

The Holy Spirit

Week 2: One God, Three Persons: The Spirit and the Godhead -- Matthew 3:13-17; Matthew 28:18-20

Stand on the bank of the Jordan River for a moment. The water is brown with spring runoff, the crowd along the shore is a mix of the curious and the convicted, and John the Baptist, sunburned and blunt as a prophet should be, is calling a nation to repentance. Then the line goes quiet, because Jesus of Nazareth is wading into the water. John objects, "I need to be baptized by you," but Jesus insists; it is fitting, He says, to fulfill all righteousness. And as He comes up out of the water, something happens that no one on that riverbank could have invented. The heavens open. The Spirit of God descends like a dove and rests on Him. And a voice rolls out of heaven: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Count the persons in that scene. The Son is standing in the river, water running off His shoulders. The Father is speaking from heaven, and He is not talking to Himself. The Spirit is descending from the Father to the Son, visible in a form John could see and later testify about. Three persons, present and active at the same instant, in the same scene, each doing something the others are not doing. Whatever the Godhead is, the Jordan River shows us this much: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not one person wearing three masks.

And yet the Bible's first confession never wavers: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is one God, not three. The Scriptures hold both truths with perfect ease, one God, three distinct persons, even when our minds strain to hold them together. At the end of His ministry Jesus gathered both truths into a single phrase. Make disciples of all nations, He commanded, baptizing them "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." One name. Three persons. He did not say "in the names," as if there were three gods, and He did not collapse the three into one, as if Father, Son, and Spirit were interchangeable labels. One divine name, shared fully by three.

This matters more than we may first feel. Some teach that Jesus is the Father and the Spirit, one person playing three roles, and the result is a God who talks to Himself at the Jordan and prays to Himself in Gethsemane. Others split the three so far apart that the one God of Israel disappears. This week we let the Scriptures set the boundaries, and inside those boundaries we find something better than a puzzle. We find a God who has forever known love, fellowship, and communion within Himself, a Father who loves the Son, a Son who delights in the Father, a Spirit who proceeds on heaven's missions, and all of it, astonishingly, opened up to us.

Group Discussion: Most Christians believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but many would struggle to explain how the three relate to the Bible's insistence that there is only one God. Why do you think this teaching is so often avoided or fumbled, and what is lost when we never study it carefully?

Personal Reflection: When you pray, whom do you picture? Many of us, if we are honest, have a vague or lopsided picture of God, all Father, or all Jesus, with the Spirit nowhere in view. How has your own picture of God been shaped, and where might it need to grow to match the God of Scripture?

Read Matthew 3:13–17; Matthew 28:18–20

Study Questions

1. Read the baptism scene in Matthew 3:16–17 slowly. What is each person of the Godhead doing in this moment, the Son, the Spirit, and the Father? Why does this single scene make it impossible to believe that Father, Son, and Spirit are one person appearing in three different modes?
2. At Jesus' baptism the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," before Jesus had preached a sermon or worked a single miracle. What does it mean to you that the Father's delight rested on the Son before the public work began, and how does being God's beloved child in Christ (Galatians 3:26–27) quiet your own need to earn what has been given?
3. Jesus commanded baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). What is the significance of the singular "name" joined to three distinct persons? What does this verse teach about the full deity of the Holy Spirit alongside the Father and the Son?
4. Baptism places a person into relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the whole Godhead claiming a life. If you have been baptized into that name, what would it look like this week to live as someone who belongs, body and soul, to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Where has that ownership been only partial?
5. In John 14–16, Jesus repeatedly distinguishes Himself from the Father who sent Him and from the Helper whom the Father will send in His name (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Trace these distinctions. How do Jesus' own words rule out the idea that He and the Father and the Spirit are the same person?

6. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35), the Son honors the Father (John 14:31), and the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). Within God there is eternal love, honor, and self-giving. How does it change your picture of God to realize He has never been lonely, and that He invites you into that fellowship rather than needing you to complete Him?
7. Scripture insists there is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:4) while presenting the Father as God (Galatians 1:1), the Son as God (John 1:1; 20:28), and the Spirit as God (Acts 5:3–4). How do passages like Matthew 3:16–17, Matthew 28:19, and 2 Corinthians 13:14 hold these truths together, and why must we affirm both the oneness and the threeness rather than sacrificing either?
8. Mystery is not the same as nonsense, and worship often begins where full explanation ends. Where do you tend to demand that God fit inside your understanding before you will trust Him? What would it mean this week to bow before what you cannot fully diagram, the way Paul does in Romans 11:33–36?
9. Some teach a “Jesus only” doctrine, that Father, Son, and Spirit are one person and that baptism must be administered only with the words “in the name of Jesus,” citing passages like Acts 2:38. Using the baptism of Jesus, Matthew 28:19, and Jesus’ own distinctions in John 14–16, how would you answer this teaching with both clarity and kindness, and how should we understand “in the name of Jesus” in Acts?
10. Look back across this week’s passages, the riverbank where all three persons appeared and the mountain where Jesus joined them in one name. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth about God. What is one concrete change in your praying, your worship, or your conversations that this week’s study calls for?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 6:4, the foundational confession that the Lord our God is one; John 1:1–3, the Word who was with God and was God; 2 Corinthians 13:14, the threefold

benediction of grace, love, and fellowship; Ephesians 4:4-6, one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father; Genesis 1:26, God's deliberation, let us make man in our image