

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 6: THE HOLY TRINITY

Lesson 21

The Deity and Personhood of the Son and the Spirit

The Full Divinity of Each Person of the Godhead

Key Text: John 1:1; Acts 5:3–4; Colossians 2:9

The Confession the Church Has Died to Defend

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Series Verse
<i>“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?”</i>
Romans 11:33–34, NASB 1995

Introduction

Every confession of faith the church has ever produced, every creed that bears the name orthodox, every doxology that rises from Christian lips, presupposes a conviction so fundamental that to surrender it would be to surrender Christianity itself: that the Son of God who became flesh and died for sinners is truly and fully God, and that the Holy Spirit who dwells within the people of God is truly and fully God. This is not a peripheral doctrine that the theologians have elaborated beyond what Scripture requires. It is the very heartbeat of the Christian faith, the confession upon which every other Christian affirmation depends, and the truth for which the church's martyrs have bled across twenty centuries of history.

In the previous two lessons, we have established the central mystery of the Trinity, one God in three co-equal, co-eternal, consubstantial Persons, and traced the eternal relations of origin by which the Persons are distinguished: the Father eternally begetting, the Son eternally begotten, the Spirit eternally proceeding. In this lesson, we press deeper into the biblical evidence for the full deity of each of the two Persons who have been most contested throughout church history: the Son and the Holy Spirit. Against every form of Arianism, subordinationism, and Unitarianism, ancient and modern, we must demonstrate from Scripture that the Son is truly God and the Spirit is truly God, and that each is not merely divine in some secondary or derivative sense but possesses the fullness of the divine nature and the complete range of divine attributes.

We must also demonstrate, with equal care, that both the Son and the Holy Spirit are genuine Persons, not forces, not modes, not divine energies, but Persons in the full theological sense: each possessing intellect, will, and distinct personal identity. The Personhood of the Son has rarely been disputed in mainstream Christian thought, since the incarnation makes it virtually self-evident. But the Personhood of the Spirit has been a more contested question, and the church's careful biblical reasoning on this point deserves our full attention. Let us therefore turn to the Scriptures, the church's only infallible rule of faith and practice, and allow them to make the case that two millennia of Christian confession have grounded in their testimony.

I. The Full Deity of the Son

A. The Explicit Affirmations of Scripture

The New Testament's testimony to the full deity of the Son is not something that must be assembled from scattered hints and allusions; it is proclaimed with remarkable directness and with a frequency that leaves no room for ambiguity. We begin where the apostolic testimony begins: with the prologue to the Gospel of John.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1, NASB 1995). Three clauses, each building on the last, constitute one of the most theologically dense sentences in all of Scripture. "In the beginning was the Word", the Word (Logos) already existed at the very moment of creation's inauguration, which

Genesis 1:1 places as the absolute beginning of all things temporal. The Word did not come into being at creation; He was already there. “The Word was with God”, the Word is personally distinct from the Father, existing in eternal face-to-face communion with Him. And then the declaration that the entire history of Christological controversy has orbited: “the Word was God.” Not “a god,” as Jehovah’s Witnesses render it in their New World Translation, an interpretation that is grammatically possible but contextually and theologically indefensible. The absence of the definite article before *theos* in the predicate position is a standard Greek construction (the Colwell Rule) indicating that the predicate noun shares the nature of the subject. The Word was God in His nature, God in His essence, God in the fullest and most unqualified sense.

John 1:18, in its best-attested reading, reinforces this: “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (NASB 1995). The Son is here explicitly called “God”, *monogenēs theos*, the only-begotten God. The apostle Thomas, when confronted by the risen Christ, makes the most direct Christological confession in the entire New Testament: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28, NASB 1995). Jesus does not correct him; He receives the worship. Paul, writing to Titus, refers to “our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13, NASB 1995), a construction in Greek (the Granville Sharp Rule) that identifies the one referent as both God and Savior. The letter to the Hebrews quotes the Father addressing the Son: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Hebrews 1:8, NASB 1995), the Father calls the Son “God.” Romans 9:5 speaks of “Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever” (NASB 1995). The accumulated weight of these texts is crushing: the New Testament does not hint at the deity of Christ; it proclaims it.

B. The Divine Attributes of the Son

Beyond the explicit predications of deity, the New Testament ascribes to the Son the full range of divine attributes, those perfections that belong exclusively to God and cannot be shared with any creature.

- **Eternity:** The Son exists before all creation. “Before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58, NASB 1995), the absolute *ego eimi*, the divine name of Exodus 3:14, applied by the Son to Himself. In John 17:5, Jesus prays: “Glorify Me together with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (NASB 1995). The Son possessed glory with the Father in eternity past, before creation existed. He is eternal because He is God.
- **Omniscience:** In John 21:17, Peter declares: “Lord, You know all things” (NASB 1995). Colossians 2:3 affirms that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (NASB 1995). Jesus knew what was in man (John 2:25), knew the thoughts of His opponents (Matthew 12:25), and knows the sheep by name (John 10:3). The omniscience ascribed to Him is not a gift from God but an attribute of His divine nature.
- **Omnipotence:** The Son is the agent of creation: “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3, NASB 1995). Colossians 1:16–17 declares that “by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible” (NASB 1995).

1995), and that “In Him all things hold together” (NASB 1995). To create ex nihilo and to sustain the cosmos in being is the work of omnipotence, of God alone.

- **Immutability:** “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NASB 1995). The divine attribute of immutability, the unchanging constancy of God’s nature and purposes, is explicitly ascribed to the incarnate Son. Though He took on human nature in time, His divine nature is unchanging, as befits the eternal God.
- **Omnipresence:** Jesus promises His disciples: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NASB 1995). The risen and ascended Christ, present with His people everywhere and always, exercises the divine attribute of omnipresence in the ongoing life of the church.

C. The Divine Works and Worship of the Son

In Scripture, there are works that belong exclusively to God: the work of creation, the forgiveness of sins, the raising of the dead, and the final judgment. The New Testament ascribes all of these to the Son.

The Son forgives sins, an act the scribes rightly identified as belonging to God alone (Mark 2:7), and Jesus asserts His authority to do precisely this (Mark 2:10). The Son raises the dead: “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes” (John 5:21, NASB 1995). The Son will execute the final judgment: “He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:27, NASB 1995). These are not the acts of an exalted creature; they are the prerogatives of God exercised by the divine Son.

Most decisively of all, the Son receives divine worship, and accepts it without rebuke. When Thomas falls before the risen Christ crying “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28, NASB 1995), Jesus does not correct him as an angel corrects John in Revelation 22:8–9. The angels of God are commanded to worship the Son (Hebrews 1:6). The hymn of Philippians 2:9–11 declares that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (NASB 1995), language drawn directly from Isaiah 45:23, where YHWH Himself declares that every knee will bow to Him. The worship that belongs to God alone is given to the Son, and the Scriptures present this as entirely appropriate.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” | “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.” | “My Lord and my God!”

John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8; Titus 2:13; John 20:28, NASB 1995

II. The Full Deity of the Holy Spirit

A. The Holy Spirit Is Called God

The deity of the Holy Spirit is established with particular clarity in the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. When Peter confronts Ananias, he declares: “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3–4, NASB 1995). The logical structure of the passage is decisive: lying to the

Holy Spirit is equated, without qualification, with lying to God. The Holy Spirit is not a representative of God, not an agent of God, not a divine power or energy, He is God. The identification is explicit and inescapable.

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians closes with the Apostolic Benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14, NASB 1995). The Spirit is coordinated with the Father and the Son in a single Trinitarian blessing in a manner that would be profoundly strange if He were less than fully divine. Paul elsewhere designates the bodies of believers as "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19, NASB 1995), a designation whose force depends entirely on the Spirit being God, for the temple is the dwelling place of God alone. And 2 Corinthians 3:17–18 identifies the Spirit as the Lord: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (NASB 1995).

B. The Divine Attributes of the Spirit

Like the Son, the Holy Spirit possesses the full range of divine attributes, demonstrating conclusively that He is not a creature but a divine Person.

- **Omniscience:** "For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10, NASB 1995). Only God can search the depths of God; the Spirit's omniscience is grounded in His divine nature. "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11, NASB 1995). The Spirit's knowledge of God is not derived or learned but inherent and immediate, the knowledge of one who is Himself divine.
- **Omnipresence:** Psalm 139:7 is the great declaration of the Spirit's omnipresence: "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (NASB 1995). David's rhetorical questions presuppose that there is nowhere in all of creation where the Spirit is absent. This is the attribute of omnipresence, which belongs to God alone.
- **Omnipotence:** The Spirit is the power by which God creates (Genesis 1:2), sustains all things (Psalm 104:30), and regenerates the dead hearts of sinners (John 3:5–8; Ezekiel 37:1–14). The Spirit effects the virgin conception of the incarnate Son (Luke 1:35). He raises Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). These are acts of divine omnipotence, not the work of a created being.
- **Eternity:** Hebrews 9:14 speaks of "Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God" (NASB 1995). The Spirit is eternal, He exists without beginning, without end, outside of time, because He is God.

C. The Divine Works of the Spirit

The works attributed to the Holy Spirit throughout Scripture are, without exception, works that belong to God alone. The Spirit participates in creation (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30). He authors Scripture: "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21, NASB 1995). The Spirit's authorship of the inspired Word is an act of divine activity, for God alone is the ultimate Author of Scripture. He regenerates sinners, creating new life in dead hearts (John 3:5–

8; Titus 3:5). He sanctifies the people of God, conforming them to the image of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). He raised Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). He distributes spiritual gifts “to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11, NASB 1995), a sovereign distributing activity that belongs to God alone.

These works are not the works of a created intermediary. They are the works of the divine Creator, Sustainer, and Sanctifier, the works of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, who is God.

“You have not lied to men but to God.” | “The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.” | “Where can I go from Your Spirit?”

Acts 5:3–4; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; Psalm 139:7, NASB 1995

III. The Personhood of the Son

If the deity of the Son has been vigorously contested throughout church history, His Personhood has been contested rather less, for the simple reason that the incarnation makes it nearly impossible to deny. A Person became flesh, walked among us, wept at the tomb of Lazarus, prayed in Gethsemane, suffered on the cross, and rose bodily from the dead. Whatever else one might say about Jesus of Nazareth, He was indisputably a Person. The theological question is not whether He was a Person but what kind of Person, and here the church has insisted, with careful biblical reasoning, that He is the eternal divine Person, the Son of God, who assumed human nature in the incarnation without ceasing to be the divine Person He eternally is.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) articulated this with the precision the controversies of the fifth century demanded: the incarnate Son is one Person in two natures, fully divine and fully human, the two natures being united without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. This is the hypostatic union: the eternal Person of the Son (the one hypostasis) subsisting in both the divine nature and the human nature simultaneously. The Son is not two persons, He is one divine Person who has taken on human nature. Nor did the divine nature swallow the human, or the human nature absorb the divine. The Chalcedonian Definition stands as one of the great achievements of the church’s theological reasoning under the pressure of Scripture.

The full humanity of Christ is equally essential to the gospel: He was genuinely human, born of a woman (Galatians 4:4), subject to growth and hunger and fatigue (Luke 2:52; John 4:6; Matthew 4:2), tempted in all things as we are yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15), and truly dead and truly risen. But His humanity is the humanity of the eternal divine Person who assumed it, never a separate human person, always the Son of God become Son of Man, the two natures united in the one Person forever.

IV. The Personhood of the Holy Spirit

A. Why the Personhood of the Spirit Must Be Established

The Personhood of the Holy Spirit has required more careful explication than the Personhood of the Son, for several reasons. First, the grammatical gender of *pneuma*

(spirit) in Greek is neuter, which has sometimes been used to argue that the Spirit is an impersonal force or energy rather than a genuine Person. Second, the Spirit is often spoken of in Scripture in ways that might superficially suggest an impersonal power, He is poured out, He fills, He moves. Third, the modern cult of Jehovah's Witnesses explicitly denies the Personhood of the Spirit, treating Him as "God's active force." And fourth, even within ostensibly orthodox Christianity, there is a tendency to treat the Spirit as an impersonal divine influence rather than the third Person of the Trinity.

Against all of these tendencies, the Scriptures speak with unmistakable clarity: the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a power; a "He," not an "it." The evidence for this is extensive, decisive, and theologically irreplaceable.

B. Personal Pronouns and Personal Actions

The most striking grammatical evidence for the Personhood of the Spirit appears in John 14–16, where our Lord promises and describes the coming of the Helper (Parakletos). The word parakletos is masculine in Greek, and our Lord consistently uses masculine pronouns to refer to the Spirit even when the antecedent noun *pneuma* would grammatically require a neuter pronoun: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13, NASB 1995). The masculine "He" (*ekeinos*) is used deliberately, overriding the grammatical gender of the noun, to indicate that the Spirit is a Person, not a thing. This is not a grammatical accident; it is a theological statement embedded in the very language Jesus uses.

Beyond pronouns, the Spirit performs actions that are the exclusive province of personal beings. He speaks: "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2, NASB 1995). He teaches: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26, NASB 1995). He testifies: "When the Helper comes... He will testify about Me" (John 15:26, NASB 1995). He guides (John 16:13). He intercedes with the Father on behalf of the saints, with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26–27). He distributes spiritual gifts "just as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11, NASB 1995), an act of sovereign personal will.

C. Personal Emotional and Moral States

Most compellingly, the Spirit is described in Scripture as capable of personal emotional and moral states, states that are entirely impossible for an impersonal force or energy.

The Spirit can be grieved: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30, NASB 1995). The verb "grieve" (*lypeō*) refers to the causing of sorrow or distress to a person. An impersonal force cannot be grieved. The Spirit can be lied to (Acts 5:3). He can be resisted (Acts 7:51) and quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19). He can be blasphemed, an offense our Lord identifies as the one unforgivable sin (Matthew 12:31–32), and blasphemy, by definition, is a personal offense against a personal Being. One cannot blaspheme an impersonal force.

All of these attributes, speaking, teaching, guiding, interceding, willing, grieving, and being capable of blasphemy, are the attributes of a Person. The Holy Spirit is not the divine electricity running through the wires of the church; He is the third Person of the Holy

Trinity, the personal God who indwells the believer, sanctifies the church, and applies the finished work of the Son to the hearts of the elect.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” | “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”

John 16:13; Acts 13:2; Ephesians 4:30; Romans 8:26–27, NASB 1995

V. Against the Errors: Arianism, Unitarianism, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses

The doctrines we have been establishing in this lesson are not abstract theological luxuries. They have been contested at great cost throughout the history of the church, and they continue to be denied by influential and numerically significant movements in our own day. A faithful pastor and theologian must know how to engage these errors with both intellectual clarity and pastoral charity.

A. Classical Arianism

As we noted in Lesson 22’s preview of the Nicene controversy, Arius of Alexandria taught in the early fourth century that the Son was the first and greatest of God’s creatures, the pre-eminent created being through whom God made the rest of creation, but was not of the same essence as the Father and was therefore not truly God. The Arian Son is a demigod: more than human, less than divine.

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) condemned this view as a fundamental corruption of the Christian faith. The homoousios clause, declaring the Son to be “of one substance with the Father”, was the council’s definitive response. The Arian interpretation cannot survive serious engagement with the biblical texts we have examined in this lesson: the Word who “was God” (John 1:1), the Son addressed as “O God” by the Father Himself (Hebrews 1:8), the one who receives Thomas’s confession “My Lord and my God!” without correction (John 20:28). These texts do not permit an Arian reading.

B. Socinianism and Modern Unitarianism

The Socinian movement of the sixteenth century, named after Fausto Sozzini (1539–1604), denied the pre-existence and eternal deity of the Son and the full Personhood of the Spirit, reading the New Testament’s exalted language about Christ as referring to a uniquely Spirit-anointed man who was adopted to divine sonship through his faithful life and resurrection. This tradition continued through the eighteenth-century Unitarian movement associated with Joseph Priestley and John Adams in England and America, and it persists in modern Unitarianism and in the theology of numerous liberal Protestant theologians.

The Socinian reading requires a systematic reinterpretation of the Johannine prologue, the Pauline hymns (Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15–20), and the explicit deity texts cited above, a reinterpretation that does not arise from the texts themselves but is imposed upon them from a prior theological commitment to a non-Trinitarian monotheism. The church’s Trinitarian confession, by contrast, arises organically from the full weight of the canonical witness.

C. The Jehovah's Witnesses

The most numerically significant contemporary denial of the full deity of the Son is the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose New World Translation renders John 1:1 as "the Word was a god", making the Son a divine being of secondary rank, an exalted creature identified with the archangel Michael. The Witnesses also deny the Personhood of the Holy Spirit, treating Him as "God's active force."

Several responses are in order. First, the rendering "a god" in John 1:1 is grammatically possible but theologically incoherent in a monotheistic context: if the Logos is "a god," John has introduced polytheism into his Gospel, a conclusion that contradicts his own affirmation of strict monotheism (John 17:3). The Colwell Rule and the overwhelming weight of Johannine and Pauline Christology both confirm that theos in John 1:1c is a qualitative predicate: the Word is divine in nature. Second, the explicit identification of lying to the Spirit as lying to God in Acts 5:3–4 is devastating to the Witness position: an active force cannot be lied to, and lying to a force is not lying to God. Third, the masculine personal pronouns in John 14–16, deliberately used by Jesus in explicit reference to the Spirit, cannot be explained away by any appeal to grammatical gender.

VI. The Athanasian Creed and the Full Trinitarian Confession

The Athanasian Creed, probably composed in the fifth or sixth century in the Western church (its attribution to Athanasius is traditional but almost certainly incorrect), represents the most technically precise and theologically comprehensive of the church's ancient Trinitarian statements. It has been received as a standard of orthodoxy in both Lutheran and Reformed churches. Its central affirmations regarding the Son and the Spirit deserve careful attention:

"The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God. The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord; and yet there are not three Lords but one Lord."

The Athanasian Creed

This formulation captures with elegant precision what Scripture teaches: the unity of the divine essence (one God, one Lord) coexists with the genuine distinct Personhood of each of the three (the Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God). To confess any less than this is to fall short of the biblical witness; to confess any more is to collapse into tritheism.

The creed continues: "In this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal together and coequal." This is the equal dignity and coeternity of all three Persons, no ontological hierarchy, no gradation of divine dignity, no temporal priority of one Person over another. The Father is not more God than the Son; the Son is not more God than the Spirit. Each is fully and equally God, distinguished only by their eternal personal relations, not by any inequality of nature or dignity.

Key Texts: John 1:1; Acts 5:3–4; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3, 8; Isaiah 9:6; John 16:13; Ephesians 4:30

VII. The Pastoral and Doxological Significance

A. The Gospel Depends on the Full Deity of the Son

The pastoral stakes of this lesson are as high as any doctrine we have examined in this series. The full deity of the Son is not a theological luxury; it is the load-bearing wall of the entire gospel. Consider what is lost if the Son is not truly God.

If Christ is not truly God, His death on the cross has no infinite worth. A creature, however exalted, can only make satisfaction for creatures of comparable standing. The infinite debt of human sin against an infinite God requires an infinite satisfaction, which only an infinite Person can provide. The atonement is of infinite value precisely and only because the one who died is the eternal Son of God, the *homoousios*, the one who is of one substance with the Father. Remove the deity of Christ from the gospel, and the cross becomes the noble death of an admirable man, moving, perhaps, but not salvific.

Moreover, if Christ is not truly God, He cannot be the object of saving faith. Scripture is unambiguous that we are to trust in God alone for salvation, to trust in a creature for salvation is a form of idolatry. But Scripture is equally unambiguous that we are to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation (Acts 16:31; John 14:1). The only resolution to this apparent tension is that Jesus Christ is God, and therefore to trust in Him is to trust in God. The full deity of Christ is the theological foundation that makes the call to faith in Christ not only appropriate but morally necessary.

B. The Christian Life Requires the Full Deity of the Spirit

What the deity of the Son is to the gospel, the deity and Personhood of the Spirit is to the Christian life. If the Spirit is merely a divine influence or energy, then the Christian is left, ultimately, to his own resources in the work of sanctification, he is aided by a divine power, perhaps, but not indwelt by a divine Person. The difference is not trivial.

But Scripture declares that God Himself, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, has taken up residence in the body of every believer: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NASB 1995). The indwelling Spirit is not a divine force or a divine emanation; He is the divine Person who teaches, guides, convicts, comforts, intercedes, and sanctifies. It is because the Spirit is a fully divine Person that His intercession avails before the Father (Romans 8:26–27), that His sealing is the guarantee of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14), and that His illumination of the Word is not merely a cognitive enhancement but the impartation of genuine spiritual knowledge of God.

C. Worship and Prayer in Trinitarian Fullness

The full deity of both the Son and the Spirit means that Christian worship is irreducibly Trinitarian. We do not worship the Father and then also direct a lower grade of devotion toward the Son and the Spirit. We worship the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and our worship is addressed to each Person fully and equally, because each Person is fully and equally God.

This shapes our prayer. We pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9), through the Son who is our only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6), in the power of the Spirit who prays within us (Romans 8:26–27; Jude 20). The entire arc of prayer is Trinitarian, because the entire economy of salvation is Trinitarian: the Father purposes, the Son accomplishes, the Spirit applies. And what the Spirit applies is not the work of a creature but the finished redemptive work of the eternal Son, presented before the eternal Father. Christian prayer is participation in the Trinitarian life of God.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: The doctrine of this lesson is the foundation of your confidence before God. The one who died for you is not a great man or an exalted angel; He is the eternal Son of God, whose sacrifice is of infinite worth, whose resurrection is the guarantee of yours, and whose intercession at the Father's right hand is unfailing. And the Spirit who dwells within you is not a divine influence that might ebb and flow, He is the personal God who has made your body His temple and will never leave you.

For the long-tenured saint: Return to the Trinitarian foundation of your faith with renewed wonder. After decades of Christian life, there is a danger of treating the Trinity as settled dogma rather than living reality. Let this lesson rekindle your astonishment that the eternal Son of God loved you and gave Himself for you (Galatians 2:20), and that the Spirit of the living God has taken up His abode in the dust of your humanity.

For the one who is doubting: The deity of Christ has been attacked from every quarter for two thousand years, by philosophers, historians, and theologians of every stripe. The church's confession has survived every assault because it is not a theological system imposed on the text but the natural, cumulative reading of the whole biblical witness. Engage the texts examined in this lesson with an open mind and a willing heart, and let Scripture make its own case.

For the one who is suffering: The God who governs your suffering is the Father who sent His own Son into the depths of human pain, the Son who cried "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46, NASB 1995), and the Spirit who intercedes for you with groanings that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26). Your suffering has not brought you to a God who is distant from pain. It has brought you to a God who has been there.

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Homoousios	Greek: “of one substance” or “of the same essence.” The term adopted at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) to affirm that the Son is of the identical divine essence as the Father. The decisive weapon against Arianism, which held the Son to be of a similar (homoiousios) but not identical substance. The one iota of difference between the two Greek words represents the difference between orthodoxy and heresy.
Hypostatic Union	The Chalcedonian doctrine that the incarnate Son is one divine Person (hypostasis) subsisting in two complete natures, fully divine and fully human, the two natures united without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. The Son did not become a human person; He is the eternal divine Person who assumed human nature into personal union with His divine nature.
Monophysitism	The heresy, condemned at Chalcedon (451 AD), that taught Christ has only one nature after the incarnation, a divine nature that has absorbed or replaced the human. Represented historically by Eutyches. Monophysitism is still held by several Eastern Christian bodies (the Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, and Syriac Orthodox churches).
Nestorianism	The heresy attributed to Nestorius of Constantinople, who was accused of dividing Christ into two persons, a divine person and a human person loosely united. Condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD). Whether Nestorius himself held this view is debated; the Nestorian label is applied to the theology of those who divide Christ’s person.
Docetism	From the Greek dokein (“to seem”). The early heresy that Christ only appeared to have a human body, He seemed to be human but was in fact purely divine. Docetism is implicitly condemned throughout the Johannine literature (“the Word became flesh”, John 1:14) and is explicitly addressed in 1 John 4:2–3.
Paraclete / Helper	From the Greek parakletos (“one called alongside to help”). The title Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit in John 14–16. Various translations “Helper,” “Comforter,” “Counselor,” or “Advocate.” The term is a masculine noun in Greek, and Jesus uses masculine pronouns in reference to the Spirit in these passages, providing strong grammatical evidence for the Spirit’s Personhood.
Colwell’s Rule	A grammatical principle in Koine Greek, identified by E.C. Colwell, stating that a definite predicate nominative that precedes the verb lacks the definite article. Applied to John 1:1c (“the Word was God”), it explains the absence of the article before theos without

	implying indefiniteness (“a god”). The predicate theos is qualitative, indicating the nature of the Word, not indefinite.
Granville Sharp Rule	A grammatical rule in Greek holding that when two nouns of the same case are joined by kai (“and”) and the first noun is preceded by the article while the second is not, both nouns refer to the same person. Applied to Titus 2:13 (“our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus”), this rule confirms that “God” and “Savior” refer to the same Person, Jesus Christ.
Adoptionism	The heresy that Jesus was a mere man who was “adopted” as the Son of God at some point in His earthly life, most commonly at His baptism or His resurrection. Adoptionism denies the pre-existence of the Son and therefore the doctrine of the incarnation. It is the ancient predecessor of modern Unitarian and Socinian theologies.
Blasphemy Against the Spirit	The one unforgivable sin identified by Jesus in Matthew 12:31–32 and Mark 3:28–29. Most interpreters understand it as the deliberate, willful, and persistent attribution of the Spirit’s works to Satan in the face of clear evidence, the hardening of the heart against the Spirit’s testimony to Christ to the point of final impenitence. Theologically, the possibility of blaspheming the Spirit is itself evidence of His divine Personhood: blasphemy is directed against a Person, not a force.
Theotokos	Greek: “God-bearer” or “Mother of God.” The title affirmed by the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) for the Virgin Mary, not as a statement about Mary’s nature but as a statement about Christ’s: the one she bore is the eternal Son of God in human flesh. The title protects the hypostatic union, Mary bore not a human person who was later united to a divine person, but the one divine Person who is both God and man.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that Jesus Christ is truly and fully God, not a divine hero, not an exalted creature, not a second-tier deity, but the eternal Son of God, of one substance with the Father, who became flesh for our salvation. We must believe this not merely as a theological proposition to be affirmed but as the living ground of our confidence before God. The Christ in whom we trust, whose death we rely upon for our forgiveness, whose resurrection we look to as the pledge of our own, that Christ is nothing less than God incarnate.

We must equally believe that the Holy Spirit is truly and fully God, a divine Person, not a divine power; an indwelling Guest, not an impersonal influence; the third Person of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. The Spirit's deity is the theological foundation of every promise Scripture makes about the Christian life: the sealing of our inheritance, the intercession that avails before the Father, the sanctifying work that will not stop until it is complete at the coming of the Lord.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the deity of Christ set your heart ablaze with wonder and gratitude. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16, NASB 1995), what was given was not a creature but the eternal Son, the one who is of one substance with the Father, the one in whom "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9, NASB 1995). The love of God in the gospel is not the love of One who sent a deputy; it is the love of One who came Himself, in the Person of His eternal Son, to enter our darkness and bear our sin.

Let the Personhood of the Spirit give you confidence in the intimacy of God's indwelling presence. You are not merely influenced by a divine power; you are the dwelling place of a divine Person who knows you, loves you, teaches you, intercedes for you, and will never depart from you. The Spirit is not a temporary visitor; He is the permanent, personal presence of God in the life of every believer, the one who makes your body His temple.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Know your Bible's Christology. The texts we have examined in this lesson, John 1:1, John 20:28, Hebrews 1:8, Titus 2:13, Colossians 2:9, are the church's arsenal against every assault on the deity of Christ. Commit them to memory. Know them in their context. Be able to explain why they teach what the church has always confessed they teach.
- Engage Jehovah's Witnesses and other Christ-deniers with patience and precision. When they come to your door, they deserve a thoughtful response, not hostility, but clarity. Know the Colwell Rule. Know why "a god" is an inadequate rendering of John 1:1. Know Acts 5:3–4. Know that the same interlocutor who denies the deity of Christ also denies the Personhood of the Spirit, and that both denials are devastating to the gospel.

- Pray to and with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not merely the One through whom you pray; He is a Person to whom the Scriptures themselves direct prayer. The Trinitarian character of Christian worship includes addressing the Spirit in praise and petition, confident that One who is fully God hears and responds.
- Live as a temple of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit who dwells within you is truly and fully God, then the implications for how you live in your body are staggering. Paul draws precisely this conclusion in 1 Corinthians 6:18–20. The holiness of the Christian life is grounded in the dignity of the divine Person who has taken up residence in the body of the believer.
- Preach and teach the full Christology of Scripture. For those in pastoral and teaching ministry: never allow a thin or vague Christology to pass unchallenged in the pulpit or the classroom. The full deity of Christ and the full Personhood of the Spirit are not doctrines for the seminary; they are the lifeblood of the local church, and every congregation needs to hear them proclaimed with clarity, urgency, and doxological fire.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before this lesson, how confident were you in your ability to explain, from Scripture, why the Son and the Holy Spirit are fully divine? What do you feel you most need to grow in understanding on this subject?

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read John 1:1–3. Identify each of the three clauses in verse 1 and state the theological truth conveyed by each. What does verse 3 add to the picture of the Son's identity?

3. Read Hebrews 1:1–12. List every divine attribute or divine work attributed to the Son in this passage. How does the Father's direct address to the Son as "O God" in verse 8 bear on the question of Christ's deity?

4. Read Acts 5:1–11. How does Peter's language in verses 3–4 establish the deity of the Holy Spirit? What would be lost theologically if "the Holy Spirit" in verse 3 were merely a reference to a divine power or influence?

5. Read John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15. Identify every action attributed to the Holy Spirit in these passages. Which of these actions could be performed by an impersonal force? Which require a Person?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

6. The Jehovah's Witnesses render John 1:1c as "the Word was a god." Explain why this rendering is both grammatically questionable and theologically incoherent in its context. What are the strongest arguments against this translation?

7. Explain the Chalcedonian Definition of the hypostatic union in your own words: one Person, two natures, united without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. What heresy does each of these "withouts" guard against?

8. The lesson argues that the deity of Christ is the load-bearing wall of the gospel. Trace that argument: what specifically would be lost from the atonement, from saving faith, and from Christian assurance if Christ were not truly God?

9. Why is the Personhood of the Spirit important for the Christian life? What specifically would change, in prayer, in sanctification, in assurance, if the Spirit were an impersonal divine force rather than a divine Person?

10. The Athanasian Creed states: "The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God." How does this formulation guard against both tritheism and modalism? Is it a contradiction, and if not, why not?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- 11.** Colossians 2:9 declares: “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (NASB 1995). How does this text reshape the way you approach Jesus, in prayer, in obedience, in trust? Does your daily life reflect the conviction that the one you are following is truly and fully God?
- 12.** If a Jehovah’s Witness knocked on your door today and denied the deity of Christ, which three biblical texts from this lesson would you turn to first, and why? Practice explaining each one clearly and charitably.
- 13.** The lesson argues that living as a temple of the Holy Spirit has direct implications for how you use your body (1 Corinthians 6:18–20). Are there areas of your life, habits, entertainment, speech, relationships, where this truth needs to be more consistently applied?
- 14.** Paul prays in Ephesians 3:14–19 that believers would be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man and filled with all the fullness of God. How does understanding the Spirit as a divine Person rather than a divine power change the way you relate to this prayer? What would it look like for you to cultivate a more personal, conversational relationship with the Spirit in your daily devotional life?

Prayer Focus

Open your time of prayer with the Trinitarian Benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14, and let it serve not merely as a closing formula but as a theological framework for your worship: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (NASB 1995). Adore the Father for the love that sent the eternal Son. Adore the Son for the grace that brought Him from the bosom of the Father into the dust of our humanity, to the cross, and through the grave to the throne. Adore the Spirit for the fellowship, the *koinōnia*, the intimate communion, He has established between the living God and the hearts of His redeemed people.

Spend time in silent gratitude before the mystery of the incarnation: that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NASB 1995). And pray that the Spirit who inspired those words would illumine them in your heart, not merely as doctrine to be believed but as the living reality of the God who is with you, in you, and for you, world without end.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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