

S T U D Y   G U I D E



# The Holy Spirit

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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# The Breath of Life

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Many Christians have some concept of the Father and of the Son. The Holy Spirit, however, is much more difficult to grasp conceptually. In this message, the focus will be upon coming to an understanding of who the Holy Spirit is in relation to the Father and the Son.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the doctrine of the Trinity
2. To define the distinctions between the Trinitarian persons
3. To explain the distinctions in the external works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

## QUOTATIONS

*In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.*

—The Westminster Confession of Faith, 2.3

*In keeping with this truth and Word of God, we believe in one God, who is one single essence, in whom there are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct according to their incommunicable properties—namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause, origin, and source of all things, visible as well as invisible. The Son is the Word, the Wisdom, and the image of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, this distinction does not divide God into three, since Scripture teaches us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each has his own subsistence distinguished by characteristics—yet in such a way that these three persons are only one God. It is evident then that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Father, and that likewise the Holy Spirit is neither the Father*

*nor the Son. Nevertheless, these persons, thus distinct, are neither divided nor fused or mixed together. For the Father did not take on flesh, nor did the Spirit, but only the Son. The Father was never without his Son, nor without his Holy Spirit, since all these are equal from eternity, in one and the same essence. There is neither a first nor a last, for all three are one in truth and power, in goodness and mercy.*

—The Belgic Confession, Article 8

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### A. Introduction: Genesis 1:1–2

1. The Holy Spirit broods over the unadorned creation and brings light and order.
2. The question we face is this: Who is the Holy Spirit and what does He do?

### B. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity.

1. The word *Trinity* is found nowhere in the Bible, yet the church has found it to be an important, useful, and meaningful term.
2. Although the word is not found in the Bible, the concept is.
  - a. God is one, yet the fullness of biblical revelation about God makes crucial distinctions within God.
  - b. There is a sense in which God is one and another sense in which God is three.
  - c. God is one in essence but three in person.
3. The terms “first person,” “second person,” and “third person” distinguish the order of the Godhead.
  - a. The Father is the first person, the Son is the second person, and the Holy Spirit is the third person.
  - b. Jesus is the second person, yet He is eternal.
  - c. To say that the Son is “eternally begotten” does not mean that the Son had a starting point in time.
  - d. There has been much philosophical speculation on the internal nature of the Trinity.

### C. The persons of the Trinity are also distinguished by their external works, by what are termed *economic distinctions*.

1. God the Father is the Creator.
2. God the Son is the Redeemer.
3. God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier who applies the work of the Son.
4. These are not distinctions within the essence of God; all of these works are Trinitarian in character, and each person participates in each work.

### D. The Holy Spirit is referred to as God.

1. The Holy Spirit is called God and given the attributes of God (see Acts 5:3–4).
2. The Holy Spirit receives worship and honor.

3. The Holy Spirit is sent by Jesus to indwell His people.
4. As Christians, we must confess the full deity of the Holy Spirit.

#### E. Conclusion

1. The Father is self-existent.
2. The Son is generated by the Father.
3. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The word \_\_\_\_\_ is not found in the Bible, but the \_\_\_\_\_ is.
2. Three propositions are essential to a correct statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. They are:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the order of the Godhead? In other words, who is first, who is second, and who is third?
4. When Christians say that the Son is “eternally begotten,” does this mean that He had a starting point in time?
5. According to those who have speculated philosophically about the Trinity, what is the difference between God Himself and God’s perfect idea of Himself?
6. What common Greek word did these philosophers use to describe God’s perfect idea of Himself?
7. The persons of the Trinity are distinguished by their external works.
  - a. God the Father is the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. God the Son is the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. God the Holy Spirit is the \_\_\_\_\_.

*Answers are found at the end of the lesson.*

#### BIBLE STUDY

1. Read the following passages of Scripture and explain the primary point or intent of each with respect to the Trinity.
  - a. Deuteronomy 6:4–5
  - b. 1 Kings 8:59–60
  - c. Isaiah 45:5–6, 21–22
  - d. Romans 3:30
  - e. 1 Corinthians 8:6
  - f. 1 Timothy 2:5

2. What do the following Scripture passages reveal to us about Jesus?
  - a. John 1:1–2, 14
  - b. John 20:28
  - c. Acts 20:28
  - d. Romans 9:5
  - e. Colossians 1:15–18
  - f. 1 Timothy 3:16
  - g. Titus 2:13
  - h. Hebrews 1:8
  - i. 1 John 5:20
3. Why is it significant that the Holy Spirit is put on the same level as the Father and the Son in the following passages: Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4–6; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20–21?
4. What do the following passages teach us about the Holy Spirit?
  - a. Acts 5:3–4
  - b. 1 Corinthians 3:16
5. Read the following Scripture passages and note the way in which they refer to the Holy Spirit. What is the significance of the pronoun used?
  - a. John 14:26
  - b. John 15:26
  - c. John 16:13–14
6. What activities unique to persons are attributed to the Holy Spirit in the following passages?
  - a. John 14:26
  - b. John 15:26
  - c. Romans 8:16
  - d. Romans 8:26–27
  - e. Acts 8:29
  - f. Acts 13:2
  - g. 1 Corinthians 2:10–11
  - h. 1 Corinthians 12:11
  - i. Ephesians 4:30
7. Some people teach that the Holy Spirit is simply another name for the “power of God.” Examine the following passages and explain why this view is not possible.
  - a. Luke 4:14
  - b. Acts 10:38
  - c. Romans 15:13
  - d. 1 Corinthians 2:4

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Romans 1, Paul says that there is some sense in which God's existence and attributes are known through creation. Is the Trinitarian nature of God revealed in creation? Or does knowledge of the Trinity require special revelation?
2. Do believers in other monotheistic religions worship the same God as Christians? Defend your answer.
3. Having discussed the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, name some errors regarding this doctrine that someone could make easily if he were not careful.

## APPLICATION

1. How does the unity in diversity inherent in the Trinity affect our understanding of the family?
2. How does it affect our understanding of the church?
3. How does our understanding of the Trinity affect our views of authority and obedience?
4. What is more ultimate—unity or plurality? Or are both equally ultimate?
5. How does one's view of the Trinity affect his prayers?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

Augustine. *On the Trinity*

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 255–334

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 82–99

Brown, Harold O.J. *Heresies*, pp. 95–157

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, I

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, I

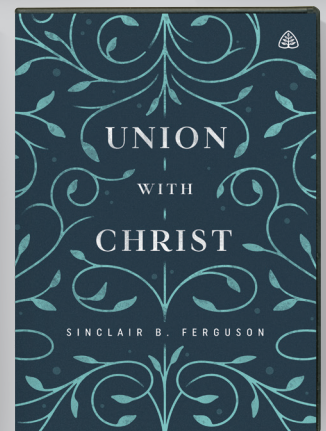
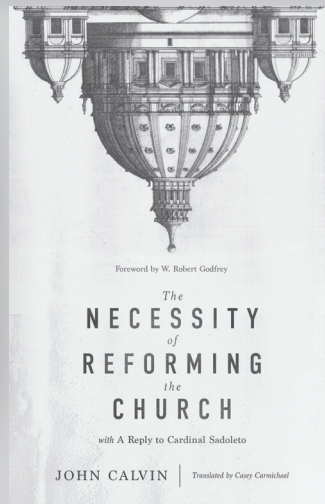
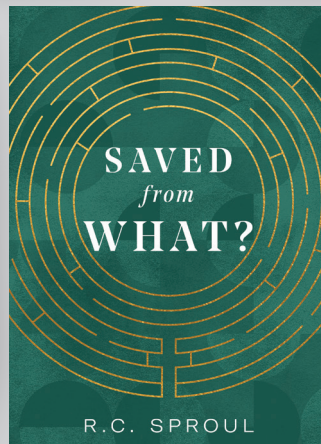
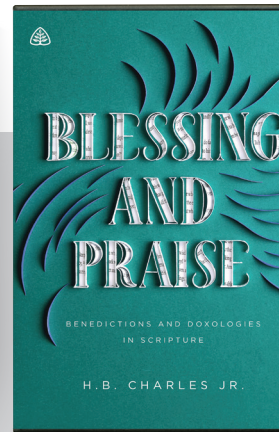
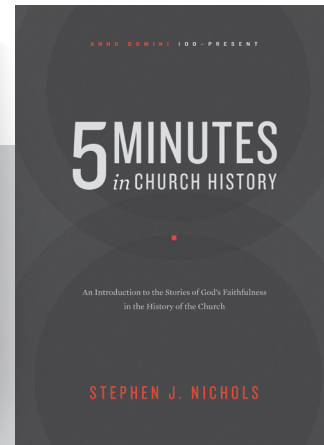
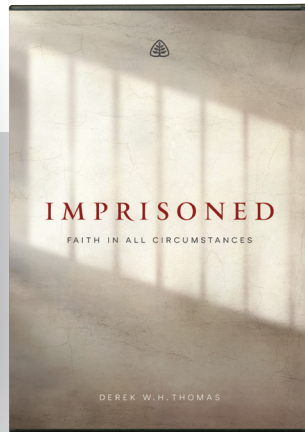
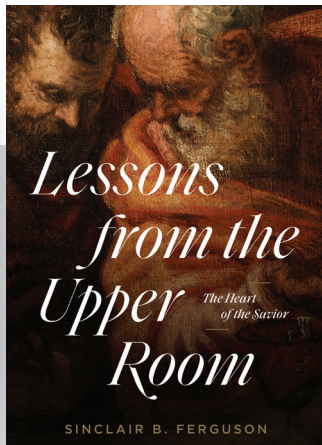
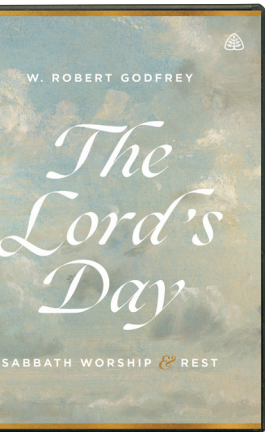
Kaiser, Christopher B. *The Doctrine of God: An Historical Survey*, pp. 23–71



## Answers to Study Questions

1. Trinity; concept
2.
  - a. There is one God.
  - b. God is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - c. Each of these three persons is fully God, yet the Father is neither the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.
3. The Father is the first person, the Son is the second person, and the Holy Spirit is the third person.
4. No
5. Nothing
6. Logos
7. Creator; Redeemer; Sanctifier

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