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We are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it.”



“Ignorance of God . . . lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today.”

Many Christians have read these and other such stirring statements in the book *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer. It is with similar thoughts that we publish a study on the Person of God. As Jeremiah so beautifully wrote, “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, *that he understandeth and knoweth me*, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jer. 9:23, 24). These verses express the desire of our hearts—that through this study we might understand and know God better. We’ve chosen them as the theme verses for the series and encourage you and your students to commit them to memory.

Our Glorious God: His Attributes

After completing lessons 1–5, let the rest of the church—particularly the children—share in what you have learned in class. Create a statement of faith that you will read publicly to the children. Pass on your Biblical beliefs as you answer the question, What would you want the next generation to know about God?

One such statement could read as follows:

“We, your parents, want you to learn the following truths about God as you grow up.

“God is made up of three Persons—the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Even though these three Persons have different names, they are all God and can’t be divided from each other.

“The Bible tells us that God knows everything.

“He can be everywhere at the same time. . . .”

And so on.

The statement of faith could also include a simple explanation of how each truth is important; e.g., “God is love. He showed us His love by sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.” Not only does this emphasize the importance of parents’ being in Sunday School, but it forces adults to make practical and simple, truths that are abstract and complex.

Our Glorious God: His Works

When you study God’s works, think about how you and your students will share with your unsaved neighbors the truth that our Creator is also our Redeemer. (See activity described on pages 64 and 65.)

Our Glorious God: His Plan

This stirring look into the future will challenge you and your students as you learn that how you live for God now affects your future reward and reign with Christ. God’s plan for mankind encompasses more than everyday issues. It is a plan that, if followed, will result in eternal glory, both for man and for our glorious God.

Dear Teacher,

To use this manual most effectively . . .

✓ Read several times the Scripture portions covered in the lesson. Answer the questions listed under Personal Study as you observe and interpret the passages on your own; then use the material in the body and Notes columns as a commentary. Also skim through the student lesson for additional material.

✓ Have a Bible dictionary and other reliable commentaries on hand for reference. The material we provide is not—and cannot be—exhaustive.

✓ Consider the needs of your students and emphasize those points most applicable to them.

✓ Insert personal stories and comments. Let the students see you. They need to experience the Word of God with a loving fellow believer.

✓ Pray that God will use you and your presentation of His life-changing Word to help your students know God better and grow in godliness.

Credits:

Quotations on pages 4 and 75 reprinted from *Confronting the Cults* by Gordon R. Lewis. Published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966, Phillipsburg, NJ. Used by permission.

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The Great Three-in-One

Summary: *God exists eternally in three Persons of one nature.*

Theme: *Only a triune Godhead could provide salvation for mankind.*

Personal Study

Answer the following questions as you study this week:

- List key Biblical passages that indicate a triune Godhead.
- Why is the doctrine of the Trinity important?
- How do we know the Holy Spirit is a Person and not just a supernatural force?
- In what ways did Jesus describe His relationship with the Heavenly Father? List key phrases from John 5, 10, and 14.

Mon John 5:1–40
Tue John 10:14–39
Wed John 14:1–14
Thu 1 Cor. 12:1–11
Fri Col. 1:12–20
Sat Matt. 3:13–17

Student Needs

Young adults can become too busy trying to get ahead in life to appreciate the need for Bible doctrine. But a correct understanding of Who God is and what He is like provides a consistent basis for godly living. **Middle and older adults** can become complacent about acting on what they know. Challenge them to share their knowledge of the truth with others.

Lesson Aims

As a result of this class session the student will

- understand the importance of accepting the Biblical truth of the Trinity;
- appreciate the importance of the truth of the Trinity in the outworking of the plan of salvation and sanctification;
- be able to use Scripture to defend before others the doctrine of the Trinity.

Focus on the Word

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19).

Materials Needed

- RBP transparency 1
- hymnals
- lesson 1 skit from resource CD
- paper for students to use in taking notes during class

No single passage in the Bible fully explains the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Matthew 28:19 mentions all three Persons of the Godhead as having authority (“name”).

Notes

"Jehovah God and Christ Jesus are two distinct persons and are not combined with a so-called Holy Ghost in one godhead called a trinity." (Jehovah's Witnesses)

"Three personages composing the great presiding council of the universe . . . these three are held to be separate individuals, physically distinct from each other." (Latter-day Saints or Mormons)

"The theory of three persons in one God suggests polytheism rather than the one, ever-present I am. . . . Life, Truth, and Love constitute the triune Persons called God—that is, the triply divine Principle, Love." (Christian Science)

These statements of belief are taken from Confronting the Cults by Gordon R. Lewis (pp. 24, 61, 88).

Lesson Outline

- I. A Definition of the Trinity
- II. An Explanation of the Trinity
 - A. Three Persons, each worthy of worship
 - B. Three Persons, sharing one divine nature
- III. The Importance of the Trinity

Lesson Exposition

SKIT: Ask four students to prepare a brief skit, using the quotations in the Notes column. Three of the students will, one at a time, visit the home of the fourth student, trying to convince this new Christian that his belief in the the Trinity is unbiblical. The visiting students may read their statements word for word, as if quoting from their own religious literature, but they should not state what cults or religious groups they represent.

Ask the rest of the students if they can identify which cults were represented in the skit.

"What if you had been in this new believer's position? Would you have been able to defend your beliefs? More importantly, do you know *why* defending the truth of the Trinity would have been important? These will be some of the areas we will discuss today as we begin our study of the Person of God."

I. A Definition of the Trinity

Consider what some of the great hymns of the faith teach about the Person of God.

GROUP READING: Give each student a hymnal. Together read aloud a doxology (a popular one is "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"). Then ask the students to turn to the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy." Read the first stanza together. Draw the students' attention to these closing words: "God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!" (If your students enjoy singing, sing both of these songs.)

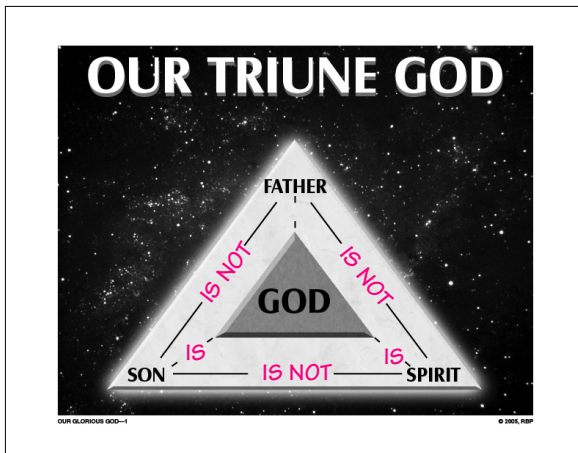
Long before these hymns were written, believers were stating their beliefs in creeds.

ASK: What is a creed? A creed is a set of fundamental beliefs, a confession of faith.

The Athanasian Creed, probably written between A.D. 450 and 550, has the most detailed statement on the Trinity of any creed. Part of that statement says, "We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, and the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty coeternal" (Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*).

No one can understand fully how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are related to each other. However, what we *do* know is that God the Father is not Jesus (Who is God the Son). And neither of these is God the Holy Spirit. There are three distinct Persons in the Godhead. This we can understand easily enough. What is not easy to understand is that these three Persons do not have natures that are similar to each other; rather, these three Persons fully share the *same* divine nature. The Athanasian Creed says that we worship one God “without either confusing the Persons or dividing the substance.” (In this case, the divine nature is referred to as “substance.”)

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 1, which illustrates both the unity and the diversity of the Godhead. Write “is” in the appropriate blanks to show the unity of each Person of the Trinity. Write “is not” in the appropriate blanks to show Their diversity.



II. An Explanation of the Trinity

LISTENING TEAMS: Ask the students to take notes as you present the following material. One-third of the students should listen for passages that would disprove the first cult’s denial of the Trinity (Jehovah’s Witnesses). One-third of the students should note those passages that describe the unity of the three Persons in the Trinity (Mormons). And one-third of the students should jot down references that describe the Trinity as Persons (Christian Science). (You may wish to hand out copies of the cults’ statements to remind the students of the specifics of the beliefs presented earlier.)

When you have finished briefly covering the following material, ask the students to meet in three groups to discuss and summarize how they would refute their cult’s belief about the Trinity.

A. Three Persons, each worthy of worship

1. God the Father

No one who claims to believe the Bible denies that there is a

Notes

One contemporary theologian defines the word “trinity” in the following manner: “It signifies that within the one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three ‘persons’ who are neither three gods on the one side, nor three parts or modes of God on the other, but co-equally and coeternally God” (Bromiley, “Trinity” in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology).

Although the references given in these outline points are all from the New Testament, the Trinity is alluded to in the Old Testament (Isa. 48:16; 61:1; 63:9, 10).

Notes

It is not until the New Testament that the concept of God the Father is fully revealed in relation to the plan of salvation, with the Son being the sacrifice and the Spirit making effective the purpose and work of redemption. However, when speaking of God in the Old Testament or in a general sense in the New Testament, it is generally understood as referring to God the Father, though it is impossible to separate Him from the others in the Trinity.

Worship was the response of the blind man whom Jesus healed (John 9:35–38). And in his vision, John saw both God the Father and Jesus, the Lamb of God, being worshiped by all creation (Rev. 5:13). In light of the Biblical command to worship only God, such worship of Jesus would be wrong if He, too, were not a member of the Godhead.

Scripture also tells us that the Holy Spirit hears and speaks (John 16:13), that the Holy Spirit can be lied to (Acts 5:3), and that He may be obeyed (Acts 13:1–4).

Person in the Godhead called God the Father. Nevertheless, we should mention some passages in God's Word where this truth is taught.

READ: Ask a student to read aloud John 6:27. Here Jesus described God as "God the Father."

One of the most famous verses in the Bible states: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). If the "God" Who so loved the world has a Son, then this "God" is properly called "God the Father."

Furthermore, Scripture makes it clear that this Person is worthy of worship. When the Devil promised all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus if only He would worship him, Jesus responded, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10).

2. God the Son

Not only do all people who claim to believe the Bible agree that there is a Person in the Godhead called God the Father, they also all agree that Jesus is properly called the Son of God. The problem arises when they try to define that title.

Have the students turn to John 5.

ASK: When Jesus claimed that God is His Father, how did the religious leaders of His day interpret this statement? He was claiming to be equal with God (v. 18).

ASK: Did Jesus agree with their interpretation? If so, how did He indicate this? (1) By stating that His claim did not originate with Him but with His Heavenly Father (v. 19); (2) by saying the Father supported His claim with miracles (vv. 20, 21); and (3) by claiming that the Father has entrusted the judging of humanity to Him so that all "should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (v. 23). The honor given to the Son is to be the same honor that is given to the Father, showing that the Son also is a proper object of worship.

3. God the Holy Spirit

Most teachers of religion recognize that the Holy Spirit is somehow related to the Godhead. What they do not agree upon is whether the Holy Spirit is a distinct Person in the Godhead (which we believe), or whether the Holy Spirit is merely the impersonal power of God.

BRAINSTORM: Ask the students to name as many passages as possible that would indicate the Holy Spirit is a Person (student Q4). According to 1 Corinthians 2:11, the Holy Spirit has intellect because He knows the thoughts of God the Father; He has decision-making ability according to 1 Corinthians 12:11 because He distributes spiritual gifts "as he will"; and the Holy Spirit possesses emotions because He can be grieved, according to Ephesians 4:30.

The Holy Spirit is also a proper object of worship. This can be

seen from Romans 12:1, which says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Since the Holy Spirit resides in the bodies of believers (John 14:16, 17), this act of yielding to the Resident so as to make Him President of our bodies is said to be our reasonable “service.” This word “service” carries the idea of worship. When a believer yields his body to the Spirit’s control, he is worshiping the Holy Spirit.

B. Three Persons, sharing one divine nature

Now that we have established that the Godhead consists of three separate Persons, we will see that each is fully and equally God.

1. John 10: Jesus is equal to the Father

STORY SUMMARY: Ask the students to skim over John 10. Then ask a student to summarize the setting of the statement of Jesus, “I and my Father are one,” found in verse 30.

Jesus asked those in the crowd why they intended to stone Him (John 10:31, 32). They replied, “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (v. 33).

The answer of Jesus can be paraphrased as follows: “Doesn’t your own Bible call mere men ‘gods’ with a small ‘g’? Since this is true because God’s Word is always true, why do you say that I am blaspheming when I, the One Whom the Father set apart and sent into the world, say that I am God’s Son?” (vv. 34–36). Jesus continued, “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him” (vv. 37, 38).

Four statements mean the same thing: (1) Jesus and the Father are one (v. 30); (2) Jesus makes Himself God (v. 33); (3) Jesus is the Son of God (v. 36); and (4) the Father is *in* Jesus, and Jesus is *in* the Father (v. 38). What do these four statements tell us? On the one hand, Jesus and the Father are one, and this oneness is not mere agreement; it is a oneness of nature. Because Jesus and the Father are one, Jesus is claiming to be God. On the other hand, Jesus is not God the Father. They are two distinct Persons. When Jesus says, “I and my Father are one” (v. 30), the verb “are” is plural (“We *are* one”). Jesus does not claim to be God the Father; rather the Father is *in* Him and He is *in* the Father (v. 38). This passage clearly teaches that while Jesus and God the Father are two distinct Persons, they share the same divine nature.

2. John 14: Jesus, the Spirit and the Father are equal

This same truth may be found in John 14:1–11. Jesus admonished His disciples to believe in Him just as they believed in God the Father. Jesus explained that He was leaving to prepare a place for them in His Father’s house, after which He would return to take them there. Thomas said he didn’t know the way, but Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Way. In fact, Jesus said, “If ye had known

Note that the answer of Jesus did not cause them to change their minds about stoning Him (v. 39).

Notes

me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (John 14:7). When Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus responded, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (v. 9).

ASK: Was Jesus claiming to be God the Father? Just as in John 10, the little word “in” distinguishes Jesus from God the Father but at the same time closely identifies them so that one who has seen Jesus may say that he has seen the Father (vv. 8–11).

Not only is Jesus in the Father and the Father in Him, but when Jesus left His disciples, another comforter (of the same kind as Jesus) came (vv. 16–18). This passage, then, says the Holy Spirit is a comforter of the same kind as Jesus (and we know from verses 8–11 that Jesus shares the divine nature along with God the Father). Therefore, it is correct to say that the Holy Spirit, as well as Jesus and God the Father, possess the divine nature.

GROUP SUMMARIES: Ask the students to meet with the others in their group and briefly summarize how they could refute the unbiblical doctrines the cults presented. Ask each group to share its summary with the rest of the class.

III. The Importance of the Trinity

DISCUSS: Why is believing in the Trinity important?

We must believe in the Trinity for at least three crucial reasons.

First, Jesus died on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. If He was merely an imperfect created being, His sacrifice could serve only as an example to us, for He would have paid for His own sins as well. Only if Jesus Christ is a member of the Godhead and, without ceasing to be divine, also human, could His death on the cross be a sacrifice for the sins of fallen humanity.

Second, according to God’s Word, salvation is applied to an individual when that one has faith in Christ (John 3:16), and, more specifically, when that one believes that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). As we have seen in this lesson, to believe that Jesus is the Son of God is to believe that He is a member of the Godhead. It is to confess Jesus as Lord (i.e., recognize His deity) as Romans 10:9–13 tells us. A person who believes that Jesus is a created being cannot be saved until he changes his mind and confesses who Jesus really is: the eternal Son of God!

Third, it is important to our spiritual growth to recognize that a divine Person indwells our bodies. We have not been left as orphans or comfortless. God’s Spirit permanently indwells us, and because He is a Person, He can be grieved when we disobey God’s Word. That is why we are warned against doing this (Eph. 4:30).

Our response to the Biblical teaching about the Trinity should be that of worship and praise. In the words of the hymn “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name”:

Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit,
Three we name Thee;
While in essence only One,
Undivided God we claim Thee,
And adoring bend the knee,
While we sing our praise to Thee.

Encourage the students to consciously worship all three Persons of the Trinity in the worship services at the church as well as during private times of worship. Each member of the Trinity plays an important part in every believer’s life.

CHILDREN’S PROJECT: If you will be producing a statement of faith to be presented at the end of lesson 5 to the children of the church, spend a couple of minutes as a class writing what you believe about the Trinity. (For further instructions, see page 1 in this manual.)

Answers to Questions in the Student Book

1. The Trinity is seen in Matthew 28:19, throughout the Gospel of John, in the greetings of the epistles and in Revelation 1. Nowhere is the doctrine of the Trinity stated forthrightly. In the Old Testament the Son had yet to come to earth and the Spirit’s work was limited to chosen believers. So, in the Old Testament we see primarily Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel. God progressively revealed Himself throughout history.
2. Personal answers.
3. The Holy Spirit in verse 4 is equated with the Lord in verse 5 and God in verse 6. The Spirit gives gifts to men—an act of intellect and will.
4. See discussion of this question on page 6 in this manual.
5. No. This makes Jesus and the Father the same Person, which Jesus denied in the Gospel of John.

Notes

FOR NEXT WEEK: Collect four photographs of members of your church. See page 11 for further directions regarding the activity.