

Two Witnesses – Oneness Sleight of Hand

by Mike Hicks

“Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.” – John 8:17-18
(All Scripture references are from the NASB)

Have you ever seen a really good magician do card tricks? If he is practiced enough, he can fool even the most attentive audience. One technique that is often used in card tricks is called “sleight of hand”. Cambridge Online Dictionary has, as one of its definitions for sleight of hand, “skilful hiding of the truth in order to win an advantage”. Using a sleight of hand move called the “double lift” a magician can make you believe that he has turned over the top card of a deck, when in fact he has turned over two. Through “palming” he can hide a card in the palm of his hand without you ever noticing.

The New Testament is full of verses that plainly draw a distinction between the Father and the Son:

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” – Phil. 1:2

“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;” – 1 Thes. 3:11

“what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” – 1 John 1:3

These verses and many others present Jesus and His Father as two persons. Oneness theologians have developed clever ways of interpreting these verses, as demonstrated by one of their foremost theologians, David Bernard:

“By referring to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the writers were emphasizing two roles of God and the importance of accepting Him in both roles. Not only must we believe in God as our Creator and Father, but we must accept Him as manifested in the flesh through Jesus Christ.”¹

Of all the verses that clearly indicate that the Father and the Son are two distinct persons, each with their own mind, will, and spirit, none presents a greater challenge to Oneness doctrine (at least in my former Oneness thinking mind) than John 8:17-18. Here Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 17:6:

“On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.”

In the Law of Moses, which came from God, the Israelites were told that one witness was not enough to sentence someone to death. This was a safeguard built into the law which would help to prevent a false witness from causing an innocent person’s death. A death sentence against an innocent would, because of this law, require a conspiracy of two or more people. In the eighth chapter of John, Jesus is claiming to be the Light of the world and calling on people to follow Him. The Pharisees, ignoring how the Father had already provided a witness to Jesus through His works (John 5:36), supposed that He was simply testifying about Himself and could therefore be rejected. Jesus’ response to them should cause all Oneness believers to pause:

“Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of **two men** is true. I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”

Notice the Scripture does not say that the testimony of two *natures* is true, but of two *men*, that is, persons. In order to avoid Nestorianism, which teaches that Jesus Christ was actually two people (the Father and the Son), Oneness adherents, like their Trinitarian opponents, teach that Jesus was one person with a “dual nature”.

“From the Bible we see that Jesus Christ had two distinct natures in a way that no other human being has ever had. One nature is human or fleshly; the other nature is divine or Spirit. Jesus was both fully man and fully God. The name *Jesus* refers to the eternal Spirit of God (the Father) dwelling in the flesh.”²

However, this one *person* with two *natures* idea begins to break down rather quickly when we consider Bernard’s next statement:

“When we read a statement about Jesus we must determine if it describes Jesus as a man or as God. Moreover, whenever Jesus speaks in Scripture we must determine whether He is speaking as man or as God.”³

If Jesus is one person, one mind, one center of consciousness, then how is it that we, when reading the Scriptures, should have to determine which “person” He is speaking as? Despite the semantics, Nestorianism is not avoided. Moreover, Oneness believers must, in John 8:18, turn Jesus into the master magician. The Pharisees think that He has lifted the top card and shown them the human Jesus card, but in reality He has performed a “double lift” and actually has the Father Jesus card hidden on top.

If Jesus and His Father are not two *persons*, then His argument in claiming His Father as another witness loses all force. In a court of law, one does not have the option of calling another *nature* to the stand to corroborate a story, but one can call another *person*. While He admitted that His own testimony was actually enough, given that He is the Truth, to satisfy them He called another witness to the stand: His Father.

Jesus was not and is not a deceptive trickster, twisting laws and finding loopholes in order to win an advantage. The fact that He used the argument of two witnesses proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that Jesus and His Father are two distinct persons.

¹ David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* p. 208

² *Ibid.* p. 86

³ *Ibid.* p. 87