

Why Modalism and Absolute Oneness Are Heresy

“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” (1 John 5:7)

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” (John 14:15–18)
“These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.” (John 14:25)

Modalism and Absolute Oneness both teach not only that there is one God, but also that God is one person. This is contrary to the plain teaching of the Scripture, which presents to us God as Trinity or one God who is three persons. Modalism teaches that God is one person who manifests Himself in different modes or under different titles; and Absolute Oneness is similar, declaring there is absolutely one person who holds all titles simultaneously while manifesting himself under those titles. Ultimately, there is very little difference between the two doctrines, so I will deal with them as one.

Here are some quotes from Modalist statements of faith:

- “There is only ONE GOD: the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and of all mankind. This One God, the I AM, is manifested (revealed) to mankind as FATHER (Creator), SON (Savior, 1 Jn.5:20), and HOLY GHOST (indwelling Spirit, Rom. 8:11). God is a Spirit (John 4:24), the Eternal One, the Creator of all things, and of all men. Thus making Him their Father (through creation, Malachi 2:10). The LORD is the FIRST and the LAST, and beside Him there is no God (Isa. 44:6).”¹
- “We believe in the One ever-living, eternal God; infinite in power, holy in nature, attributes and purpose, and possessing absolute, indivisible Deity. This one true God has revealed Himself as Father in creation, through the Son in redemption, and as the Holy Ghost by emanation (I Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6; II Corinthians 5:19; Joel 2:28) ... This one True God manifested Himself in the Old Testament in divers ways, in the Son while He walked among men; as the Holy Ghost after the ascension.”²
- There is one God, who has revealed Himself as Father; through His Son, in redemption; and as the Holy Spirit, by emanation. Jesus Christ is God manifested in flesh. He is both God and man. (See Deuteronomy 6:4; Ephesians 4:4-6; Colossians 2:9; I Timothy 3:16.)³

History shows Modalism was first taught in the second century AD by one Noetus, of whom Novation said, “Now, that *Noetus* affirms that the Son and Father are the same, no one is ignorant. But he makes his statement thus: ‘When indeed, then, the Father had not been born, He *yet* was justly styled Father; and when it pleased Him to undergo generation, having been begotten, He Himself became His own Son, not another’s.’”⁴ We read also of one Sabellius who taught a doctrine similar to that of Noetus: “But some treat the Holy Trinity in an awful manner, when they confidently assert that there are not three persons, and introduce (the idea of) a person devoid of subsistence. Wherefore we clear ourselves of Sabellius, who says that the Father and the Son are the same. For he holds that the Father is He who speaks, and that the Son is the Word that abides in the Father, and becomes manifest at the time of the

¹ <https://aljc.org/doctrinal-statement-copy/> (Accessed 02/24/2025)

² <https://aljc.org/articles-of-faith/> (Accessed 02/24/2025)

³ <https://upci.org/our-beliefs/> (Accessed 02/24/2025)

⁴ Hippolytus of Rome, [“The Refutation of All Heresies,”](#) in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. J. H. MacMahon, vol. 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 127–128.

creation, and thereafter reverts to God on the fulfilling of all things. The same affirmation he makes also of the Spirit. We forswear this, because we believe that three persons—namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are declared to possess the one Godhead: for the one divinity showing itself forth according to nature in the Trinity establishes the oneness of the nature; and thus there is a (divinity that is the) property of the Father, according to the word, ‘There is one God the Father;’ and there is a divinity hereditary in the Son, as it is written, ‘The Word was God;’ and there is a divinity present according to nature in the Spirit—to wit, what subsists as the Spirit of God—according to Paul’s statement, ‘Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.’⁵” Another said, “Sabellius...blasphemes in saying that the Son Himself is the Father, and *vice versa*.⁶” We also read, “For Sabellius, the God of Hellenistic philosophy, the absolute and unlimited Being, is the same as the God of the Church. The three Persons which the historical experience of the Church affirmed are just three masks, three different modes of appearance and activity of the one God: specifically, God appears and acts in the Old Testament as Father, in the New Testament as Son, in the life of the Church as Holy Spirit.”⁷

This doctrine is called Modalism because it teaches the one God manifests Himself in different modes or masks. Another way it is presently described is, one God but three different titles.

As one can see, this doctrine was immediately opposed as heresy, and it should be opposed as such today. We shall now see why we should oppose it.

Why Modalism and Absolute Oneness Are Heresy

- They misrepresent Biblical Trinitarian doctrine as teaching three gods as well as teaching three separate persons. (Note: the three Divine Persons are distinct but not separate.)
- Modalism presents God as one who changes. Instead of being the same yesterday, today, and forever (*Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8*).
- Both doctrines present to us a diminished and weak god whose power and glory are too small to be three persons, therefore he can only change from one to the other in appearance and title.
- Modalism presents to us a god that lies, because God said He does not change, while Modalists teach God does change from Father to Son to Spirit.
- Both doctrines deny the very Word of God that teaches God is three persons in one being. (*1 John 5:7; John 14:15-25; 2 Corinthians 13:14*)
- These erroneous doctrines teach Jesus was literally begotten in the flesh by the Father and the Holy Ghost, failing to understand Jesus’ conception was not a mere carnal conception but a special creative work of God, as Jesus is the second Adam (Compare *Genesis 2:7* and *Luke 1:35*).⁸
- Both present an illogical and irrational god.

⁵ Pseudo-Gregory Thaumaturgus, [“A Sectional Confession of Faith,”](#) in *Fathers of the Third Century: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and Minor Writers, Methodius, Arnobius*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, vol. 6, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 42.

⁶ Dionysius of Rome, [“Against the Sabellians,”](#) in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 7, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 365.

⁷ Christos Yannaras, [Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology](#), trans. Keith Schram (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 23.

⁸ “If God and the Holy Ghost are two separate persons, which was the Father of Christ? Matthew 1:20 says that the Holy Ghost was the Father, while Romans 15:6, II Corinthians 11:31, and Ephesians 1:3 say that God was the Father. There is no contradiction when we realize that God the Father and the Holy Ghost are one and the same Spirit. Matthew 10:20; Ephesians 4:4; I Corinthians 3:16.” From <https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/32960/what-churches-identify-themselves-as-being-modalist> (Accessed 02/24/2025)

- These two doctrines present a Father who is His own Son and Son who is His own Father as well as being the Spirit. This is both impossible and irrational. An impossible and irrational god does not exist, therefore the god of Modalism and Absolute Oneness does not exist, those who teach them preach a different Jesus than the Bible teaches.
- Both teach the Father sent Himself in the Son, who obeyed Himself as the Father, offered Himself as a sacrifice to Himself as the Father, was raised by Himself as both Father and Spirit, ascended to Himself and sits at His own right hand as the Son of His Father who is Himself, is mediator and intercessor between Himself and man, and prayed to Himself as the Father and sent Himself as the Spirit from Himself.
- Both present to us a mentally ill god who speaks to himself, pretends there is a god other than himself to whom he prays although he is himself, and declares there is a god other than himself who indwells his people although he is the same god. Again, such an irrational god is impossible and non-existent and is thus different from the God of Scripture and the Jesus of the gospel.
- Both doctrines teach a god who is not three persons yet manifests himself as three personalities as one lights on another and one speaks of another, saying, “Can Trinitarians show that three divine persons were present when Jesus was baptized by John? Absolutely not. The one, omnipresent *God used three simultaneous manifestations. Only one divine person was present-- Jesus Christ the Lord.*”⁹ This is irrational and a plain distortion of the Scriptures.
- *Luke 4:1* says Jesus was filled with the Holy Ghost. If Modalism were true Jesus would have been filled with Himself, which is neither logical nor complimentary.
- Both teachings distort the gospel by confusing the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - The Father sent the Son into the world to die for our sins and rise again. *John 3:16-17; 6:33-41*
 - The Son ascended to Heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father as our mediator and to intercede with the Father for us. *Mark 16:19; Acts 2:34; 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 10:12.*
 - The Son prayed to the Father and the Father sent the Spirit in the Son’s name.
 - The sending of the Holy Spirit *Luke 11:13; John 14:15-25; Acts 2:33*
 - The Spirit sent into the hearts of believers *Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 5:5; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:12-14; 1 John 3:24; 4:13*
 - By the Spirit we approach the Father through the Son. *John 3:5, 16; Ephesians 2:18; Romans 8:26-27 and Jude 1:20 cf Hebrews 10:19-22*

Such muddled doctrine easily leads to confusion concerning the gospel of Christ. In fact, this doctrine is a distortion and misrepresentation of the gospel because of its misrepresentation of God. Who did what? To whom should we pray? Who died for whom and who sent whom? And who is at work in the world and in God’s children? These have no clear and plain answer in either theology, whereas Trinitarian theology answers them precisely.

- Finally, Modalism and Absolute Oneness are heresy because it blasphemes God through misrepresenting Him as He reveals Himself to us in Scripture and diminishing His glory and greatness as a result.

Modalism and Absolute Oneness Are Damnable Heresies

A damnable heresy is one that deserves condemnation and makes those holding it liable to condemnation. This is not a claim to make lightly or take lightly; and I do not make this claim carelessly.

Scripture says, “*I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he*

⁹ <https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/32960/what-churches-identify-themselves-as-being-modalist>
(Accessed 02/24/2025)

that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” (1 John 2:21–23) Modalism and Absolute Oneness deny Jesus the Christ by declaring Him to be the Father and the Spirit, denying His eternal Sonship as the only begotten of the Father. In so doing, according to the text above, this is also a denial and rejection of the Father. This is damnable because it leaves those who hold this doctrine in a very precarious spiritual position.

I will not claim that every person who holds to Absolute Oneness or Modalism is lost, but will state the following:

1. If they are truly saved God will chasten them and bring them to repentance and the truth. *Hebrews 12:4–11.*
2. If they are saved and refuse to repent when chastened God will take them out of this life for this sinfulness. *1 Corinthians 11:30–32 cf 1 John 5:16*
3. Those who hold this doctrine and never repent and never experience chastening never knew God at all. *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” (1 John 2:19–23)*

I realize these are very serious claims, and state again that I do not make them carelessly but with a heavy heart. We have been very plainly warned against heretics who deny the Lord. God’s Word says, *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” (2 Peter 2:1–2)* Not only are their doctrines and ways damnable and destructive, but we are commanded to separate from them. *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.” (2 John 9–10)* This is not to say we are to mistreat them and abuse them. We certainly are not to be bitter toward them. We should love them enough to warn them. We should pity them and pray for their repentance. The last thing we should wish upon anyone is for them to experience the pains of chastisement or death; and we certainly should never desire for someone to die without believing the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

To sum this up, Modalism and Absolute Oneness are heresies because both deny the Father and the Son, misrepresent God, distort the gospel, and condemn souls. Let us pray for those who hold these doctrines!