



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 2.7.1 – The Doctrine of God

### One God in Three Persons

In Lesson 2.5 The Essence of God, we saw that Scripture teaches that there is only one God. At the same time, the Bible talks about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we make a careful study of everything God has revealed to us about Himself in the Bible, it is clear that God has described Himself as one God with three specific entities, that we call Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since God has revealed Himself as one God in three Persons, the early Christians created the terms “Trinity” and “Triune” to summarize the Bible’s teaching about God. These words are not found in the Bible, but the doctrine that these terms represent is clearly taught in Scripture.

God tells us clearly in the Bible that there is only one God. The LORD (Jehovah, Jahveh) is that one true God. The Bible also teaches us that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. These three are one God and yet at the same time distinct from each other, and thus separate Persons of God.

The distinctness between the three Persons is clear from the scene at Jesus’ baptism, as recorded in Matthew 3:16-17:

**When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’**

God the Father is the speaker from heaven. Jesus, the man who is baptized, is His Son. The Spirit of God descends like a dove on Jesus. These three are not interchangeable. It would not be right to say that the Son spoke from heaven or that Jesus was His Father. It was not the Father who came down on Jesus like a dove, but it was the Holy Spirit. So, each Person is separate, and yet there is only one God.

At Jesus’ baptism all three Persons were present. All three Persons were present today when we baptize someone, for Jesus has told us to **“go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (Matthew 28:19). One name in three Persons. Because of the order Jesus uses here, we call the Father the First Person, the Son the Second Person, and the Holy Spirit the Third Person. This does not imply any rank or hierarchy.

When the angel Gabriel told the girl Mary that she would have a son, he spoke of the three Persons of God. He said to her: **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God”** (Luke 1:35).

On the evening before He died, Jesus talked of the three Persons of God as separate entities. He said to His disciples: **“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth”** (John 14:16-17). On that same evening Jesus told them: **“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”** (John 15:26).

In his letters the apostle Paul often referred to the three Persons as separate from each other. For example, in speaking of God's gifts to His believers, Paul wrote: **"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all"** (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). When Paul says "Lord", he is almost always talking about Jesus. When Paul says "God", he is almost always talking about the Father. We see, for example, in his closing benediction to these same Christians in Corinth: **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all"** (2 Corinthians 13:14).

### Questions

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1. Why does it not matter that the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible?
2. Use a previous lesson to show from the Bible that there is only one God.
3. How were the three Persons present at Jesus' baptism?
4. How does the Bible show that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit is not the Father?
5. What are some of the different orders in which the three Persons are listed in the Bible?
6. Why do we call the Father the first Person, the Son the Second Person, etc.?