

3. Doctrine of The Trinity

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Trinity

1. There is one God, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—co-eternal in being, co-identical in nature, and co-equal in power and glory. This is known as the Trinity, meaning that God is three-in-one, or triune. Each member shares the same divine attributes and perfections,¹ while fulfilling distinct roles within the Trinity² (Matt 28:19; John 10:30-33; 14:9-11; 15:26; 16:13-15; Acts 5:3-4; Rom 8:9; Col 1:15; 2:9; Heb 1:2-3; 1 John 5:20).
2. The eternal fellowship, love, honor, and delight of the Trinity is the very center and wellspring of all that exists, and the actions of this triune God demonstrate the desire to display the perfection of their loving fellowship and invite others into it (John 17:1-5, 20-26; Acts 17:24-27; Col 1:16; 1 John 1:3-4; Rev 4:11).

The Father

1. God the Father is an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, honor, wisdom, power, and love. Accordingly, as the Creator of all things, he³ is the absolute Sovereign and omnipotent Ruler of all creation (Gen 1:1; 1 Chr 29:10-13; Ps 103:19; 119:137; John 3:16; 4:24; 1 John 4:7-8; Rev 4:11).
2. He is self-existent, eternal, omnipresent, and unchanging, and he orders and disposes all things according to his own wisdom, will, and grace (Ps 90:2; 104:24; Jer 23:24; Eph 1:11; Job 42:2; Isa 10:5-7; Jer 18:3-11; Matt 6:25-33; 10:29-30).
3. He has decreed for his own glory all things that come to pass by continually upholding, directing, and governing all creatures and events. However, in his sovereignty, he is neither the author nor approver of sin, nor does he diminish the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures for their own choices and actions (Gen 50:20; Isa 45:1-7; 46:8-11;

¹ See resources for further study for more on the attributes of God.

² In this we stand in the tradition of the Nicene Creed (See Appendix B).

³ In this doctrinal statement, we use masculine pronouns and titles to refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We acknowledge that as a spirit, God is not a biologically gendered being (though the Son was incarnated as a biologically male human), and we affirm that both men and women are created in the image of God, meaning that both masculinity and femininity originate with God. We also acknowledge that at times in Scripture God's actions and characteristics are described using feminine metaphors (Num 11:12; Deut 32:18; Ps 91:4; Isa 46:3; Hos 13:8; Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34). However, we also affirm that the Bible invariably refers to God by using masculine pronouns and titles. Therefore, in this document, we utilize masculine pronouns and titles to refer to God, in accordance with how God has revealed himself in his Word. For more, see John W. Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999).

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Acts 2:23-24; 4:27-28; James 1:13).

4. His fatherhood involves both his designation within the Trinity and his relationship with humanity:
 - a. As the eternal Father of the Son, he is relational, loving, and self-giving. He exercises loving, glorifying headship over the Son and Holy Spirit—seen most powerfully in his sending of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to redeem his people from sin and bring them into loving fellowship with himself (1 Cor 11:3; 15:27-28; John 16:13-15).
 - b. In one sense, the fatherhood of God as our creator extends to all humanity (Acts 17:28-29; Eph 3:14-15), yet in a greater sense, he is Father only to his people whom he has graciously chosen from eternity past as his own. This fatherhood is accomplished in history as God regenerates and adopts them as his sons and daughters (John 1:12-13; 6:37, 44; 8:42-47; Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7; Eph 1:4-5; 1 John 3:1-2; 5:1)

The Son

1. The Son, who is the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine attributes, and in these, he is coequal, consubstantial,⁴ and coeternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:1; 10:30-38; 14:9-11; 17:5; Phil 2:6).
2. The Father created all things according to his will through his Son, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2-3).
3. In the incarnation, the eternal second Person of the Trinity took on all the essential characteristics of humanity, yet was without sin, and so became the God-Man, Jesus Christ— true God and true man in perfect, indivisible oneness⁵ (John 1:14; Phil 2:6-8; Col 1:15, 19; 2:9; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 2:14, 17-18; 4:15; 7:26).
4. As the God-Man, Jesus Christ came to reveal God as the Image of God, redeem his people, and rule over God's kingdom, thus fulfilling God's intention for humanity⁶ (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8; Matt 28:18; John 1:18; 14:8-11; Eph 1:7-10, 19-23; 1 Cor 15:20-28; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:1-2; 2:5-11; Rev 5:9-10; 11:15-18).
 - a. Jesus Christ was conceived within the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. At Jesus' baptism, the Father identified Jesus as his Son, and the Holy Spirit anointed and empowered Jesus for his ministry (Matt 1:18-20; 3:16-17; 12:28; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:14, 18; John 1:32-34; Acts 10:38).
 - b. In his ministry, Jesus Christ proclaimed good news that "the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15), calling people to repent and follow him as king.⁷ He revealed his deity and kingship through his authoritative teaching and miracles,

⁴ Meaning of the same substance or essence.

⁵ In this we stand in the tradition of the Chalcedonian Definition (see Appendix C).

⁶ For more on Jesus as the Image of God, see *Doctrine of Humanity*, 2b.

⁷ For more on the Kingdom of God, see *Doctrine of the Church: The Church in the Biblical Story*, 4.

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- by which he demonstrated his authority over Satan, demons, sickness, the material world, and even death (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20; Mark 1:21-27; 4:35-5:43; John 5:21; 10:37-38; 11:38-44; 14:8-11; 21:25).
- c. Jesus Christ is Israel's promised Messiah, born in the royal line of David. Through his obedience, he fulfilled the covenant law God had given to Israel, and through his death and resurrection, he inaugurated the New Covenant, through which his people from all nations share in the blessings of his kingdom (Matt 5:17-18; Luke 1:32; Ps 2; 110; Isa 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 52:13-53:12; Dan 7:13-14; Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:6-13; 9:15; 12:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Gal 3:13-14; Eph 2:11-22).
 - d. Jesus Christ is the second Adam who succeeded where the first Adam failed. He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father, experienced the same temptations to sin that all people experience, yet submitted to the Father's authority even to the point of death on the cross. As a result, through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has become the representative head of a new humanity, reconciling his people to God and granting his people the free gift of grace, righteousness, and eternal life, in place of the sin, condemnation and death that came through the first Adam (Matt 4:1-11; Heb 4:15; 5:8-9; Rom 5:10-21; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Eph 2:15-16; Phil 2:8).
5. Jesus Christ died on the cross as a representative, substitutionary sacrifice, satisfying God's wrath towards his people due to their rebellion against him. In the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the Father confirmed the deity of Jesus, gave proof that he accepted Jesus' atoning work, and guaranteed a future resurrection life for his people (John 3:16; 6:39-40, 44; 10:11-18; 11:23-26; Mark 10:45; Acts 1:3; 2:24, 32; 13:30-37; Rom 1:18; 3:23-27; 5:8-11; 6:4-5; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:1-57; Gal 1:3-4; 1 Thess 4:14; 5:9-10; 2 Tim 1:10; 1 Pet 1:3-5). The meaning and effects of Christ's atoning work can be seen in three scriptural and complementary perspectives:⁸
- a. As the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ took his people's sin upon himself when he died on the cross, receiving the just punishment that they deserved, in order to remove their guilt and make them righteous in the Father's sight⁹ (Isa 53:5-6; Rom 3:21-26; 4:25; 2 Cor 5:21; Col 2:13-14; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 4:9-10).
 - b. As the honorable Son of God, Jesus perfectly honored the Father through his obedience to the point of death, even a shameful death on a cross. His sacrifice

⁸ While most Christians agree that these three perspectives of the atonement are scriptural, not everyone sees them as equally important. Most conservative evangelicals have viewed penal substitution as the central view and the other two as subcategories, but this is changing. All three views have been seen as the central view by Christians in different cultural and historical contexts. Cornerstone's position is that all three of these views are equally important and complement each other, addressing different aspects of the problem of sin and the nature of redemption. Therefore, we seek to understand and value them equally. However, we identify this as a secondary doctrinal matter, because we understand that others do not see these perspectives as equally important. For more information, see Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel* (self-published, 2014), ch. 3; and Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007). For an explanation of primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrinal matters, see *Prolegomena: Our Theological System and Tradition*.

⁹ This perspective is known as *Penal Substitution*: Penal, meaning that Jesus died to pay the *penalty* for sin. Substitution, meaning that Jesus died in our place, as our substitute.

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satisfied the honor-debt which his people owed to God and removed the shame that their sin brought upon both them and God. Jesus Christ also upheld the Father's honor by fulfilling his promise to bring salvation to all nations. Therefore, the Father honored and exalted the Son by raising him from the dead and seating him in glory at his right hand. Likewise, the Father honors and exalts his people to share in Christ's glory¹⁰ (Acts 2:24, 32-33; Phil 2:6-11; Heb 2:9-10; 5:8-9; 12:2; Rom 1:18-21, 15:8-9; Col 3:4; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Pet 2:4-7).

- c. As the conquering Son of God, Jesus secured the decisive victory over Satan, sin, and death through his own death and resurrection. As a result, he has liberated his people from Satan, sin, and death, and the Father has transferred them into his kingdom and everlasting life¹¹ (Gen 3:15; John 12:31-33; 1 Cor 15:24-26, 50-57; Eph 2:1-7; Heb 2:14-15; Col 1:13-14; 2:13-15; 1 John 3:8).
6. We recognize that sincere, Bible-believing Christians differ on the *extent* of Christ's atoning work, or what it accomplished, and thus we consider it to be a secondary matter.¹² Our understanding of Scripture leads us to conclude that it was not the *intention* of our triune God merely to make salvation available to all, while leaving its *actual* accomplishment up to those who would respond by faith. Rather, God's intention was for the Son to *actually* redeem the many whom the Father chose to save¹³ and call his people; and for the Spirit to then bring his people from darkness to light and from death into life by regeneration, resulting in faith, repentance, and growth into Christ-likeness.¹⁴ Salvation is all the work of our triune God, which guarantees that his intention will be accomplished (Isa 53:4-6, 10-12; John 10:11, 26-28; 17:6, 9; Rom 5:6-10; Eph 1:4-7; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7; 1 Pet 2:24; Rev 5:9-10).
 7. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and was exalted at the right hand of God the Father. From this exalted position, Jesus has poured out the promised Holy Spirit on his people. Presently he rules over all things, is the head of the church, and intercedes before the Father on his people's behalf (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:3-11; 2:32-33; 5:31-32; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:19-23; Phil 2:9-10; Col 1:18-20; 3:1; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 1:3-4; 4:14-16; 7:25; 8:1; 1 Pet 3:22).
 8. Jesus Christ is the one appointed by the Father as final Judge of all humanity, awaiting the time when, having placed all of his enemies under his feet, he will return in glory to gather his people to himself, judge the living and the dead, and consummate his kingdom on the earth (Matt 25:31-46; John 5:22-29; Acts 3:19-21; 10:42; 17:31; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 15:20-28; 2 Cor 5:10; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:15-18; 2 Thess 1:7-10; 2 Tim 4:1; Titus 2:13; Heb 9:27-28; 10:12-13; 12:2).

¹⁰ This perspective is known as the *Satisfaction* view of the atonement.

¹¹ This perspective is known as *Christus Victor*, which is a Latin phrase meaning "Christ the Victor." For more, see *Doctrine of Created Spiritual Beings: The Spiritual Realm and the Biblical Story 2*.

¹² See Prolegomena: *Our Theological System and Tradition* for more on the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrinal matters.

¹³ See *Doctrine of Salvation: Election 1-2*.

¹⁴ See *Doctrine of Salvation: Regeneration 1-2*.

The Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit is a Person of equal deity and glory with the Father and Son. He possesses all the attributes of personality and deity, and is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father and the Son¹⁵ (Matt 28:19; John 15:26; Acts 5:3-4; 16:6-7; 28:25-27; Rom 8:9; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 4:30; Heb 10:15-17).
2. In the history of redemption, the Holy Spirit has been active from all eternity.
 - a. His activity was evident in the Old Testament, beginning with creation and continuing with the empowerment of certain people for important tasks in the history of Israel (Gen 1:2; Ex 31:2-3; 35:30-31; Num 11:24-25, 29; 1 Sam 10:6, 9-13; 16:13-14).
 - b. More of his personhood and activity were revealed in the New Testament, beginning with the incarnation as Jesus was conceived within the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, was anointed and empowered by the Spirit at his baptism, and poured out the Spirit on his disciples following his resurrection and exaltation (Matt 1:20; 3:11, 16; 12:28; Mark 1:8-10; Luke 1:35; 3:16, 22; 4:14, 18; John 1:32-33; 3:34; 20:22; Acts 2:33; 2 Pet 1:19-21).
 - c. In all his activities, the Holy Spirit delights to glorify the Father and the Son (John 16:14-15; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6).
3. The Holy Spirit is the supernatural Agent of regeneration who baptizes all believers into the body of Christ at the moment of conversion, permanently indwells¹⁶ and seals them unto the day of redemption, cleanses them of sin, intercedes for them according to the will of God, testifies to their adoption as children of God, and progressively transforms them into the image of Jesus Christ as they walk in obedience with him (Ezek 36:25-27; John 3:5-8; Acts 2:38; Rom 8:9-11, 13-16, 26-27; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:18; 5:5; Gal 3:14; 4:6-7; 5:16-25; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30; Titus 3:4-6).
4. The church, which is the body of Christ and the “dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:22), is comprised of those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ He fills the church continually with his grace for Christian life and witness. This grace empowers individual believers within the church to exercise gifts and ministries for the edification of the body and for good works in the world, including convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). These gifts and ministries are apportioned as he wills, vital to the mission of the church, and to be practiced in accordance with Scripture¹⁸ (John 16:7-15; 20:21-22; Acts 1:8; Gal 5:16-6:10; Eph 2:22; 5:18; Joel 2:28-29; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 3:16; 12:4-13, 28-30; 14:1- 40; Eph 4:11-16).

¹⁵ In this we stand in the tradition of the Nicene Creed (See Appendix B).

¹⁶ See *Doctrine of Humanity: Creation of Humans*, 2 for more on the connection between the Holy Spirit’s presence in the believer and God’s purpose in creating humans in his image.

¹⁷ For more on the church as a regenerate community, see *Doctrine of the Church: The Church’s Identity and Mission*, 1-2.

¹⁸ For more on spiritual gifts and ministries, see *Doctrine of the Church: Local Church Life*, 2b; and *Leaders, Members and Church Discipline*, 2.

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5. The Holy Spirit is the divine Teacher who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they wrote God's revelation, the Bible, and he continues to guide his people into truth as they read and understand his written revelation and are transformed by it (2 Pet 1:19-21; John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 Cor 2:9-13; 1 John 2:20, 26-27).

Resources for Further Study

Beginner

- A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1961.

Intermediate

- Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 1996.
- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 1973.
- Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 2012.

Advanced

- Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 1978.
- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1994.
- Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 2007.