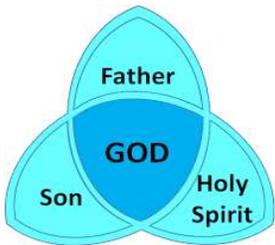


The first course that I took when I started my undergraduate degree was introduction to social work and there was much information about social systems theories. That was years ago, and I've forgotten many of the finer points of the theories, but what remains in my memory are diagrams with circles, overlapping circles of individuals and groups representing how we all intersect with each other. People, while individuals, don't live in isolation. Many aspects of our lives interact, overlap and impact others in multiple ways. Think about that for a minute—it makes sense! You come from a family, so interact with your family members. If you are married, you have interactions with your spouse, your spouse's family, your children, your grandchildren, and these all interact with each other to, so multiple overlapping connections. And then you are a part of other social circles, like church, various friends and maybe a service club. So, we move in multiple circles or social systems. Being a visual person, I tried to create the image I had in my mind of this, so I created a very simplistic diagram to share—simplistic because my computer skills have obvious limitations!

The circles are a way to show relationships that we have with others, and where the circles overlap, is where the relationships overlap. For example, you, your sister and your friend from school and your friend from church overlap with each other. You are in relationship with each other. You are a social system. Ok, so what you are by now probably asking 'What is the purpose of all this drive!'



Well, look at this diagram now—and the similarities with the above diagram. This is one illustration—a very commonly seen one at that, of the Holy Trinity. When humanity tries to grasp a concept that is challenging to the intellectual mind, we often try to find visual constructs to help us understand. This diagram brings forward the idea of the Godhead, the three 'aspects' or the 'three persons' or 'personas' within the one God Almighty—a way to help us understand the doctrine of the Trinity, which is truly one of those very difficult theological conundrums that is nigh on impossible for us to fully wrap our intellects around. Yet on Sundays most Christians will say the Apostle's Creed; we regularly say that we believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty, ... and we believe in the one Lord Jesus Christ, son of God... and we believe in the Holy Spirit. Meaning that as Christians we believe that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are manifestations of the One God, although if asked to explain it, we'd be hard pressed to do so! It's one of those beliefs that over time, if you really spend any time considering this at all, you do get a sense of it -- kind of within yourself, in your heart, your soul, but to rationally explain it—well according to one source I read this past week: we shouldn't feel bad about it if we don't really 'get' it completely, or are not able to explain it, because the church fought about it for over a century before they came up with an agreed upon Doctrine of the Trinity.¹ There is no explicit doctrine of the Trinity In the bible per se; this was developed by the church years later after decades of many scholars diligently working on it.

This image above of the Godhead, of course, is not perfect, how could we as humans come up with a perfect image of God?! However, it appeals to me in that it shows the interrelatedness between the three aspects or personas of God, who all together are God, they are within themselves a 'social system'. This image shows that there is an ever flowing relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who together are the fullness of God. They are by their

¹David Lose: Dear Working Preacher column: <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3254> ACCESSED May 22, 2018

very nature relational, and invite us into that relationship with them. How do we know we are invited into that relationship with them? In the story from John's Gospel of Nicodemus coming to meet Jesus at night, Jesus says to Nicodemus "the wind"—the Spirit of God—"blows where it chooses". And the wind, as we know we sometimes can hear it, we feel it, but can't see it. That is what it is like to those born of the Spirit. The Spirit is forever moving; the Spirit is there like the blowing wind, touching us all. But we're not always fully aware of its presence, or completely understand that presence when it blows over us. But the Holy Spirit nudges us none the less. A bit like in Nicodemus' situation--he had been touched by the Spirit's presence working in Jesus. He knew there was something about this man, something was nudging him on to find out more. So he sought Jesus out, at night, on the sly so the other religious leaders wouldn't know—for if they found out he would put himself and his position as a leader of the synagogue at risk. He just knew that he needed to know more about this special man from God. Yet, when Jesus tried to explain it to him, he found it too challenging to jump on board totally with Jesus' teachings--this went against his training as a Pharisee. Being re-born into the faith it seems isn't any easier than being born from the womb!

Jesus is inviting Nicodemus into a new faith with him, inviting him into relationship with him, the Son of God, and with God the Father through the indwelling of the Spirit. That's what Jesus means by being born again. A new life, a life directed by God's Spirit living in us. This coming to faith, this being infused by the breath, the Spirit of God and being so full of the Spirit of God that it changes your life to being God-centered in your living. That is the re-birth of oneself as a child of God -- to be in constant relationship with all persons of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to have the love of God within you guiding your life, your decision making, your interaction with others, instead of your own ego and personal agendas and other worldly influences guiding your life.

God wants nothing more than for us to be in relationship with God. How do we know that? Just even the briefest look at the bible, shows us a book full of writings by many people's experiences with God over thousands of years, how God affected them and their lives. Over and over God calls us back to relationship with God. Though Moses God presented God's people with laws to guide our lives as people who can live in God's ways. However over the centuries people fell away from living in God's ways, adapted the laws to suit themselves. So what did God do? God sent prophets to bring God's word to the people, reminding them to return to God's way. Then God became incarnate, became human and walked among God's people as the person of Jesus to once again show us the way. And when Jesus left the earth, he sent the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter so that we would not feel bereft, we would not be without God's presence. Why does God do this? After all this time why would God even bother? Because "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believe in him may not perish but may have eternal life." What is Eternal Life? Eternal life is not endlessly living, eternal life is life with God at our center, nudging us, guiding us, empowering us with the Father, the Creator's life giving love, a love that gives us strength, a love that forgives us and guides us into the ways Christ showed us, the breath of the Spirit surrounding us with loving comfort.

I will end with a prayer: May the eye of God dwell within us, may the foot of Christ give guidance to us, and may the shower of the Spirit pour upon us, richly and generously. Amen