

DOCTRINE OF GOD
Lesson 5: The Triune God
God Three in One

*Glory to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
worlds without end.*

I. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

a. God is **one** in **essence**.

- i. *"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."* Mt. 4:10
- ii. *"And they glorified the God of Israel."* Mt. 15:31
- iii. *"Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one."* Deut. 6:4
- iv. *"For although there may be so called gods in heaven and earth....for us, there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."* 1 Cor. 8:6

b. God is **three** in **persons**.

- i. *"...and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."* Mt. 28:19
- ii. *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit be with you."* 2 Cor. 13:13
- iii. In the NT, pious Jews who were resolutely monotheistic worship Jesus. (*"My Lord and my God."* Jn. 20:28)
- iv. Jesus is identified at the same time as being one with God and yet distinct from him. (Jn. 1:1-3)
- v. Jesus is charged with blasphemy because he dared to call himself the Son of God. (Jn. 5:18; 10:31-33)
- vi. Later NT writers would not hesitate to call him God. (Col. 1:15-16,19)
- vii. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is called God, and to lie to him was to lie to God. (Acts 5:3-4)

II. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

a. Key terms:

- i. Essence/ substance/ nature: *the common foundational unity within the godhead; what the three persons of the Trinity have in common, i.e. deity. All that is God is true of each person of the Trinity.*
- ii. Person/ subsistence: *that which makes up the distinctions between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While each person is God, the Father is not the Son, who, in turn is not the Holy Spirit.*

- iii. The Immanent Trinity: God as he is in himself outside of time and space.
 - iv. The Economic Trinity: God as he reveals himself historically in the economy of redemption.
 - v. Perichoresis: *the individuality of the persons is maintained and yet, because each shares the simple, undivided, divine nature, they share in the life of one another. They penetrate one another's being.*
 - vi. Appropriation: *following the doctrine of perichoresis, appropriation insists that the work of the Trinity is a unity so that every outward work of the godhead is a work of each person, such as creation and redemption.*
- b. Ancient heresies:
- i. Modalism/ Sabellianism: God is one person and reveals himself in different ways at different times, sometimes as Father, other times as Son, and at different times as Spirit. This is a denial of the three distinct persons of the Trinity.
 - ii. Subordinationism: The belief that the Son and Holy Spirit are inferior to the Father in their essence. This is a denial that each person of the trinity possesses the divine nature perfectly.
 - iii. Tritheism: God is three persons with no unity of essence.

III. THE TRINITY AND THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

- a. Eternal relations/ processions: *the Son and Spirit are related to the Father by eternal processions.*
- i. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father (generation because the procession is "filial"). When the biblical writers tell us that the Father sent his son into the world, they presuppose his existence as Son prior to that sending. (Jn. 20:21; Gal. 4:4; 1 Jn. 4:14; Heb. 1:1)
 - ii. The Spirit is eternally breathed out from the Father (spiration).
- b. Temporal missions: *the eternal relation of Father, Son, and Spirit is extended into time and space for our redemption. God is with us by virtue of the sending of Son and Spirit by the Father. In the words of Irenaeus, the Son and Spirit become the "two hands of the Father".*
- i. The Son is sent as the incarnate God man. (Gal. 4:4)
 - ii. The Spirit is outpoured. (Jn. 14:16; 15:26)