Who is God?
Today's Question: Who Is God?

Last Week: God Is _______ and God Is _________
This Week: God Is _______

1. The Son _______________

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented." Matthew 3:13-15

Compare Leviticus 1:8-9; 14:8; 16:4.

2. The Spirit _______________

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him." Matthew 3:16

Compare Isaiah 11:1-2; 42:1.

3. The Father _______________

"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" Matthew 3:17


Next Steps:
• Complete Session 3, Who Is God (Part 2) in our Essential Truths Series
• Take the ‘Who Is God?’ Quiz (online or included in today’s study guide).
• Connect with someone in our 10-week journey through these Truths.

Check out bethanychurch.com for more details.
Who is God?

God is beyond us.

God is with us.

God is Trinity.

What comes to mind when we hear the word, “Trinity”? Perhaps the term is just a bit confusing. We know it speaks about God. We know it has something to do with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But what does all this mean? How can there be one God and three divine persons? So, let’s break it down. The notion of Trinity captures two fundamental ideas about God: One God and Three Persons.

1. Trinity Means One God

Old Testament

The first people of God lived in a world that believed in many gods. Each people group, each nation had several patron gods and goddesses who saw to their protection and prosperity. In this sort of polytheistic context, God’s people stood out in dramatic contrast. The law of Moses makes this categorical statement:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah affirmed this same fundamental belief:

“This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.” (Isaiah 44:6)

While other peoples prayed to gods of their own definition, Israel’s God insisted that there were in fact no other gods. These so-called, “gods” were mere figments of errant minds. The prophet, Jeremiah, describes them in colorful language:

“Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.” (Jeremiah 10:5)
New Testament

In the New Testament, we find this same insistence upon one and only one God. In fact, when someone asks Jesus what commandment is the most important, He points to this focus on one God:

“‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”’ (Mark 12:29)

The apostle Paul repeats the Old Testament teaching that other gods are figments of sinful human imaginations:

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.” (Romans 1:20-23)

Whether, then, we are talking about the Old Testament or the New Testament people of God, the truth about God is the same. There is one and only one God.

Other Views of God

In our day, we also encounter many different definitions of God. As in ancient days, our culture will not agree with us if we dare to maintain that there is no God except the God of the Bible. Unlike these ancient days, however, we live in a different sort of kingdom, governed by a different set of rules. Ancient Israel was divinely authorized to exert its military force over other nations, to demonstrate to the world which god is truly God. But Jesus changed all of this. He chose not to take a physical throne and force Judah’s enemies into submission. Rather, He chose to die, so that death itself could be destroyed, and He rose again so that new life could be given to all the people of all the nations.

• The Teaching of Jesus

In this new kingdom of God, then, our weapons are focused on the gospel message, rather than weapons that kill the body. As Jesus Himself says:

“‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’” (John 18:36)

When Jesus sends His disciples out on their mission, He sends them out with a message rather than a sword:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20)
• The Teaching of Paul

The apostle Paul repeats this focus on victory through proclamation rather than blood-shed:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” (Ephesians 6:12-18)

These weapons are all spiritual in nature: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer. As we live out our faith, God works through these spiritual weapons to draw all people to Himself, to conquer hearts and minds, to heal a broken world.

2. Trinity Means Three Persons

On one hand, therefore, the notion of “Trinity” speaks of one and only one God. At the same time, however, Trinity speaks of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This understanding of one God in three persons develops over time in the story of the Bible and even reaches into the early history of the church.

1 Comparing Genesis and John

Perhaps the easiest way to see how this story unfolds in the Bible is to compare the first few verses of Genesis, in the Old Testament, with the first few verses of the gospel of John, in the New Testament. The opening sentence in Genesis says:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” (Genesis 1:1-3)

Notice the three different aspects of God described in the these verses. We see the name, “God”, a reference to the “Spirit of God”, and the spoken word of God.

After Jesus appears on earth, John retells this story of creation in a slightly different way. Here are the opening words of his gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” (John 1:1-4)

John has made explicit something that was implied in Genesis. The words God spoke were a way of talking about Jesus as the Word of God before He appears on earth. The light that God creates in Genesis is now Jesus, who is the spiritual light that brings life.

The Baptism of Jesus

If we were to walk through other passages in the Bible, we would see this same pattern continuing to emerge. What is implied about the Father, Son and Spirit in the Old Testament is made clear and explicit in the New Testament. Note, for example, how all three persons of the Trinity appear at the Baptism of Jesus:
“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17)

The Father declares Jesus to be the Son and the Spirit descends in the form of a dove. All of this fulfills an Old Testament hope, that God would someday raise up a Son to inherit His kingdom:

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD.” (Isaiah 11:1-2)

Jesse was the father of King David, who was a type or an image of the righteous Son of God who would one day come to rule the nations. The story of Jesus’ baptism tells us that He is this promised Son of the Father, who is filled with the Spirit of the LORD.

The Term, “Person”

So then the basic truths about the Trinity, one God in three persons, are clearly taught in the story of the Bible. The term, “Trinity”, itself, however, does not appear in the scriptures. It arises in the centuries that follow Christ’s resurrection as the early church tries to explain in contemporary terms how the Father, Son and Spirit can be one God. Various schools of thought debated ideas and language about this fundamental Biblical mystery. Over time, scholars used the Latin term, “trinitas” to describe this teaching, and they used the term, “persona” to refer individually to the Father, Son and Spirit. In English, we simply borrow these Latin terms and refer to “Trinity” as One God in Three “Persons”.

Basic Assumptions

By using these standard, historical terms we affirm the following biblical ideas:

1. The three persons of Father, Son and Spirit are one God. They are not three distinct gods.

2. The three persons of Father, Son and Spirit are not identical with one another. The Father is not the Son, The Father is not the Spirit, The Son is not the Spirit. In other words, the Father, Son and Spirit are not just different forms or names of the one God.

3. The three persons of Father, Son and Spirit are each fully and equally God. While the Bible sometimes speaks of the Son serving the Father, and Spirit serving both the Father and the Son, this does not suggest that one Divine Person is somehow "less than" the other Divine Persons. Rather these passages simply demonstrate that, in the Trinity, one Divine Person can serve another Divine Person without diminishing His own Divine nature in any way. This is a mutual submission of love to fulfil the Trinity's one, unified will for His creation.

Conclusion

These statements about God, of course, take us into some pretty deep waters. Christians continue to discuss and debate precisely how to describe this divine mystery correctly. We acknowledge up front that our simple human minds and language are not up to the challenge of so deep a truth. Yet, this language will help us to remain as consistent as possible with scriptures. In Trinity, we speak of one God in three persons.

In our last session, we learned that God is both beyond us and with us, and now we see that God is Trinity. Taken together, this gives a good picture of how the Bible describes this first Essential Truth. If someone asks us, “Who is God?”, we can answer, “God is beyond us. God is with us. God is Trinity.” Until next time, then, may God reward you and bless you as you continue your spiritual journey.
Discussion Questions

Opening

Our society today has a fascination with the great empires of the past and the gods they served. This fascination has made its way to the big screen, with countless movies including these ancient gods. To test your ancient god knowledge, list out the names of as many of those gods you have heard of before (Example – Greek god Zeus).

Going Deeper

1. One God

✓ As you live in a pluralistic society, what is your initial reaction to the idea that there is only one God?
✓ Israel worshipped the one true God. In what ways would this truth have caused them to stand in opposition to their neighboring nations?
✓ Paul tells us in Romans 1:20-23, that the creation of other gods was the result of sinful human imaginations. Why do you believe people from all cultures and nations create other gods to worship?
✓ Jesus, God in the flesh, came to earth and died on the cross and rose from the grave so that new life could be given to all the people of all the nations. How does this action of God stand in contrast to the actions of the many other “gods” of this world?
✓ Truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God and prayer–these are the spiritual weapons of the kingdom of God. How can God use these weapons to change the lives of men and women today

2. Three Persons

✓ Read Genesis 1:1-3 and John 1:1-4. Notice the parallels in the passage and identify the three active participants in the creation of the world (see also Matthew 3:16-17).
✓ Why do you think the Lord inspired the Gospel writers to record the baptism of Jesus and make clear and explicit the Trinity at the Baptism of Jesus?
✓ Why is it important for us to study and learn how the early Christians in the centuries that followed Christ’s resurrection came to understand the Trinity? What kind of credibility does it bring to a particular Biblical belief/doctrine if the Church for many centuries has held it as credible?
✓ Why is it important that our definition of the Trinity, one God in three persons, remain as consistent as possible to the clear teaching of the Scriptures?

Next Steps

After these first two sessions, has your view of God changed? Has it become clearer? Do you have any further questions or would like any further clarity about God? If so, list these questions, and reach out to a reliable source to explore possible answers. Don't hesitate to reach out to any of the pastors.
Who Is God? Review Quiz

After you complete Session 2, Who Is God? Part 1, and Session 3, Who Is God? Part 2, you can take this Quiz to review what you have learned. You can take the quiz as many times as you desire. This is one of the Quizzes required in order to earn a Bethany Essentials Certificate.

1. When we say that God is “transcendent”, we mean that:
   - “God” is a spiritual term describing nature.
   - God’s nature and our human nature are essentially the same.
   - God is beyond us.
   - God is more a force than a person.

2. The main point of the Creation Story in Genesis is:
   - To give us a detailed, biological account of God’s Creation.
   - To show that God wants us here and that He has a place for us in His created order.
   - To show that humanity is a biological accident.
   - To give us a fictional, mythological account of the origins of the universe.

3. When we say that God is “sovereign”, we mean that:
   - Everything must bow in submission to God.
   - Everything will be judged by the standard of God’s holiness.
   - Everyone owes their existence to God.
   - All of the above.

4. When we say that God is “omnipotent”, we mean that:
   - God is all-powerful.
   - God sees all.
   - God knows all.
   - God is everywhere.

5. When we say that God is “omniscient”, we mean that:
   - God is all-powerful.
   - God sees all.
   - God knows all.
   - God is everywhere.

6. When we say that God is “holy”, we mean that:
   - God is a Spirit.
   - God is unknowable.
   - God is present everywhere.
   - God is without imperfection, evil or defect.

7. When we say that God is “immanent”, we mean that:
   - God is unknowable.
   - God has no equal.
   - God is with us.
   - None of the above.

8. The fact that God reveals Himself as the great “I AM”, means that:
   - God is personal.
   - God is impersonal.
   - God is unknowable.
   - God can be known by reason alone.

9. Because God is love, we know that:
   - God is committed to us and to His entire creation.
   - God is constantly working to restore His creation from the power of evil.
   - Jesus comes into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it.
   - All of the above.

10. When we refer to God as “Trinity”, we mean that:
    - God is three distinct divine beings.
    - There is only one God who appears in three different forms.
    - There is one God in three persons.
    - There is one God with three different names.