

Student Lesson 1.3

Three-In-One?

One of the more common words utilized by the apostle Paul to describe both the character and activity of God made known in Jesus is *mystery*. In other words, talking about God is not something we accomplish once but an adventure Christians constantly pursue. Over the past two-thousand years, great thinkers and regular folks like you and I have wrestled with how to understand who God is and how God works. As mentioned in Lesson 1.1, even the Bible is flooded with various illustrations and metaphors that attempt to describe who God is. However, as Christians, the primary illustration we use to describe God is *Trinity*, i.e. God as being three parts (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Dr. Daniel Migliore, a Christian theologian and teacher, says this about the Trinity:

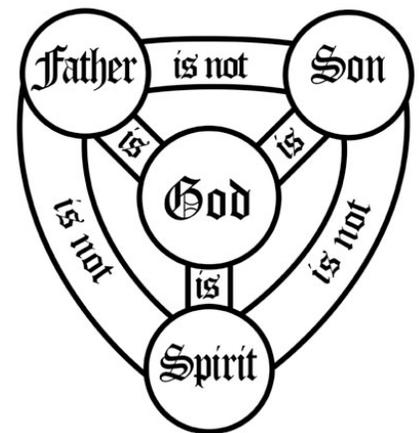
[The trinity] describes God in terms of shared life and love rather than in terms of domineering power. God loves in freedom, lives in communion, and wills creatures to live in a new community of mutual love and service. God is self-sharing, other-regarding, community-forming love (73).

(ask your small group leader to break this one down for you ☺)

In other words, when we understand God as three-in-one, we most fully understand who God is throughout the Bible, in the person and work of Jesus, the very real presence of the Holy Spirit, whom has called and sent the church, i.e. the community of faith, to be God’s people in and for the world.

Because God is pictured as a community, i.e. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it is only fitting that God is experienced not just individually but in community with others.

Yet, the word Trinity is *never* mentioned in the Bible. Trust us...we have looked ☺ Still, God as Trinity has been throughout history the best way, although mysterious, for Christians to confess both God’s unity and diversity. However, there are many places in the Bible that give us hints and guesses to God as Trinity.



Read Matthew 28: 16-20

(Responses to the questions in red should be completed on the response sheet and handed in at small group)

Q1: What does it mean to do something “in the name” of something or someone?

Q2: Why do you think Jesus told his disciples to baptize people “in the name” of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Q3: Where are some places that you hear the words in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Read 1 John 4:7-21

This scripture talks about the actions of God through the persons of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Q4: How is God illustrated in this passage?

Q5: Where do you see reference to the “trinity” in this passage?

Q6: In this passage, how is the community of faith called to embody the Trinity in their shared life together?

Another Christian theologian that has wrestled with theology or *God talk*, is Jürgen Moltmann. He says this about the Trinity, “*We don’t believe in the Trinity only. We live in the Trinity; we live in God...surrounded from all sides.*” As we continue to wrestle throughout the year with “God talk,” let us be reminded that we are not called to words, but also and especially to action. Better said, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:18). Only then can we even begin to comprehend the mystery of God as Trinity.

Q7: Application: Ask three people (friends, family, teachers, etc.) to give you their definition of Trinity. Write it down and bring it with you to small group time. Also consider looking up other passages in the Bible that may speak about God as three-in-one.

One of the ways we try to find a way to explain something that is hard to express in words is by using art. Go to your web browser and search for images of “Trinity.” Save and print one of the images you find. Now take a few moments to make your own design of “three-in-one.” Don’t worry about perfection, be creative. Bring it with you to small group time.



Fun Fact and Trivia – “Perichoresis”: The relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has historically been described with the Greek word *perichoresis*. “Peri” meaning around and “choresis” meaning to make room. Gregory of Nazianus used the word to describe the relationship within the Trinity and how the three persons interacted and created together.

Can you guess which English word we get from *perichoresis*? Watch this week’s CREDO video on the Imago Dei website if you need a hint!



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The Apostle's Creed was adopted by the early church in efforts to convey what they believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, and other elements of the faith. It is a *creed*, or confession of faith, which we still recite today. Throughout the year we will work on understanding this beautiful tradition within the community of Christian faith.

Read and continue to memorize the first and second portions of the Apostles Creeds which describes what the church believes about God and Jesus. **Notice how the creed is actually in three parts... ☺**
Why might that be?

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.