**God Is Three-In-One (SR: Ex. 20:1-6)**

Without a doubt, one of the most puzzling truths about the Creator of the universe is that He is one, while simultaneously being three. It is a subject with which everyday believers, renowned theologians, and everyone else in-between struggle. How can someone or something be one AND also three? That is a mathematical and factual impossibility, right? We hope today to spend some time thinking about this facet of God’s identity to the end that we may be in a better position to explain this truth for our own personal edification and for the defense of this doctrinal truth regarding the God Whom we serve.

**I. God Is Complex**

A. Christianity is rooted in the belief that God is unobjectifiable. He is beyond the scope of equivalent comparison since all that He has created is less than Himself. An infinite God cannot be fully represented in a finite illustration.

B. As such, God is incomprehensible and that, as well as other divine characteristics, makes Him worthy of worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23f).

C. This divine complexity should cause us to be overwhelmed and awestruck. Even so, the partial revelation of this mystery should teach us:

1. Great truths about what God is like and Who He is

2. Great truths about relationship and community

3. Great truths about our own identity and how God interacts with us

**II. The Bible Says That God Is One**

A. In the age of the Patriarchs, God is universally identified as singular and one (e.g. Gen. 1; 4:26; 14:18-22; 39:9; Ex. 3:6; Matt. 22:32).

B. Under the Law of Moses, God is one (e.g. Ex. 20:1-6; Deut. 4:35; 6:4)

C. In the age of Christ, God is one (e.g. 1Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:4-6; 1Tim. 2:5)

**III. The Bible Also Says That God Is Three Persons**

A. The Bible often states the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in too many passages to be listed. The three are often present together and/or linked together in equivalence. A handful of examples might include:

1. Creation (Gen. 1:1f, 26f; Col. 1:15-19)

2. Baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:22)

3. Promise to the Apostles (John 14:26; 15:26)

4. Great Commission (Matt. 28:19)

5. The 1st Gospel Sermon (Acts 2:33)

6. God’s interaction with the Christian (Rom. 8:9; 1Cor. 6:11; 2Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2:18, 22; 1Pet. 1:2)

B. Each can be discussed with a degree of independence. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father (e.g. Matt. 26:39, 42; Lk. 23:46; Jn. 14:16).

C. There is a hierarchy that exists, even in the Godhead. Such is not exercised by domineering or conflict, but rather by willing and joyful choice (cf. Mt. 26:39, 42; Jn. 14:28; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 5:8). Even w/ hierarchy, God is one (e.g. Jn 10:30).

**IV. People Have Understandably Struggled with This Concept**

A. Non-Believers Have Struggled with It

1. Non-believers all over the religious or non-religious spectrum have claimed that Christianity is inconsistent since its holy book claims there is “one” God but also, as they say, “three gods”. 1+1+1=3 is the story from such.

2. Some add a perverted understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into a religious pantheon. Others have dismissed the roles and functions of the Holy Spirit & Jesus (e.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, Mormons, etc.).

B. Believers Have Struggled with It

1. Some believers admit that the Godhead is a struggle for them to comprehend. In fact, this lesson was requested because of that!

2. Some believers think they have complete mastery over God’s identity – a foolish and arrogant claim.

3. Though believers may have some understanding of what is meant, the proper place for a Christian is humble acceptance of this reality in faith with the effort to NOT fully but MORE fully, understand this aspect of God.

4. Please note that this proper position gives room for growth and study. Ignoring this truth about God or developing a nonchalance or dismissive attitude and mindset about God as three-in-one is irreverent and foolish. Such an attitude is reflected in Immanuel Kant’s statement: *“Taken literally, absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of the doctrine of the Trinity”* (*The Conflict of the Faculties*, 1798). Just because Immanuel can’t see the importance, that does not automatically make it so. Rather, the importance of studying this subject is seen for many reasons including the undeniable fact that many have left the faith when their questions here went unanswered or casually dismissed.

C. The struggle has resulted in many attempts to describe this facet of God’s identity. Historically, this has led to a plethora of insufficient or even heretical beliefs such as tritheism, partialism, and modalism. These systematic treatments have major failures, as do many of the traditional illustrations used (e.g. the egg, the apple, the states of matter, etc.). So, what can we do?

**V. How We Can Attempt to Make This More Clear**

A. Understand the Biblical Languages Better

1. “Elohim” (e.g. Gen. 1:26f) – though plural in form, when used with the article, in reference to THE supreme and unique God (*Strong’s*)

2. “Godhead/Divine Nature” (e.g. Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; 2Pet. 1:4) – Greek: *theios* or *theiotes*; divine, godlike; power and providence which proceed from oneself (*Vine’s, Strong’s*)

3. “One” (e.g. Deut. 6:4f)

1. Deut. 6:4 – *‘echad* – one, united, alike, together (*Strong’s*); compare the identification of man and woman as one in the marriage relationship as an imperfect parallel (Gen. 2:24).

2. Eph. 4:6 – *heis –* one in contrast to many, union, concord, a single in exclusion to others, one and the same, united in one (*Vine’s*)

B. Keep certain passages that deal in some detail with the Godhead within the realm of our regular, more intensive study (e.g. John 14-16; really all of John’s Gospel!).

C. Understand Ourselves Better

1. Since we are *“created in the image of God”* (Gen. 1:26f) & *“become partakers of the divine nature”* (2Pet. 1:4), it stands to reason that our identity might, in some way, testify to this aspect of God.

2. Perhaps a comparison to the three-part identity of man (1Thess. 5:23) would be analogous, though obviously imperfect in correspondence.

D. Studying Historical Descriptions

1. Though these statements often come in the form of human creeds, they in- and-of-themselves may be accurate, or at the very least insightful and helpful, statements of truth. They should not be accepted on par with Scripture and should only be referenced as imperfect attempts to unpack this doctrine. Use them with discretion.

2. Several credal examples for insight would include:

a. The 1st seven “Ecumenical Councils” all discussed the identity of God in three persons and developed statements regarding this biblical doctrine. These councils included: First Council of Nicaea (325), First Council of Constantinople (381), Council of Ephesus (431), Council of Chalcedon (451), Second Council of Constantinople (553), Third Council of Constantinople (680-681), and Second Council of Nicaea (787)

b. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646-1647) – Reformation creed

c. Geerhard Vos’ “Doctrine of the Trinity in Five Theses” (1862-1949; Reformed Calvinist most known for his work with Princeton)

3. Some developments and discussions have even led to the creation and formulation of religious terms that can be helpful (e.g. Trinity).

E. Use (Understandably Imperfect) Illustrations/Visualizations

1. The Math Illustration

a. So often, the attack on faith is made from the standpoint of 1+1+1=3.

b. We can use a little math of our own and flip the script—1x1x1=1; 13=1.

2. The Dance Illustration

a. Early believers described the Godhead w/ Greek term “*perichoresis*” which is where we get our term “choreography.”

b. The idea was that each member moved in perfect concert with the other in the most beautiful & precise coordination of movement, continuity, and community possible. The Godhead locks eyes and moves together in step in such a precise way, that God is one.

3. Charts/Diagrams – see PowerPoint

If God’s ways & thoughts are higher than ours (Is. 55:8f), then certainly His divine nature is also higher than our comprehension. Even so, the Scriptures have encouraged study of God so that we may be more thoroughly acquainted with His ways. Rather than dismiss the question of how God is three-in-one, we should continually study the matter, acknowledging our imperfect thinking abilities, & also challenging ourselves to further develop each & every day.

I don’t pretend to stand before you w/ thorough & perfect knowledge of God’s essence. If I did, I’d be a liar. But I do know this, God found a way to inhabit human form and deliver us from the penalty of our sins. And for that, we should all be eternally and unswervingly thankful and respectful. God will deliver you from your sins by His grace through your faith if you will open your heart to His instruction & guidance. Decide today what your eternity will look like.