



GLOBAL IMPACT MINISTRIES

A Defense of the Apostolic
Christian Faith

Did Sabellius Teach Patripassian Sequential Modalism? Response to Dr. Morrison Part 6



Sabellius ministered in Rome and in North Africa

At 14:30 in Part 2 of his lecture on church history (https://youtu.be/3zwmTjNBS_o), Mr. Morrison alleged that the Sabellians held a “sequential Modalistic” doctrine in which the Father as the Father became the Son and became the Spirit during the time of Tertullian and Hippolytus. We must keep in mind that Mr. Morrison based his conclusions upon two of Sabellius' detractors, namely, Tertullian and Hippolytus, who falsely claimed that the Modalists were teaching sequential “Patripassianism” (*Patripassianism: The Father as the Father became the Son to suffer and die as the Father*). Since the subsequent Roman Catholic Church destroyed all of Sabellius' writings, there is no way to prove that Sabellius ever taught patripassianism and sequential Modalism other than the Father becoming incarnate as a true man (a true human son).

The early Modalists likely taught that God as the Father did not suffer and die as the Son, but rather, God the Father entered into a new mode of existence as a true man (a true human son) through the virgin who could suffer and die for our sins in the Father's new mode of existence as a true human son who was made 100% man.

Church historian B. B. Edwards wrote, “... that which makes out the Sabellians to be the same as Patripassians (meaning that the Father suffered and died as the Father), and represents them as denying the distinctions in the Godhead; is altogether a mistaken view of the subject.” (THE BIBLICAL REPOSITORY AND QUARTERLY OBSERVER. By B. B. EDWARDS. Under Views of Sabellius, The Biblical Repository and Classical Review, American Biblical Repository, 1835)

Under “Sabellianism”, the Catholic *Encyclopedia* states, “It is true that it is easy to suppose Tertullian and Hippolytus to have misrepresented the opinions of their opponents (the Sabellians).”

While Tertullian mocked the Modalists for allegedly denying any distinctions between the Father and Son, there is some historical evidence to prove that they never denied these distinctions. David Bernard wrote, “Noetus said that Jesus was the **Son by reason of his birth**, but he was also the Father (Footnote 25 - Wolfson I, 591).” The Modalistic Roman bishop Zephyrinus had said, “I know only One God, Christ Jesus, and apart from him no other who was born or could suffer ... **it was not the Father who died but the Son** (Heresy and Orthodoxy Vol. IV, of *A History of the Early Church*, Pg. 155, by Jules Lebreton and Jacques Zeiller).”

The early Modalistic Monarchians taught that God the Father as God the Father could not suffer and die, but the Father's new manifestation as God with us as a true human Son “by reason of his birth” could suffer and die. Here we have the evidence to see that Oneness Theology was misrepresented by our opponents back in the third century just as it is being misrepresented today in order to make our position look bad through false statements about our alleged denial of any distinctions. Knowledgeable Oneness theologians believe that there is a definite distinction between God as the Father and God with us as a man as the Son.

While we believe that the Father became the human Son in the incarnation through the virgin as a true man, we do not believe that the Father ever became the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God the Father has always been the Spirit of God the Father throughout eternity past. Sabellius did not launch his successful ministry into North Africa until after 210-220 AD so the Modalistic doctrine did not originate with Sabellius. Tertullian's work “Against Praxeus” chapter 3 proves that the Modalists were the Christian majority both during and before the time of Tertullian (160-225). Tertullian wrote, “... they that always make up the majority of believers reject ... the Trinity”. The context proves that he was addressing the Modalists who believed like Praxeus. This statement alone proves that the Christian majority was not only Modalistic during the time of Tertullian (160-225) but as far back as Tertullian knew, the Modalists were “ALWAYS” the “Majority of the believers”.

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