Chapter Four
The Uniqueness of God's Being

"Taxonomy" is the science of classifying things. We humans love to classify ideas, creatures, social settings, and more. In biology, for example, science has developed categories of beings allowing certain characteristics to mark off the differences in animals so that a whale is considered a mammal while a large-mouth bass is considered a fish.[1] What makes a mammal? Among other traits, a mammal gives birth to live offspring and provides nutrition through mother's milk. Whales, humans, and dogs are mammals. Fish lay eggs; they aren't mammals.

Many brain scholars believe the desire to classify and recognize patterns is hard-wired in the human brain. We look for patterns as part of seeking understanding. This tendency of humanity is evident in any discussion about the nature of God. What is it that makes God God?

Most ancient civilizations believed that gods were like humans, just on a super scale, having super powers, super longevity, even super emotions. Gods were classified unto themselves, but seemed in many ways to be extensions of the traits of humanity. Israel's God, the God who revealed himself through Scripture is unlike any of the gods of Israel's neighbors.

Before looking at Scripture, it is useful to consider the nature of God. How do we understand his essence? Is he made of atoms, like nature? Many of Israel's neighbors believed they saw the gods in the things of nature. The god of thunder came in the storms, loud and powerful. The sun god drove his chariot across the sky. Canaanite neighbors put gods into streams, rivers and mountains. God's revelation to Israel was very different. God wasn't found in the atoms or stuff of nature. God was a being whose Spirit hovered over creation. Creation was something God made; it wasn't made out of God.

This leaves us with a predicament. How are we to understand the essence or nature of God? Can we put him under a microscope and see what he is made of? Can we use an electron microscope and get detailed images of him? Can we put him in a spectrometer and size him up? Of course not. God is not made of the stuff of

[1] Not all scientists agree on the precise terms for classifying one organism into one group versus another. I am speaking here generally, rather than wading into the issues of how many inner ear bones are required to allow a species to be mammalian rather than some other classification.

this universe, and we can't dissect him as if we were. So, if we can't subject God to human devices for understanding matter, how do we understand God?

As a trial lawyer, I live in the world of analogies and pictures. Why? I need them! Often I need to explain scientific concepts to lay jurors, many of whom never liked science when they took it decades before in school. Similarly, I frequently must explain economic ideas to non-economist jurors some of whom have trouble balancing their bank accounts. Occasionally, I have had to explain aspects of engineering to jurors who might have thought the term itself meant "someone who builds engines."

For example, once I was trying a case about whether the drug "pioglitazone" (commonly called "Actos") caused bladder cancer. I needed to teach my jury some concepts of molecular biology. Yet I didn't have any kind of a biologist on the jury, much less microbiologists. The closest I came was a butcher!

See if this paragraph makes sense: In molecular biology speak, I needed to teach that jury how a group of trans-nucleic receptor proteins termed "peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors" ("PPARs," for short) function in a human cell. Layered on that, I needed to explain how theses PPARs were able to transport the pioglitazone molecule through a cell's cytoplasm, across the nucleic border, and into the DNA.

If anyone reading this has a strong science background, and certainly if one is a molecular biologist, what I have written in the preceding paragraph should make sense in itself. But with a non-scientific jury, those words don't readily translate into understanding, especially if one isn't allowed to Google while listening.

As a trial lawyer, I have several choices:

1. I can decide that I don't need to educate the jury, and just hope they grasp the essence of what I am saying, trusting in me and my witnesses to be telling the truth, even though they aren't sure what that truth is.

2. I can hope that one or two of the more biologically-savvy jurors understand enough to then influence or educate the other jurors in deliberations.

3. The third option can often compound the problem I am seeking to solve. This option involves defining concepts that my jurors don't

understand using more scientific words they don't understand. It layers misunderstanding on top of misunderstanding to become a hopeless puddle of confusing and boring words. It would be me telling the butcher,

> "PPARs play essential roles in the regulation of cellular differentiation, development, and metabolism (carbohydrate, lipid, protein), as transcription factors regulating the expression of genes. This ability can also make them tumorigenic in higher organisms."

I don't like any of those options. Leaving someone uneducated about important aspects of what they must decide seems both ludicrous and lazy. If that is what our jury system is, then we should seriously consider having something more than a lay jury for science-rich cases. (Which I DON'T believe is the answer! But that is a different book.)

Nor can I accept the option of hoping one or two science minded jurors might be able to grasp my evidence and then educate the other jurors. I am the trial lawyer. My job is to educate the jury. I cannot relegate that job to someone(s) I don't know, especially if I am uncertain that someone is up to the task!

The third option is no option at all, although I have seen lawyers do this very thing. I am reminded of a trial when an issue was whether a certain drug (Vioxx, a "Cox-2 inhibitor") caused blood clots, and hence, myocardial infarctions, or in laymen's terms, "heart attacks." I worked hard to explain the necessary science and medicine, but my opposing counsel was content to use words, explain them with more words the jurors didn't know, and move on, trusting the jury now had the necessary knowledge. I almost chuckled out loud when the lawyer said something like,

> Hemostasis exists in our blood, modulating levels of prostaglandins like thromboxane and prostacyclin to ensure that the body can both continue blood flow while being able to stop hemorrhaging when the need arises. Let me explain. When there is a hemorrhage, the endothelial cells of vessels express a heparin-like molecule and thrombomodulin and prevent platelet aggregation with nitric oxide and prostacyclin.

I leaned to a lawyer next to me, commented on the glazed look of jurors, and whispered, "I've lived with this case for three years, I have deposed countless

doctors and scientists, and I don't have a clue what she just said! I am sure the jurors don't!"

Rather than any of the three options I have briefly described above, I believe it incumbent on me as a lawyer to do something different. I need to educate the jury. I need to explain to them the concepts in a way that they can grasp what I am saying, have a firm foundation from which to understand key terms and concepts in documents, and be able to listen to experts in the fields discuss the fields, comprehending what those witnesses are saying.

So, for example, with the PPARs, I used an analogy of a party. I explained that each cell is like a piece of property. The house on the property, where the people live and the valuables are kept is generally not open to the public. But we have these substances (called PPARs) in our cells that have special invitations that allow them to attend a party inside the "nucleus" or the cell's house. Moreover, these invitations have a "Plus One." In other words, the PPARs are able to bring someone into the house with them. The PPARs in this case take in the Actos ("piaglitizone") molecule. This allows the Actos to interact with the cell's DNA, the treasure inside the home that plays a strong role in making or preventing cancers.

The analogy worked. The jury got it. Certainly, the analogy wasn't perfect. One could readily point out ways it breaks down. But it communicated what was needed to help jurors understand what they needed to in order to make the right decisions.

This idea of analogies and pictures are important as we try to understand the nature of God. God has revealed himself using pictures, words, and analogies, but these educate us only to a point. No human can fully understand the nature of God. It isn't in our experience, vocabulary, or capacity to do.

Consider it this way. The latest estimate of how many stars are in the known universe is conservatively 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (1×10^{22}). Those are STARS, i.e., "suns." The term for that number is "10 sextillion." Scientists believe the universe has multiple more stars than the earth has grains of sand.

Think through how huge that number is. But as many as it is, it pales in comparison to how small atoms are. We know that suns are made up of atoms, just as you and I are, but when I speak of how small atoms are, it is notable that they are INCREDIBLY SMALL. If one were to pile up the number of suns as if each one was just one atom, how huge would a pile of 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 atoms

be? Four times smaller than a dust mite! Those who have done the math compute that one grain of sand has *more atoms* in it than the universe has suns.

Now put this together in light of God. The God of the universe is a being that understands and names all 10 sextillion stars. But he is also the God who knows every atom in every grain of sand, on every beach, on every planet rotating around every sun. To further express the incomprehensibility of this, I could detail how many particles smaller than an atom are known. God knows where every subatomic particle lies or moves.

This being we know as God is clearly far beyond our ability to fathom. We have no reference point. No human brain is big enough to capture his abilities, and his greatness. Over time, many people have tried to devise solutions to the problem posed by God's immensity. Almost all of these problems involved reducing God down to something that more readily fits into a human mind.

For example, some set out a pyramid structure as the process by which God could handle the greatness of humanity. These folks reduced God to the equivalent of an ancient king who has a court that is in charge of various underlords who then oversee the masses under their care. In this older view of God, the underlords were the angels who would go around and give God reports on how things were going on earth. The angels were assigned territories and people, and this was the way God "kept up with things."

The Biblical God needs no such help. The Biblical God knows everything about you and I, past present and future (Ps. 139). Isaiah 40:12 explains that God,

> has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure…

The "span" in that passage is the distance between a thumb and pinkie in an extended hand. The picture is profound. As the Psalmist concluded,

> How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you" (Ps. 139:17-18).

That is not to say that Scripture doesn't have angels doing God's bidding. God uses angels, humans – even non-willing humans—to do his bidding. But God

doesn't *need* angels or humans. God is self-sufficient in all ways. God isn't a created being, God is the being without creation.[2]

Even this concept, God as one who was never created, who never failed to exist, lies outside our ability to comprehend. We are created people. We weren't, and then we were. Our brains are wired to understand what has happened to us. Our experience gives us a basis for comprehending coming into being. But always existing? That isn't something we can readily grasp.

Similarly, the physical make-up of God is not something available to us. We are barking up the wrong tree if we are trying to make God into something we easily fathom. Any God who is easily fathomed could never be the God of the universe and the atom, much less the God who knows the hearts and minds of all people in all time.

Trying to fathom God in his greatness has brought forth interesting ideas from some of Christianity's most original and thoughtful writers. C.S. Lewis thought that perhaps God's ability to know and understand all things might stem from God's ability to step out of time. Lewis thought that perhaps God has an ability at any moment, and split-second, to step outside of time and see and know everything. To put this into a simple explanation, if God wanted to know where every electron was in an orbit around every atom in the entire universe, God could make that observation by removing himself from time. In modern parlance, God could hit a "pause" button, check out and know all he needs, and then hit play, only to hit pause again.

Yet the truth of Scripture doesn't provide answers to these questions. As Francis Schaeffer was fond of saying, "We cannot know God ***fully***, but we can know God ***truly***." We can know God truly because God has chosen to reveal things about himself to humanity.

God has chosen to reveal himself to humanity in a number of ways. As discussed in the last chapter, we can see evidence of God's divine nature in the created world. Scripture also contains an unfolding revelation of God's character, evidence in his interactions with people, as well as in the words he has chosen to convey his story to humanity.

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[2] Theologians speak of the "aseity" if God. "Aseity" comes from the Latin "a," which in English becomes "from", "se," which finds itself in the English "self" and "ity," which is an English suffix showing the word is describing a quality or condition. The "aseity" of God means the truth that God is un-created. He is a being that exists of and from himself.

God's revelation has used many different techniques to explain who he is. God has spoken in metaphors, analogies, human terms and relationships, and intellectual ideas. God's revelation tells of his essence in a number of ways and terms, and one can find great joy in thinking through his revelation. The human response has often been to try and develop our own analogies and terms to help understand the nature of God. One of the most prominent comes into Christian speak as the "Trinity."

Analogies of the Trinity

One often hears of analogies when trying to explain the Trinity. It is an effort to help humanity understand the challenge of seeing God as three and yet also as one. Human analogies for this aspect of God often fall short, as do most analogies that get pushed beyond their limitations.

Some speak of the Trinity like an apple. The apple has a core, flesh, a peeling. All three make up one apple, even though the three are distinct. Yet this analogy breaks down upon careful consideration. The apple core is not an "apple" by itself. It is a part of an apple. Yet the Bible teaches that God the Father is fully God, not simply God when joined with the Holy Spirit and Son. The same can be said about the apple peeling or flesh. Here the analogy breaks down.

Another analogy often used for the Trinity is "H^2O." When H^2O is found in a liquid state, it is water. When it is found in a solid state, it is ice. In a gaseous state, H^2O becomes steam. This analogy says that the Trinity is one substance in three forms. I tend to like this analogy better than the apple, but even this analogy breaks down. You don't find H^2O in all three states co-existing in the same space.

People grab hold of analogies because of the ease of learning from "anchoring." Social scientists and educators use the word "anchoring" to describe the process of finding something someone already knows and using it to explain and then tie-in or "anchor" into the mind a new concept. As a simple example, let me teach you three Hebrew words one quickly learns in first-year Hebrew class.

In ancient Hebrew, הוּא is the ancient word we usually translate as "he" or "it." A second word you can gloss over, unless you read Hebrew, is הִיא, usually translated "she." The third word is דָּג, usually translated simply as "fish." Now giving you those words, using letters most readers don't know, isn't going to teach much of anything. Yet if I told you how to pronounce the words, we would be a good way

down the road to you learning them. הוּא is pronounced "hū." הִיא is pronounced "hē," and דָּג is pronounced "dag." Now the "anchoring" comes in.

Here is the way to learn and remember those three Hebrew words:

"In Hebrew, 'hu' is 'he?' 'he' is 'she!' And the 'dag's' a 'fish!'"

If that still doesn't register, use more proper English spellings of the English words that sound like the Hebrew and remember that in Hebrew, "who" is "he." "he" is "she," and a "dog" (if you pronounce it "dag" like you are from Boston) is a "fish."

Anchoring through metaphors and analogies are useful tools in our understanding the nature of God. Anchoring is importance even though I find most analogies fail to explain the Trinity.

Here is the problem anchoring helps address. Our knowledge base extends to things we are, things we see, things we experience, and things we imagine. Our understanding is almost always put into language form, with words forming in our heads to express our thoughts. It is a phenomenon of neuro-science. It is how we are. But God is something beyond our knowledge base. We aren't God. What's more, we can't see him as he is since he is what we term, "spirit." While we can experience God, and while evidence of him is present in his creation, those experiences do not fully reveal his essence as a being. Our creative brains can imagine things – real things – about God, but that is much different than having visual inspection as a basis of knowledge.

In light of this, as we read of God and think of God, we tend to do so in our human words and experiences. As noted in the last chapter, the Hebrew Bible speaks of the "arm of God.' This isn't because God is human-esque, with arms and legs. The Hebrew uses "arm" as a metaphor to refer to the actions and work of God. Most people use their arms to lift, to carry, and do basic work. (I have known several people without arms, and am constantly amazed at how they are able to work just as industriously. For them, the most useful metaphor for God's working might be the legs of God, or even the mouth of God.)

Our best knowledge base of God comes from how he has revealed himself to humanity in the stories and language encapsulated in Scripture. God's revelation was not what in my profession of trial law is called a "full-on data dump." In other

words, God didn't send down a treatise or instruction manual that gave humanity in one fell swoop, everything that could be or needed to be known about God.

Instead, God interacted with humanity and in the stories of those interactions, as well as the occasional verbal proclamations through the voices and pens of prophets. God progressively revealed more and more of who he is, using metaphors, analogies, proclamations, parables, figures of speech, and more – all to teach and illuminate human minds to see God for who he is and what that means to us.

Even beyond the pages of Scripture, over time through prayer contemplation, spirit-led discussions, and careful deliberative thought, God's people have grown to understand insights in Scripture beyond that which earlier generations understood. God's Spirit "bears witness" to God (Jn. 15:26), guiding the apostles, and the church today, into truth (Jn. 16:13). It is not surprising, therefore, that the church has developed ideas and understandings about God that are firmly rooted in God's revelation of Scripture, yet put into modern terms and ideas, anchoring unusual concepts to those we more readily understand. This recognition lays a good basis for understanding the Trinity.

The Trinity as a Word

The word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible. Neither is the word "science." But that doesn't mean that the Bible doesn't discuss scientific ideas. Don't get me wrong, the Bible isn't a science text book, as some might try to make it out to be. When the Psalms talk about the sun rising and setting (Ps.113:3) while the earth doesn't move (104:5), they aren't speaking scientifically.

God used pictures and language understood by the people of the day to convey important ideas about God's love abiding from daybreak to sunset and through the night. The words are no more scientific than the Psalm that speaks of God himself as "a sun and shield" (Ps. 84:11). Similarly, we err if we read the Psalms talking about where the earth "ends" if we think that means the earth isn't round (Ps. 72:8). Our goal in reading those passages needs to be first to understand why they are written, and then what they meant to the original readers. Only then can we properly understand them in light of today.

So even though the Bible doesn't use the word "science," and isn't a "science book," it doesn't mean that science isn't firmly rooted in an understanding of God and Scripture. The Bible does teach that this is a world of consistency, created by a

consistent God. The Bible teaches cause and effect, a core truth of all physics and life. Consider the early Biblical story of Onan.

Onan's brother, Er, had died, leaving a widow. As per the day's culture, Onan was responsible for marrying his brother's widow and helping her bear children to inherit Er's resources and responsibilities. Onan didn't want a child by this woman. So we read in Scripture that,

> Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother (Gen. 38:9).

The Bible isn't a science or health book on the biology of reproduction. Yet it bears out the truth that without the sperm, a woman will not bear a child. It would take divine intervention to obviate this rule of nature.

No one I know of says, "there is no such thing as science because the word isn't used in the Bible." Yet I have often heard people challenge the idea of the Trinity "because the word isn't used in the Bible."

Before looking at the Biblical basis for the Trinity, it is helpful to consider the word itself. "Trinity" is an English word that surfaced in Middle English, a period the Oxford English Dictionary dates from 1150 to 1500. This period is best known today for producing Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

"Trinity" developed over time through Old French ("*trinite*") being sourced from the Latin *trinitas*, related also back to the Greek *trias* (τριάς). The Latin, *trinitas* means "three-ness," from *tribus*, the Latin word for "three." Don't get lost in the muddle of my working back through the languages. The key is to understand that "Trinity" is an English word that at its core means simply "three-ness." This word was and is used by the church to express the Biblical idea that the one God has a "three-ness" to him. This doesn't mean that there are three Gods. There is one.

How can this be? How can there be one God who is "three-ness"? Before answering this ultimate question, the approach needs to start with a close inspection of how Scripture speaks of God as "one" and as "three."

The Trinity (three-ness) of God in Hebrew Scriptures

God as plural

Scriptures earliest revelation of God is found in the first chapters of Genesis. There God is referred to by the generic Hebrew word for "God" *Elohim*. Genesis 1:1 says,

> In the beginning, God [plural form *Elohim*] created the heavens and the earth.

Interestingly, *Elohim* means "God" in a plural form. The singular form "*El*" is not what is used in Genesis 1. In spite of using a plural noun "literally "Gods," the Hebrew uses a singular verb form ("*he* created," not "*they* created"). Is this an early indication of a plurality within the one God or is it an ancient anachronism of the Hebrews inheriting a concept of more than one God and reducing it do to the idea of one God? Scholars disagree.

This gets more interesting where God creates humanity. Genesis 1:26 explains,

> Then God [again, the plural form *Elohim*] said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Notice the plurals again? God didn't say, "I will make mankind in my image." He said "our" image. Again, scholars have different explanations for why this might be so, but one is an indication that God is more than simply a singular being.

This plural language is similar to that found in the throne room experience of Isaiah the prophet. From the throne we read of God,

> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I [singular] send, and who will go for us [plural]?" (Isa. 6:8).

This same perplexing singular/plural exchange goes on in the story of the Tower of Babel. There we read,

> Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD dispersed

> them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. So the LORD dispersed them… (Gen. 11:7-8).

The "us" is clearly plural, yet the "LORD" who does the action is singular.

God as Spirit

This same chapter is the one that references the "the Spirit of God" hovering over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). Now some will point out that the Hebrew word for "Spirit" can also mean "breath" or "wind," but even there we see an extension of God beyond the simple "God" designation.

Over and over in the Old Testament one reads of the "Spirit" of God. The prophet Ezekiel was frequently taken away by the Spirit of God (see, e.g., Ezek. 3:14; 11:24). Haggai spoke of God's Spirit remaining in the midst of his people (Hag. 2:5). The contrite Psalmist, confessing his sin, asks that God won't "take your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:10). When Zachariah proclaimed the word of the Lord to the people, he was first, "clothed" with "the Spirit of God" (2 Chron. 24:20).

Lest one think that the "Spirit" of God in the Hebrew Scriptures is just a breath or impersonal wind, Isaiah 63:10 proclaims clearly,

> But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.

The idea of grieving an impersonal wind seems nonsensical.

God as Three

Even beyond God as Creator and as Spirit, the Old Testament has interesting stories like that of three visitors to Abraham. On an otherwise normal day, Abraham looks up and sees "three men were standing in front of him" (Gen. 18:2). Interestingly, this story is introduced in the previous verse. The appearance of the three men is preceded by this,

> And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1).

This story unfolds with Abraham speaking to the three in the singular form as if they are one.

> O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, you [singular] do not pass by your servant (Gen. 18:3).

Even as Abraham used the singular "you" in the verb "do not pass by," Abraham recognized and used the plural form when referencing their presence:

> Let a little water be brought, and wash your [plural] feet, and rest yourselves [plural] under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you [plural] may refresh yourselves [plural] (Gen. 18:4-5).

Then the three "men" talk as one in responding to Abraham. "*They* say, 'Do as you have said'" (Gen. 18:5). The story doesn't have "one of them" saying it, but the three speak as one. This happens over and over in the story, most notably in verses 9 and 10.

> They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."

In these two verses, the "They said" is followed quickly by "The LORD said." One can easily understand in this storyline that the LORD has appeared as the three men. (This storyline and the interchange of singulars, plurals, and the LORD continue through the next vignette dealing with Abraham and God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, although those passages can also be read to indicate that the Lord was one of the three and the other two were "angels.")

God as One

We are remiss if we fail to note the key capstone idea of God's revelation to the Israelites. There are not multiple Gods. There is one God. Israel's most hallowed prayer, one to be repeated multiple times a day, comes from Deuteronomy 6:4,

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Yet even in this passage, the Hebrew word for God is used in its plural form rather than its singular (*Elohim* rather than *El*). The unity proclamation is one that expresses that the plural God is one God.

All of these passages convey ideas that are in themselves perplexing, if not downright confusing. Yet in the consideration of the Trinity, the idea of God being a three-ness in his unity, these passages can make sense on a new level.

The Trinity (three-ness) of God in the New Testament Scriptures

The New Testament are not to be considered the "Christian Scriptures" as opposed to the Old Testament that are the "Hebrew Scriptures." For the Christian, both the Old and New Testament are equally "Scripture." But as one considers the New Testament, one sees the unfolding picture of the three-ness of the one God in ways that lend further insight into God's nature.

God as One

The New Testament does not take away one bit of truth that God is one. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote of God as one, noting it was a truth even the demons understood.

> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! (Jms. 2:19).

James was not the only to write of God as one. Paul was unequivocal in his language as well.

- "God is one" (Gal. 3:20).
- "Since God is one…" (Rom. 3:30).
- "For there is one God…" (1 Tim. 2:5).
- "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, *the only God*, be honor and glory forever and ever." (1 Tim. 1:17).
- "We know that … 'there is no God but one.'" (1 Cor. 8:4).

James and Paul were not resurrecting some Old Testament idea that was lost on Jesus. Jesus also knew, understood, and taught on the unity of God. When asked which commandment was the most important of the whole Bible, Jesus answered,

> The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one… (Mk. 12:29).

But none of this should take away from the recognition of these New Testament witnesses to Jesus as God and the Holy Spirit as God. Even as Jesus prayed to God the Father as "one God," he placed himself in the same category,

> And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (Jn. 17:3).

Jesus as God

The New Testament over and over emphasizes that Jesus is God. This wasn't something "new" decided by Christians looking to prop up their nascent faith in the generations after the death of Jesus. It was a confidence that drove the believers to gladly die a martyr's death, rather than deny the truth.

Some of the earliest New Testament writings are those of the rabbi turned apostle Saul known by both his Hebrew name Sha'ul (or "Saul" when spelled with Greek letters) as well as his Roman name "Paul." Paul's letter to the church at Philippi comes, at the latest, just three decades after the death of Jesus. In that letter, Paul uses what most scholars consider a well-known song or verse in speaking of Jesus, urging his readers to model the humility of Jesus. Paul illustrated Jesus' attitude of others first recanting the hymn[3] saying of Jesus,

> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).

This is a bold and clear affirmation of the deity of Jesus. Jesus was "in the form of God" before taking on a human form. Jesus post-resurrection has returned to an exalted position of "Lord."

Paul was writing in Greek, and the word "Lord" in Greek can mean simply "master." But the Greek word held special meaning for scholars like Paul who were

[3] Some scholars consider Paul's passage simply poetic, and not an early Christian hymn.

steeped in both the Hebrew scriptures and in the Greek translation of those Scriptures. There the word "Lord" was the word used for the holy God who revealed himself to Moses from the burning bush.

This is the "Lord" of which the Hebrew prayer says, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one." This understanding gives greater depth to Paul's instruction that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" with real understanding unless filled by the Holy Spirit of God (1 Cor. 12:3). Consider the way Paul interchanges "Lord" from the Old Testament with Jesus being "Lord" in several chapters of Romans:

- "for the *Lord* will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." And as Isaiah predicted, "If the *Lord* of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."" (Rom. 9:28-29).

- "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is *Lord* and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom. 10:9).

Paul clearly speaks of Jesus as Lord interchangeably with the Lord of the Old Testament. Just three verses after the above, Paul writes,

> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is *Lord* of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the *Lord* will be saved."

Paul has already referenced Jesus as the "Lord" whose name saves. Yet he also accords Jesus as the Lord who bestows riches, echoing his praise of God in Romans 2:4 as the God who bestows "riches" of kindness.

Paul was not alone in his exalted view of Jesus as God. The Gospel of John begins with the affirmation that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was God*." Lest there be any doubt about who John is referencing, in verse 14 of the same first chapter John explains that he means Jesus, the "Word" that "became flesh and dwelt among us."

John would later record the prayer of Jesus where Jesus gives further insight into the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son. In the prayer Jesus offered before his arrest, Jesus prayed that God would restore him to where he was before the creation of the world.

> Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed (Jn. 17:1-5).

Another passage that speaks of Jesus as God that isn't as readily apparent to 21st century readers who often aren't as steeped in Old Testament prophecy as the faithful in New Testament times comes from the first verses in the Gospel of Mark. Mark begins,

> Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' (Mk. 1:2-3).

In these verses, Mark melds together two prophetic promises from the Old Testament. Malachi 3:1 says that, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me." The "me" in Malachi is the Lord God Almighty. When Mark appropriates that verse for the story of the gospel of Jesus, Mark is letting his readers know from the very beginning that Jesus is the Lord God.

The second verse that Mark uses is from Isaiah 40:3 which reads,

> A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

This is again, the Lord who is coming. As Mark uses this verse in its prophetic sense, he is leaving no doubt that Jesus who is spoken of, is the coming Lord God of Isaiah.

Matthew gave details about the incarnation of Jesus explaining that an angel of God appeared to Joseph when Mary was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. The angel told Joseph that Jesus would save the people from their sins, adding that,

> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (Mt. 1:22-23).

"God with us" is what is meant by the phrase, "God incarnate." Jesus was God in flesh, God made man.

The Father as God

As indicated in the previous section, Jesus as God also prayed to God the Father. In most passages that speak of Jesus and the Father, the references reinforce not only that the Father is God, but that the Son is as well. The example of John 17:1-5 is not unique, though it is important.

> Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you…. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed (Jn. 17:1-5)

In the same prayer, Jesus used phrases like John 17:21, where Jesus prayed that his followers "may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you." This prayer came on the heels of Jesus explaining to his apostles that,

> I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father (Jn. 16:28).

Even beyond his praying, Jesus frequently spoke of God as his Father in unique ways, quite unlike others. The effect of Jesus' claim as God's unique Son was not lost on those around him. They noted the God-ship of the Father as they noted the claim of God-ship of Jesus the Son. As John explained,

> This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (Jn. 5:18).

Jesus also explained that the Father was God in explaining that Jesus alone had known and seen God as such.

> It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. (Jn. 6:45-46).

In this passage, Jesus speaks clearly that he has seen God the Father. Yet we already know from an earlier passage in John, that no man has seen God.

> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (Jn. 1:18).

In this passage, a number of ancient copies of the Gospel of John have slightly different meanings, all of which emphasize the import of what John was claiming. Some manuscripts read, "No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." Others read "No one has ever seen God; God the only begotten, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

Under all of these readings, it is clear the New Testament places Jesus in the unique position of having "seen" God the Father, something that no man could ever do if one considers seeing God in his pure essence. As God explained to Moses,

> You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. (Ex. 33:20).

When Jesus quoted the Old Testament law, he quoted it as something that God spoke.

> He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' (Mt. 15:3-4).

The Holy Spirit as God

The Holy Spirit makes his first appearance in our New Testaments in the Gospel of Matthew, the first chapter. Mary's pregnancy was not a normal one! Mary hadn't yet been with a man, yet was pregnant "from the Holy Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit that made her Son something beyond human. This Holy Spirit made Jesus "God with us" (Mt. 1:18-23).

In Matthew 3:16, Jesus is coming up from the water of his baptism when,

> immediately … behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.

Nothing in the text indicates that the reader is to consider the Spirit as anything less than the same Spirit of God that hovered over the waters at creation, or the Spirit

that inhabited Mary bringing forth the birth of Jesus. This is the same Spirit that spoke as God to the Old Testament prophets and poets (see, e.g., Mk 12:36; Heb. 3:7).

Some think the Spirit is an impersonal force, something akin to God's power being expressed, but not a distinct being. This view does not fairly assess the breath of passages that speak of the Holy Spirit in personal terms as well as God terms. In John 15:26, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as a "helper," a Greek term used for an advocate or one called along to help one out.[4]

> But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

The "Helper" is a being, not merely a force. This is why Paul could speak of "grieving" the Holy Spirit. One doesn't cause grief to an inanimate force.

> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

In much the same fashion, Jesus spoke harshly about anyone who might "blaspheme' the Holy Spirit, again, something one can't really do to an inanimate force.

> And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (Lk. 12:10).

These are not the ideas of someone speaking of an inanimate force. These are the concepts one uses for a being.

A final illustrative passage comes in the writings of Paul, who explained the role of the Holy Spirit in assisting the believer in prayer.

> For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who

[4] The Greek word is παράκλητος (*paraklētos*). It is also translated as a "mediator" or an "intercessor," and even occasionally a "lawyer."

> searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27).

The Spirit has a "mind," a "will," and acts accordingly. The Spirit of God is clearly revealed in Scripture to be a "being," not some impersonal force.

The Implications

What does it matter that God exists as a "three-ness" being? Why has God bothered to reveal himself as such to humanity? We cannot climb into the mind of God to determine his motives. But we are not without some common-sense answers to these questions.

Analysis might best begin with the negative – the reasons that aren't why God revealed himself as he has. Often, we try to learn what makes up a being in order to better address problems that arise. For example, doctors try to understand human biology in hopes of curing disease. But God didn't reveal himself because he needs medical treatment. The revelation of God as he is, shows the precise opposite. God doesn't need anything from people. God is fully self-sufficient.

The fact that God exists in three-ness emphasizes that God is a being with personal interactions. God has love and communication in his own fullness. God isn't creating humanity for companionship. God already has eternal companionship. God doesn't create humanity to give him entertainment, love, or anything else. God made humanity to give to humanity. God made humanity in his image, enabling humans to interact, communicate, love, create, and make choices. God didn't need people to do this. God chose to give people the ability to do this.

God as a being of love and communication, a personal being, calls into the lives of people an opportunity to be personal as well. Humanity should learn from the three-ness of the one God that humanity should work toward a unity of purpose, expressed in love and commonality. Even if the unbelieving world fails to comprehend this, the followers of Jesus should make it a top priority.

Jesus expressed this goal for his followers in praying through clear passages that speak of the plurality of the one God. In John 17: 20-21, as Jesus (God) prayed to the Father (God), we read his desire for the unity of God to be found in God's people. Jesus prayed,

> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Notice carefully the last clause of the prayer, for this leads insight into another practicality of understanding the Trinitarian nature of God. "So that the world may believe that you sent me," indicates that as Christians understand and live in a unity based on the unity of God, that the world will notice and respond. This seems true on several levels.

The idea of diverse people, from different countries, different political ideologies, different economic situations, different educational levels, different interests, different – fill in the blank – coming together and uniting around a common faith in the God of Judgment and Mercy, of Love and Hate, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is a powerful reality. Such a unity commands attention for the observant. That unity is other-worldly. Like the Trinity, it is beyond the ability of humans to fathom, yet is beautiful to behold when it occurs.

Another way the prayer of Jesus communicates truth is the unveiling of some of the mystery of God. Humanity should fall in awe and worship at the truth of God's glory and grandeur. Yet when we try to force God into a "taxonomy" of human making, when we try to wedge God into something or someone we can fully fathom, we are actually reducing God down from who he is.

Thinking back about the ostentatious of the universe, the idea of a God who grasps it in its fulness, and could do so almost as an afterthought. Consider that this same God knows the movements of every PPAR in every cell in every human at any point of time in all of history. Any thinking person should realize that such a God is not going to be easily grasped by a human brain. No one has the resources, the reference points, or the knowledge to understand the essence of such a God. So, we are left with God revealing himself in metaphors, explanations, story lines, etc., that allow us to understand that there is only one God, but somehow that God is three beings even as that God is one.

How this could be is a mystery. No one can give a simple explanation. One is left with the explanation that God has given. We can see God as Father, Creator, and Lord; as Savior, Redeemer, and Son; as wisdom, strength, inspiration, and Spirit. We can worship this awesome God with fear and trembling. We can join with the Psalmist and wonder how and why such a God would care about humanity,

especially about me. (Read Psalm 8.) And Yet, God does. The beyond comprehension God cares and acts on my behalf. Not out of need, but out of love.

That is an amazing thing to have on one's C.V.