

Is there a hierarchy in the Trinity?

1. Carefully observe the hierarchy between God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in these verses. What is the hierarchy based on?

And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" And God furthermore said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name from generation to generation. (Ex 3:14-15, LSB)

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in the same manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, (John 5:19-22, LSB)

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26, LSB)

"When the Advocate 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, (John 15:26, LSB)

But to us God revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the depths of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the depths of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. (1 Cor 2:10-11, LSB)

2. Carefully observe these verses involving significant events in the Bible. Is there a hierarchy in nature and function?

Creation

God the Father

Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. (Ps 102:25, LSB)

Jesus Christ the Son

For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Col 1:16, LSB)

Holy Spirit

And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. (Gen 1:2, LSB)

Creation of man

God the Father

Then Yahweh God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and so the man became a living being. (Gen 2:7, LSB)

Jesus Christ the Son

For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Col 1:16, LSB)

Holy Spirit

The Spirit of God has made me,
And the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4, LSB)

The Incarnation

The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:35, LSB)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the One who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 1:18-20, LSB)

The Baptism of Our Lord

But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he permitted Him. And after being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him, (Matt 3:15-16, LSB)

Death of Christ

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:14, LSB)

The Resurrection of Christ

God the Father

For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways. (Acts 3:26, LSB)

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thes 1:10, LSB)

Jesus Christ the Son

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this sanctuary, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body. (John 2:19-21, LSB)

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. (John 10:17, LSB)

Holy Spirit

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom 8:11, LSB)

The Provision of Our Redemption

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:14, LSB)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to the obedience of Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Pet 1:1-2, LSB)

Indwelling Believers

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him. You know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17, LSB)

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him. (John 14:23, LSB)

The Great Commission

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20)

3. What is your conclusion from the observations you made in questions #1 and #2?

Is there a hierarchy in the Trinity? Teacher Notes

There are lots of biblical verses to cover in this lesson. Here's a suggestion: Question #1 – go over the verses together as a class, and Question #2 - divide each section among the class and have each group present their findings. Help the students with their observation by asking questions and let the biblical data drive their interpretation.

1. Carefully observe the hierarchy between God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in these verses. What is the hierarchy based on?

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God is recognized and honored as the One with Fatherhood. God the Father was the One who made the covenant to be God to Abraham and his descendants.

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in the same manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, (John 5:19-22, LSB)

Jesus is recognized as the Son of God who does what His Father desires and follows His Father's example. As a reminder, the Hebrew behind the Greek name "Jesus" means "God is salvation."

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26, LSB)

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The Father sent the Son whose purpose was to reveal the invisible God the Father. Jesus Christ sent the Spirit whose purpose was to reveal the Son of God. The Holy Spirit knows and understands the thoughts and depths of God the Father.

2. Carefully observe these verses involving significant events in the Bible. Is there a hierarchy in nature and function?

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Holy Spirit

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Each personality of the Trinity created the world.

Creation of man

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Jesus Christ the Son

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Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the One who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 1:18-20, LSB)

The power of God, ministered through the Holy Spirit, resulted in the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Baptism of Our Lord

But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. And after being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him, (Matt 3:15-16, LSB)

When Jesus Christ was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on Him and God the Father attested to His Son.

Death of Christ

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:14, LSB)

Each personality of the Trinity was involved with the death of Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection of Christ

God the Father

For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways. (Acts 3:26, LSB)

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thes 1:10, LSB)

Jesus Christ the Son

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up."20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this sanctuary, and will You raise it up in three days?"21 But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body. (John 2:19-21, LSB)

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. (John 10:17, LSB)

Holy Spirit

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom 8:11, LSB)

Each personality of the Trinity was involved with the resurrection.

The Provision of Our Redemption

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:14, LSB)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to the obedience of Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Pet 1:1-2, LSB)

Each personality of the Trinity is brought together in providing for man's eternal salvation. God the Father provided the only sacrifice for the penalty of humanity's sin, Jesus Christ the Son was the only acceptable unblemished sacrifice for atonement, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the only indication of God's treasured possession among all people, kingdom of priests, and holy nation (Ex 19:5-6).

Indwelling Believers

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him. You know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17, LSB)

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him. (John 14:23, LSB)

Both Jesus and God dwell within Believers through the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Great Commission

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20)

The name of each distinct personality of the Trinity is invoked at baptism; but note that they are declared as one name.

3. What is your conclusion from the observations you made in questions #1 and #2?

While each personality of the Trinity has a different functional role throughout biblical history, there is no apparent hierarchy in their roles. A hierarchy appears to exist only in the relationship they have with each other.