

How Can God Be Both Three And One?

Jer. 10:10 – “But the Lord is the true
God, he is the living God.”

We Must Understand The Essential Unity of God First of All

- Scripture teaching at Deuteronomy 6:4 and Isaiah 45:22, as well as throughout the Bible:
 - Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD:
 - Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.

We Must Understand The Essential Unity of God First of All

- Reason Dictates the Same Thing Scripture Teaches:
 - There can be but one first cause and ultimate end of all things.
 - There cannot be two or more beings that are infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.
- God's omnipotence teaches the same because he could not be almighty if he could be resisted.

We Must Understand The Essential Unity of God First of All

- The vast variety within the eternal decree does not argue for more gods than one because the decrees are only various with respect to the different objects and effects to which they extend, but not with respect to the divine will, which is but one.

Yet Some Are Called Gods Who Are Not Gods

- Angels are called gods because of the excellence of their nature, power, and wisdom.
 - Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all *ye* gods. (Psalm 97:7)
 - Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word (Psalm 103:20).

Yet Some Are Called Gods Who Are Not Gods

- Magistrates are called gods because they are God's deputies for government and justice among men.
 - Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people (Exodus 22:28).
 - For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil (Romans 13:4).

Yet Some Are Called Gods Who Are Not Gods

- The idols of pagan nations are also called gods in Scripture because ignorant persons have given them honor as such; but there is no reason to fear them.
 - And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land, whom God destroyed before them (1 Chronicles 5:25).
 - They *are* upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also *is it* in them to do good (Jeremiah 10:5).

Yet Some Are Called Gods Who Are Not Gods

- Satan is called the god of this world because he reigns and rules over the greater part of it and the world of men operates according to his design instead of God's design.
 - In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (2 Corinthians 4:4).
 - Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2).

Some Implications From The Unity of God

- Beware of having mistaken notions or ideas of God as though he were in a location rather than being everywhere at once.
- He is called the living God because he has life in himself (John 5:26); he is the author and giver of life (Acts 17:28); and likewise in opposition to dumb and dead idols (Psalm 115:4-7).

Some Implications From The Unity of God

- He is called the true God as opposed to all false and imaginary gods (Jer. 10:10-11).
- “True and living” are joined in our answer because they are joined inseparably in him (1 Thessalonians 1:9)
- Thus we must present our bodies a living sacrifice as befits a living God (Rom. 12:1)
- Thus we must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) because he desires truth in the inward parts (Psalm 51:6), and likewise we must beware of setting up an idol or regarding any iniquity in our hearts; otherwise he will not hear us (Psalm. 66:18).

Yet Are There Three Persons In the Godhead

- It is not enough for us to know what God is with respect to his eternal perfections; we must also know who he is with respect to his personality; as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
 - Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: *(but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also* (1 John 2:23).

Yet Are There Three Persons In the Godhead

- This is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, upon which eternal life may well depend:
 - And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent (John 17:3).
- Otherwise we would remain ignorant to some degree of the love of the Father, the merit of the Son, and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

Yet Are There Three Persons In the Godhead

- The meaning of the word (which does not actually appear anywhere in the Scripture itself) is a “tri-unity” or three-in-one; that is three distinct persons, in one and the same individual or particular essence (being).
 - For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one (1 John 5:7).

Yet Are There Three Persons In the Godhead

- The Holy Trinity is a revelation that in many ways transcends our thoughts and capacity to understand; thus God is unsearchable and his ways are past finding out.
 - That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ (Col. 2:2).
 - And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that *they are* double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee *less* than thine iniquity *deserveth*. Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? (Job 11:6-7).

Yet Are There Three Persons In the Godhead

- It is not unreasonable to require a belief of that which we cannot fully comprehend. On the contrary, it is quite reasonable that we should believe what God says about himself and expect that it would be more than a finite mind can fully grasp. The office of faith is to submit our reason to the revelation of Scripture.

What is a Godhead?

- By the term “godhead” is meant simply the divine essence or being (Rom. 1:20 cp. Gal. 4:8).
 - For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:
 - Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

What, Then, Is A Person?

- A person, as it relates to one of the members of the godhead, is a complete, intelligent, and individual subsistence, which is neither part of nor sustained by any other of the persons; but is distinguished by an incommunicable property in the same undivided essence.

Some Ancient Heresies Die Hard

- Sabellians (modern-day United Pentecostals) maintained that there is but one person in the godhead, who assumes different names or modes of subsistence.
- Tri-theists (who are really just pagans) maintained that the three persons are actually three distinct gods. Sabellians continue to call Trinitarians by the name of this false doctrine.

What Does Scripture Say?

- The institution of baptism:
 - Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19).
- The apostolic blessing:
 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen (2 Cor. 13:14).
- John's Salutation to the Churches:
 - John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Revelation 1:4-5).

What Does Scripture Say?

- At Christ's baptism the Father was manifested by a voice from heaven; the Son by his bodily presence on earth; the Holy Ghost by his lighting on Christ in the similitude of a dove (Matthew 3:16-17).

How Are The Persons Distinguished?

- By Their Personal Properties or Perfections, which are incommunicable to one another:
 - The personal property of the Father is to beget the Son from eternity (Psalm 2:7).
 - The personal property of the Son is to be begotten of the Father (John 1:14).
 - The personal property of the Holy Spirit is to proceed from the Father and the Son (John 15:26).

Does The Spirit Proceed From the Son As Well As The Father?

- Though it is not expressly confirmed in Scripture, yet we know it to be the case because:
 - He is called “the Spirit of the Son,” (Gal. 4:6).
 - He is called “the Spirit of Christ,” (Rom. 8:9).
 - He receives all things from Christ (John 16:14, 15).
 - He is “sent” by Christ, (John 15:16).
 - The Father sends Him “in Christ’s name,” (John 14:26).

How Are The Persons Distinguished?

- A “Personal Property” is peculiar to one of the persons only, while an “essential property” is common to all three.
- The personal properties are incommunicable because they are what distinguish the persons from one another such that it cannot be affirmed of either of the other persons.
- Thus it is not the divine essence that begets, is begotten, or proceeds, for each of these is a personal act or property

Each Person Is Properly Called God

- Each person is God, in the true and proper sense of the word; though none can be called God to the exclusion of the others.
- Thus, in John 17:3, Jesus did not say that the Father is the only true God to the exclusion of the Son or the Holy Ghost, but only in opposition to idols, or gods falsely so-called.

Each Person Is Properly Called God

- Similarly, when Christ stated “My Father is greater than I” in John 14:28, he did not speak of his nature or the nature of the godhead, but of his office as Mediator, in which respect he was Jehovah’s servant (Isaiah 42:1 ff.).

No Separation or Division

- The persons are not separated or divided, but only distinguished from one another by their personal properties. As the unity of the essence does not confound the persons, so the distinction of persons does not divide the unity of the essence of God (1 John 5:7).
- NB: Those who do not worship God as one essence and three persons are guilty of worshipping another god. Thus Jews and Muslims, though monotheistic, do not worship the true and living God.

Implications From This Doctrine

- “The gift of eternal life, in the promise and offer of the gospel, to the sinners of mankind, is attested by the three famous witnesses in heaven, who are above all exception (1 John 5:7, 11); and consequently, that a portion infinitely rich, is insured by the covenant of grace to all those who believe, when it makes over all the three persons to them to be their God, Jer. 31:33).” James Fisher, *Exposition of the Shorter Catechism*, p. 54.