

Tambua

RESEARCH & RESOURCE UPDATE



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Test all things—Hold fast to what is good—Abstain from every form of evil (1 Ts. 5:21–22)

A SPECIAL WARNING ABOUT THE “JESUS ONLY” CULT

Real Christians have always believed that there is only one true God. Numerous Bible verses teach this. For instance, in Isaiah 43:10 God declares, “Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me.” But believing in only one God doesn’t guarantee that someone is a genuine Christian. (The demons believe that there’s only one God, and they shudder—James 2:19!)

For centuries the biblical doctrine of the Trinity has rightly been believed as a central and essential teaching of the historic Christian faith, affirmed by all true Christians everywhere. Here is a simple summary of what Scripture teaches about this important doctrine:

The one true God eternally exists as three distinct, co-equal, and co-eternal Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

(To learn more about the biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity, see the list of helpful resources given at the end of this article.)

But today there is a group of churches that twists and changes what the Bible says about the “oneness” of God. Even though they *call* themselves Pentecostals, “Oneness Pentecostals” are dangerously different in what they teach. Their main belief—a very ancient heresy called “modalism”—says the biblical doctrine of the Trinity is false. Instead, they misread the Bible to claim that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are just one person: Jesus. “Oneness” churches trace this belief back to a third-century heretic named

Sabellius, and some of their followers claim the doctrine was “rediscovered” by revelation at a Pentecostal camp meeting in California in 1913.

“Oneness” churches use many different names. In East Africa they include the United Pentecostal Church International (known locally as the “**United Apostolic Church of Uganda**”, or **UACU**); World Christian Ministries Association; Apostolic Union of the World; and True Jesus Church. Many people call them “Jesus Only” churches.

These “Oneness” groups aggressively work to deceive and convert Christians who believe in the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Their missionaries boast about re-baptizing Trinitarian pastors and their congregations!

HOW SERIOUS IS THE ONENESS THREAT IN UGANDA?

Here are just some of the towns and districts where they are doing active missionary work: Alebtong, Alegu, Bundibugyo, Gayaza, Hoima, Igunda, Kampala, Kyatega, Kyegegwa, Musomba, Mvundo, Nyaga, Nyabukole, Nyanga, Tororo, West Nile (Adjumani, Amacha, Amoro, Ogolo, Pakele, Paluga), Mt Elgon (Bududa, Budaka, Mbale, Moro) and Lake Albert (Mpongo, Mubejja, Mumbai, Nakasongola). They also proselytize among South Sudanese refugees.

“Oneness” missionaries are claiming success in places like Karugutu (“many have been baptized in Jesus Name,

three Trinitarian pastors have been baptized”), Wanka (“New Church constructed and people are excited, over fifteen baptized in Jesus Name”) and Bugiri (“Two [evangelical] pastors who have seen the revelation of the Name of Jesus have joined the UACU and are now in Fellowship”). They boast that in Kampala “Many pastors have contacted us and said they are coming to be baptized and learn of our Oneness Doctrine”.

So Christians need to be warned about two teachings that “Oneness” missionaries use to trap evangelical believers into false worship: **modalism** and **requiring baptism in Jesus’ name**.

MODALISM

Modalism falsely claims that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all just one person. Each of them is simply a “mode” in which God operates. Modalists say this is like a man who plays different roles in life as a father, a husband and a teacher. This doesn’t mean that the father and husband and teacher are three different people—they’re different “modes” (or titles) used by the same man. Likewise, modalism says that God is only one person but operates in three modes: the Father in creation, the Son in redemption and the Spirit in regeneration. According to them, “Jesus” is the name of all three persons! We only call Jesus “the Son” to refer to Him after He was born here on earth.

But this isn’t what the Bible teaches. Though we can’t understand it fully, Scripture reveals that within the nature of the one true God there are three distinct persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Yet the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. For instance, Galatians 4:4 and John 3:16 describe God the Son (Jesus) as living alongside the God Father before He was born on earth. In John 8:17–18, Jesus appeals to the Old Testament law stating that “the testimony of two witnesses is true.” Then He explains that “I am one who testifies for Myself; My other witness is the Father, who sent Me.” If Jesus is the both Father and the Son, then there would only be one witness, and Jesus’ testimony would be invalid (see also John 5:31–32).

In John 14:16–17, Jesus tells the disciples that He will ask the Father to give them another Helper (or Comforter): the Holy Spirit. Is Jesus asking *Himself*? Is the Father sending *Himself*? Indeed, this is completely different from someone who is simultaneously a father, husband and teacher. It would make no sense for the husband to say, “I will ask the father [*that’s me*], and he will send the teacher [*that’s me, too*].” Though the relationship among the persons of the Trinity is hard for us to grasp, passages like John 14:16–17 can only make sense if the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons within the one being of God. (Also consider Matthew 3:16–17, which describes Jesus being baptized, the Father speaking from heaven, and the Spirit descending. All three of them are right there at the same time, yet each one of them is clearly distinct from the others.)

“Oneness” followers will often quote Colossians 2:9, which says that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” This verse tells us that Jesus is fully God. But “Oneness” followers misapply the verse to argue there can’t be a distinct divine person other than Jesus. Why is this logic false? For example: Just because you (the reader) are fully human, this doesn’t mean that no one else is human! You can be fully “human” in your nature while others are equally human. In just the same way, **Jesus is fully God at the same time that the Father and Spirit are also fully God.**

DEMANDING BAPTISM IN JESUS’ NAME

“Oneness” cultists don’t baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). They claim that the words “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” aren’t names, but titles. They reason that for us to obey Matthew 28:19 we must find out what the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is. As we explain above, “Oneness” followers falsely teach that “Jesus” is the name of all three titles. They claim this is why Peter preached, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). They will also tell you that Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:19 were never used by anyone in the Book of Acts, and instead the disciples always baptized “in the name of Jesus” (see Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5). They insist that true and correct

baptism must *always* be done by speaking the words “in the name of Jesus.”

There are big problems with this “Oneness” teaching. First, “Jesus” is not the name of God the Father. Jesus Himself would sometimes use the word “we” when talking about His Father (see John 14:23), so “Jesus” can’t be the Father’s personal name.

But is speaking the exact words “in Jesus’ name” required for baptism? No—and here’s why: The “Oneness” argument only seems to make sense in English translations of the Bible, because in the four separate accounts of baptism “in Jesus’ name”, the original Greek language uses different words. “Oneness” followers may say these differences don’t matter, but they really do. Ask yourself: If God were requiring an exact formula to use, then why didn’t He give us one? The formula would have to be exactly the same in every account—but it isn’t. Only Acts 8:16 and 19:5 are identical. But instead of saying “in the name of Jesus Christ”—as in Peter’s sermon—they say “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Acts 2:38 and 10:48 are almost identical in the Greek, but they use different prepositions. Hence, *the wording in the four accounts have three different formulas.* God doesn’t require Christians to use an identical formula all the time and everywhere.

So why do we find a difference between the accounts in Acts and the one in Matthew 28:19? The key is to correctly understand the meaning of the phrase “in the name of Jesus.” This phrase doesn’t mean that there is something magical about Jesus’ name that makes the baptism valid. Instead, “in the name of” is a common expression that means “by the authority of...” For instance, you may have heard someone say, “Halt in the name of the law!” This doesn’t mean that the law has an actual name of some kind! Instead, this is calling on the authority of the law to command someone to stop. In the same way, when Peter said “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” (Acts 3:6), he wasn’t using a mandatory formula for healing lame people; Peter healed the man by Jesus’ authority (see also 1 Samuel 17:45).

So when you read the verses in Acts about “baptism in Jesus’ name”, notice: None of them quotes anybody actually speaking the phrase “In the name of Jesus!” when they baptize. Instead,

all these accounts merely tell us that people were baptized *in the name of*—that is, *by the authority of*—Jesus. No special words are spoken. And importantly, Matthew 28:19 doesn’t give us a formula either. Instead, it commands us to baptize by the authority of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Throughout the centuries, Christians have used Matthew 28 when they baptize—not because those words are required, but because they’re honoring the authority by which they’re commanded to baptize. In short, **it’s not wrong to baptize using the words “in the name of Jesus”, but it is wrong to say that is the only true and correct way to baptize.**

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated, these two teachings of Oneness Pentecostalism are clearly in error. You may ask: Are these false doctrines serious enough to worry us? **Yes, absolutely!**

First, **we must not be deceived into false worship.** The Bible commands us to “worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness” (Psalm 29:2). God’s call to worship is not a burden, but should be a delight to Christians! As we consider the wonders of God’s nature, the riches of His majesty and the depth of His love, our response should be worship. But how are we to worship God? Jesus explains that **“those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”** (John 4:24)—according to how He reveals Himself in Scripture. The God preached by “Oneness” Pentecostals is not the true God of the Bible and so we must reject it. How tragic for a Christian to be deceived by this cult, become an enemy of Christ and His people, and waste the rest of his or her life worshipping a false God!

Second, **“Oneness” Pentecostals divide the Body of Christ.** They come to Christians as the “wolves in sheep’s clothing” that Jesus warned us about (Matthew 7:15). They confuse Christians about God and in order to lead them into their cult, and they boast of re-baptizing Trinitarian pastors and entire congregations—as though they were trophies.

What attitude should we have as Christians when we meet such “Oneness” followers? The Bible tells us to be ready to have an answer for them, and to offer it “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). We should also “not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when

wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:24–26). **If you need help, [contact ACFAR](#).**



ACFAR's **Apologetics Notebook for Pastors and Christian Workers** contains an excellent section on the Trinity. To request your copy, [click here](#). Available in both English and Swahili.

The online resources listed below can help you and your congregation to understand and defend the historic Christian doctrine of the Trinity today.

ARTICLES AND STUDIES

[Resources on the Christian Doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit](#) (IRR)

A great collection of articles that explain the Trinity and answer the false objections raised by cults.

[Take a Test on the Trinity](#) (Challies)

How well do you know the doctrine? Find out here—you may be very surprised!

[A Chart Explaining the Trinity](#) (Challies)

Using words and pictures to help us better understand how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the one true God.

[Oneness Pentecostalism Profile](#)

(Watchman Fellowship)

A most helpful overview of this movement and its errors.

[Oneness Pentecostalism: An Analysis](#) (Biola)

A theologian explains the serious problems in the “Jesus Only” movement.

AUDIO

[Oneness Pentecostals](#) (CFAR)

VIDEO

[How Do You Make a Biblical Case for the Trinity?](#)

(Stand to Reason)

ACFAR is preparing a new tract and video to answer the dangerous errors of “Oneness” Pentecostals. **We will value your partnership in forming a united front against this heresy.**

NEW MINISTRY RESOURCES

DVD

ACFAR now offers a teaching DVD answering the false “hyper-grace” gospel. With teaching videos in English, Luganda, Runyankore and Lhukonzo, **What Is Biblical Grace?** will help your church or student fellowship understand and answer the dangerous ideas being spread by Phaneroo and other movements.



If you are a pastor or student leader, [contact ACFAR](#) today and request your copy. (Note: Only one DVD per person, please!)

We encourage you to copy these DVDs for your friends!

RADIO

ACFAR continues to broadcast its message of biblical discernment and hope to Christians in Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan. You can listen on these and other stations:



English

“Defending the Faith” on Spirit FM 96.6—Kampala, on Thursdays from 8:30–9:00 p.m. and on Sundays from 6:30 to 7:00 a.m.

Luganda

“Okulabura—Kungigiriza Enkyamu” on Namirembe FM 93.9—Kampala, on Sundays from 7:30–8:00 a.m.

Lhukonzo (Rukonjo)

For stations and broadcast times, [contact ACFAR](#).

SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

ACFAR offers speakers to warn and train believers in biblical discernment, the defense of the faith, and cult evangelism through our outreach ministries:

- Pastors on Guard
- Test Before You Trust (*students*)
- Project Priscilla (*women and girls*)

If you are interested in having a speaker present at your church, school, women's conference or campus fellowship, [contact ACFAR](#).

HELPFUL ARTICLES

[10 Things You Should Know About Interpreting the Bible](#)

Be very cautious about seeking guidance from God through random words or verses taken out of context.

[How Do I Tell That I May Be Dealing with a Cult?](#)

There are some general, very clear marks of cultic teaching, behaviour or tendencies.

[Four Ways to Become a Better Listener and a Better Apologist](#)

If you want to defend your faith well, become a good listener.

QUOTATIONS

"If you are not a student of the Word, you are not called to be a teacher of the Word."

—D.A. Carson

"Let us receive nothing, believe nothing, and follow nothing which is not in the Bible, nor can be proved by the Bible."

—J.C. Ryle

"Not all 'God-sized' visions are from God. Many are from a God-sized ego, and have no claims on God's provision."

—J.R. Vassar

"95% of knowing the will of God consists in being prepared to do it before you know what it is."

—Donald Grey Barnhouse

"Christian leaders must practice what they preach if they are to see what they preach practiced."

—Douglas Milne

"God may not do what we ask, but we must never think it's because He's not able to do it."

—D.A. Carson

"The cross is the quickest and best summary of what God says to unworthy people."

—Ed Welch

"At the core of any healthy congregation is a vibrant exposition of God's Word."

—Steve Lawson

"God humbles the proud so that they, and the world through them, may know that He rules."

—David Helm

Tambua (Swahili, "discern") is an e-newsletter of the Africa Centre for Apologetics Research (ACFAR). It is sent periodically and free of charge to pastors and Christian workers to assist them in the task of discernment and defending the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Learn more about ACFAR and its mission [here](#). [Disclaimer](#): Reference herein to any specific resource that is not produced by ACFAR should not be considered an endorsement of all its contents or of other works by the same author(s) or organisation(s). When we use the word "cult" we mean primarily the commonly accepted theological definition.