

Pentecostal Theology

The Oneness of God

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David K. Bernard

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by David K. Bernard

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A Study Guide for The Oneness of God

by David K. Bernard and Neil Stegall

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1

CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM

“Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

“God is one” (Galatians 3:20).

There is one God. There is only one God. This doctrine is central to the Bible message, for both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach it plainly and emphatically. Despite the simplicity of this message and the clarity with which the Bible presents it, many who believe in the existence of God have not understood it. Even within Christendom many people, including theologians, have not comprehended this beautiful and essential message. Our purposes are to address this problem and to affirm and explain the biblical doctrine of the oneness of God.

Monotheism Defined

The belief in only one God is called monotheism, which comes from two Greek words: *monos*, meaning alone, single, one; and *theos*, meaning God. Anyone who does not accept monotheism can be classified as one of the following: an atheist—one who denies the existence of God; an agnostic—one who asserts that the existence of God is unknown and probably unknowable; a pantheist—one who equates God with nature or the forces of the universe; or a polytheist—one who believes in more than one God. *Ditheism*, the belief in two gods, is a form of polytheism, and so is *tritheism*, the belief in three gods. Among the major religions of the world, three are monotheistic: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Within the ranks of those labelling themselves Christian, however, there are several divergent views as to the nature of the Godhead. One view, called trinitarianism, asserts that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—but yet one God. (See chapter 11.)

Within the ranks of trinitarianism, one can discern two extreme tendencies. On the one hand, some trinitarians emphasize the unity of God without having a carefully developed understanding of what is meant by three distinct persons in the Godhead. On the other hand, other trinitarians emphasize the three-ness of the trinity to the point that they believe in three self-conscious beings, and their view is essentially tritheistic.

In addition to trinitarianism, there is the doctrine

of binitarianism, which does not classify the Holy Ghost as a separate person but asserts belief in two persons in the Godhead.

Many monotheists have pointed out that both trinitarianism and binitarianism weaken the strict monotheism taught by the Bible. They insist that the Godhead cannot be divided into persons and that God is absolutely one.

These believers in strict monotheism fall into two classes. One class asserts that there is only one God, but does so by denying, in one way or another, the full deity of Jesus Christ. This view was represented in early church history by the dynamic monarchians, such as Paul of Samosata, and by the Arians, led by Arius. These groups relegated Jesus to the position of a created god, subordinate god, junior god, or demigod.

The second class of true monotheists believes in one God but further believes that the fullness of the Godhead is manifested in Jesus Christ. They believe that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are manifestations, modes, offices, or relationships that the one God has displayed to humans. Church historians have used the terms modalism and modalistic monarchianism to describe this view as held by such early church leaders as Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius. (See chapter 10.) Today, those who believe in both the indivisible oneness of God and the full deity of Jesus Christ frequently use the term “Oneness” to describe their belief. They also use the terms “One God” and “Jesus Name” as adjectives to label themselves, while opponents sometimes use the misleading or derogatory designations “Jesus Only” and “New Issue.” (The label