

Title: "OIC Statement of Faith, Part 2: We believe in one God existing in three persons"

Key verse: 1st Peter 1:2 (NIV) – "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Last month, I began a series of messages on our church's Statement of Faith, the fundamental doctrines that we stand on as members of Osaka International Church. Paragraph 1 of that statement declares our belief in the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God, the final authority for all Christian doctrine and practice. Today, I will be speaking on Paragraph 2 of our Statement of Faith. The title of today's message is "We believe in one God existing in three persons." That title is a summary of what paragraph 2 says. Let me now quote that paragraph:

We believe in one God, creator of all things, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2

This is the bedrock doctrine of orthodox Christian theology: that God is one, and that He exists as a Trinity of three distinct Persons. This may seem like a contradiction in terms, but this is the conclusion that we come to as we examine all that the Scriptures have to say about God, the creator of all things ... and about the Lord Jesus Christ ... and about the Holy Spirit. In the early centuries of the Christian Era, and even continuing today, there are Christians who have struggled with exactly how to explain and how to understand the notion that God can be one God, but existing in three persons. This is the doctrine that I would like to outline for you today, and of course, I have a big assignment to accomplish in today's message.

Where shall I begin outlining this doctrine? How about if I begin in the Old Testament? How about if I begin with the famous statement known in Hebrew as the *Shema*. We find this in Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV) – "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." The Hebrew word for "hear" is "shema," and so this verse is often called the *Shema* or the *Shema Yisrael*: "Hear, O Israel." And what is it that Israel is to hear? That their God is Yahweh, the LORD, and that He is ONE. This is a declaration of exclusivity: that the people of Israel are to follow one God, Yahweh, the LORD. This is in stark contrast to the surrounding nations, which worshipped multiple gods — the other nations were polytheistic, but God wanted His people to follow Him alone, to worship Yahweh exclusively.

Let's look at the first of the 10 Commandment, in Exodus 20:2-3 (NASB) – "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³You shall have no other gods before Me." It was the LORD who had brought the people out of slavery in Egypt, and He wanted their complete allegiance, He wanted to be their only God.

Let's look at Isaiah 45:5-6 (NIV) – "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, ⁶so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other."

When Deuteronomy 4:6 states that the LORD is ONE, this is a statement of exclusivity, and not a statement of the internal unity of God. Some religious people have taken that verse to mean that God cannot be described as a Trinity because they rigidly interpret this verse to mean that He is one in His internal essence. Actually, the Hebrew word for "one" in this verse is *'ē·hāq̄* (אחד), and it is possible to read this word as a composite unity ... a composite unity. My Hebrew dictionary says this words means, "that which is united as one in contrast to separate parts" (James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*). This word is used in

Genesis 2:24 (NIV) which reads, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” One flesh. A composite unity.

Thus, in Christianity, we speak of God existing in a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are not three separate gods. This is one God, existing as three distinct persons. We often speak of the “Triune God.” Triune = “tri” (meaning *three*) and “une” (meaning *unity* or *united*). Three in One. Our God is the God who is “Three in One,” the Triune God.

My *ESV Study Bible* has this to say in an essay on the Trinity:

“The biblical teaching on the Trinity embodies four essential affirmations: 1) There is one and only one true and living God. 2) This one God eternally exists in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. 3) These three persons are completely equal in attributes, each with the same divine nature. 4) While each person is fully and completely God, the persons are not identical. The differences among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are found in the way they relate to one another and the role each plays in accomplishing their unified purpose.”

(Excerpt From: Crossway. “ESV® Study Bible.”)

For many churches and denominations, when they write up their Statement of Faith, they will list several Bible verses to support each of their doctrinal points. I notice that in the OIC Statement of Faith, the list of Bible verses is quite minimal: only one or two or three passages of Scripture are referenced for each paragraph. In the next few minutes, I want to take the one verse referenced in Paragraph 2 of our Statement of Faith and expand on it with some additional related verses.

If you look at Paragraph 2, it references 1st Peter 1:2. Let’s read that verse (NIV): “who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

Here we see each member of the Trinity mentioned in a single verse: God the Father, God the Son (that is: the Lord Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit.

We find the three persons of the Trinity mentioned together in several other verses of the New Testament. Perhaps the most famous of these is in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-19 (NIV) – “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

You may have noticed when you watch a Christian baptism that the pastor says something like, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” That wording comes from this verse. We are commanded to baptize in this name. And notice that the word “name” is singular, not plural. This is one God, but we know Him as Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons. We have the Triune God here. It is very important to baptize using this Trinitarian formula: in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is a hallmark of Christian baptism. We Christians have been divided on exactly how to practice baptism, but one thing we are agreed upon is that the ceremony of baptism must take place the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let’s look at 2nd Corinthians 13:14 (NIV), where the Apostle Paul ends his letter with the following benediction: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Again we see here, each of the members of the Trinity mentioned in one verse. Notice how Jesus Christ is called Lord, a common title for Him throughout the New Testament.

Let's look at 1st Corinthians 12, when Paul begins his discussion of spiritual gifts. Verses 4-6 (NIV) say this: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service [ministries], but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work." In verse 4 we see that there are differing gifts, but one Holy Spirit distributes them. In verse 5, the Lord Jesus Christ is sovereign over the different kinds of ministries going on in the church. In verse 6, it is God at work in the exercise of every gift and in the life of everyone who is gifted for working in the church. Because God the Father has the number one position in the Trinity, oftentimes when the Father is being referred to in a passage of Scripture, He is simply called "God," as we see here in 1st Corinthians 12 and as we saw a moment ago in 2nd Corinthians 13.

Let's look at one more passage of Scripture where the three members of the Trinity are mentioned. It is at the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16-17 (NASB) – "After He was baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and settling on Him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"." Notice that in this scene, we have Jesus, the Son of God, with the Holy Spirit coming upon Him, and God the Father speaking from heaven.

I have shown you several passages of Scripture where all three members of the Trinity are specifically mentioned. There are more verses I could show you, but I must move on to the next part of my message.

I would like to take a few minutes to look individually at God the Father, at His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and at the Holy Spirit. First, let's have a look at Old Testament names for God.

At the beginning of today's message, I spoke of the *shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV) – "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." You heard me speak of God as "Yahweh." This name that I used comes from the name of God as used often in the Hebrew Bible, which we transliterate in English with the letters YHWH (יהוה). In ancient Hebrew, they did not write down the vowels, so we only have the consonants: YHWH. In English, we often pronounce this as "Yahweh," though sometimes you will hear it spoken as "Jehovah," since the Y has sometimes been transcribed as a J.

As you look at this verse in most English Bibles, you will see the word "LORD" in all capital letters. When you see that, this means that the Hebrew word is YHWH. The ancient Hebrews were reluctant to try to pronounce God's name, so whenever they were reading the Bible and they came across YHWH, they would say the Hebrew word for Lord: Adonai. In English, we continue to follow this habit, using the word "Lord," but in our printed Bibles, we like to put this word in all capital letters (LORD) in order to illustrate that the word is actually YHWH. In Japanese Bibles, what they do is use the kanji for lord (主) and put it in bold type, as you see here on the screen.

The origin of this name YHWH (יהוה) is in Exodus 3:13-15 (NIV) – "Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM (יהיחא). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM (יהיחא) has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD (יהוה), 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, the name you shall call me from generation to generation." The name YHWH is derived from the Hebrew word *hayah*, which means *to be*. This is the God who IS.

My *ESV Study Bible* has this to say in an essay on the Character of God:

"Among the many names for God in the Bible, there is none more important than *Yahweh* (translated "LORD"), a name that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:15).

Linguistically related to the verb “I am,” *Yahweh* is packed with theological import. It most likely communicates God’s self-existence, independence, self-sufficiency, eternity, and unchanging character. . . . God is both majestic and intimate, the great, eternal “I AM,” the God who knows his children by name and keeps his covenant promises.”

(Excerpt From: Crossway. “ESV® Study Bible.”).

Let me repeat one sentence in the middle of this quote: this name *Yahweh* *most likely communicates God’s self-existence, independence, self-sufficiency, eternity, and unchanging character.*

Another important name for God is *Elohim*, which is usually just translated as “God.” *The Complete Jewish Study Bible* says this:

“*Elohim* is the most common of the names of God, used 32 times in the first chapter of Genesis alone, and 2500 times in the Tanakh [Old Testament]. It is plural in form, though it is commonly construed with a singular verb or adjective — most probably, this is explained as the plural of majesty or excellence, expressing high dignity or greatness. This ancient name for God conveys the idea of his creative power, authority, and sovereignty.”

There are a variety of names for God using “El.” These include *El Elyon* (God Most High) in Genesis 14:18 and other places. And *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) in Exodus 6:3 and extensively in the book of Job.

God is also referred to as *Adonai*, meaning “my Lord” or just “Lord.” This word often occurs with *Yahweh*, and when it does, *Adonai Yahweh* is translated into English as “Lord GOD,” with God in capital letters. It is found frequently in the book of Psalms, but also sometimes in the Prophets and in the Pentateuch.

God is sometimes referred to as “Father” in the Old Testament. Isaiah 63:16 (NASB) – “For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from ancient times is Your name.”

The first half of Malachi 2:10 (NASB) – “Do we not all have one Father? Is it not one God who has created us? . . .”

And the second half of Deuteronomy 32:6 (NASB) – “. . . Is He not your Father who has purchased you [created you]? He has made you and established you.”

Of course, there are many places in the New Testament where God is referred to as our Father. One of them is in the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer, in Matthew 6:9 (NASB), where Jesus says, “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name’.”

Next, I would like to speak for a few minutes about the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most well known Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah is in Isaiah chapter 9. You often hear these verses read out during the Christmas season. Let’s read verses 6 and 7 (NASB) – “For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.⁷ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

When David was king over Israel, the prophet Nathan came to him and gave him a promise from God, which we call “the Davidic Covenant.” This promise was that a son of David would sit on the throne and that this Davidic kingdom would be established forever. In 2nd Samuel 7:12-13 (NASB), Nathan says to David: “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

Verse 16 concludes God's covenant with David: "And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."

I don't have time today to outline all the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises of a Messiah, and even today we look forward to the return of Christ to establish His kingdom on this earth. However, that is a topic for another message in the future. My focus today is on Jesus as the Son of God and as fully divine. Why do we call Him fully divine? There are some interesting verses in the Old Testament that indicate two separate persons being called the Lord God.

Psalm 45:6-7 (NASB) – "Your throne, God, is forever and ever; The scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of justice. ⁷ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your companions." Look at verse 7 again: how can God have another God above Him? The New Testament recognizes this as a reference to Jesus Christ.

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens with some very interesting lines. Let's read verses 1-3 (NASB) – "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

And then in verses 8 and 9, Psalm 45:6-7 is quoted - "But regarding the Son, He says, "Your throne, God, is forever and ever, And the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your companions"."

The promise of the Davidic covenant of a kingdom established forever is repeated in Psalm 45 and Hebrews 1, and Jesus Christ is the God whose throne is established forever.

Let's look at Psalm 110:1 (NASB) – "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'." *Yahweh* says to *Adonai*, 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'. Again, two persons are said to be God.

Let's return to Hebrews chapter 1. Verse 13 says, "But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'?" The answer to this question is that God did not say this to any angels; rather, *Yahweh* said this to *Adonai* (*Yahweh* said this to His Son), and what we have here is a reference to God and the words God spoke to His Son.

Let's look again at Hebrews 1:2-3. In verse 2, it says that through His Son, God made the world. Verse 3 states that Jesus has the same glory and nature as God the Father.

Let's look at Colossians chapter 1. Here we read that God the Son was deeply involved in the creation of the world ... and we read about the Son's crucial work of the redemption of mankind through His sacrifice on the cross. Let's read Colossians 1:13-17 (ESV) – "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Verses 19 and 20 – “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

There are so many other passages of Scripture I wish I could share with you. These are just a small sample.

Let us move on to a discussion of the Holy Spirit. For many people, it has been difficult to view the Holy Spirit as a Person, on an equal level of personhood as the Father and the Son. We see the Father and the Son speaking and acting in so many different ways. It is hard for people to picture the Holy Spirit acting in a similar manner. Actually, there are many people who want to deny the Trinity and they try to say that the Holy Spirit isn't a person at all, but is just some kind of impersonal force or influence stemming from God. But there are a number of verses that indicate that He must be a person.

Earlier in today's message, I quoted for you some verses in 1st Corinthians 12 about spiritual gifts. And at the end of the introduction on spiritual gifts, the Apostle Paul says in verse 1st Corinthians 12:11 (ESV): “All these [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each person individually as he wills.” Notice how the gifts are distributed: as the Holy Spirit wills. It is His choice how the gifts are distributed. The Holy Spirit cannot be an impersonal force because here we see that He is making choices ... He has a will. Therefore, He must be a person. He is an equal member of the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There are many more verses I could share with you to illustrate this point further, but this one example will have to suffice for today.

Let me close today's message with one more quote from the *ESV Study Bible*:

“As the nature of God is progressively revealed in Scripture, the one God is seen to exist eternally in three persons. These three persons share the same divine nature yet are different in role and relationship. The basic principle at the heart of God's triune being is unity and distinction, both coexisting without either being compromised. Anything that is necessarily true of God is true of Father, Son, and Spirit. They are equal in essence yet distinct in function.”