

# A Oneness View of Jesus' Prayers

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## 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<sup>1</sup> 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. See, [Avoiding the Achilles Heels of Trinitarianism, Modalistic Monarchianism, and Nestorianism: The Acknowledgement and Proper Placement of the Distinction Between Father and Son](#)

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 Son, 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.<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> distinction arising in the incarnation due to God's newly acquired human existence.

While there is only one person in the Godhead, YHWH, 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 a 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.<sup>4</sup> 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, 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, but in the incarnation the Spirit of YHWH 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, 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. For further reading see, [Avoiding the Achilles Heels of Trinitarianism, Modalistic Monarchianism, and Nestorianism: The Acknowledgement and Proper Placement of the Distinction Between Father and Son](#)

### **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 (See my article titled [Jesus' 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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? (For further reading on this issue see my article titled [Love in the Godhead?](#))

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..<sup>7</sup> 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<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 developmen 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.<sup>10</sup>

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 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 the 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, however, 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).[11](#)

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 locus 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 co-equal, 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 consciousnesses 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 or 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.<sup>12</sup> 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. (See my article titled [Avoiding the Achilles Heel of Trinitarianism, Modalistic Monarchianism, and Nestorianism: The Acknowledgment and Proper Placement of the Distinction Between Father and Son](#)) 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.<sup>13</sup> It takes a concrete person (hypostasis) to actualize the generic nature (*physis*).<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Jesus' prayers ought not 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).<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> The divine person utilizes each nature to perform the functions peculiar to each, but both natures are motivated by the one and selfsame person.<sup>18</sup> The one person of Christ carries out His activities in, through, and with both natures.<sup>19</sup> 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,"<sup>20</sup> deciding the actions made possible by the natures.<sup>21</sup>

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."<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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 Eutychian 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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 disguise"). 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.<sup>27</sup> (For further discussion see my article titled [Avoiding the Achilles Heels of Trinitarianism, Modalistic Monarchianism, and Nestorianism: The Acknowledgement and Proper Placement of the Distinction Between Father and Son](#))

### **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. For a detailed exegesis of this passage see my article titled [Christology](#).

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<sup>28</sup> within Him, and thus Christ's consciousness is like that of other human beings. Any knowledge Jesus possessed that superceded 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.<sup>29</sup> So it is with God in the incarnation. (For further reading on the kenosis and its importance as it relates to Christ's work, see my article titled [Christology](#))

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<sup>30</sup> 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. See my article titled [Why be a Trinitarian?](#)

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?<sup>31</sup> 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 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?<sup>32</sup> 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 I 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; I 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 centralized 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.[33](#)

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 of 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 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 another equally divine, but distinct person (Trinitarianism, Apollinarianism). Nestorianism splits Christ in two; Trinitarianism splits God in two<sup>34</sup>; 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.

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[Christology](#)

[The Dual Nature of Christ](#)

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### Footnotes

1. I use "mode" hesitantly because of its negative associations. It is often perceived to mean a fictitious role God plays in the incarnation that He will one day stop playing after the purpose of the incarnation has been accomplished. The Son is not a temporary role God played to be discarded in the future. The Son is a genuine human being, a real ontological being, and like all other genuine human beings will live for eternity as a human being. Jesus' humanity is no mask that is discardable when the drama of human redemption has been accomplished. I use "mode" to mean "an ontological manner of existence—the manner in which an underlying substance is manifested," not a role or nominal device with no real ontological reference.

It should also be made clear that my application of "mode" to God differs from the way Oneness believers have traditionally applied the term. Oneness theology has traditionally taught that God exists in three "modes" (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). I, however, only confess two modes of existence (Father, Son). I do not believe we can rightly claim the Spirit as a mode of God's existence. God *is* Spirit. "Holy Spirit" describes God's identity and nature, referring to His innermost essence. We cannot make anymore distinction between God and His Spirit as we can between our self and our spirit (I Corinthians 2:10-11). Just as my spirit is not a mode of my existence, but an aspect of my being, neither is the Holy Spirit a mode of God's existence, but is the aspect or nature of His being.

We can make a true distinction, however, between God's manner/mode of existence as a genuine man, and His continued manner/mode of existence beyond the incarnation as the transcendent divine Spirit. There is a true ontological distinction between these two modes of existence because of the humanity God assumed in the incarnation. Confessing a duality of modes between Father and Son is not a fictitious distinction of (successive) roles God plays, but a reality of something God has truly become and will forever remain.

2. Let it be noted that "Son" does not refer only to Jesus' human nature. "Son" refers to the God's incarnate existence. The term is incarnational in nature, arising only after the incarnation because of the addition of humanity to God's previously unmitigated deity, and describing the relationship between God transcendent beyond humanity and God limited in a human existence, but is not referring only to Christ' humanity. "Son of God" calls attention to the humanity emerging from

the incarnation, but does not refer only to Jesus' humanity to the exclusion of His deity. To say that "Son" only refers to Jesus' human nature is Nestorian at heart, separating Jesus into two persons in one body. "Son" refers to the whole person of Christ, both deity and humanity united into one inseparable person (Hebrews 1:8-10).

3. I use "existential" as an adjective for "existence," meaning 'pertaining to existence.' It should not be confused with existential philosophy, or be understood to have any affinity with an existential understanding of God or Christology.

4. Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Change?: The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation*, Studies in Historical Theology, Vol. IV (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1985), 42-43.

5. God's "coming to be man" does not imply a transmutation of God into a man. God remained who He was both in and after the incarnation. If God had changed into a man He would cease being God, or at least cease being the same God He was prior to the incarnation. This would take away any meaning to the notion that "Jesus is God" because the God who became man ceased being God when He became that man, and thus the man He became is no longer God, but man. Even Jesus' humanity could not be considered to be completely human, because it would have experienced changed through its association with deity. Any transmutation of God into man would demand that Jesus is a third something (*tertium quid*) that is neither fully God nor fully man, but some hybrid of the two.

6. This is ironic in light of history. Trinitarianism was the theological response to Arianism. The doctrine of the Trinity was developed to protect Christ's equality with the Father against the Arian doctrine that asserted His inferiority. Modern Trinitarians', in their understanding of Christ's prayers, however, often will unwittingly propose an Arian Christ who is inferior to the Father.

7. The theological problems associated with such a view will be discussed under the section, "The Origin of Jesus' Prayers," subsection "Divine Consciousness Only."

8. I do not use "acts" or "acting" in the sense of "pretending," but in the sense of performing "actions" (speaking, healing, praying, sleeping, eating, teaching, etc.).

9. Weinandy, 107.

10. Such denials of the *genuineness* of Jesus' prayers are rooted in a denial of the *humanness* of Jesus' prayers. The heresies of Apollinarianism, Eutycheanism, and Monophysitism all reflect this tendency because they either deny Christ a human psyche, or diminish His humanity, understanding the deity to have overwhelmed the humanity in the union, nearly to the virtual obliteration of the humanity. In each of these heresies the divine person *as* God is the subject (active principle, seat) of all Christ's acts, so any limitations Christ experienced were only apparent limitations, because God cannot be limited. As a result Jesus only pretended not to know certain things, only asked questions for rhetorical purposes, and prayed for an example to believers. All such claims deny the reality of the incarnation.

11. It should be made clear that orthodox Trinitarianism is not Arian in its theology. Trinitarian theology was developed in large part in reaction to Arian theologians who wished to make Christ's deity inferior to the Father's deity. Trinitarians asserted that Christ's deity is co-equal (*homoousion*) to the Father's. The point I wish to make is that while Trinitarian theology demands that Christ's deity is *homoousion* to the Father's, such co-equality is denied when it is asserted that Christ's acts are rooted in His divine consciousness, because Christ's speech

indicates that He is inferior to the Father.

12. God's "coming to be man" does not imply a transmutation of God into a man. God remained who He was both in and after the incarnation. If God had changed into a man He would cease being God, or at least cease being the same God He was prior to the incarnation. This would take away any meaning to the notion that "Jesus is God" because the God who became man ceased being God when He became that man, and thus the man He became is no longer God, but man. Even Jesus' humanity could not be considered to be completely human, because it would have experienced changed through its association with deity. Any transmutation of God into man would demand that Jesus is a third something (*tertium quid*) that is neither fully God nor fully man, but some hybrid of the two.

13. 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).

14. *Hypostasis* and *physis* together express both the essential nature of something and who it is that is of such an essence or nature, namely the person. When Chalcedon said Christ is one *hypostasis* in two *physeis* they were saying Christ is one person who has the essential attributes of both deity and humanity.

15. Weinandy, 31.

16. The human nature has no distinct human ego (*hypostasis*) to actualize the attributes of that nature, but is individualized (*hypostasized*) by God Himself.

17. Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*. Translated by J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 163.

18. Athanasius *Oratio 3 Contra Arianos*.

19. Chemnitz, 217.

20. Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 72-3.

21. John Macquarrie, *Christology Revisited* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1998), 55.

22. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*. 2nd ed. (Edinburg, England: T & T Clark, 1998), 103.

23. Origen, 2.6.3.

24. Weinandy, 171.

25. Even Jesus' miracles were those of a man. The Scripture is clear that Jesus was anointed by God to work miracles (Luke 4:18; Matthew 12:18; Acts 2:22; 4:27; 10:38). God has no need of being anointed; He is the one who anoints others. If Jesus' miracles were performed "as God" it would make little sense to see His need of anointing. Unless we understand all of Jesus' acts, including His miracles, to be those of a genuine human being anointed by God we come into conflict with both Scripture and logic.

26. Weinandy, 117.

27. In Trinitarian theology God the Son exists as man in the incarnation, and continues to exist in Himself as He always has (as God) beyond the incarnation. Just as the Son's dual existence does not create a fourth person in the Godhead according to Trinitarian theology, neither does positing a dual existence for a uni-personal God create two persons in the Godhead according to Oneness theology. Trinitarians can only charge Oneness theology with creating two persons in God if they are willing to admit that the Son's dual existence after His incarnation creates two persons out of the Son, and thus four persons in the Godhead instead of three.

Until Trinitarians are ready to confess that their view turns the Trinity into a "Quartary," they have no basis upon which to charge Oneness believers of being "Trinitarians in disguise." Neither position creates another person in God, however, because both understand the incarnation as one person taking on a new manner of existence while continuing to exist in His "old" manner of existence, not one person changing into another person, or one person becoming two persons.

28. Meaning Christ's deity is "there" ontologically, but by divine choice the divine prerogatives are not exercised because God chooses to exist as man with all accompanying human limitations.

29. Analogies taken from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 735-736.

30. Relating to the way in which we come to know.

31. In certain OT passages YHWH does speak to or of the Son (Psalm 2:7; 45:6; 110:1), but a few things should be noted. First, it is never said that the "Father" spoke to the Son. It only speaks of "YHWH" or "God," never suggesting a Father-Son relationship prior to the incarnation. Secondly, these OT passages are clearly prophetic, speaking of the Messiah, and thus cannot be divorced from the incarnation which was yet future. The communication between YHWH and the Messiah (Son), then, was not a present transaction, but a future event.

32. While it may be argued that Jesus would not communicate with God the Son (as he exists beyond the incarnation) because Jesus was God the Son incarnate, and for Jesus to communicate to God the Son would be for Jesus to communicate to Himself, this assumes that Jesus' communication to the Father arose out of His divine consciousness, rather than a genuine human consciousness. Such a view of Christ denies Christ a true human consciousness and psyche, being Docetic and Apollinarian in nature. Trinitarians must confess a genuine human consciousness for Christ. If His consciousness was human, then His prayers were also human, and could not be construed to be one divine person praying to another divine person, but a genuine human being praying to God. In such case it would not matter if Jesus (God the Son incarnate) prayed to God the Son transcendent because Jesus' prayers arose out of His human consciousness, not God the Son's divine consciousness.

33. Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity*, in *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 202-3.

34. Trinitarianism actually splits God in three when we include the Holy Spirit into the picture, but since I am here only speaking of Jesus' prayers to the Father, it is more proper to say that it splits God in two.

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