

Question 9. *How many persons are there in the Godhead?*

Answer. *There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power and glory.*

I. “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...These three are one God...”

A. As Christians, we confess that there is one God, YAHWEH, who subsists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons are one God. Christians do *not* believe that God can only exist if you add each person together as if they are parts of His divine being (Father + Son + Spirit = God). Rather, Christians believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God in and of themselves, that they are distinguishable in their person, and yet also the same in being (or essence).

II. Pro-Nicene Orthodoxy

A. “The Son... Same in essence, equal in power and glory.”

1. Setting the Stage

a) **Arianism:** Arius (256 – 336) was a Libyan pastor who made his mark in 318 in Alexandria by teaching that the Son of God (the *logos*) is not the same in essence as the Father but was created by the Father out of nothing. He proposed that the Son is the chiefest of all beings created by the Father.

(1) Due to the controversy, a council was held in Nicaea in 325, from which we have received the Nicene Creed. In this creed, we are introduced to the Greek word *homoousios*, “of the same essence.” Pro-Nicene theologians affirm the consubstantiality (share the same substance/essence/nature) of the Father and the Son.

(a) **Philippians 2:5-7 (LSB):** *Have this way of thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a slave, by being made in the likeness of men.*

b) **Same Power:** Because the Son is the same in essence, He must therefore be equal in power. This means that the Son is omnipotent because God is omnipotent and the Son is truly God. There is no difference in degrees in the power between the Father and the Son; they are the same. There is, however, a difference in the expressions of the divine power amongst the divine persons.

(1) **John 5:19-21 (LSB):** *Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in the same manner. 20 For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. 21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*

c) **Same Glory:** Because the Son is the same essence as the Father, the Son must also share in the glory of God, for the Son is truly God.

(1) **John 17:5 (LSB):** *Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

B. “The Spirit... Same in essence, equal in power and glory.”

1. Setting the Stage

a) Sabellianism (or today known as Modalism) is the heresy that denies any distinctions in the Godhead. It instead believes that the unity of God is simply expressed in different modes, as seen in the Father (mode 1), the Son (mode 2), and the Spirit (mode 3).

(1) There was also a movement in the 4th century known as the Pneumatomachi, which means “fighters against the Spirit.” Like the Arians who denied the deity of the Son, the Pneumatomachi denied the deity of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Nicene Creed was revisited in 381 at the Council of Constantinople and was revised due to the lack of clarity on the Holy Spirit.

a) *“And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets, and in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.”* – The 381

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

3. This addition was the dying wish of Basil of Caesarea (330 – 379), who passionately defended the deity of the Holy Spirit, though sadly he was not alive to see it happen (see Basil’s work *On the Holy Spirit*). His treatise on the deity of the Holy Spirit was an instrumental work for the church.

a) **Exegesis:** According to Basil, 2 Thessalonians 3:5 shows that the “Lord” mentioned must be the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

(1) **2 Thessalonians 3:5 (LSB):** *And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.*

b) **Inseparable Operation:** The Spirit gives life just as the Father and the Son give life (John 5:21).¹⁵

(1) **John 6:63 (LSB):** *The Spirit is the One who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*

(a) See also 2 Corinthians 3:6.

c) **Same Essence as God:** Basil says, “*Furthermore, in what way is it characteristic of the Spirit to search the depths of God? Even as Scripture says: no one ‘knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him. So also no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God’ (1 Cor 2:11). But just as nothing which is alien or foreign is able to contemplate the thoughts within the soul, so it is also clear that if something partakes of the ineffable thoughts of God, it is neither alien nor foreign to him, [but] is able to examine the depths of God’s judgments.*”¹⁶

(1) Basil rightly points out that no being can examine and know the depths of God but God Himself. For the Holy Spirit to know the thoughts of God must mean that the Holy Spirit is God (see 1 Cor. 2:10-11).

¹⁴ St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Yonkers, NY, 2011), 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 94–95.

¹⁶ St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius* 3.4, translated by Michael A.G. Haykin.

d) **Equal in Glory:** Basil mentions how mankind has glory (Psalm 8:6), Israel has glory (Rom. 9:4), the sun, moon, and stars have glory (1 Cor. 15:41), and the ministry of the Apostles has glory (2 Cor. 3:9). But then he asks why the Spirit would not have glory?¹⁷

(1) **2 Corinthians 3:8 (LSB):** *how will the ministry of the Spirit not be even more in glory?*

III. Application

A. We see in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) that Christian baptism is to be done “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” To be a true disciple of Christ, to belong to the Christian faith, means that we believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To be a Christian is to confess that we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and these three persons are one God.

1. **2 Corinthians 13:14 (LSB):** *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*

B. As Christians, we rely on and worship the whole God of the Bible. He is not just Father, He is Son and Spirit. To express our worship of God correctly, we ought to remember that He is Triune. When we pray, when we sing, when we speak of God, we should do so in light of who God is and how He has revealed Himself, which is one God in three persons.

C. Reflection Questions

1. **Question 1.** *“How often do you meditate on the Holy Trinity?”*
2. **Question 2.** *“Are you ready to show from the Scriptures the deity of Jesus?”*
3. **Question 3.** *“Do you remember to give glory to the Holy Spirit for who He is and what He does?”*

¹⁷ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 93.

IV. Repeat / Sing Question & Answer 5 – 9

A. **Question 5.** *May all men make use of the Holy Scriptures?*

1. **Answer.** *All men are not only permitted, but commanded and exhorted, to read, hear, and understand the Holy Scriptures.*

B. **Question 6.** *What things are chiefly contained in the Holy Scriptures?*

1. **Answer.** *The Holy Scriptures chiefly contain what man ought to believe, concerning God and what duty God requireth of man.*

C. **Question 7.** *What is God?*

1. **Answer.** *God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.*

D. **Question 8.** *Are there more gods than one?*

1. **Answer.** *There is but one only, the living and true God.*

E. **Question 9.** *How many persons are there in the Godhead?*

1. **Answer.** *There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power and glory.*