

APOSTOLIC

FAITH

Trinitarianism or
Modalism?

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Apostolic Faith

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The Cover

The cover photo is a picture of one of the oldest surviving church buildings in history. It was built in Constantinople, ancient Istanbul Turkey, and was dedicated in 360AD. The name of the building is Hagia Sophia which means Holy Wisdom. The full name in Greek is Ναός τῆς Ἁγίας τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας, "Shrine of the Holy Wisdom of God", dedicated to Jesus, the Wisdom, the Logos, and the Son of God. It was a central hub for Eastern and Greek Orthodoxy. In 381AD the second ecumenical council was held in this very building. At the council the doctrine of the Trinity was re-confirmed as the doctrine of the Apostles. At the time of the council this church, along with the church in Antioch were the two largest Christian communities in Asia Minor. These two churches along with those in Alexandria, Jerusalem and Rome were home to some of the oldest of the apostolic churches. Apostolic faith and tradition was all that was taught in these churches. Any teaching that could not trace its origin to the Apostles through apostolic succession was considered to be "Ipsa Facto False!"

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Stakenas, Brower and Emmerich families with my deepest love and respect. It is dedicated to the pursuit of a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Apostles, and desires to uncover and reveal Apostolic Faith. The hope of the author is that a concise and accurate presentation is given to enable the readers from these families to understand the history of their church's doctrine, and to be able to compare it with the teaching of the Apostles and the Historical Christian Church. One reason for this is because by the admission of the church which these families attend there is a desire to be identified as Apostolic. There is a desire on their church's behalf to maintain the teachings and practices of the Apostles and their disciples, especially as found in the New Testament book of "The acts of the Apostles", aka. "Acts." This can be seen in the name of their church; **A**postolic **C**hristian **T**abernacle, which contains the acronym "Acts." It also identifies with being "Apostolic."

For this reason and because of the fact that it makes sound logical sense to do so, this project will continually appeal to the writings of the apostle's disciples to identify that which is Apostolic. These writings can be studied through numerous resources as "Apostolic Fathers" and "Ante-Nicene Fathers."

The most important reason for doing this is to assist in understanding the correct interpretation of the scriptures which our doctrines are based on because scripture, and the correct interpretation of it, is the final authority for establishing true apostolic doctrine. For this reason many citations from these fathers will be presented for reading so the readers can make side by side comparisons with the scripture being referenced.

The prayer of the author is, "Lord Jesus I ask for your help so that my motive for embarking on this research project and writing this book is clearly understood, and that it is based on love and concern I have for my immediate family and in-laws and not for any snarky, ego, or pride driven reason. I pray that it is accurate and that it represents our Apostolic Faith correctly." The doctrinal issues that will be reviewed are no joke. It's not a matter of semantics or splitting hairs but it's a matter of eternal life. In Revelation 2:14-16, 24 Jesus showed his disdain for false doctrine saying, "I hate the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes." This attitude of Jesus towards heresy was given birth in the church and has been maintained persistently throughout history. Therefore it is the contention of the author that where there are diametrically opposite doctrines the differences need to be examined.

Because of my love for Nolan, Sandy, and Madilyn Emmerich I want to make a special dedication of this book to them. The reason for this is because the greatest responsibility of a parent is the discipleship of their children and grandchildren. For the sake of the love I have for my grandchildren I'm willing to risk ridicule and banishment from the family for a chance to examine our doctrinal differences and declare biblical truth, and so we can be certain that we have eternal life. I apologize in advance if by writing this I hurt someone's feelings because I am fairly certain that at least one person will be offended by it and not receive it in the spirit in which it was written.

Thank-You

I must mention and give special thanks to Jeff and Jen Stakenas for their help in discipling my grandchildren. The time they spend teaching memory verses to the kids is something I can never repay. Their dedication to the processes of the engraftment of the word of God in the hearts of these children is something that goes well beyond my capacity for gratitude. I will always be indebted to them and grateful for their faithfulness to this discipleship endeavor.

Apostolic Faith

Chapter Two
Monotheistic Modalism

Is it Apostolic?



In Acts chapter six a man named Stephen was brought before the council of the high priests accused of teaching blasphemous heresies (6:11-13). Even though he had performed miracles in their presence they were angered against him because he told them the truth which they didn't want to receive and were not prepared to hear. When he told the council that they had killed their Messiah they were angered to the point of stoning Stephen to death. Their negative reaction to the truth was caused by a hardness of heart which only allowed them to accept information or proof which supported their pre-determined supposition. It is the hope of this author that the same type of hardness of heart doesn't keep the reader from examining the evidence and considering the information in the following pages to be accurate. Hopefully a similar type of negative reaction doesn't occur as the truth about Monotheistic Modalism and Apostolic Faith is presented from Scripture and historical literature.

Monotheistic Modalism, or Oneness theology is a particular identification or definition of the God which Oneness Pentecostals worship. Their modalistic teaching about God has caused major division between them and the body of Orthodox Christian believers.

Therefore, if there is to be any constructive dialogue as it relates to the Apostolic, Historical Christian faith, the definition of the God we seek to know must be established as first things first. This first chapter will focus on that definition. For the sake of clarity from the start this definition of Monotheistic Modalism will be used throughout the writing of this book with the hope of eliminating as much confusion as possible. The definition of the God which Modalism confesses will be understood this way:

- The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three different manifestations of one person who is God. This is clearly different from Trinitarianism which identifies them as three distinct persons.
- The name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is Jesus.
- When the Bible speaks of the Father it is referring to the divine nature of Jesus, and when it speaks of the Son it speaks of the human nature of Jesus.
- The Father (Jesus) became the Son at the point of the incarnation of the “Word of God” as man.
- The “Word was with God and the Word was God” is understood as the Word was not the Son of God but merely the “idea of” the Son of God. In the time before the incarnation the Son did not exist. The Son of God began with the human incarnation of Jesus (The Father).

This definition comes from the website of the United Pentecostal Church (UPCI) and from the publications of their own authors on oneness theology such as David Bernard. Bernard is a bishop within the UPC organization. When speaking in the following chapters of "Bernard" this is who is being addressed, for the reason that he will most likely be representing the UPC's teaching accurately. Therefore there should be no question as to what the UPC teaches.

The definition of God as per the UPC is different from the Historical Church. The Eastern, Greek, Coptic, and Oriental Orthodox churches, Roman Catholic Church, and Reformed churches of the Protestants never knew of this type of Unitarianism. So where did the UPC and its doctrine come from? The UPC originally came out of the Assemblies of God Pentecostal movement of the Azusa street revival 1906. Twelve years after the revival in 1917-18 a small group of men united under the oneness teaching of an African-American G. T. Haywood, broke off from the Assemblies of God. In 1925 because of Jim Crow laws and racism in the American south, this oneness group broke up into segregated churches identifying themselves by the use of the term "Apostolic." In 1946 two of these churches combined to form what is now known as the United Pentecostal Church or, UPCI.

Outside of a small movement in the early 18th century Oneness doctrine can't be found between the time of 300AD and 1,917AD. The doctrine taught by the UPC today can only find its origin and existence in the early 3rd century AD. In 200AD Noetus and Praxeas taught concepts which are taught by the UPC today. The Historical Church condemned these men as heretics and their teaching as heretical because their doctrine did not originate with the Apostles of Jesus. Hippolytus of Rome personally refuted Noetus in writing; "Against Noetus," and Tertullian of Carthage did the same writing, "Against Praxeas." History shows that both Noetus and Praxeas were rejected as heretics for attempting to teach the same things that the UPC teaches because their teaching did not originate with the Apostles.

From the time after the ascension of Jesus until the councils of the 4th and 5th centuries the church fathers were united in their efforts to refute all heretics and false doctrine. This practice is advocated in both epistles to Timothy and in the letter of Paul to Titus. Paul to Titus clearly directs a bishop in the following way against heretics:

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. **Titus 1:7-11**

Because of this exhortation by Paul the early church fathers made it a point to “Defend the Gospel” and to speak against heretics.¹ This can be seen in the writings of the disciples of the Apostles (Apostolic Fathers), and can also be seen in the writings which came after them (Ante-Nicene Fathers). From the time of the Apostles and through ancient Church history a common rule was understood amongst the leaders of the Church. Their rule is clearly laid out in the discourse of Tertullian “Prescription against heretics” written about 200AD.

Tertullian: *Prescription against Heretics, Ch. 21, 35, 200AD*

“21-All True Doctrine Comes Through the Church from the Apostles, Who Were Taught by God Through Christ. All Opinion Which Has No Such Divine Origin and Apostolic Tradition to Show, is Ipso Facto False.

¹ Jude 1:3/ Phil 1:7

From this, therefore, do we draw up our rule. Since the Lord Jesus Christ sent the apostles to preach, (our rule is) that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed; for "no man knows the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach— that, of course, which He revealed to them. Now, what that was which they preached— in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them— can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles founded in person, by declaring the gospel to them directly themselves, both vivâ voce, as the phrase is, and subsequently by their epistles. If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine which agrees with the apostolic churches— those moulds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the (said) churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God. Whereas all doctrine must be prejudged as false which savours of contrariety to the truth of the churches and apostles of Christ and God. It remains, then, that we demonstrate whether this doctrine of ours, of which we have now given the rule, has its origin in the tradition of the apostles, and whether all other doctrines do not ipso facto proceed from falsehood. We hold communion with the apostolic churches because our doctrine is in no respect different from theirs. This is our witness of truth.

35-Challenged and refuted by us, according to these definitions, let all the heresies boldly on their part also advance similar rules to these against our doctrine, whether they be later than the apostles or contemporary with the apostles, provided they be different from them; provided also they were, by either a general or a specific censure, precondemned by them. For since they deny the truth of (our doctrine), they ought to prove that it also is heresy, refutable by the same rule as that by which they are themselves refuted; and at the same time to show us where we must seek the truth, which it is by this time evident has no existence among them.

Our system is not behind any in date; on the contrary, it is earlier than all; and this fact will be the evidence of that truth which everywhere occupies the first place. The apostles, again, nowhere condemn it; they rather defend it—a fact which will show that it comes from themselves. For that doctrine which they refrain from condemning, when they have condemned every strange opinion, they show to be their own, and on that ground too they defend it.”

This rule of the early church necessitates the usage of Patristic writings for us today to assist in the correct interpretation of scripture. John writes:

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” **John 20:30,31.**

Because there were many other things which Jesus did and taught that were not written, it should be remembered that we today were not there to witness them. However the Apostles were there and it is only logical that their disciples had a greater understanding of what the Apostles wrote in the New Testament and what the apostolic understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures was as well. If two people are reading the New Testament and come up with diametrically different interpretations, then the Apostolic Fathers **MUST BE** questioned and appealed to so as to determine what truly originated from the Apostle’s doctrine. This is a must if we wish to be identified as “Apostolic.”

Irenaeus of Lyons (*Against Heresies* III, 3:1 & 4:1) and Eusebius of Caesarea (*Ecclesiastical history of the church* vol. III & IV) kept records of the succession of church bishops ensuring the best defense against heretics. By review of this record it is evident who had been disciplined by the Apostles and who had not. By the record of Eusebius the lineage of the apostolic succession can be shown without question up to the generation of 300AD. Before the time of Noetus and Praxeas, Irenaeus speaks to the exposure of heretics by this method. This is also found in II Timothy 2:2 and is the foundation which "our rule" that Tertullian was speaking of is built upon.

Irenaeus: *Against Heresies* III, 3:1, 170AD

A refutation of the heretics, from the fact that, in the various Churches, a perpetual succession of bishops was kept up.

1. It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to "the perfect" apart and privily from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men

Against Heresies III, 4:1

The truth is to be found nowhere else but in the Universal Church, the sole depository of apostolic doctrine. Heresies are of recent formation, and cannot trace their origin up to the apostles.

1. Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account are we bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the thing pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question?

After the controversy about the heresy of Noetus and Praxeas, Sabellius, a bishop of Rome was excommunicated for suggesting the same heresy. Instead of receiving correction about his errors Sabellius developed a more defined version of Modalistic Monarchianism; the doctrine which resembles the modern teaching of the United Pentecostal Church (UPC). What the UPC teaches as Oneness doctrine is referred to as Sabellianism because it resembles the doctrine of Sabellius more than any other in history. Sabellius advocated his modalistic doctrine about 265AD. During this time Dionysius of Rome wrote, "Against the Sabellians." After the death of Sabellius the heresy vanished. It disappeared as quickly as it had emerged under Noetus.

What will be shown in the following chapters is that Trinitarianism is the view which the Apostles adhered to. Some opponents of this view argue against it by claiming that the doctrine of the Trinity is something concocted by apostate Christians who became pawns of Rome and formulated the doctrine during the first two ecumenical councils of 325 and 381AD. This will be easily refuted by the first and second century writings which came about before the existence of Noetus, Praxius, Sabellius, or the councils. It is Trinitarianism not Modalism which can be clearly traced to the Apostles.

A simple definition of Trinitarianism which will be carried through the following pages of this book is understood in this way. The doctrine of the Trinity has always maintained that;

- There is only one God-monotheism.
- The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit are the one God.
- They are one in substance and nature but not in person.
- They are three persons not three Gods.
- The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the father. They are not different manifestations of the same person.
- Jesus, the Son of God is eternally God and was not created.

During the examination of the historical literature presented in the following chapters the reader needs to continually be aware of and address this question; "Is Monotheistic Modalism Apostolic doctrine?"

Chapter Three

Is Jesus the Father and the Son?

Different Jesus?



At first glance Sabellianism, or the Oneness doctrine appears to be Christian as it relates to the nature of God and the person of Jesus Christ. It confesses the divine nature of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. It sounds Christian to the average ear but in reality, by its own definition it's not. "How is that" you ask? Well, when the chameleon layers are removed what is left is a belief that Jesus is both the Father and the Son. According to this Sabellian doctrine, Jesus as the Father wrapped himself in human flesh and became the Son. The time before the incarnation the Son did not exist, only the Father (Jesus).

At the time of creation the Father (Jesus) created all things and the Word of God which was with God was not the Son of God but an idea or concept of the Son of God. This concept, "There was a time before the incarnation when the Son of God was not," is the exact statement made by the heretic Arius shortly after 300AD. This statement caused Arius to be excommunicated by the Church and created the necessity of the first ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325AD. Arius believed in the divinity of Jesus yet he believed there was

a time when the Son was not, that He was created. This is similar to the doctrine held by the UPC but not identical to it. The doctrine of Sabellius portrayed one God but the doctrine of Arius depicted two gods with one being created.

Sabellian Oneness re-interprets John 1:1-14 as one person creating all things. Notice that John's first chapter starts in the same way that Genesis starts; "In the beginning God created." John's gospel account was based on his understanding of Genesis chapter one. John asserts the singularity of the nature of God along with the plurality of persons. The "He" and "Him" of John one is the Word of God (vs1,2)... the Son, not the idea of the Son. The Son created all things (vs 3) not the idea created them. The Son was in the world and the world was made by Him yet the world knew Him not (vs 10) not the idea was in the world. The Son came to his own and they rejected Him (vs11) not the idea came to the Jews. As many as receive the Son (vs 12) not as many as receive the idea. The Same He, the Son was in the beginning with God the Father (vs 2) not the idea was with the Father. The Word (the Son) was with God (the Father) and the Word (the Son) was God. Not the Son was the Father. All scholars with expertise in the area of Biblical languages and Bible translating will confirm this.²

² AT Robertson-Word Pictures in the New Testament: John 1:1-14/ John 10:30

This plurality of persons in creation is also clearly depicted on the first page in everyone's Bible. It had been commented on many times in patristic literature long before the doctrine of Sabellius ever came to be. The teaching that in the beginning the Father and the Son created all things, and created man in their image and likeness, can be seen as continually taught by each succeeding generation of Bishops or teachers, from the time of the Apostles up to the time of the Sabellian heresy. Up to and during the time of Noetus and Praxeas this is what the church leaders wrote concerning Genesis 1:26. The first page in their Bibles was understood by them in this way, and the rest of their theology followed on this foundation.

Genesis 1:26 "Let Us"

Epistle of Barnabas: 6:11,12, 98AD

Since, therefore, having renewed us by the remission of our sins, He has made us after another pattern, it is His purpose that we should possess the soul of children, inasmuch as He has created us anew by His Spirit. For the Scripture says concerning us, while He speaks to the Son, "Let Us make man after Our image, and after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea." And the Lord said, on beholding the fair creature man, "Increase, and multiply, and replenish the earth." These things were spoken to the Son.

Justin: *Dialogue with Trypho 62, 135AD*

'Let Us make man after our image and likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heaven, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creeping things that creep on the earth. And God created man: after the image of God did He create him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and said, Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it.' And that you may not change the [force of the] words just quoted, and repeat what your teachers assert—either that God said to Himself, 'Let Us make,' just as we, when about to do something, oftentimes say to ourselves, 'Let us make;' or that God spoke to the elements, to wit, the earth and other similar substances of which we believe man was formed, 'Let Us make,'—I shall quote again the words narrated by Moses himself, from which we can indisputably learn that [God] conversed with some one who was numerically distinct from Himself, and also a rational Being. These are the words: 'And God said, Behold, Adam has become as one of us, to know good and evil.' In saying, therefore, 'as one of us,' [Moses] has declared that [there is a certain] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. For I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is said to be among you is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that [God] spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of angels. But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him

Theophilus of Antioch: *Apology to Autolytus-Book II, Chapter 15, 18, 170AD*

For the sun is a type of God, and the moon of man. And as the sun far surpasses the moon in power and glory, so far does God surpass man. And as the sun remains ever full, never becoming less, so does God always abide perfect, being full of all power, and understanding, and wisdom, and immortality, and all good. But the moon wanes monthly, and in a manner dies, being a type of man; then it is born again, and is crescent, for a pattern of the future resurrection. In like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries, are types of the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His wisdom.

...But as to what relates to the creation of man, his own creation cannot be explained by man, though it is a succinct account of it which holy Scripture gives. For when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," He first intimates the dignity of man. For God having made all things by His Word, and having reckoned them all mere bye-works, reckons the creation of man to be the only work worthy of His own hands. Moreover, God is found, as if needing help, to say, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." But to no one else than to His own Word and wisdom did He say, "Let Us make."

Irenaeus: *Against Heresies, IV, 20:1, 175AD*

It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, "Let Us make man after Our image and likeness;" He taking from Himself the substance of the creatures [formed], and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments in the world.

Tertullian: *Against Praxeas, 12, 200AD*

If the number of the Trinity also offends you, as if it were not connected in the simple Unity, I ask you how it is possible for a Being who is merely and absolutely One and Singular, to speak in plural phrase, saying, "Let us make man in our own image, and after our own likeness;" whereas He ought to have said, "Let me make man in my own image, and after my own likeness," as being a unique and singular Being? In the following passage, however, "Behold the man has become as one of us," He is either deceiving or amusing us in speaking plurally, if He is One only and singular.

Or was it to the angels that He spoke, as the Jews interpret the passage, because these also acknowledge not the Son? Or was it because He was at once the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, that He spoke to Himself in plural terms, making Himself plural on that very account? Nay, it was because He had already His Son close at His side, as a second Person, His own Word, and a third Person also, the Spirit in the Word, that He purposely adopted the plural phrase, "Let us make;" and, "in our image;" and, "become as one of us." For with whom did He make man? And to whom did He make him like? (The answer must be), the Son on the one hand, who was one day to put on human nature; and the Spirit on the other, who was to sanctify man. With these did He then speak, in the Unity of the Trinity, as with His ministers and witnesses.

After reviewing this documentation, and paying attention to when these commentaries on Genesis 1:26 were written, it should be patently obvious to everyone that the Trinitarian concept of God was handed down as Apostolic doctrine through the succession of the discipleship process of each generation. The heresy that taught "Jesus is the Father and the Son" did not originate with the Apostles and didn't exist until two centuries after the birth of the Savior. It was those who had been commissioned by the Apostles to defend the faith, which identified this teaching of Modalistic Sabellianism as damnable heresy. This is what the facts of history declare. Let US make man in OUR image and in OUR likeness clearly shows the composite unity of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. None of these writers were ever labeled as heretics for their Trinitarian view on creation.

John 8:13-18, "Testimony of two people"

In the defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, the historical argument against the Praxean's concept of singularity of person was addressed using Jesus' own words. In John chapter eight a conversation is recorded by John between Jesus and the Pharisees. In verse thirteen the Pharisees attempted to invalidate anything Jesus was saying by bringing the accusation against Him that, "You alone bear record of yourself, therefore your record is not true." The words of Jesus which follow perfectly and clearly refute the Pharisees and contradict the teaching that "The Father and the Son are one person."

The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true." Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me." **John 8:13-18**

Tertullian: *Against Praxeas* 22, 200AD

When, however, He declares that He is not alone, and uses these words, "but I and the Father that sent me," does He not show that there are Two— Two, and yet inseparable? Indeed, this was the sum and substance of what He was teaching them, that they were inseparably Two; since, after citing the law when it affirms the truth of two men's testimony, He adds at once: "I am one who am bearing witness of myself; and the Father (is another,) who has sent me, and bears witness of me." Now, if He were one— being at once both the Son and the Father— He certainly would not have quoted the sanction of the law, which requires not the testimony of one, but of two.

In 1988 when I first considered if the teaching of Sabellius was true, which taught that the Father and the Son are the same person, it was this text more than any other which proved it impossible. As Tertullian comments on the text it is clear that this passage of scripture doesn't need extensive commentary. When Jesus quotes the law from Deuteronomy 19:15-21 as it relates to a witness's testimony in court, He points out that the law clearly says a man cannot be convicted on the testimony of one single person. In order for the witness against someone to be considered valid it had to come from the testimony of multiple persons specifically, "Two or three witnesses." Jesus appealed to them implying that they knew this to be true.³ He said, "In your law it is written," pointing out that this was known by these teachers of the law because it was in their law, in their book in which it was written.

³ Mt 18:15,16/ Mt 26:59-61/ II Cor 13:1/ I Tim 5:17-19/ Heb 10:28

Jesus then makes the clearest of statements by pointing out his testimony is valid because He himself was one person bearing witness to the truth and his Father was the second person bearing witness to the same truth. If the Father and the Son were one person as the heretics contended then it would be impossible for this statement to be true and for Jesus to make this claim!

Hebrews 1:5-10, "To the Son He says"

5) For to which of the angels did He ever say:

"You are my Son, today I have begotten You"?-Psalm 2:7

And again:

"I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"?-II Samuel 7:14

6) But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

"Let all the angels of God worship Him."
-Psalm 97:7

7) And of the angels He says:

"Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire."-Psalm 104:4

8) But to the Son He says:

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.

9) You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions."-Psalm 45:6,7

10) And:

"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands."-Psalm 102:25-27

This passage of scripture contains a clear conversation by God the Father with and towards another person, God, the Son. The one speaking says, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son" (vs 5). The one speaking refers to Himself as "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" when He (the Father) says, "therefore God your God has..." (vs 9). It will be addressed later but Paul and Peter used this expression when they opened their epistles.

This passage in Hebrews not only refutes any possibility of the Father also being the Son, but it confirms the plurality of persons in the creation account of Genesis chapter one, and John chapter one. The Father says to the Son, "You Lord in the beginning created the heavens and the earth" (vs 10), identical to Genesis 1:1. There is no other option than to recognize that the Trinitarian concept of creation is the only viable explanation of the scriptures which discuss it. The teaching that the Father and the Son are the same person doesn't fit the context of all Scripture as a whole and neither was it something that the church taught as Apostolic doctrine.

Deuteronomy 6:4, & Composite Unity

The Shema Yisrael is recited by Jesus in Mark 12:29 as the greatest commandment of all. The Shema reads: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one." This passage which declares the monotheistic nature of God, or the oneness of God is of pre-eminent importance in any study about God. The UPC understands the importance of the oneness of this passage but misunderstands it in a unitarian manner as do Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and others. It is thought by these groups that one God means singularity of person. It is their misconception that three persons would equal three Gods. This is not so. This section is dedicated to showing that the oneness concept contained in the Bible is many times understood in plurality or composite unity.

In John's gospel there are many passages which directly or indirectly speak of the oneness of the Father and the Son. For this reason the UPC concludes erroneously that the Father and the Son must then be the same person. The most often cited passage for advancing this idea is John 10:30 where Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." It needs to be noted that He never said, "I and the Father are one person" or "I am the Father" or "I am the Father manifest in the flesh." He said, "I and my Father are one." The occurrence of the oneness language in this passage is not unique to the New Testament, in fact it occurs more than a few times. In each case it never implies one person. The following is a short list of verses that show the composite unity of more than one person.

- 1) Galatians 3:28.....The Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, are one
- 2) I Corinthians 3:8.....The planter and the waterer, are one
- 3) John 17:11, 21-23....The Father and the son and the believers, are one
- 4) Matthew 28:19 The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, are one (I John 5:7 in some manuscripts)
- 5) Matthew 19:5,6..... The husband and the wife, are one
- 6) I Corinthians 6:16....The fornicator and the prostitute, are one
- 7) I Corinthians 6:17....The believer and the Holy Spirit, are one
- 8) John 10:30The Father and the Son, are one

In each case it is clear that when referring to a group of people as being “one” it does not mean “one person.” The composite unity of persons is clearly visible. It is the same with the language of John 10:30. The Father and the Son are one in nature or one in purpose but clearly not one person. When writing against the heretics Hippolytus and Tertullian gave clear commentary on John 10:30.

John 10:30, "We are one"

Hippolytus: *Against Noetus 7, 210 AD*

If, again, he allege His own word when He said, "I and the Father are one," let him attend to the fact, and understand that He did not say, "I and the Father am one, but are one." For the word are is not said of one person, but it refers to two persons, and one power. He has Himself made this clear, when He spoke to His Father concerning the disciples, "The glory which You gave me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and You in me, that they may be made perfect in one; that the world may know that You have sent me." What have the Noetians to say to these things? Are all one body in respect of substance, or is it that we become one in the power and disposition of unity of mind? In the same manner the Son, who was sent and was not known of those who are in the world, confessed that He was in the Father in power and disposition.

Tertullian: *Against Praxeas 22, 200AD*

Then, again, concerning His sheep, and (the assurance) that no man should pluck them out of His hand, He says, "My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all;" adding immediately, "I and my Father are one." Here, then, they take their stand, too infatuated, nay, too blind, to see in the first place that there is in this passage an intimation of Two Beings— "I and my Father;" then that there is a plural predicate, "are," inapplicable to one person only; and lastly, that (the predicate terminates in an abstract, not a personal noun)— "we are one thing" Unum, not "one person" Unus.

These historical commentaries on John 10:30 point out three things. 1) He is speaking of two persons when He says "I and my Father." 2) He is speaking of two persons when He says "are one" and not "am one." 3) He is speaking of two persons when He says "We are one." Jesus said, "I and my Father are one,"⁴ implying "We are one." These words of Jesus are repeated in John 17:22, "that they may be one, even as we are one." Before leaving this section it should also be noted that Jesus makes the same clear representation of the composite unity of Himself and the Father in John 14:23. Jesus said,

"If a man love me he will keep my words and my Father will love him, and WE will come unto him, and make OUR abode with him."

Again, in unambiguous terms Jesus demonstrates the composite unity of Himself and the one He calls "MY Father" by using the plural "WE" and "OUR." Jesus is clearly not speaking of his divine nature and his human nature, He is speaking of Himself and another person who He calls "My Father." Jesus didn't say, "I and my Father are one person."

⁴ Interlinear Greek New Testament has: I and My Father, We are one.

Isaiah 9:6, Jesus "Everlasting Father?"

Some students of the Bible have asked, "What about Isaiah 9:6? Doesn't that passage say that Jesus is the Father?" I used to think this was a good argument but after doing some simple research I found it to be a very poor argument, and here's why. With the use of a Strong's concordance anyone can find what the word "father" in Isaiah 9:6 means. The word translated father is Ab. It's seen carried over into the Greek New Testament in Romans 8:15 where we cry out Abba (father).

The Hebrew word Ab is used many times in the Old Testament connected with another noun. This construction translates to "father of" which carries the meaning of source, and is used to refer to "a certain characteristic of a person." Examples of this can be found in Strong's Hebrew dictionary numbers 22-54. Father of gathering, father of the sea, father of music, father of help, father of strength, father of Joy, father of judgment, father of knowledge, father of peace, father of gifts, father of error, father of height etc. The person called father of strength was a strong guy, father of music was a musician, father of height was tall etc.

Abiy-gail is "father of joy", or a joyfull person. But we know that Abigail was a woman, she was never a man, or a father (I Sam 25:3). The meaning of "father of"; "a certain characteristic of a person," can also be seen in the Isaiah 9:6 passage. Abiy-Ad means "father of eternity" or, one who is eternal.

This doesn't say that Jesus is the person He called my Father, but rather that his going forth is from everlasting to everlasting,⁵ and in context his kingdom is the same. Jesus is the Father of eternity, He is eternal. Everlasting Father in this passage does not call Jesus "The" Father but rather "Father of." Isaiah 9:6 say, "Unto us a SON is given." The passage calls Jesus the Son of God and declares that the Son of God is eternal, Father of Eternity.

Who is "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"?

This part of the discussion may be too technical for some so it might be difficult to understand. Without teaching a class on biblical grammar this section hopes to discuss but simplify a rule of biblical translating, and review salutations of the New Testament epistles in light of this rule. The rule is Granville Sharp's rule on the connective use of KAI (and). A simple explanation of it can be found on line as *Sharp Redivivus?-A re-examination of the Granville Sharp rule*. In layman's terms the rule works like this; When you have two nouns connected by the word "AND" the position of the article "THE" determines if the nouns are speaking of one thing or person or two or more things or persons. Example one; If "THE" is used before the first noun and not the second the two nouns connected by "AND" are speaking of the same thing.

⁵ Micah 5:2

Examples of this are found many times in Peter's epistles. II Peter 3:2 says, "The Apostles of the Lord and Savior." Because the word "THE" appears before the first noun (Lord) but not the second (Savior) it demands the interpretation that both Lord and Savior are speaking of one person Jesus Christ (see also II Peter 2:20). I Peter 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father..." For the same reason God and Father is referring to one person.

Example two; If "THE" is used before the first noun and the second noun then the two nouns connected by "AND" are speaking of two different things. This construction can be found in every salutation at the beginning of Paul's epistles.⁶ The expression which is used is, "From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Literally in the original Greek language, "From the God and Father of us and the Lord Jesus Christ." Because "THE" is before God and Father, and also before Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are understood as two different persons. This rule is consistently accurate through the entire New Testament. The only time this rule does not apply is when the nouns are proper names such as Barnabas and Saul (Acts 12:25).

⁶ Rom 1:7/ I Cor 1:3/ II Cor 1:2/ Gal 1:3/ Eph 1:2/ Philp 1:2/ Col 1:2/ I Thes 1:1/ II Thes 1:1,2/ I Tim 1:2/ II Tim 1:2/ Tit 1:4/ Philm 1:3

The UPC tries to avoid this evidence by stating the fact that the word AND can be translated EVEN which would mean that both nouns are referring to the same thing. This statement is true however, KAI understood as EVEN would only be possible under the conditions of example one. Unfortunately for the UPC these salutations have the article THE before both nouns which makes it impossible to use the translation of “even” in the case of Paul’s salutations. From God our Father AND from the Lord Jesus Christ. [See also II John 1:9 where John refers to us as “having BOTH the Father and the Son”]

One last observation of the salutations at the beginning of the epistles should be noted. Paul and Peter both used another expression; “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Pt 1:3/ Eph 1:3/ Col 1:3/ II Cor 1:3). This phrase clearly refers to one person as “The God and Father OF,” OF the second person “Our Lord Jesus Christ.” All UPC answers here are unsatisfactory. This salutation expresses the God and Father of the Son in the same way that the Hebrews 1:9 passage did previously.

Matthew 28:19, And Granville Sharp

One last application of the Sharp rule can be seen in the passage of Matthew 28:19. The text reads “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Using the Sharp rule the three are clearly identified. The word “THE” precedes all three nouns: The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Each noun is connected by “AND”, therefore each of the three is distinctly different from the others. If we were to understand all three as being one person instead of three the text would have to read, “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” THE would only precede the first noun Father and not the other two but it doesn’t. It precedes THE Father, THE Son, and THE Holy Spirit. The word OF also strengthens the fact that three different persons are in view. The singularity of the text is correctly pointed out by the UPC in their attempts to object to this interpretation. However, even though there is singularity in the word “name” it doesn’t mean a “proper name.”

Because they have incorrectly pre-determined before hand the singularity of person, it leads them to misunderstand what “in the name of” means. Because of this misunderstanding they will incorrectly ask the question, “What is his name?” thinking that “in the name of” refers to a proper name. This will be discussed in more length later, but the context of the verse shows that “in the name of” refers to “the authority of” not a proper name.

The text begins in vs. 18; "All authority has been given unto me... go therefore" in my authority, not in a proper name. The grammatical rules and the context of this passage clearly show singularity in authority and plurality in persons; In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This clearly refutes Modalism and favors Trinitarianism.

In conclusion it should also be apparent that logical reasoning in light of historical facts strongly favors Trinitarianism. Logic demands that if Jesus and the Apostles taught Modalism, and their successors taught the same doctrine, then when Praxeas and Sabellius came along and taught Modalism it would have been considered to be correct. It would have been perceived as that which was always taught by the Apostles. It would have been received as status quo. But history shows us that this is not the case in fact, a huge uproar ensued as a result of the modalistic teachings of Praxeas and Sabellius because of the very fact that it was a doctrine foreign to the churches and in no way resembled what the Apostles had taught. Because of the controversy that surrounded their teaching it is clear that the Modalists were inventors of non-Apostolic doctrine and that the Apostles were Trinitarian and not Modalists.