

The Holy Spirit, Teacher's Guide

Week 2: One God, Three Persons: The Spirit and the Godhead

Matthew 3:13–17; Matthew 28:18–20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson asks the class to hold together two truths that Scripture never compromises: there is one God, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct, eternal persons who are each fully that one God. The doctrinal stakes are high on two fronts. On one side stands the “Jesus only” or Oneness doctrine, found especially in the United Pentecostal Church and similar fellowships, which teaches that Father, Son, and Spirit are not distinct persons but three manifestations of one person, and which requires baptism to be administered with a “Jesus only” formula. This is the old error of modalism, and the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3 refutes it in a single scene: the Son stands in the water, the Father speaks from heaven, and the Spirit descends as a dove, three persons present, distinct, and active at the same moment. On the other side stands the opposite error, tritheism in practice if not in name, and alongside it the Watchtower’s denial that the Son and the Spirit are God at all. The teacher must be ready to walk the narrow biblical path between these errors with a steady hand.

But this week must not become a mere geometry lesson about God. The threeness of God is the reason “God is love” (1 John 4:8) was true before anything was created: the Father has eternally loved the Son in the fellowship of the Spirit (John 17:24). The God of the Bible has never been lonely, never needed us, and yet opened His own fellowship to us, baptizing us into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Students who grasp this do not merely win arguments; they worship more deeply, pray more intelligently, and rest more securely as beloved children. The aim of the lesson is a class that can defend the Godhead and is moved to adore it.

Send students home with two outcomes. First, the ability to show from Matthew 3, Matthew 28, and John 14–16 that the one God exists in three distinct persons, and to answer the Oneness argument about Acts 2:38 without embarrassment. Second, a bigger and warmer vision of God Himself, so that the next time they bow to pray they know, with more wonder than before, who is listening.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read the baptism scene in Matthew 3:16–17 slowly. What is each person of the Godhead doing in this moment, the Son, the Spirit, and the Father? Why does this single scene make it impossible to believe that Father, Son, and Spirit are one person appearing in three different modes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk the class through the scene as eyewitnesses rather than theorists, because the argument is the scene itself. The Son is in the river; He has just been baptized, and Matthew says He “went up immediately from the water” (v. 16). The Spirit is descending “like a dove and coming to rest on him,” moving from heaven to the Son, which requires that the Spirit and the Son be distinct; a person cannot descend upon himself. The Father is speaking from heaven, and His words are about the Son, in the third person: “This is my beloved Son.” He is not addressing Himself, and the Son is not throwing His voice. Three persons, three simultaneous actions, one moment in history.

Spell out the logical force gently but firmly. Modalism, ancient and modern, claims that God is one person who appears successively in three modes, as Father in creation, Son in redemption, Spirit in the church. The fatal word is “successively.” At the Jordan the three are present at once. If the Father, Son, and Spirit were one person, then at the baptism that person was in the water, in the air, and in heaven, speaking to Himself about Himself while descending upon Himself. No unforced reading of Matthew 3 survives that. This is why the baptism of Jesus has been called the modalist’s most uncomfortable text, and the teacher should make sure every student can describe the scene from memory.

Notice also what the scene affirms positively. The Father’s voice expresses eternal relationship: “my beloved Son” reaches back before Bethlehem (John 17:24, “you loved me before the foundation of the world”). The Spirit’s descent marks the anointing of the Messiah for His public work (Acts 10:38, anticipating Week 4). Each person acts according to His place in the one divine work of redemption: the Father sends and approves, the Son obeys and saves, the Spirit anoints and empowers. Distinction of persons never means division of purpose.

A caution worth voicing: the Spirit descended “like a dove,” a visible form given for John’s testimony (John 1:32–34); the Spirit is not a bird, just as the Father is not a literal voice box. God accommodated human senses so that the reality of three persons could be seen and heard and reported. That is how much He wanted us to know this about Himself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Three persons present and active simultaneously: the decisive refutation of modalism
- The distinctness of the persons: the Spirit descends upon the Son; the Father speaks about the Son
- The eternal relationship behind the words “my beloved Son” (John 17:24)
- Distinction of persons without division of purpose in the work of redemption
- The dove as a visible form for testimony (John 1:32–34), not the Spirit’s nature
- Why Jesus was baptized: “to fulfill all righteousness,” not for remission of sins He did not have

Discussion Prompts

- If you were explaining this scene to someone who had never read the Bible, how many actors would you have to mention, and what is each one doing?
- Why is it significant that all three persons appear at the launch of Jesus' public ministry?
- What does the Father's public approval of the Son before the work began tell us about the relationship within the Godhead?

Question 2

Student Question:

At Jesus' baptism the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," before Jesus had preached a sermon or worked a single miracle. What does it mean to you that the Father's delight rested on the Son before the public work began, and how does being God's beloved child in Christ (Galatians 3:26–27) quiet your own need to earn what has been given?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Father's words land before a single sermon, miracle, or convert. In the Gospels' chronology, Jesus has healed no one yet, called no apostle, fed no crowd. And heaven is already well pleased. The Father's delight in the Son rests on who the Son is and the relationship they share, not on a quarterly performance review. Of course Jesus' obedience pleased the Father throughout His life (John 8:29), but the order matters: belovedness came first, and the work flowed from it, not toward it.

Now build the bridge to the student, and build it carefully on the gospel's actual architecture. Galatians 3:26–27 says we are sons of God through faith, "for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." The baptized believer is in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6), and the Father's verdict over the Son becomes the Father's welcome over those who are clothed with the Son. This is not a sentimental "God thinks you're wonderful as you are"; it is a covenant reality with an address: in Christ. The student who has been baptized into Christ does not work to become a child; he works because he is one.

Most adults in your class carry some version of the earning treadmill: the quiet suspicion that God's pleasure rises and falls with their performance, that a bad week makes them less His. That suspicion produces either exhaustion or pretending, and it is functionally a denial of grace. Let the Jordan correct it. The same Father who delighted in His Son delights in His children, disciplines them as sons (Hebrews 12:5–8), and is not waiting for a reason to disown them.

Guard the other ditch in the same breath. Belovedness is not indulgence; the beloved Son was immediately led into the wilderness to be tested, and He learned obedience (Hebrews 5:8). Sonship calls for likeness (Matthew 5:44–45). The rest the gospel gives is rest from earning, never rest from obeying, and Scripture is emphatic that children of God can forfeit their inheritance through unbelief and rebellion (Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4). Security is found in remaining in Christ, not in a one-time experience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Father's delight in the Son preceding the Son's public work
- Adoption through faith and baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:26–27), not through performance
- The error of the earning treadmill: serving to be loved rather than because we are loved
- Belovedness and testing: the Spirit led the beloved Son straight into the wilderness
- Remaining in Christ: sonship is forfeitable through apostasy, against "once saved, always saved"
- Obedience as the fruit of sonship rather than its purchase price

Discussion Prompts

- What is the practical difference between obeying to earn God's pleasure and obeying because you already have it?
- How does being "in Christ" through baptism connect you to the words spoken at the Jordan?
- Where in your life does the earning treadmill show up most, and what truth from this passage answers it?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus commanded baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). What is the significance of the singular "name" joined to three distinct persons? What does this verse teach about the full deity of the Holy Spirit alongside the Father and the Son?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The grammar of Matthew 28:19 deserves a slow look, because Jesus chose His words with precision on a mountain where He claimed all authority in heaven and on earth. He commands baptism "in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Three observations. First, the singular "name" with three coordinated persons gathers the three into one divine identity; in biblical idiom the name stands for the person, authority, and character of God Himself (Exodus 34:5–7). One name means one God. Second, the repeated article in the Greek, "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," keeps the three distinct; they are not merged into a single person. Third, the construction places the Spirit on exactly the same plane as the Father and the Son. No Jewish teacher, formed by the Shema, would speak of being baptized into the shared name of God, God's Messiah, and an impersonal energy, or of God and two exalted creatures. The verse is intelligible only if the Spirit is a divine person.

This is the capstone of the case begun last week. The Spirit who can be lied to (Acts 5:3–4), who teaches and wills and intercedes, here stands inside the one divine name. Add 2 Corinthians

13:14, where Paul prays for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, a threefold blessing from three persons, and the New Testament pattern is unmistakable.

Bring out what baptism “into the name” means for the one baptized. To be baptized into the name of the Godhead is to be brought under that name’s ownership and into that name’s fellowship, the way a bride takes a new name. The baptized person belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This is one reason baptism can never be a mere symbol of something already complete; it is the divinely appointed moment of union (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27), when heaven writes its name on a life.

Anticipate Question 9 briefly: students may already be wondering why Acts records baptisms “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38). Plant the flag now and promise the full discussion later in the lesson: “in the name of Jesus” in Acts means by His authority, exactly as Matthew 28:18–19 grounds the command in “all authority.” The two phrases describe the same baptism from two angles; there is no contradiction and no rival formula.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The singular “name” with three persons: one God, three distinct persons in a single phrase
- The full deity of the Holy Spirit, placed on the same plane as the Father and the Son
- The name as ownership: baptism brings a person under the Godhead’s possession and care
- Baptism as the appointed moment of union with Christ (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27)
- 2 Corinthians 13:14 as the parallel threefold text
- Preparing for the Acts 2:38 question: authority, not a competing formula

Discussion Prompts

- Why would the wording of Matthew 28:19 be impossible for a strict monotheist unless the three persons are each fully God?
- What does it mean to you, concretely, that the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit was placed on you at baptism?
- How does this verse equip you to answer both the person who denies the Spirit’s deity and the person who denies the three persons?

Question 4

Student Question:

Baptism places a person into relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the whole Godhead claiming a life. If you have been baptized into that name, what would it look like this week to live as someone who belongs, body and soul, to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Where has that ownership been only partial?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question moves from the grammar of Matthew 28:19 to its claim on a life. Baptism into the name of the Godhead is the language of total transfer: out of one ownership and into another (Colossians 1:13). The baptized believer does not add God to an otherwise self-managed life; he hands over the deed. Paul's phrase for it is that we are "not our own," bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, which Week 9 will revisit). The practical question for the class is whether the transfer has reached every room of the house.

Help students inventory honestly. Most Christians have surrendered the rooms where surrender came easily and kept a key to one or two others: the finances, the temper, the entertainment choices, the ambitions for their children, the grudge that has become a pet. Belonging "body and soul" to the Father, Son, and Spirit means there is no category of life marked private. The Father's will sets the agenda, the Son's lordship governs the choices, the Spirit's holiness sets the atmosphere.

Keep the tone evangelical rather than crushing. The ownership of the Godhead is not a hostile takeover; it is the safest possession a soul can know. The Father who owns us delighted in His Son and delights in His children; the Son who owns us died for us; the Spirit who owns us is the Helper. Surrender to such an owner is not loss but homecoming, and every kept-back room is a room where we are still doing our own maintenance with our own resources.

Ask for one specific room this week. Not "I should be more surrendered," but "the way I talk about people at work," "my anxiety about money," "what I watch when no one knows." Encourage students to name it privately, confess it to God, and invite a trusted brother or sister into the renovation. Application that stays general stays imaginary.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Baptism as transfer of ownership: delivered from darkness into the kingdom of the Son (Colossians 1:13)
- "You are not your own": the whole life under the Godhead's claim
- Partial surrender as the chronic illness of comfortable Christianity
- The kindness of God's ownership: Father, Son, and Spirit as the safest possessor of a life
- Specific, nameable surrender versus vague spiritual intentions

Discussion Prompts

- Which room of your life has been hardest to hand over, and what makes it feel safer in your own keeping?
- How does remembering whose name was placed on you at baptism change a Monday morning decision?
- What would our congregation look like if every member lived fully owned for one month?

Question 5

Student Question:

In John 14–16, Jesus repeatedly distinguishes Himself from the Father who sent Him and from the Helper whom the Father will send in His name (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Trace these distinctions. How do Jesus' own words rule out the idea that He and the Father and the Spirit are the same person?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Send the class into John 14–16 with a pencil, because the distinctions are everywhere once you look. Jesus prays to the Father (14:16), and praying to oneself is not prayer. The Father sends the Helper at the Son's request, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper" (14:16), three parties in one sentence: the asking Son, the giving Father, the given Spirit. The Father sends the Spirit "in my name" (14:26); the Son sends the Spirit "from the Father" (15:26); the Spirit "proceeds from the Father" and "will bear witness about me" (15:26). In 16:7 the Son must depart so the Spirit may come, which makes them distinct; in 16:13–15 the Spirit speaks not on His own authority but takes what is the Son's, which is the Father's, and declares it. Every sentence collapses if the three are one person.

Lay alongside these the broader pattern of the Gospels. The Son prays to the Father in Gethsemane, "not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39), two wills in willing submission, not one will talking to itself. The Father knows what the Son, in His earthly humility, declared He did not know (Mark 13:32). The Son commits His spirit to the Father at death (Luke 23:46). On the Oneness reading, these scenes become theater, God pretending to pray, pretending to submit, pretending to be forsaken. The cost of modalism is the sincerity of Jesus, and that price is unpayable.

Be fair to what Oneness teachers quote. John 10:30, "I and the Father are one," asserts unity, and the Greek is "one thing" (neuter), one in nature, purpose, and work, not one person; John 17:21–22 uses the same oneness for disciples, who obviously remain distinct persons. John 14:9, "whoever has seen me has seen the Father," speaks of perfect revelation, the Son as the exact imprint of the Father's nature (Hebrews 1:3), in a context where Jesus has just distinguished Himself from the Father in the same breath (14:6–7, 10). Read in context, the Oneness proof texts affirm exactly what we affirm: full deity and full distinctness.

Summarize with the simple grid the church has always used: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God; the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father; and there is one God. Every text in John 14–16 fits that grid. No text fits modalism.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The threefold pattern of John 14–16: the Son asks, the Father gives, the Spirit comes
- Prayer, sending, and submission as proofs of real personal distinction
- Gethsemane and Mark 13:32 as scenes that modalism turns into theater
- Handling Oneness proof texts in context: John 10:30; 14:9; 17:21–22
- The classic grid: each person fully God, the persons distinct, one God

- The sincerity of Jesus as what is finally at stake in this doctrine

Discussion Prompts

- Which single sentence in John 14–16 do you find hardest to reconcile with the claim that Father, Son, and Spirit are one person?
- How would you respond to someone quoting “I and the Father are one” to prove there is only one person in the Godhead?
- What happens to the meaning of Gethsemane if the Son and the Father are the same person?

Question 6

Student Question:

The Father loves the Son (John 3:35), the Son honors the Father (John 14:31), and the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). Within God there is eternal love, honor, and self-giving. How does it change your picture of God to realize He has never been lonely, and that He invites you into that fellowship rather than needing you to complete Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the doctrine turns to doxology, and the teacher should let the wonder breathe. Before creation there was not a solitary deity in silent isolation; there was the Father loving the Son (John 17:24) in the fellowship of the Spirit. “God is love” (1 John 4:8) was true from all eternity because love had an eternal object within God Himself. A strictly solitary god could not have been love until he made something to love; the God of Scripture has always been a fountain of love, which is why creation and redemption are acts of overflow, not of need.

Press the implication Paul states on Mars Hill: God is not “served by human hands, as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:25). God did not create us because He was lonely, and He did not save us because He was bored. He made and redeemed us out of fullness. This rescues the gospel from the subtle blasphemy of imagining ourselves God’s therapy, and it makes grace truly grace: we are wanted, not needed, and wanted is better.

Then open the door Jesus opens in John 17:20–26: that the love with which the Father loved the Son would be in us. Through Christ we are brought into the family fellowship, children of the Father (Galatians 3:26–27), brothers of the Son (Hebrews 2:11), indwelt by the Spirit (Acts 2:38, Week 9). Prayer, worship, and the church’s shared life are participation in a fellowship older than the universe. That is what students are walking into when they bow their heads tonight.

Pastorally, this lands on loneliness, one of the quiet epidemics in every congregation. The God who has never been lonely understands fellowship perfectly and has designed His people for it. The lonely member is not invited to admire the Godhead’s love from a distance but to enter it, and the church is meant to be the visible outpost of that communion (John 13:34–35). Let the

application be double: draw near to God who welcomes you, and be the welcome for someone else this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Eternal love within the Godhead: “God is love” true before creation
- Creation and redemption as overflow of fullness, not remedy for divine need (Acts 17:25)
- Believers drawn into the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Spirit (John 17:20–26)
- Prayer and worship as participation, not performance
- The church as the visible community of the Godhead’s love (John 13:34–35)
- A word to the lonely: designed for the fellowship God has always known

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that God created and saved us out of fullness rather than need?
- How does the eternal love between the Father and the Son change what you think prayer actually is?
- Who in our congregation needs to experience the Godhead’s kind of welcome through you this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Scripture insists there is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:4) while presenting the Father as God (Galatians 1:1), the Son as God (John 1:1; 20:28), and the Spirit as God (Acts 5:3–4). How do passages like Matthew 3:16–17, Matthew 28:19, and 2 Corinthians 13:14 hold these truths together, and why must we affirm both the oneness and the threeness rather than sacrificing either?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the lesson’s systematic center, so give it order. Start with the oneness texts and do not rush them: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4); “there is no God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4); “I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:5). Biblical faith is monotheism, full stop. Any account of Father, Son, and Spirit that yields three gods has left the Bible. Say that plainly, because our doctrine is sometimes caricatured as tritheism, and the caricature deserves a clear denial.

Then lay down the threeness texts in three rows. The Father is God: “God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (Galatians 1:1). The Son is God: “the Word was God” (John 1:1), Thomas’s confession “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28), which Jesus accepted as worship rather than correcting as blasphemy. The Spirit is God: lying to the Spirit is lying to God (Acts 5:3–4), and He shares the one name (Matthew 28:19). Each row is plural in witnesses; this is not a doctrine balanced on one verse.

Now show the texts that hold both truths in one frame: the baptism scene with three persons in simultaneous action; the one name of Matthew 28:19; the benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14; the sevenfold “one Spirit... one Lord... one God and Father” of Ephesians 4:4–6, where all three persons anchor the church’s one faith. The Bible never blushes at stating both truths side by side, and it never explains the mechanics. Our task is to affirm everything Scripture affirms and stop where Scripture stops. We do not have to comprehend God to confess Him accurately; a child can stand in the ocean without holding the ocean.

Warn against the shortcuts. Every popular analogy fails toward a heresy: water, ice, and steam fail toward modalism (the same substance taking turns); the three-leaf clover and the egg fail toward division (parts of God); the sun and its light fail toward making the Son and Spirit mere emanations. Analogies may illustrate aspects, but the moment one is pressed as an explanation it misleads. The safest teaching method is the one the Bible uses: state the truths, show the scenes, and worship. Note for precision that Scripture’s own vocabulary is “Godhead” or “divine nature” (Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9); the word “Trinity” is a human label for the Bible’s teaching, and what we defend is the teaching, not a word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Monotheism as non-negotiable: the oneness texts heard at full volume
- The three rows of deity texts: Father, Son, and Spirit each called God
- Texts holding oneness and threeness together: Matthew 3; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4–6
- The failure of popular analogies and the wisdom of stopping where Scripture stops
- “Godhead” (Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9) as the Bible’s own term for the divine nature
- Confessing accurately without claiming to comprehend exhaustively

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important to begin with the Bible’s insistence on one God before discussing the three persons?
- Which of the popular analogies have you heard, and where does each one break down?
- How would you state the Bible’s teaching about God in three sentences a teenager could memorize?

Question 8

Student Question:

Mystery is not the same as nonsense, and worship often begins where full explanation ends. Where do you tend to demand that God fit inside your understanding before you will trust Him? What would it mean this week to bow before what you cannot fully diagram, the way Paul does in Romans 11:33–36?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Godhead is the first doctrine most students meet that flatly exceeds their mental containers, and that makes this question more than a side trail. How a person responds to truth he cannot fully diagram reveals whether his real authority is Scripture or his own sense of the plausible. The demand that God fit inside our understanding before we will trust Him is not intellectual honesty; it is a quiet enthronement of self.

Distinguish carefully, though, between mystery and nonsense, because thoughtful students (and skeptical coworkers) will raise it. A contradiction asserts and denies the same thing in the same sense: one God and three gods would be nonsense. But Scripture asserts one God in essence and three in person, oneness and threeness in different senses, which is mystery, not contradiction. We affirm more than we can model, not less than is coherent. Analogies from creation help here only negatively: a man who cannot fully explain light or his own consciousness should not be astonished that he cannot fully explain God (Isaiah 55:8–9).

Then take the class to Romans 11:33–36, and notice what Paul does at the edge of his understanding. After eleven chapters of the densest reasoning in the New Testament, he does not file a complaint; he sings. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” The deepest minds in Scripture respond to mystery with doxology. Job, given no explanation at all, puts his hand over his mouth and worships (Job 40:4–5; 42:1–6). Worship is what trust does when explanation runs out.

Make the application concrete to suffering as well as doctrine, because that is where this muscle is actually used. The same person who demands a diagrammed Godhead usually demands a diagrammed providence: why this illness, why this loss, why now. The student who learns to bow before the mystery of God’s being is in training to bow before the mystery of God’s ways, and that training may be the most practical thing this whole study does for some hearts in your class.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mystery versus contradiction: affirming more than we can model is not nonsense
- The authority question hidden inside the demand for full explanation
- Romans 11:33–36 and Job: doxology as the biblical response at the edge of understanding
- Trusting God’s ways flows from trusting God’s being
- Humility of mind as a Christian virtue (Isaiah 55:8–9; Deuteronomy 29:29)

Discussion Prompts

- Where is the line between honest questions and the demand that God answer to us?
- Why do you think Paul ends Romans 11 with a hymn instead of a summary?
- What mystery in your own life is God currently asking you to trust Him through rather than understand?

Question 9

Student Question:

Some teach a “Jesus only” doctrine, that Father, Son, and Spirit are one person and that baptism must be administered only with the words “in the name of Jesus,” citing passages like Acts 2:38. Using the baptism of Jesus, Matthew 28:19, and Jesus’ own distinctions in John 14–16, how would you answer this teaching with both clarity and kindness, and how should we understand “in the name of Jesus” in Acts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now meet the Oneness doctrine head-on, because your students will meet it, in charismatic media, in “Jesus only” congregations, and in family conversations. The teaching: God is one person; “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” are titles or manifestations of that one person, who is Jesus; the Trinity is a pagan corruption; and valid baptism must be spoken “in the name of Jesus” only, with Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, and 19:5 as the warrant. Many who hold this are devout, know their proof texts cold, and believe trinitarians worship three gods. Equip your class with both the answers and the temperament.

The biblical answer stands on the scenes already studied. The baptism of Jesus presents three simultaneous, distinct persons; no honest paraphrase can make one person do all three things at once. John 14–16 has the Son asking the Father to send another Helper, three parties in grammatical and personal distinction. Gethsemane has the Son submitting His will to the Father’s. The resurrection has the Father raising the Son (Galatians 1:1). Stephen sees the Son standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55–56), which requires two. And Matthew 28:19, the verse Oneness doctrine must explain away, places the three in one name by the Lord’s own command.

Then resolve the Acts question, because it is the hinge of their argument. “In the name of Jesus Christ” in Acts is the idiom of authority, not a recitation formula. Peter heals “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (Acts 3:6) and the council demands to know “by what power or by what name” the apostles act (Acts 4:7); Colossians 3:17 commands everything be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” To baptize in Jesus’ name is to baptize by His authority, which is precisely what Matthew 28:18–19 commands: all authority is His, therefore baptize into the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The phrases describe one baptism from two angles, command and authorization, never two rival formulas. Notice too that Acts itself varies the wording (“in the name of Jesus Christ,” “in the name of the Lord Jesus”), which is fatal to the claim that Acts records a fixed verbal formula. Scripture nowhere prescribes the exact words a baptizer must pronounce; it prescribes the action (immersion), the subject (a penitent believer), the purpose (for the forgiveness of sins), and the authority (Christ’s).

Finish with manner. The Oneness believer is typically zealous, morally serious, and certain that he is defending the deity of Christ against pagan tritheism. Begin where you agree: there is one God, and Jesus is fully God. Then open Matthew 3 and ask him to walk through the scene with you, person by person. Ask who Jesus prayed to in Gethsemane, and whether the Father’s love

for the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17:24) can be real if they are one person. Gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15) are not garnish on this conversation; they are the strategy. A man rarely surrenders a conviction to someone who has mocked it; he may surrender it to a friend with an open Bible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Oneness (modalist) system: one person, three manifestations, “Jesus only” baptism
- The decisive scenes: the Jordan, Gethsemane, Acts 7:55–56, the resurrection
- “In the name of Jesus” as authority (Acts 4:7; Colossians 3:17), not a rival formula
- Acts’ own variation in wording as evidence against a fixed verbal formula
- What Scripture actually binds about baptism: action, subject, purpose, authority
- Matthew 28:19 as dominical command that no tradition may override
- Speaking the truth in love to zealous, sincere people (1 Peter 3:15; Ephesians 4:15)

Discussion Prompts

- If someone insisted your baptism was invalid because of the words spoken over you, how would you respond from Scripture?
- Why is the baptism of Jesus a better starting point than a debate about formulas?
- What common ground could you honestly affirm with a Oneness believer before addressing the error?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this week’s passages, the riverbank where all three persons appeared and the mountain where Jesus joined them in one name. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth about God. What is one concrete change in your praying, your worship, or your conversations that this week’s study calls for?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the week into its two scenes: the riverbank, where the Father spoke, the Son stood, and the Spirit descended; and the mountain, where the risen Son gathered all three into one name and sent His people to the nations. Between those two scenes lies everything this lesson taught: one God, three persons, one name, one baptism, one fellowship opened to us. Now the capstone question asks each student to say where this truth is remaking him.

Guide the formation into the three channels the question names. Praying: many students will realize their prayers have been addressed to a fog. Scripture’s pattern gives prayer a shape: to the Father, through the Son, with the Spirit’s help (Ephesians 2:18; Romans 8:26). Encourage them to pray this week with the persons in view, thanking the Father for the Son, thanking the Son for sending the Helper. Worship: singing and the Lord’s Supper gain depth when the

worshiper knows who is being praised; watch for the Godhead in the songs this Sunday.

Conversations: at least one student likely has a Witness relative or a Oneness coworker, and this week's texts, Matthew 3, Matthew 28:19, John 14–16, are now in his hands. Ask who needs a gentle conversation, and what the opening question might be.

Insist, as always, on specificity. "I want to know God better" evaporates by Tuesday. "I am going to begin my prayers this week by name, Father, thanking You for Your Son, and for the Spirit You have given" survives. "I am going to ask my brother-in-law to walk through the baptism of Jesus with me, just to see the scene" survives. Formation happens in sentences with verbs and dates.

Close the class with worship rather than summary. Read 2 Corinthians 13:14 over the students as a benediction: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. They have spent an hour studying the Godhead; let the last word be the Godhead blessing them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The week's two scenes, Jordan and Galilee, as the frame for the doctrine
- Prayer with the persons in view: to the Father, through the Son, with the Spirit's help (Ephesians 2:18)
- Worship deepened by knowing whom we praise
- Equipping for one real conversation with a Witness or Oneness friend
- Specific, dated, verbal commitments as the test of formation

Discussion Prompts

- How will your prayers this week sound different because of this lesson?
- Which truth about the Godhead most moved you from explanation toward worship?
- What is one sentence about God you want your children or grandchildren to be able to say because you taught it to them?