

Session 3: God

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all-powerful and all-knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

Names of God

Hebrew	Greek	Translation
Elohim	Theos	“supreme divinity”, “supreme God”, but often used to describe any deity. Used for the true God and pagan gods.
Adonai	Kurios	Sometimes used meaning a term of human respect (“Mr” or “Sir”), but more often used to describe a personal relationship with a helper in time of need.
Jehovah Yahweh		Name most often used for God in Scripture. It separates Israel’s God from the false gods. It is also God’s “redeeming” name. “Jesus” means “Jehovah is salvation”.

What are God’s attributes?

E.Y. Mullins describes seven “natural” attributes of God and four “moral” attributes:

Natural

Self-existence	“God exists by reason of what he is in himself.”
Immutability	God is unchanging in His nature. God changes His methods, but his very nature is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
Omnipresence	God is everywhere. He is present at all times in every part of His universe.
Immensity	God is larger than His creation—larger than the universe. We cannot limit Him – we cannot “put God in a box.”
Eternity	God exists outside of time as we know it. He has existed forever and will exist forever.
Omniscience	God knows everything. His knowledge is immediate—without the need for thought or memory.
Omnipotence	God is all-powerful. The only limits to God’s power are self-imposed. He cannot act in conflict with His nature.

Moral

Holiness	God's holiness is His "supreme moral excellence." The word "holy" describes something that is pure from desecration.
Righteousness	God is righteous in His nature—He is dedicated to that which is right. He cannot condone or ignore evil.
Truth	God is the source and ground of all truth.
Love	"Love is the attribute that permeates all other of God's attributes. God's love expects us to give Him our lives and He seeks the highest good for his children.

God defies all of our attempts to explain Him, describe Him, or define Him. God is not solely the angry, vengeful God of the Old Testament books, yet He is not the kindly old man with the long white beard that many (wishful) people envision. God is everything we read in Scripture and more.

Most of all, He is holy and does not tolerate sin. He will not be mocked. He extends mercy and grace to all men, but those who reject him will receive judgment. God is just to all men.

The Trinity

Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God (*Elohim*) is one LORD (*Jehovah*).

The Israelites, in this passage, state their belief about their God. In this statement, they deny:

- Dualism – a doctrine that the universe is under the dominion of two opposing principles one of which is good and the other evil
- Pantheism – a doctrine that equates God with the forces and laws of the universe ("God is in everything")
- Polytheism – belief in or worship of more than one god

Though God is one being, He reveals himself in three relationships to man: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Sometimes a human example is used to describe this: I am not only a father to my child, but I am a son to my mother, and a husband to my wife. Though I perform three roles, I am still one being.

When speaking of God, we refer to these three relationships as the "Trinity". The term "trinity" is not used in the Bible, though the concept is certainly there. "Trinity" is the term we use to describe how God reveals Himself in Scripture. It is not a concept we created, but one we discovered based on the biblical text.

The Trinity is not a succession of forms that God has appeared in over history. God did not appear as the Father during the Old Testament, Jesus during the gospels, then the Holy Spirit after Jesus' death.

Also, Jesus did not become part of the Trinity at his baptism. He, like the other parts of the Trinity, has existed throughout time and was fully divine the entire time.

The three persons of God appear simultaneously in Scripture in the story of Jesus' baptism:

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

God the Father

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, and all-wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

The statement from the Baptist Faith and Message describes God reigning "with providential care over His universe, [and] His creatures." The Bible specifically rejects the idea of God as "the clockmaker" who creates the clock, sets it into motion, and then walks away. The Bible describes a God who is intimately interactive with His creation.

Matthew 10:29-30

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.

30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

When we speak of God reigning over the "flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace", we are speaking of the redemptive plan of God as it is carried out throughout Scripture. God entered into covenants with His people and sent prophets to foretell the Messiah He would send to redeem the world.

Finally, and it is an important distinction to make: God has given the right for all men to become His sons through Jesus Christ. But not all men will accept Jesus. For those who do not accept Christ, God will remain fatherly in His attitude toward them. For those who do accept Christ, God becomes father “in truth.” God created all men; but not all men are His children.

John 1:12-13

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--

13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

Fully Divine

Just like God the Father and Jesus, the Holy Spirit is fully divine. Also, the Holy Spirit is referred to as “He”, not “It”. You may also hear references to the Holy Ghost—it’s the same as the Holy Spirit.

Herschel Hobbs, in his book on the Baptist Faith and Message, makes the following observation about the Holy Spirit:

“The Holy Spirit does not reveal himself; he reveals God in Christ, which is one explanation as to why one understands Jesus better than he does the Spirit. Jesus said, “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” (John 16:14) He shall glorify me! Not himself. Which suggests that any system of religion or theology which magnifies the Holy Spirit above Jesus is not of the Holy Spirit!” (Hobbs, BF&M, p.46-47)

The Holy Spirit, both in His work through the Scriptures, and through the work He performs today, points mankind to Jesus Christ.

Who has the Holy Spirit? All Christians receive the Holy Spirit when they are saved. The New Testament does not teach a separate “blessing” or “baptism” of the Holy Spirit.

All Christians receive the Holy Spirit--but they do not necessarily receive His power—you must be submissive and available. Those who are not submissive or available to the Spirit of God may not receive His power.

History

Just like God the Father and Jesus, the Holy Spirit is eternal—He was not created. But in Scripture, references to the Holy Spirit are sparse in the Old Testament. However, in the later passages of the Old Testament, the prophet Joel speaks of the Spirit's arrival:

Joel 2:28-29

28 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

The Holy Spirit appears at Jesus' baptism and at some points during Christ's ministry. But His full coming in power was during the festival at Pentecost:

Acts 2:14

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures

Last session, we spoke of the Bible being an inspired book. The first function mentioned in the Baptist Faith and Message regarding the Holy Spirit is that He inspired the writers of the Bible to write Scripture.

As Southern Baptists, we hold to either of two theories regarding the inspiration of the Scripture. The first is that the writers became passive instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit, called the "dictation" theory. The second is that the Holy Spirit communicated the truth to the writers, and they were free to write the text in their own words. This is known as the "dynamical" theory.

Through illumination, the Holy Spirit enables men to understand the Scripture. Without it, we would not be able to understand God's truth. When we encounter a very difficult passage, or when Scripture doesn't seem to make sense, we pray that God will allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to us His truth.

The Holy Spirit and the Lost

The Holy Spirit convicts men of their sin and enables them to turn to Christ. Jesus himself said:

John 16:8

“When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”

We are called by Christ to witness to others, but we ourselves cannot perform the work of salvation. We must tell the lost of God’s saving grace, but only the Holy Spirit can enable a sinner to come to Christ.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian

The third work of the Holy Spirit is that of comforter. Jesus himself called the Holy Spirit “the comforter” in the book of John:

John 14:16 KJV

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;

The Holy Spirit comforts us when we are worried, depressed, or grieving. The Holy Spirit encourages us when we are despondent or disappointed. God has provided us with the Holy Spirit—which will never leave us—as a constant companion, comfort, and guide.