

A photograph of Jesus, with a beard and long hair, wearing a white robe, standing on the left and gesturing with his hands as if speaking. He is facing a group of people, mostly men with beards and wearing simple, earth-toned clothing, who are sitting on the ground in a desert-like environment. The background shows rolling hills under a bright, hazy sky. The overall tone is warm and spiritual.

The ONE Story

*Sharing in His Life Now
and Forever*

ETHAN LONGHENRY

One Story

Preview

By
Ethan Longhenry

© 2023 Spiritbuilding Publishers.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by
Spiritbuilding Publishers
9700 Ferry Road, Waynesville, Ohio 45068

ONE STORY
By Ethan Longhenry

ISBN: 978-1955285-78-0

Preview

Spiritbuilding
P U B L I S H E R S

spiritbuilding.com

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
ONE God	3
ONE Man	14
ONE Another	29
ONE Story	40
Your Role in the ONE Story	56

Preview

Introduction

E PLURIBUS UNUM

(out of many, one; on the Seal of the United States)

One love / one blood / one life / you got to do what you should
One life / with each other / sisters / brothers
One life / but we're not the same
We get to / carry each other (U2, One)

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.
—Jesus, John 17:20–21

What are we looking for out of life?

What is our goal in our relationships with one another?

How can we find the harmony in life we so desperately seek?

We have heard many answers coming from many different time periods and perspectives. So, who should we trust and believe?

We can find a way forward regarding these questions by seeking after true unity: to be ONE.

ONE begins with the 'One God'. Who is God? How can we know anything about Him? What is our relationship with Him? Where is He?

We then must factor in the 'One Man'. Who is this Man? Why is He important? Why should we listen to Him? What role did this One man plan in correcting what went wrong between God and humankind?

Then we must turn to 'One Another.' What kind of relationship should we have with one another? How can we achieve that relationship? How does this relate to the One God and the One Man?

Let us begin our study of these major issues that we all face in our lives so that we may be One with God and with one another, sharing together in God's ONE story!

Preview

ONE God

“Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is one.”

—Moses, Deuteronomy 6:4

“I and the Father are one.”

—Jesus, John 10:30

“And [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

—Paul, Acts 17:26–28

We start at the beginning, and in the beginning, there was God, according to Genesis 1:1. Everything we will discover about unity and the One will find its origin and basis in God.

Who is God?

As we begin this study, let us seek to understand the picture of God as presented within the pages of the Bible. Perhaps you are here and are not completely sold on the idea that the Bible is God’s revelation to humans. For now, if that’s the case, I ask you to keep an open mind to the material, and give it an honest hearing. Hopefully, it will show how the Bible’s picture of God makes sense in terms of the reality which we experience.

God is spoken of as the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1—2:3). According to Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3, all things consist in God, and God continues to uphold and sustain the universe by His power.

Jesus declares that God is spirit (John 4:24). We are not told much about the nature of spiritual beings, but we do know God has personality; He is not an “it,” a “thing,” or some vague mist or vapor or any such thing.

Above all, the Bible makes it known that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present (cf. Job 28:24, Psalm 147:5, Acts 17:26–27, Hebrews 4:13, Revelation 19:6). His personal name—YHWH, most likely pronounced Yahweh—simply means I AM, or the “Existent One” (cf. Exodus 3:14). We live and move and have our being within God. In this view, if there is no God, there is nothing at all.

If we understand that God is our Creator, the Author and Giver of life, and all-powerful, then we should understand we are not all-knowing or all-powerful. As we continue in our discussions, it is important for us to keep two passages in mind:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares YHWH. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8–9)

“The secret things belong to YHWH our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Moses, Deuteronomy 29:29)

There are some questions whose answers we cannot understand. Some aspects of God, His nature, and His work are beyond our capabilities. Nevertheless, the Bible indicates that God has made many revelations regarding Himself to humans, and humans are expected to understand those revelations. Therefore, we must be careful: we must not go beyond what we can know, but we must work to come to an understanding of what can be known.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

According to the Bible, God is the Creator, a Spirit, all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful. He has revealed some things about Himself to people, and there are other things about Him which people cannot understand. Since God is so great, why do we exist? Why would God bother to create this universe and to have anything to do with us humans?

For us to explore this question further, we must dig deeper into an understanding of who God is. From the days of Moses on, one of the great declarations about God is that He is One. (Deuteronomy 6:4) In a world where most people believed in many different gods controlling different aspects of this world, the idea that there was really just one God behind everything was radical and controversial!

But how is God one? A lot of people just assume that God is one like you are one and I am one: one person. But let us look at what the Bible says:

- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John, John 1:1)
- ‘Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”’ (John 8:58)
- “For in [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” (Paul, Colossians 2:9)
- “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” (1 Peter 1:1–2)
- “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21)

We learn in Deuteronomy 6:4 that God is One, but when we look at these passages, it seems that Jesus, John, Paul, and Peter are saying that the Word, Jesus, is also God, and the Holy Spirit is God as well. How can this be?

There are only three possible answers. The first is to say that God remains one person but has three forms: God as the Father, God as the Son, Jesus, or God as the Holy Spirit. But the Bible shows that this view does not work: all three are present when Jesus is baptized in Matthew 3:16–17, and Jesus declares that the Father and the Son are two separate witnesses in John 8:17–18. The second is to say that God the Father is really God, and while Jesus and the Spirit are divine, they are not on the same level of divinity as God the Father. Yet the Bible again speaks differently: notice how Paul says that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus in Colossians 2:9, and John says that the Word was not just with God but was also God in John 1:1.

Notice how both answers try to maintain the assumption that God is one in person. Yet no passage of Scripture declares that God is one Person. This brings us to our third answer: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all one God, but in three Persons. This is the idea of the Trinity, or the Triune God. Despite all the bad press this idea receives, it remains the best way to try to understand how God is One yet Three.

Yes, we have now ventured deeply into the dark forest of theology. Theology is often understood as boring and mostly irrelevant to life. This is a sad reputation, especially considering how important the Triune God is to our understanding of the world in which we live. It is only when we understand how God is One in Three that we can really understand why He bothered to create the universe and us in it.

How, therefore, can God be considered One yet in Three Persons? While much remains mysterious, and beyond our understanding,

the Bible does tell us some things about this unity. God is one in eternal existence: as John says, the Word was God and with God from before the beginning (John 1:1–3), and the Spirit was there as well (Genesis 1:2). This means that all three are One in “age”. God is also of the same substance, or being; the Father is spirit, the Word is spirit, and the Spirit, obviously, is spirit (John 1:14, 4:24). We will see in the future that the Word, otherwise known as Jesus, or the Son, will take on human flesh, but that does not change the fact that He remained fully God and thus spirit. God is of the same character: all the qualities that mark the Father are also true of the Word/Son and Spirit (Hebrews 1:3). God also has one will: the Father, the Word/Son, and Spirit all have the same purpose, ideas, and intentions (cf. John 17:20–23).

We could get into a lot more detail about what can be known about the inner workings of the nature of God, but ultimately, God wants us to understand that He is One in ‘relational unity’. God is One in Three Persons because of the powerful relationship that exists amongst the Three!

Jesus provides a glimpse of this in John 17:20–23:

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. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father; they are perfectly One, and yet they remain distinct Persons. The same is true with the Spirit. Their unity is not based in personhood but in *relationship*. Think about it: God is so perfectly unified in nature and will that we can speak of Him in the singular. Even though it is

God the Father, God the Word/Son, and God the Holy Spirit, God is One. He is YHWH, the Existent One: the Father, the Word/Son, and the Holy Spirit, all perfectly One.

What Does It All Mean?

So God is One according to relational unity. Why does that matter? And how can we know for sure?

We have wanted to know why God bothered to create the world and to have anything to do with us. Jesus really gives us an answer to those questions in John 17:20–23, but we first need to consider a few big issues.

The Bible declares that God is love in 1 John 4:8. Defining love can get tricky in society today, but both the Greek word and its use in the Bible shows us that love involves seeking the best interest of the beloved, even at great personal cost (cf. John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, 1 John 4:7–21). Love is something that can only exist within some sort of a relationship; therefore, this is a strong proof that God is one in relational unity, since He would have to be in relationship within Himself to be love.

Likewise, the Bible declares that God can be known not just through what He has spoken to people but also through the creation. Paul says that God's invisible attributes—His eternal power and His divine nature—can be perceived in the creation that He made. (Romans 1:19–20) To this day we are left awestruck at the majesty of creation, and how everything works together to facilitate life: everything from constants of the operation of the universe down to the coding of DNA. We can therefore see God's eternal power. But where do we perceive God's divine nature?

This brings us to the third great declaration of Scripture: man is made in God's image.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26–27).

For, ‘In [God] we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man (Paul, Acts 17:28–29).

Since God is not physical but spiritual, we can safely declare that God is not a human (John 4:24). Thus, if we are made in God’s image, it has something to do with our minds, hearts, and souls!

What are we all looking for in life? While it is true that different people are motivated by different ideals and purposes, most of us really seek after the same things. We might want a comfortable lifestyle, money, and such things, but we cannot imagine having those things alone. Many people want to be as wealthy as Ebenezer Scrooge, but no one really wants to be Ebenezer Scrooge! We want to have connections with other people. We seek after that one special person with whom we will maintain close intimacy, physically and emotionally. We seek to be known, to be loved, and to be appreciated. In short, we seek ‘relationships’. In fact, scientists and psychologists are discovering that we humans are wired to be social animals: we were not designed to be isolated from each other. We want to share in relationships!

Let’s stop and think about the relationship we normally associate with the term: marriage. What is the ideal situation? We have one man and one woman who are not related to each other. Through

one of a few processes, they meet, get to know each other, and create a deep connection. They make a commitment to each other because of their love for one another. Even though they remain two individual people, they become one: they are one in being (they're both humans), they work to share one will, and they seek each other's best interest. It is no longer about "me" for either of them; it becomes about "us."

What is the result when these two become one? They want to share in that love, not just with one another, but in a product of that relationship. Children are born and raised with the expectation that there will remain a sense of oneness in relationship within the family. Yes, the children will likely grow up and marry spouses themselves, but ideally, parents and children still share in life together at some level. They still remain one family, even as it grows with grandchildren and great-grandchildren and so on and so forth.

None of this is coincidental. Genesis 2:18, 24 says, "Then YHWH God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ... "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

It is not good for man to be alone because man was never made to be alone. Man could never have been made to be alone because he was made in God's image, and who is God but Three Persons in relational unity? Man was made for relationship, for God is one in the relationship.

In marriage, the two become one, just as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one.

Let us consider again John 17:20–23 (emphasis mine):

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. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, **that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One. Therefore, God, I, and my fellow man are to be one. This does not mean that humans become gods, but it does mean that humans are to better reflect the image of God. This is the way God has always intended.

We now have our answers. God is love, and God shared in that love within Himself. Thus, God is so relationally one that we can speak of Him in the singular, even though God is in Three Persons. We can understand this in part from the analogy of marriage.

And just as love in marriage ideally leads to a desire to share that love with offspring, so God as love wanted to share that love with “offspring”—the creation, this universe, and this world—and especially with those creatures made in God’s image, humanity. God wants to have a deep, close relationship with humans, to share in the joy of true, self-sacrificial love. And just as true love cannot be forced, so God does not force that relationship on anyone. Instead, He invites people to share in that relationship.

Is there a God? And is that God the Triune God revealed in the pages of the Bible? Let’s look around. Can we not perceive that there is a power greater than ourselves, an intelligent, creative being who can appreciate aesthetic pleasures such as art and beauty? Don’t we appreciate beauty and creativity? Do we seek after meaning, connection, relationship, and love? Don’t we get the impression that there is something more to life than just the biological realities of living? Why do we seek meaning if meaning is just a tragic misfiring of our biological development? And why is it that we are still nagged

with this understanding, deep down, that there are such things as right and wrong, and that justice is worth pursuing?

Why are we all so afraid of being left alone and abandoned?

Paul is right. There is a God, and His eternal power and divine nature can be perceived in the physical universe and within the design of humanity made in His image. It makes sense to believe that God is love and that all things exist on account of that love. It makes sense that God is Three in One, maintaining relational unity, since humans seek relationship, not just with fellow humans but also with his environment and his Creator. It is not good for us to be alone. We need a relationship with our Creator.

Nevertheless, as we look around, we see a lot of pain, suffering, abuse, hatred, and discord. Things are not all lovely around here. What happened? How can it be made better? These will be our subjects as we consider the ONE Man in our next lesson.

Preview

Questions for Discussion

1. Who is God?
2. How can God be One in Three Persons?
3. How does the creation show us that there is a God?
4. How does the creation show us that God is One in relational unity?
5. What does it mean that humans are made in God's image?
6. How can we know that man is made in God's image?
7. Why did God create the universe?
8. Why are we here?