

Aim of lesson

For the young people to understand in a balanced way the relationship between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bible background

For the sake of continuity this lesson concentrates on passages from the gospel of John, in particular chapters 1 and 14.

Preparation required

This may be a rather abstract lesson for some young people, and if you feel that those in your group will not be able fully to grasp the meaning of this lesson you may like to consider an alternative approach, as suggested at the end of this lesson.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the young people of the essence of the previous topic - the revelation of the Almighty God, in the lives of man and of angels, so that the scriptures speak of Abraham, Moses, and others, talking, eating - even wrestling - with God.

God with us

In the light of the last lesson it is not difficult for us to see the Lord Jesus as a manifestation of God - not someone who was like God, but a revelation of the Almighty himself. Jesus did not say 'He that hath seen me should be able to work out what God is like'.

Explain this concept to the young people. The person who was walking on the earth was not one person of the Deity come down to earth but the Father, the one and only God, revealed in human form (in the same way as he had been to Abraham), and talking to his people, (as he had to Moses).

This understanding takes away most of the difficulties of passages which speak of Christ as God, and you should be able to talk about them without feeling defensive.

It can be helpful to consider the way in which human children are often like their parents, but like all analogies it has its limitations, and the relationship between the Lord Jesus and his Father went beyond mere resemblance.

The quotation on the right is not one to use in isolation, and needs to be understood in the context of the book from which it comes, but in the light of scripture we can appreciate why brother Thomas wrote it.

John 1

Verses 1-5

Turn to John 1:1-5, and see the echoes of creation there. Remind the young people of the lesson about the holy spirit, which found that the holy spirit is God's word, power, mind, and breath. God speaks and it is done, as in creation. God's word carries his power and authority; and 'runs swiftly' (Psalm 147:15).

You may need to explain to the young people that, especially in modern versions, the translators have reflected their belief in the trinity in the way they have written these verses. So the 'Word' tends to be referred to as 'he', even though the Greek does not convey the idea of a person (as we have already discussed in the lesson on the holy spirit). Logos is masculine, but that does not mean that it is a person any more than 'le mot' in French is a man.

Get the young people to see how many echoes of Genesis 1 they can find. Their list should look something like:

Genesis	John
In the beginning	In the beginning
and God said	was the Word
God made everything	All things were made by him
let there be light	... and the life was the light of men
darkness was upon the face of the deep	the light shines in the darkness

Ask the young people why they think there are so many reminders of Genesis. John is trying to get us to understand the might and power of God that, in verse 14, were 'made flesh', and to think of the Lord Jesus as the start of a new creation.

Verses 14-18

Ask the young people what verse 14 means and try to emphasise the following lessons.

Here we have the coming together of the two parts of the nature of Christ

- the word, the spirit of God, given 'without limit' (John 3:34, NIV).
- the flesh - our human nature, 'Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity' (Hebrews 2:14).

How these two opposing forces fought within the Lord we can only imagine, but the conflict is not beyond our comprehension, because to some extent they fight within us as well. For him, of course, the battle was to be much more intense; we are not tempted to turn stones into bread, or to rule the world.

So in Christ the word of God was embodied - became flesh. The same verb is used again when the water was turned into wine in chapter 2:9. It is not inaccurate to speak of incarnation, but the term might be misunderstood.

Like his Father, the Lord Jesus spoke and it happened. God had entrusted the fullness of the spirit to his Son.

The second part of the verse tells us that in Christ men saw the glory of God, full of grace and truth. The glory was manifested in his miracles and signs, as at Cana (2:11) or in raising Lazarus (11:4,40). John goes on in verses 16-17 of chapter 1 to emphasise the grace and truth that were revealed in him.

And verse 18 sums it all up. The word 'declared' (AV), or 'made him known' (NIV) means 'to lead something, or someone, out', as one might bring out a new car for people to see. In the same way, the Lord Jesus brought his Father into public view.

John 14

Now take the young people on three years, to the end of the Lord's life on earth, and get them to read verses 6-11. There are really two points to bring out.

- To see Jesus was to see God. When Jesus said 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father', he meant it. Not 'anyone who has seen me can work out what God is like'.
- The words Jesus spoke and the things he did were the words and actions of his Father. It is not that he was merely a bit like God, nor that he was imitating his Father; but when he spoke or acted it was God speaking and acting through his Son.

Other New Testament passages

Depending on how many young people are in the group, you could share out some or all of these references and ask them to read them:

Hebrews 1:1-3

Last week we saw how God had worked in Old Testament times; now we see how he revealed himself 'in these last days' through his Son, who was (NIV) the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

2 Corinthians 5:19

'God was in Christ' emphasises what we read in John 14:10 - that Jesus' words and actions were those of his Father.

Colossians 1:19; 2:8-9

The same root word for 'fullness' is used in Mark 6:43, after the feeding of the 5,000, when twelve baskets were filled with fragments. Imagine a basket so full of bread

that it won't take any more; that is how God was in Christ - all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

John 5:17-22

There is no distinction between the work of God and of his Son, except that Jesus is dependent on his Father (v19).

Difficulties become clear

Appreciating this perspective makes some 'difficult' passages clear. Depending on the experience (and stamina) of the young people in your group you may like to look at some of these.

Bread from heaven - John 6:35-38,51

Jesus is comparing himself with the manna. The manna did not itself, of course, descend from heaven, nor was it ever in heaven, but it was the hand of God which placed it on the earth. In the same way, Jesus came from his Father; God sent his spirit to dwell in, and work in, his Son.

Before Abraham was - John 8:58

Compare this with the words of the angel to Moses at the bush: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'. We would not have wondered at the angel saying 'Before Abraham was, I am', and would have understood that it was God speaking - so neither should we be puzzled when Jesus uses these words.

I and my Father are one - John 10:30

If anything, this argues against the trinity, in which God the Father and God the Son are separate beings. Simply, of course, it means what we have already seen - that God was in Christ, and that to see the Son was to see the Father. In the context (see verses 28-29) the Lord Jesus and his Father are one shepherd, one hand.

They shall look on me

There is a remarkable passage in Zechariah 12:10. Nearly every English translation (and the Septuagint) carries the phrase 'they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him ...'. The RSV translates it 'look on him', but a footnote - in some editions are least - acknowledges the Hebrew 'me'.

So in the crucifixion, God was pierced. Just as Abraham and Isaac walked together to the hill in the land of Moriah, so Father and Son walked together to Golgotha. It was his son's blood, but the Father, too, felt the pain - as, in passing, did the mother, 'a sword will pierce your own soul too', Simeon had said to Mary (Luke 2:35).

Truly, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Relevance to our lives

It should be to us a source of constant wonder that the Almighty God, to whom 'the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust' (Isaiah 40:15) should reveal himself in a man - not just any man, but one who 'humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross'. And the thought that this same God wants to live and work in us in the same way should change our lives.

So finally, get the young people to look at John 14:21,23. 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' When asked by Judas for an explanation, Jesus went on 'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him'.

Prayer

Almighty Lord God, we have come to wonder at the way in which you revealed yourself in a man who lived as a carpenter, who looked like anyone else, but who in his life, and especially in his death, showed us the depth of your love. May your spirit dwell in us also, so that we may become like you in the way we live our lives, and may look for the day when we may be fit for you to dwell with us for ever. Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

If you want to make this lesson more down to earth, get the young people to make a list of the characteristics of God, then go through them and consider how many of them applied to the Lord Jesus. Some do not apply - Jesus had a human mother; he was visible, and could be approached. These differences make some important points about why he came. In other cases, get the young people to think of examples and explain in each case how Jesus revealed what God is like.