

King's Online Bible School

Doctrine 101: Learning about God — Spotlight Studies

(adapted from Wayne Grudem's *Bible Doctrines* & R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths*)

God is Triune (Lesson 3)

1. God, being Himself

The instant before He creates man, God reveals what it is like to be the eternal God. The Genesis creation account lets us "hear" God speaking to Himself: "Let Us make man in Our image" (Gen 1:26).

This was His customary way of presenting His own reflecting on His creation, using singular and plural at the same time: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us'" (Gen 3:22).

When God calls Isaiah to be His prophet, He expresses this same relationship within Himself again: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send. And who will go for Us?'" (Isaiah 6:8)

In fact, God began to present Himself this way even earlier, in the very first words of His revelation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1).

Every Hebrew-speaking person knew that their word for "God" *Elohim* was a plural form.

But notice what The Lord declares about Himself when He introduces His Law to the nation of Israel: "Hear, O Israel! Yahweh (I AM) is our God (Elohim), Yahweh (I AM) is One!" (Deut 6:4)

So, from the beginning, God wants us to understand that He is One and, at the same time, plural.

2. Meeting the Spirit (Old Testament revelation and realization)

The first detail God reveals about Himself as "Us" appears in the second verse of His recorded revelation: "And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2).

God creates, and the heavens and the earth come into being (v. 1). Beginning in verse 2, the creation account turns its full attention to the earth. Over the darkness and waters covering the earth, it is the Spirit of God Who is moving (v. 2) as God speaks (v. 3).

Generations later, when men have multiplied on the earth and God determines to destroy the earth because of its wickedness, we read these words: "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, . . .'" (Gen 6:3).

It is through His Spirit:

- that all animate life comes forth and is sustained in the earth: "You send forth Your Spirit, they are created" (Ps 104:30):
- that the Lord relates to those who acknowledge Him:
 - "Where shall I go from Your Spirit?" (Ps 139:7).
 - "Do not take Your Holy Spirit from Me" (Ps 51:11).
- that God anoints and empowers each individual He calls to lead His people and to accomplish His will: *e.g.*, Bezalel (appointed to construct the tabernacle, Exod 35:30-31), 70 elders (Num 11:25), Joshua, judges, kings, prophets.

How do we know from the Old Testament that "the Spirit" is God?

What do the things the Spirit does indicate about His power?

What can we say about the relationship between "the Lord" and the Holy Spirit?

3. A Holy One among men (Old Testament revelation and realization)

a priest

"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought our bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said,
 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
 Possessor of heaven and earth;'
 Abram gave him a tenth of all" (Gen 14:18-20).

a visitor

"Now the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, . . . and . . . behold, three men were standing opposite him" (Gen 18:1).

"Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. Abraham came near and said, 'Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?'"

". . . As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the Lord departed, and Abraham returned to his place" (Gen 18:22-23,33).

an opponent

"Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak."

"He said, 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.' . . . And he blessed him there."

"So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, 'I have seen God face to face'" (Gen 32:24, 28-30).

a fire

"The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of the bush; . . . God called to him from the midst of the bush . . . Then he said, 'Do not come near here; remove your sandals . . . , for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'"

"He said also, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." (Exod 3:2, 4-6).

"Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently" (Exod 19:18).

a captain

"Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you for us or for our adversaries?'"

"He said, 'No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.'"

"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, 'What has my Lord to say to his servant?' The captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, 'Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did so" (Josh 5:13-15).

4. A Man to come (Old Testament revelation and realization)

a seed

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman;
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head;
And you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen 3:15).

"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 22:18).

What is the promise God is making to Abraham? See Galatians 3:16.

a prophet

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen; you shall listen to him" (Deut 18:15).

a king

"The Lord his God is with him,
And the shout of a king is among them" (Num 23:21).

"But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain" (Ps 2:8).

In Psalm 24, "everlasting doors" are commanded to open before the King of glory. The watchman inquires about this king's identity and credentials, "Who is this King of glory?"

The answer comes:

"Yahweh, strong and mighty,
Yahweh, mighty in battle.
Yahweh of Hosts,
He is the King of glory" (Ps 24:7-10).

Then, in Psalm 45, addressed to the king, we read these words:

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. . . .
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of joy above Your fellows."

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, receives a dream to which God gives Daniel the interpretation, disclosing the period in world history when the God of heaven will inaugurate an everlasting kingdom:

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will . . . crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever" (Dan 2:44).

Other prophets disclose details by which this King can be identified when He comes:

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, . . .
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity."
Therefore He will give them up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child."

"And He will arise a shepherd His flock
In the strength of the Lord
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. . . .
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.
This One will be our peace" (Micah 5:2-5).

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech 9:9).

a son

"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, 'You are My Son;
Today I have begotten you.
Ask of Me and I will make nations Your inheritance;
Your possession the ends of the earth'" (Ps 2:7-8).

"Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isa 7:14).

"For a child will be born to us,
A son will be given to us" (Isa 9:6).

a servant

"Behold, My Servant, Whom I uphold;
My chosen one in Whom My soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him; . . .
He will not be disheartened or crushed
Until He has established justice in the earth" (Isa 42:1, 4).

"Behold, My servant will prosper,
He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted" (Isa 52:13).

"By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant will justify the many.
As He will bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11)

Question: How much is being revealed about God in Isaiah 42:1?

5. A Father in heaven

a. In the Son we meet the Father.

"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18).

"In these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son . . . And He is . . . the exact representation of His nature" (Heb 1:2-3).

"He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15).

"Jesus said to him, '. . . If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him and have seen Him'" (John 14:6-7).

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

"Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me" (John 14:11).

"The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me is doing His works" (John 14:10).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

b. Through the Son we learn of the Father:

"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, not reap, not gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? (Matt 6:26)

". . . how much more will your Father Who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matt 7:11)

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father Who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name'" (Matt 6:9).

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

"For whoever does the will of My Father Who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12:50).

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48).

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven" (Matt 5:45).

6. The Son reveals God

When Jesus is introduced to Israel, those who are observant become aware that God *Elohim* is three Persons.

Already at Jesus' baptism we meet the three Persons in a very distinctive way.

"And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:16-17).

Jesus' words to His disciples, hours before He is arrested, begin to reveal how the three Persons work together in distinctive roles to accomplish the eternal purpose.

"But the Helper, 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).

"When the Helper comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth Who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me" (John 15:26).

The equality of the three Persons and the significance each Person shares in every believer's life stands out in its prevailing importance in Jesus' final mandate to His disciples:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).

7. The apostles' witness

Paul explains the power and preciousness of the gospel as centering in the involvement, interaction, and triumph of the three Persons in Jesus' resurrection:

". . . the gospel of God, . . . concerning His Son, Who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 1:1, 3-4).

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit act together in bringing Jesus' victory into men's lives in this world, anointing His servants to proclaim the gospel of salvation.

This is the message Peter presents to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, helping them understand what the pouring out of the Spirit means:

"Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He (Jesus) has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

The gospel is nothing less than the proclamation of the attentive work of the three Persons of the Godhead in each believer's life:

". . . Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood (1 Pet 1:2).

"But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all Who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6).

"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' (Gal 4:6).

"For through Him (Jesus) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18).

"And He Who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

"Jesus ... Who died,.. Who was raised, Who is at the right hand of God, ... also intercedes for us" (Rom 8:27, 34).

"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 body, through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).

As the apostles seek to strengthen the believers in every church, their letters, prayers, and blessings commend them to the keeping and action of God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life" (Jude 20-22).

"Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Rom 15:30).

8. Faith's cherished truth

Trinity (or Tri-unity) is the word Christians use to refer to what God reveals about Who He is.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we do not fully understand. What God reveals about Himself in this regard in the Bible requires that we hold to three truths:

God is three Persons.
Each Person is fully God.
There is one God.

We cannot explain how these three statements can fit together, but if we do away with or weaken any one of them we are not remaining consistent with the truth that the Bible clearly teaches.

Because God is three Persons, then the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each distinct Persons. The Father is not the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not the Son.

It is not possible to be God, as each of the Persons is, except to be fully God. This is so because God is infinite.

9. Truth's boundary lines

None of those who have attempted to resolve the biblical witness to the Trinity have been able to do so satisfactorily. The Bible teaches that:

God is three Persons.
Each Person is fully God.
There is one God.

If somebody denies any of these three statements about the Father, Son, and Spirit, what he or she is proposing is not true to the teaching of Scripture.

Five teachings gained some prominence in the early centuries A.D., but church leaders rejected them as unbiblical.

Modalism claims that there is one Person Who appears to us in three different forms (modes): sometimes as Father and other times as Son or Spirit. This denies that God is three Persons and fails to account for reports of the Father, Son, and Spirit each being active in different ways at the same time (*e.g.*, at Jesus' baptism [Matt 3:16-17]).

Arianism claims that there is one God, but denies that the Son is truly God. Arius saw the Son as "similar to the Father," not of one essence with the Father. He taught that the Son was created by God before any other creature as the one through whom all other creation came into being. He acknowledged him as the greatest created being, but only as a created being. For Arius, the Son was only "god" in the lesser sense that he was made like God.

Subordinationism accepted the biblical witness that the Son was divine and eternal, not created. However, this teaching considered that the Son was not equal to the Father in being or in attributes, but inferior.

Adoptionism taught that Jesus was an ordinary man until his baptism, but then God adopted him as His son and endowed him with supernatural powers. This view denied that Jesus was eternal or that He ever actually became divine. He never became more than an exalted man, whom God called His "Son" in a unique sense.

Tritheism affirms the distinctiveness of the three Persons, but concludes that there are three Gods.

10. God in His fulness

Each member of the Trinity is fully God and personally shares in all the attributes.

i. The Father is fully God.

Whenever we speak of God the Father, there is nothing to make us question that we are speaking of God. We frequently address the Father simply as "God." He is the One of Whom Jesus spoke as "the Father in Heaven."

When Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," the Jews intended to stone Him because, as they said, "You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (John 10:30-33).

ii. The Son is fully God.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14).

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col 2:9).

Only God Himself is worthy of worship from angels and from men.

"And when He brings the firstborn into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Heb 1:6).

"After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshipped Him" (Matt 2:11).

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Col 1:19-20).

"The next day he (John) saw Jesus coming to him and he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world'" (John 1:29).

No created being is able to take all the sins of the world on himself and to absorb all of the Creator's poured out wrath against it.

iii. The Holy Spirit is fully God.

"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, . . . who were **born . . . of God**" (John 1:12-13).

"Unless one is **born of** water and **the Spirit** he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

When Peter confronts Ananias. he asks him,

"Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . . ?
You have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:3-4).

11. God's Unity

Scripture is abundantly clear that there is only one God.

God makes this truth about Himself a centerpiece of Israel's testimony:

"Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is One" (Deut 6:4).

"For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me" (Isa 46:9).

In the New Testament, Paul presents the Father and the Son at the same time He reaffirms that God is One.

"God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved . . . For there is one God, and one Mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:3-5).

"We know . . . that there is no God but one. . . .There is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (1 Cor 8:6).

"God is only one" (Gal 3:20).

Paul's words reflect His conviction that three Persons preside over the universe as One.

"There is . . . one Spirit, . . . one Lord, . . . one God and Father of all Who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6).

So the Persons of the Trinity are one in essence; God is only one Being. There are not three Gods.

To know that there is one perfect, sovereign, infinite Being and Will is a reality on which our sense of security rests.

12. Three Persons for His world

In creation, the Father spoke. The Son is the Word going forth. All things came into being through Him (John 1:3). The Spirit, moving over the surface of the waters (Gen 1:2), brings forth being and life.

In anticipating redemption (the new creation), the Father purposed salvation in counsel with the Son and the Spirit (Heb 9:14, 13:20, Col 1:18-20).

The Father is presented as the One purposing and sending. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He sends His Son.

The Son obeyed and accomplished redemption. The Son comes into the world acknowledging, "A body you have prepared for Me; . . . Behold, I have come . . . to do Your will, O God" (Heb 10:5-7). The Father commands. The Son obeys.

The Father provides and prepares the body which the Son receives. The Holy Spirit comes upon Mary, overshadowing her with the power of the Most High and the Son is conceived (Luke 1:35).

The Son lives as a man in communion with and obedience to the Father. The Father anoints Him with the Holy Spirit for ministry and the Son becomes the sacrifice that atones for the sins of the world.

Jesus' redeeming work is vindicated by the Spirit (1 Tim 3:16) and the Father raises Him up from death and exalts Him at His right hand (Eph 1:20-21).

Receiving the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, the Son pours Him out in the lives of believers (Acts 2:33). The Spirit imparts the Son's life and authority to them, giving them new birth as the Father's own sons and daughters (John 3:5-8) and indwelling them with the life, authority, and power of the Son, Whose corporate body they are (Eph 1:18-20, 22-23).

"For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father Who speaks in you" (Matt 10:20).

13. Love from forever

As God brings forth the original and new creations, a willing subordination is seen in the Son and the Spirit. What the three Persons are, they are eternally.

a. willing subordination

Eternally and essentially the Father in His very nature is the One Who initiates, commands, and sends.

The Son by His very nature is the One Who obeys. He is the One Who radiates the glory and reveals the Father. He is the Word expressing the Father's heart.

The Spirit is eternally preoccupied in seeking to glorify the Son. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, imparting the Son's life — bringing forth new birth in those the Father is making His sons and daughters.

b. love seeking the other

the Father loving:

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand" (John 3:35).

"This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17).

"The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing" (John 5:20).

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him" (Col 1:19).

". . . that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, . . . and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

". . . that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

the Son loving:

"The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).

"Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, 'Behold, I have come . . . to do Your will, O God'" (Heb 10:5, 7).

"The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (John 5:19).

"The death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God" (Rom 6:10).

"Then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One Who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

the Spirit loving :

"The Spirit of truth . . . will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears He will speak" (John 16:13).

"The Spirit of Truth Who proceeds from the Father . . . will testify about Me" (John 15:26).

"The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit . . ."
" (Rom 5:5).

"Now I urge you, brothers, by the love of the Spirit . . ." (Rom 15:30).

"The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal 5:22).

14. God's nature in His creation

All creation is a reflection of Who God is and what He is like. The strength of relationship revealed in His being is characteristic of all His works.

- a.** The vital importance and preciousness of relationships stands out in the wonder of conception and from the instant of birth.
- b.** "For . . . the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body . . . (1 Cor 12:12).
- c.** In marriage a man and a woman become one flesh. God's provision is for children to become the persons He has made them to be in the security of each family unit He creates.
- d.** The church is "many members" yet "one body" (1 Cor 12:12).

Every new believer is baptized into Christ into His body, and is no longer his/her own.

Christ, living in each of His members, serves His Father as members respond to His voice in their lives and in their life together.

The Holy Spirit moves in each member with God's love, the bond of unity.

Christ gives the church pastors and leaders who, like fathers, feed, equip, and direct the members in serving each congregation's vision and in becoming who they are in Christ.

As in the natural family, each member is secured and grows into the realization of the Father's purpose and his or her personal fullness as together they embrace the work to which Christ calls them in and through His body.

- e.** Good music is a celebration of unity and diversity. In an orchestra each musician has a unique contribution. A lifetime of individual training to master an instrument finds its purpose and expression in repeatedly submitting to what each piece of music demands and the way the conductor wants the music performed. No musician in a symphony orchestra does what he or she pleases. Only in this uniting and orchestrating of diversity is harmony achieved in its richness and fullness.
- f.** Every successful company depends on persons with a variety of skills, training, and experience working in harmony together within established lines of authority toward the same objectives.
- g.** God established authorities in nations to provide policies for cooperation and restraint that maintain a peaceful and secure environment for families with diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and traditions to work, play, and live together in communities and neighborhoods.

Summary: Tri-unity — revealed & essential

1. God presents Himself from the start as One but plural.
2. The Creation account introduces God's Spirit.
3. Old Testament individuals encounter a Holy One.
4. The Old Testament anticipates a Man to come.
5. The Son introduces the Father in heaven.
6. The Son reveals God as three Persons.
7. The apostles' witness to Father, Son, and Spirit
8. The church makes God's Self-revelation its confession.
9. Rejecting views that deny Tri-unity
10. God in His fulness
11. God is One.
12. God in three Persons for His world
13. God has known perfect love forever.
14. God's works reflect His nature.