

Explaining Complex Concepts Simply

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I. Philosophical Foundations

A. Rules of Thumb

1. **PRAY!!!!** Always pray before you teach – over the lesson, over the kids, and over your speech. Ask the Lord to give you the words to say, to be with you, and speak through you, and help you to answer the questions that the kids will ask you. 1 Peter 3:15 – “**Always be prepared.**”
2. Don’t ignore their questions. Acknowledge that you heard them, but then redirect them to the point of the story. Keep the main thing, the main thing.
“That’s a great question Bobby, but I’m afraid you are missing the point of the lesson, which is...”
3. Moral questions – don’t answer in front of the entire class. Different types of parents have varying levels of what they consider “appropriate” for their child’s age. Even if you think it’s something a child that age should know, it’s not up to you.
4. **FILTER!!!** Calvary Curriculum specifically filters out topics that aren’t age-appropriate. As kids get older, you can address various topics with them, but when they are little, there’s no need to explain every single word in the Bible. You are a water filter, not a fire hose. Just hit the main points! If you don’t use a curriculum that does this for you, you can do this on your own as well. You can write out the story for them in simpler language and make copies for them, along with a coloring sheet or activity.
 - Examples: a three-year-old does not need you to explain what adultery is. Also, the question, where did Cain get his wife? The answer is that we don’t actually know, all we know is that God provided her. That’s all you need to say. The Hebrew never actually says anything except *ish-shaw*’ which could be wife, woman, or female. We can make assumptions about her being a distant relation of course, but that’s not something to share with little ones.
5. Kids are smarter than we give them credit for. Just teach them the simplest, most correct way you can, and encourage them to keep learning until they can understand it. DO NOT feel bad or beat yourself up if you can’t explain a complex concept simply enough. As a human, you are not supposed to be able to understand everything fully. (1 Cor. 13:9-12)
6. Read *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis
 - “If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with Fact. Of course anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about.”
Mere Christianity, p. 145

B. Apprehension vs. Comprehension

There is a difference between apprehending and understanding. All kids need to be able to do for those really difficult complex topics is to apprehend them.

- **Apprehension:** acquisition or addition of knowledge (Gk. *nooumen*)
 - Accepting something as truth
- **Comprehension:** the act of understanding something; to fully grasp mentally (Gk. *gnosis*)

Explain to children that in faith, sometimes, God asks us to accept things about Him, even if we can't fully understand them. We may not fully understand how God created *the world out of nothing* or how He is three and one, but we can accept it by faith.

- *Hebrews 11:1-3* – “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”
- The word “understand” in the Greek here is *nooumen*, or apprehension. We could never fully understand how God created ex-nihilo, and we definitely didn't learn it through experience.
- Phillips Translation: “it is after all only by faith that our minds **accept as fact** that the whole scheme of time and space was created by God's command.”
- When we go through all of the evidence, you will realize what an embarrassment of riches we have as Christians compared to other religions. So, when you have a student who is doubting, share with them all of the wonderful things we do know and can show them about God. Or what we call "the tangible evidence." Most times, the mountain of evidence ends up outweighing the doubts.
- Basically, **we know enough to trust that which we don't know**. And if you don't know enough, get equipped!

II. Practical Answers

Q: Who made God?

A: No one did. He was not made. He has always existed. The laws of physics state that only things that have a beginning need a beginner (a maker). God had no beginning, so He did not need to be made. The Bible declares God to be eternal 73 times! We don't need to *understand* the eternity of God to accept that the Bible is telling us the truth about Him. (At this point, you can give the case for the trustworthiness of the Bible aka MAPS. If the Bible is true, then what it says is true.)

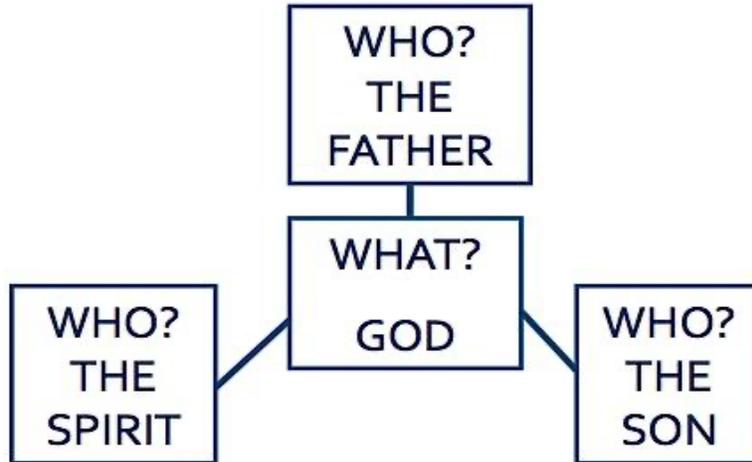
Q: How can God be both three and one?

A: Avoid analogies for the Trinity.

- *Egg, clover, apple*: If used consistently, all three analogies subscribe to what is referred to as
 - **Partialism** — the teaching that each person within the Trinity (i.e. the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) is merely a part of God, resulting in each person not being fully God in and of their self.
- The *water* analogy of the Trinity follows this line of reasoning: water can be a solid (ice/frozen water), liquid, and gas (water vapor), and yet all three forms are still water (H₂O), and likewise, God manifests Himself in 3 different ways in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This analogy falls into what is known as
 - **Modalism** — the teaching that God is one person that manifests Himself in different modes, as either the Father, the Son, or the Spirit (1 god, 1 person with 3 different manifestations instead of 1 God, 3 persons). This belief is also referred to as Unitarian as opposed to Trinitarian. As a result of such a belief, the Father is the Son and is the Holy Spirit.
- Lastly, the idea that God is *LOVE* (1 John 4:6). To have love, there must be a lover (God the Father), and beloved (God the Son), and a spirit of Love (The Holy Spirit). This is
 - **Pantheism** – reduces the holy spirit to a feeling, force, or emotion, but not an actual person.

God is three “whos” in one “what”, or three persons in one nature. We have three Whos –persons–

in one What – deity/nature. It WOULD be a contradiction to say he is three whos in one who, or three whats in one what. But he is three whos in one what. It’s a little Dr. Seussy, but the logic follows: because he is not three and one at the same time, in the same sense.



Nabeel explains the Trinity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fL2q_Mg-D58

Q: Why doesn’t God answer my prayers?

A: God always answers prayers, just not in the way we assume He will. God answers prayers in 4 ways:

1. Directly: Yes
2. Delayed: Wait
3. Differently: Or
- 4: Denial: No

Here’s where the hard part comes in, when a child follows up with “**why would God say no when I pray for bad things to stop happening?**” How do you answer that? With the following biblical truths...

The reason bad things happen is because there is sin in the world. Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. God could take away our ability to sin, but that would be taking away our freedom to choose how we act.

So, instead of taking away our ability to sin, He gave us the Holy Spirit to have power over sin!

- James 4:7 *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*
- Romans 6:14 *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*
- Genesis 4:7 *Sin crouches at the door, but you shall rule over it.*

However, it is our choice whether or not we obey Him. We cannot force people to obey God.

Q: Why do bad things happen to “good” people?

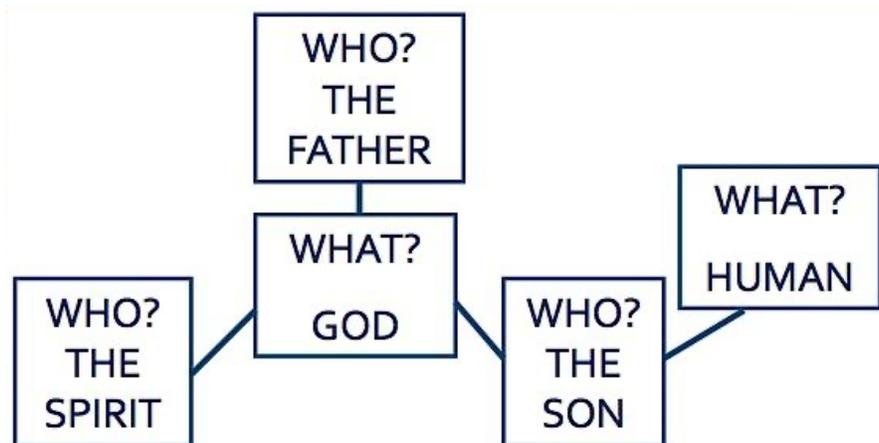
A: God would have to violate a bad person’s free will to keep them from hurting someone else, and a completely fair God would not do that. The inevitable follow up is well, what about disease and other naturally occurring phenomena? God could prevent that from happening to people who obey Him, and it wouldn’t violate any free will. That is true. But

A: Trials and tribulation have purpose.

- James 1:2-4 says, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*”
- As the saying goes: “Grow through what you go through.”
- In times of severe testing, we should not ask “How can I get out of this?” but “What can I get out of this?” We are to endure but also mature through the trials that God allows.
- We can learn from difficult things because experience is often the best teacher.
- “**None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; no one does good, not even one.**” Romans 3:1—12, [Paraphrase mine]
- You can explain that due to our sin nature, in God’s eyes, no one is good. We can’t even comprehend how wretched we are. Therefore, when we are asking why God doesn’t prevent bad things from happening to some people but not others, the answer is that in God’s eyes, everyone is the same, and he doesn’t play favorites.
- “Why do bad things happen to good people? That only happened once, and He volunteered.” ~ R.C. Sproul (Also check out the book, *If God, Why Evil?* By Dr. Norman Geisler)

Q: How is Jesus both man and God?

A: Just as God the Trinity is 3 persons in one nature, Jesus is one person with two natures. It is the joining of the eternally divine nature and the human nature in the one person of Jesus. Jesus the “who” added another “what”.

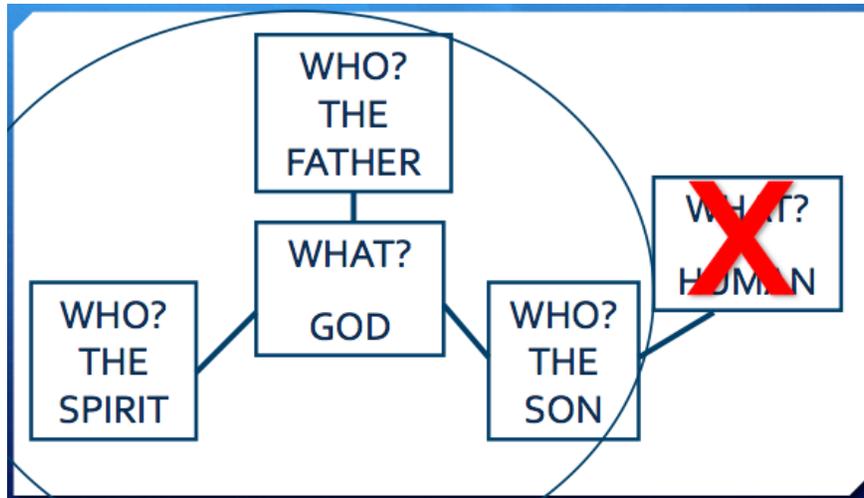


The most important thing to remember when teaching the deity of Jesus is to make sure and emphasize that he is 100% man and 100% God, otherwise you can end up with various heresies here as well.

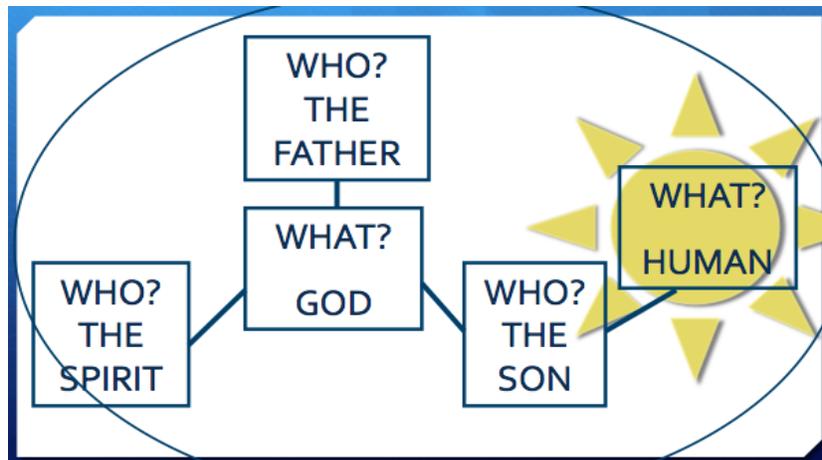
- *Philippians 2:5-8*
Jesus is fully HUMAN
- *John 10:30*
Jesus is fully GOD

Q: Did God die on the cross when Jesus did?

A: Jesus’ human nature died temporarily (for three days), but his divine nature did not. The Trinity was still intact and continuously working at that time.



Then his physical body was resurrected and glorified, and he remains in that state to this day as a part of the eternal Godhead.



Common “Unintended” Heresies about Jesus

Nature of Jesus (J. Warner Wallace, coldcasechristianity.com)

Adoptionism - denies the pre-existence of Christ and therefore denies His Deity. It taught Jesus was simply a man who was tested by God and after passing the test was given supernatural powers and adopted as a son (this occurred at His baptism). Jesus was then rewarded for all He did (and for His perfect character) with His own resurrection and adoption into the Godhead.

Docetism - from the Greek word, *dokesis* which means “to seem”. It taught Jesus only appeared to have a body and was not truly incarnate. Docetists viewed matter as inherently evil, and therefore rejected the idea God could

actually appear in bodily form. By denying Jesus truly had a body, they also denied He suffered on the cross and rose from the dead.

Apollinarianism - denied the true and complete humanity of Jesus, because it taught He did not have a human mind, but instead had a mind that was completely Divine. The heresy lessened the human nature of Jesus in order to reconcile the manner in which Jesus could be both God and man at the same time.

Arianism - taught Jesus was a “creature” who was “begotten” of the Father. Only God the Father is “un-begotten”. In this view, only the Father is truly God; He was too pure and perfect to appear here on earth, so He created the Son as His first creation. The Son then created the universe. God then adopted Jesus as a son (because, after all Jesus and God are not supposed to have the same nature in this view). Jesus was worshipped only because of His preeminence as the first creation.

Nestorianism - Jesus was really two separate persons, and only the human Jesus was in Mary’s womb. If that was true, then Jesus was not God incarnate while in the womb.

Eutychianism [Monophysitism] - Jesus’ humanity was absorbed by His divinity. The heresy is *Monophysite* in nature, derived from the Greek words *mono* (“one”) and *physis* (“nature”). In essence, the heresy claimed Jesus had only *one* nature (something new and different than the Divine or human nature that God and humans have, respectively). Instead, this heresy taught a *third* unique nature was possessed by Jesus; a blend or mixture of the human and the Divine.

Monothelism - derived from a Greek root that means “one will”. Monothelism taught Jesus had two natures but only one will. Instead of having two cooperative wills (one Divine and one human), Jesus had one Divine-human *energia*.

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Recommended Resources

