

Shared Titles of God and Christ:

The Biggest Stumbling Block to Oneness Believers

by Mike Hicks

Oneness Pentecostals are correct in their acknowledgement that the Bible does not teach that God is a Trinity. Their belief that God is one singular person is commendable and is certainly a minority position within Christendom. Their failure is in retaining the Trinitarian concept of the dual nature, the idea that God became a man, that Christ has two natures: one deity, the other human. Whereas Trinitarians believe that God the Son became a man, Oneness believers insist that God the Father became a man.

Oneness adherents tend to place the distinction between the Son and the Father as a flesh vs. Spirit paradigm. For an example, let us look at three different ways of explaining Jesus praying to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane. We will consider the Trinitarian view, the Oneness view, and the Unitarian view.

- Trinitarian view: God the Son was praying to God the Father. He was praying out of His human nature, not out of His divine nature.
- Oneness view: Although Jesus is the Father robed in flesh, His human nature (the Son) was praying to His divine nature (the Father).
- Unitarian view: The man, Christ Jesus, was praying to God, His Father.

The Trinitarian and Oneness positions are very similar in that neither view has “God praying to God”. They both center on the idea of a human nature praying to Deity. The Oneness view of God and Christ, in striving to maintain Biblical monotheism, has not gone far enough.

One of the major stumbling blocks to Oneness believers is the fact that titles that are applied to God are also applied to Jesus Christ. The assertion is that, since God and Jesus share many titles (Redeemer, Saviour, God, Shepherd, Lord, King of Kings, Judge) they must be one and the same person. The argument can be very convincing and is, I believe, one of the major hindrances to Oneness believers in coming to a Unitarian understanding of God and Christ.

If it is true that the sharing of these titles means that Jesus is in fact the LORD God Himself, then it should stand to reason that nobody else could have these titles applied to them, since there is only one God. Let us see what the scriptures reveal:

Redeemer

“So I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy *it* before those who are sitting *here*, and before the elders of my people. **If you will redeem *it***, redeem *it*; but if not, tell me that I may

know; for there is no one but you to redeem *it*, and I am after you.’ And he said, ‘**I will redeem it.**’” – Ruth 4:4 (NASB)

In this verse, Boaz is discussing with Naomi’s near kinsman who would redeem her land and marry her Daughter-in-law, Ruth. The near kinsman rejected the deal, and so Boaz became Ruth’s redeemer.

Saviour

“Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them **saviours** who saved them from the hand of their enemies.” – Nehemiah 9:27 (ESV)

As seen in the book of Judges, Israel would often rebel against God, causing Him to oppress them with their enemies. Upon their repentance, God would send them a saviour, that is, an individual from among Israel who would destroy the oppressor and save Israel.

God

“So the LORD said to Moses: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘See, **I make you as God to Pharaoh**, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.’” – Exodus 7:1 (NASB)

“I said, ‘**You are gods**; and all of you are sons of the most High’” – Psalm 82:6 (NASB)

The Hebrew word *el*, meaning god, was applied to the true God (Yahweh), Moses, Israelite judges, kings, and false gods. The word simply means someone who has great authority and power, and does not only apply to Yahweh.

Shepherd

“Son of man, prophesy against the **shepherds of Israel**. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, **Woe, shepherds of Israel** who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?’” – Ezekiel 34:2 (NASB)

“**I will set shepherds over them** who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.” – Jeremiah 23:4 (ESV)

God spoke to the shepherds of Israel, even though He was the Shepherd of Israel. Moreover, during the Millennium God will set up shepherds to feed His flock. These are the saints who are ruling and reigning with Christ.

Lord

“So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I am worn out, and **my lord** is old, shall I have pleasure?’” – Genesis 18:12 (ESV)

“**The LORD says to my lord:** ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” – Psalm 110:1 (NIV)

Many people in the Bible are referred to as lord. It is simply a term of respect, much like calling a man “sir” today. David tells us that the LORD (Yahweh) prophetically told David’s lord (Adoni/the Messiah) to sit at His right hand. Adoni is a Hebrew word translated “lord” and always references a human or angelic superior. It is never used to reference Yahweh. This Old Testament scripture is quoted in the New Testament more than any other and is crucial in understanding Christ’s relationship to God. Although David was King, he recognized that the future Messiah would be his superior and would sit at God’s right hand.

King of kings

“You, O king, **the king of kings**, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory,” – Daniel 2:37 (ESV)

Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar the king of kings. Daniel was not confusing him with Yahweh, but merely acknowledged the fact that human beings can share God’s titles in certain situations. Moreover we see that, although he was considered “king of kings”, his authority was a derived authority: it came from God almighty who is the ultimate King of Kings.

Judge

“For the **LORD is our judge**; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us.” – Isaiah 33:22 (ESV)

“When **the LORD raised up judges** for them, **the LORD was with the judge** and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.” – Judges 2:18 (NASB)

Ultimately, Yahweh is the Judge. Nevertheless, He raised up human judges and He was with them in their judgments. Paul said that there is coming a day when God will judge the world “by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” This is an example of agency, which is the way in which God, ever since the fall of man, has interacted with humanity.

One can also see the concept of agency in the New Testament between Christ and His followers:

“As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He *said*, “**I am Jesus whom you are persecuting**” – Acts 9:3-5 (NASB)

Saul was not chasing Jesus around trying to arrest Him. He was, in actual fact, persecuting the followers of Jesus. However, because the church is the body of Christ, they are His agents or ambassadors, and so to persecute them is to persecute Christ Himself.

“ ‘When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.’” Matthew 25:39-40 (NASB)

In Biblical language, to do something to a Christian is to do something to Jesus. This does not, however, make the church Jesus or Jesus the church in a literal sense.

We can also see the concept of shared titles between Christ and the church:

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘**I am the light of the world**. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” – John 8:12 (ESV)

“**You are the light of the world**. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” – Matthew 5:14 (ESV)

Either Jesus was extremely confused as to who He was and who we are, or He both acknowledged and used the concept of agency.

The fact that men and angels can bear the name and titles of God is well attested to in the scriptures, as is the fact that Christians can and do bear the titles of Jesus Christ. This realization, coupled with the understanding that God works through agency (see Raymond James Essoe’s “Shaliah: An Introduction to the Law of Agency” at <http://www.christianmonotheism.com/media/text/Raymond%20Essoe%20--%20Shaliah.pdf>), will go a long way in helping a Oneness believer to see what the Bible really teaches about God and Christ.

As a former Oneness believer, I can appreciate the force of the shared titles argument. However, the argument falls flat when we see these same titles applied to other men. It should be fully expected that the Messiah, the special man that God would use to redeem His creation, the One who fully represents and speaks for God, who is His very Word and image, would bear all of these divine titles. Indeed He is our Redeemer, our Saviour, our God (in a Mosaic sense). He is our Shepherd, our Lord, and our King. He is all of these things because it has been given unto Him:

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power **is given unto me** in heaven and in earth.” – Matthew 28:18 (KJV)