstrated His faith, in God, by addressing Him in a Word of prayer, before performing His Will. If you notice, Jesus never asked the Father to raise Lazarus from the dead. He *thanked*

God, that He was always heard by Him, Jesus was assured of the Lord's Will, and was

merely, giving thanks for it. This is what He said for the Jew's sake. *He prayed to the Father to demonstrate to the Jews, that indeed, what was about to transpire, was a work of God, done through Him and not a work of His own, apart from God. If they believed it was done, by God, then Jesus' claims as to His identity would be justified and believed, too.*

In conclusion, Jesus needed to pray as much as we do, and He did. We should follow His example, but He did not pray, merely for the purposes of His actions, being exemplified by others. 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).

## Can God be God if the Incarnation is Permanent?

### Introduction

Early in my Christian life, I believed that Jesus' humanity ceased to exist upon His ascension to heaven. I reasoned, that the incarnation was only temporary for the purpose of accomplishing our redemption, at Calvary. Once our redemption was secured through Christ's death, His humanity was no longer necessary and simply, dissolved upon ascension. I believed it was in this manner, that God was "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). While I have since come to believe differently, concerning the duration of Christ's humanity, I know that there are many believers, who continue to conceive of Christ's humanity, as a temporary manifestation of God, that has now ceased to exist. This article seeks to demonstrate the permanence of the incarnation from both, a Biblical and theological perspective, and specifically deal with the common objections, that Christ's glorification means the cessation of His human body, and that a permanent incarnation would limit God's ability to be God.

### *Biblical Perspective*

There are many Scriptures that bear witness to the fact, that Christ's humanity, continued beyond the ascension. Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead, bodily." The Greek word, *katoikei*, translated "dwells" is a present tense verb, indicating that the fullness of the Godhead was dwelling in Christ's body at the time of Paul's writing. Paul penned Colossians around AD 60-61, some thirty years after Jesus' ascension. It is clear, that Paul believed Jesus still possessed a human body. 1 Timothy 2:5, seems to indicate, that Jesus, the Man, is still our mediator. Peter declared, that Jesus has gone into heaven and is currently seated at the right hand of God, angels, authorities and powers, being subject to Him (1 Peter 3:21-22).

The author of Hebrews, likewise, declared the continuation of Jesus' human existence and mediatorial role saying, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He *ever lives* to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25, italics mine). Jesus is said to have passed into the heavens, as our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). He is not said to have ceased to exist, after passing into the heavens. Finally, Hebrews 9:15 declares, "And for this cause, He is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death ...they which are called, might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." The Biblical testimony is clear, that Christ's humanity continues in heaven.

### *Theological Perspective*

Christ's humanity was not a mere fleshly shell that God rented and used for a temporary amount of time. God did not just come to live in flesh as a Man, but the "Word became flesh" (John 1:14). God incorporated human nature into His eternal being. In the incarnation, humanity has been permanently incorporated, into the Godhead. God is now, a Man, in addition, to being God. At the virgin conception, God acquired an identity.

He would retain, for the rest of eternity. His human existence is both, authentic and permanent. Jesus' humanity is not something that can be discarded or dissolved back into the Godhead, but He will always and forever, exist in heaven as a glorified Man, albeit God, at the same time.

If the incarnation is real, and God truly became a Man, we must confess a continuation of Christ's humanity, *because genuine human beings, do not simply, cease to exist.* Every genuine human being, who has ever existed, will live for eternity in one of two places: heaven, hell. If Jesus is truly Man, He cannot just pass out of existence. To believe that Christ's humanity, ceased to exist upon ascension, is to deny the reality and genuineness of His human existence, and hence, a true incarnation of God.

#### Objection: Christ Discarded His Body at Glorification

Some argue, that Jesus' glorification brought about an obliteration of His humanity. While glorification may *enhance* the nature of humanity, it does not change the *nature* of humanity. We will be glorified after the pattern of Christ (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:1-2), and yet, we have no reason to believe that our humanity will cease to exist. According to Paul, the resurrection and glorification involves the perfecting and exalting of our human bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-54). If our glorification patterns Christ's glorification, then we must conclude, that His glorification involved the exaltation of His human body, as well. *It must be understood, that glorification is not the same as deification.* Jesus did not cease being Man upon His glorification. The glorification, rather, is the eternal exaltation of Jesus' humanity.

#### Objection: Jesus' Humanity Limits God

Some people reason, that if the incarnation will continue forever, it would forever limit God's ability to be God; i.e., be omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. If Christ's eternal humanity causes one to question God's ability to be omniscient, it reveals traces of a "Jesus Only" theology, wherein the heavens are thought to be vacant, while Jesus was here on earth, but became filled once again, upon His ascension and the

obliteration of His humanity. To put it in lighter terms, Jesus is viewed as a human ShopVac, that sucked all of God out of heaven and into a human body, but at the ascension, the ShopVac ceased to exist, releasing God to fill the heavens, once again.

Such a view of the incarnation is not true to the Biblical data, for it presupposes, that God can only exist in one way, at one time: He either has to exist as God, or Man, but could not exist as both, God and Man, simultaneously. The Bible is clear, that God continued to exist as God, even after becoming Man.

The incarnation was not God changing into a Man and ceasing to be who He was in Himself. The incarnation, rather, is God, coming to exist in a new manner as Man, while continuing to exist in Himself, as He always has. God did not have to sacrifice His deity to become Man. He merely incorporated a human existence into His One Divine person. Because God continued to exist beyond the incarnation, as He always had, God continued to be omniscient, even while Jesus sojourned here on earth. Jesus' eternal humanity does not impose any more problems than did His earthly sojourn. *If Christ's humanity did not limit God's omniscience during His earthly sojourn, there is no reason to believe, that Christ's continued humanity would limit God's ability to be omniscience, in heaven.*

The eternity of Jesus' humanity could not change God's essential nature. God could never cease being omniscient, for example, without ceasing to be who He is, God, and thus, we know that while Jesus was here on earth, and even now when He is in heaven, God has been and continues to be omniscient. *If we think that Jesus' eternal humanity means God cannot be God, we would not only be forced to deny Christ's eternal human existence, but would have to deny an incarnation altogether, because any sort of an incarnation would mean, that God would have to cease being God, for a time, and such is not possible, in light of God's immutability.*

In conclusion, in His human manner of existence, as the Son, God is not omniscient, but as He continues to exist beyond the incarnation, in His Divine mode of existence, God is

omniscient. Because God remained omniscient, in His Divine mode of existence beyond the incarnation, even during Christ's earthly sojourn, God can also remain omniscient in His Divine mode of existence, while Christ's glorified humanity dwells in heaven. Jesus does not have to cease being Man for God to be God, because God is able to exist both, in Himself as God, and as Man, simultaneously, without compromising the genuineness, of either mode of existence.

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