

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

Lesson Guide

LESSON
ONE

IN THE TRINITY



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

pneumatology – the doctrine or study of the Holy Spirit

- *pneuma* – “spirit”
- *logos* – “study”

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a distinct, uncreated person of the Trinity took millennia to develop because God chose to reveal it over time.

Trinity – God has three persons, but only one essence

- person – a distinct, self-aware personality
- essence – God’s being, fundamental nature, the substance of which he consists

The doctrine of the Trinity was hinted at in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, all three persons of the Trinity were fully revealed: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

II. Old Testament (3:56)

God has always existed in Trinity – all three persons are, and always have been, uncreated and fully God.

Although there are hints throughout the Old Testament, it’s only with the clarity of the New Testament that we can see the Holy Spirit as a distinct person.

B.B. Warfield (1851–1921) compared the Old Testament to a room that’s richly furnished but poorly lit (*The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity*).

Because God really does exist in Trinity, and because the Old Testament really does reveal him, the Old Testament contains clues about the Trinity.

A. Spirit (8:20)

Old Testament names for God’s Spirit:

- “Holy Spirit”
- “Spirit of God”
- “Spirit of the Lord”
- “My Spirit”

ruach – Hebrew word for “spirit” can refer to:

- wind or breath
- principle of life that animates living creatures
- immortal human soul
- spirits without material bodies
- when used of God, either a synonym for God himself or his personal presence and active engagement with creation

When *ruach* is combined with a name or pronoun for God, it indicates that God's Spirit is associated with God or that it actually is God, such as in:

- Spirit of God
- My Spirit
- Spirit of the Lord

The Old Testament name "Holy Spirit" couples *ruach* (spirit) with *godesh* (holiness), also reflected in other names like "the Holy One."

Unlike the New Testament, in the Old Testament, these names refer to God without clearly distinguishing between God's persons.

B. Divinity (11:02)

At least four Old Testament characteristics of God's Spirit point to the Spirit's divinity.

1. God himself (11:54)

Some Old Testament references equate the Spirit with God himself.

"Holy Spirit"

- Isaiah 63:10:
 - "[The Israelites] ... grieved his Holy Spirit."
 - Similar to Paul's warning against grieving the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 4:30.

- Isaiah 63:11-14:
 - “[God] set his Holy Spirit among them.”
 - Refers to the same miracles God himself performed in Exodus 14–15.
 - Equates God’s Holy Spirit to God’s arm, meaning God himself was invisibly present as a warrior for his people.

“Spirit of God”

- Genesis 1:2 – The Spirit of God hovered over the waters at creation.
- Job 33:4 – The Spirit of God is the creator of human beings.
- Psalm 106:32, 33 – The Spirit of God is God, the Lord, against whom the Israelites rebelled at Meribah.

“Spirit of the Lord” (“Yahweh”)

- Isaiah 63:14 – “They were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord.”
- Micah 2:7 – “Is the Spirit of the Lord impatient?” (NASB)

“My Spirit”:

- Genesis 6:3 – God (“My Spirit”) contends with humanity
- Haggai 2:5 – God remains present with his covenant people through his Spirit.

2. **Prophecy and visions (16:55)**

In the Old Testament, the Spirit empowered prophecy and visions, revealing knowledge that only God could possess.

Demonstrations of the Spirit's divine authority and power:

- 1 Samuel 19:20-24 – Saul and his men were temporarily given the gift of prophecy.
- 2 Chronicles 24:20 – The prophet Zechariah was empowered to speak God's words on his behalf.
- Ezekiel 11:24 – The Spirit of God gave Ezekiel a prophetic vision.
- Numbers 22–24 – The Spirit only allowed the prophet Balaam to deliver blessings on Israel (Numbers 24:2-4).

The “Spirit of the Lord” was a source of prophecies, indicating that this name could also refer directly to God:

- Numbers 11:29 – Moses revealed that the Lord's Spirit was the source of prophetic gifts.
- Ezekiel 11:5 – The Spirit of the Lord put God's words in the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel.
- 2 Samuel 23:2-3 – David's last words directly equate the Spirit of the Lord with the God of Israel himself.

God used the name “my Spirit” to describe the pouring out of the gift of prophecy during the last days (Joel 2:28-29).

Peter taught that Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled when God poured out the Holy Spirit on the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-29).

Joel didn’t explicitly declare the existence of the third person of the Trinity, but the Spirit in Joel’s prophecy was God himself.

3. Special skill and knowledge (21:44)

In the Old Testament, God’s Spirit supernaturally gifted human beings to perform ministry tasks:

- God filled the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab with his Spirit so that they could craft the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exodus 31:3, 35:31).
- Craftsmen needed sufficient skill and knowledge of all the crafts necessary to build the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9, 40).

Similarly, the Holy Spirit provided spiritual gifts to the church in the New Testament (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4).

4. Anointing and empowerment (23:21)

In the Old Testament, the Spirit anointed and empowered kings and other leaders among God's covenant people.

When the Spirit of God anointed kings, he exercised authority that belonged to God himself, indicating that the Spirit was God.

Most Old Testament references to anointing and gifting refer to the "Spirit of the Lord" (Yahweh), emphasizing the covenantal nature of these offices:

- David received the Holy Spirit when he was anointed king, even before he ascended Israel's throne (1 Samuel 16:13).
- Saul lost the Holy Spirit's supernatural blessing and gifting, even though he still ruled as king (1 Samuel 16:14).
- After David sinned with Bathsheba, he feared he might lose this gifting and begged to keep God's Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11).

The New Testament sheds some light on this activity of the Spirit:

- At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit anointed him for ministry and for his office of Messiah (Matthew 3:14-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22).
- The Spirit of God at Jesus' baptism is the third person of the Trinity; the same Holy Spirit performed the same function in the Old Testament.

When the Spirit anointed and gifted people, it meant that God himself was interacting with the world:

- the anointing of Saul – 1 Samuel 10:6
- the gifting of David for his rule as king – Isaiah 11:2
- Micah's gifting for his office of prophet – Micah 3:8
- the appointing and empowering of Israel's judges – Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14

C. Personhood (29:05)

The Old Testament demonstrates the Spirit's personhood in that it proves him to be a fully divine, uncreated person.

Every passage that equates God's Spirit with God himself demonstrates that the Spirit is personal.

Some passages ascribe personal qualities specifically to the Spirit that could never be used to describe an impersonal force.

1. Emotions (31:28)

Impersonal forces do not exhibit emotions.

Scripture describes the Holy Spirit experiencing emotions such as grief or anger (Isaiah 63:10; Micah 2:7).

2. Relationships (32:30)

God's Spirit contended with humanity and intelligently responded to humanity's sin (Genesis 6:3).

Impersonal forces can't contend, respond intelligently, or demonstrate patience, as the Spirit did.

3. Authority (33:19)

The Spirit's personhood is demonstrated by people's response to his authority.

- At Meribah, the Israelites “rebelled against the Spirit of God” (Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 106:33).
- They rebelled against the Lord who had authority over them, not just against his rules.

4. Volition (34:10)

The Spirit is shown to be speaking of his own volition and making choices about what prophets should say on his behalf.

- David claimed that the Spirit of the Lord spoke through him (2 Samuel 23:2).
- The Spirit of the Lord told the prophet Ezekiel what to tell his people (Ezekiel 11:5).

Old Testament passages don't reveal the Holy Spirit as a distinct person within the Godhead, but they do demonstrate that God's Spirit is a divine person and not simply a force.

III. New Testament (35:52)

The New Testament refers to the Holy Spirit in ways that echo the Old Testament.

pneuma:

- New Testament term for “spirit.”
- Used in the same way as the Hebrew term *ruach*.
- Refers to wind, breath, the life force of animals, human souls, and non-corporeal spirits.
- The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) commonly translates *ruach* as *pneuma*.

New Testament names for God’s Spirit:

“Holy Spirit”	“the Spirit of Christ”
“the Spirit of God”	“the Spirit of Truth”
“the Spirit of the Father”	“the Spirit of Holiness”
“the Spirit of the Lord”	“the Spirit of Life”
“the Spirit of Jesus”	“the Spirit of Grace”

These names:

- Identify the Holy Spirit with God’s Spirit in the Old Testament
- Describe his character and work
- Show him to be one with the Father and Son
- Ascribe to him attributes like truth, holiness, life, and grace

The New Testament teaches much more clearly and directly that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person within the Trinity.

A. Jesus (37:55)

Jesus confirmed the Old Testament teachings that:

- The Holy Spirit is God himself.
- The Holy Spirit is a person.

Jesus also revealed that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons within God.

The Jews rightly understood that there is only one true God, but wrongly inferred that God existed as only one person.

When Jesus said that he cast out demons “by the Spirit of God,” he was referring to the Spirit as a distinct person from the Father (Matthew 12:24-28).

Jesus' fullest teachings on the Holy Spirit's distinct personhood can be found in his Farewell Discourse (John 14–16):

- The Holy Spirit is a distinct person from both the Father and Jesus.
- The Holy Spirit would be sent by the Father and by his Son Jesus.
- The Spirit would speak what the Father told him to speak and would replace the Son as God's active presence among his people.

Jesus called attention to the Spirit's personhood in the Great Commission when he said:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”
(Matthew 28:19):

- The word translated “name” is singular.
- Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all listed as equals.
- All three are listed in a way that points to their joint membership in the Godhead (“Trinitarian formula”).
- They all share God's own authority, meaning they must all be God.
- All three persons of God would rule over the nations.

B. Apostles (44:38)

The apostles believed the Holy Spirit was fully divine and a distinct person from the Father and from the Son. For example:

- Peter said that lying to the Holy Spirit was lying to God (Acts 5:3-4).
- Paul mentioned all three persons of the Trinity equally (2 Corinthians 13:14).
- Peter described believers as, “God’s elect ... chosen according to ... God the Father ... the Spirit ... [and] Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1-2).

The apostles affirmed the Spirit’s full divinity and personhood in many ways:

- They ascribed personal qualities to him:
 - determination (Acts 15:28)
 - love (Romans 5:5)
 - grief (Ephesians 4:30)
- They spoke of him performing intentional actions:
 - interceding for the church (Romans 8:26, 27)
 - distributing gifts according to his own will (1 Corinthians 12:11)

- They ascribed incommunicable divine attributes to him that only God can possess:
 - omniscience; the Spirit knows everything that God knows (Ephesians 1:17; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11)
 - eternity; he existed before creation, and his existence is everlasting and unbreakable (Hebrews 9:14)

- They attributed the inspiration and authorship of the Old Testament Scriptures to him:
 - “The Holy Spirit spoke [the Scripture] ... through the mouth of David” (Acts 1:16).
 - “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth ... through Isaiah the prophet” (Acts 28:25).
 - “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

The apostles’ understanding of the divinity and personhood of the Holy Spirit was affirmed when the Spirit was poured out on the church (Acts 2).

IV. Church History (50:51)

The early church worked to explain and summarize Scripture’s teaching on the Holy Spirit.

A. Apostles' Creed (51:39)

The Apostles' Creed grew out of baptismal creeds which new believers were expected to affirm when they were baptized.

The Creed reflects the early church's belief that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person within the uncreated Godhead, equal with the Father and the Son.

The Creed lists the various works of each person of the Trinity:

- the Father – Maker of heaven and earth
- the Son – conception, birth, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and future return
- the Holy Spirit – responsible for the church and for the application of salvation to believers

The Creed didn't provide a clear definition of the doctrine of the Trinity.

B. Trinitarian Doctrine (54:55)

Tertullian (ca. A.D.155–230) popularized the term *trinitas* (“three” or “triad”) to refer to the Bible's teachings that God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Other terms used by Tertullian:

- *persona* – “person”; used to refer to the distinct persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- *substantia* – “substance” or “essence”; refers to God’s being, which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share in common.

“Trinity” – God has three persons, but only one essence.

There were many arguments over the details of Trinitarian doctrine.

In the fourth century A.D., many parts of the church broadly rejected the same Trinitarian doctrine they had previously accepted as biblical.

C. **Nicene Creed (58:14)**

The original Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) said very little about the Holy Spirit.

The First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) met to debate and resolve questions about the Trinity:

- rejected the Arian heresies (that denied Jesus’ full membership in the Godhead)
- defended the Nicene understanding of the Trinity
- revised and expanded the Creed so that it clearly affirmed God’s eternal existence as three distinct, uncreated persons in one essence

Basil of Caesarea's book *De Spiritu Sancto (On the Holy Spirit)* refuted those who refused to acknowledge the full deity of the Holy Spirit and made the point that the Holy Spirit deserved to be worshiped.

D. Ontology and Economy (1:01:10)

As church history progressed, theologians began to speak of both the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity:

- “ontological Trinity” – having to do with the existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the Trinity

The Holy Spirit is equal in power and glory to the Father and the Son and shares with them all divine attributes.

- economic Trinity – how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit interact with each other, especially as it pertains to creation

Each member of the Trinity has different roles, different responsibilities, and different authority.

Scripture suggests that the Holy Spirit willingly serves the Father and Son:

- He was sent by the Father and the Son (Luke 11:13; John 14:26, 15:26; Acts 2:33).

- He obeys the Father and the Son by doing the work they've sent him to do (John 16:13; Romans 8:11; 1 Peter 1:2).

Although the Father and Son appear to have greater authority within the economic Trinity, the Holy Spirit is still fully God and isn't in any way inferior to the Father and the Son.

Throughout the centuries, nearly all branches of the church have affirmed the same beliefs about the Holy Spirit's role in the Trinity.

V. Conclusion (1:07:33)

Review Questions

1. Define the term “pneumatology” in both a broad sense and in Christian theology. Why did the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a distinct, uncreated person of the Trinity take so long to develop?
2. List and explain several names the Old Testament uses to refer to God’s Spirit.

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3. The lesson discusses four characteristics of God's Spirit in the Old Testament that point to his divinity. Select one of these characteristics, and describe in detail how this characteristic indicates the Spirit's divinity. Cite specific Scripture references to support your answer.

4. How does the Old Testament point to the personhood of the Holy Spirit? Include references from Scripture to support your answer.

Application Questions

1. Systematic theologians traditionally define the Trinity by saying that, “God has three persons, but only one essence.” In your own words, how would you explain the Trinity to someone who is struggling to understand it?
2. In his book, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity*, B.B. Warfield compared the Old Testament to a room that is richly furnished but poorly lit. What did he mean?
3. Do Old Testament names like “Spirit of God” or “my Spirit” directly refer to the third person of the Trinity? Explain your answer.
4. What evidence do we have in the Old Testament that God’s Spirit is personal rather than just a force or power? Why is the Spirit’s personhood important for us in the church today?
5. In Jesus’ Farewell Discourse in John 14-16, Jesus called the Holy Spirit “the Counselor.” This has also been translated as “the Comforter,” “the Helper,” or “the Advocate.” In what way has the Spirit been a Counselor/Comforter/Helper/Advocate in your own life?
6. What does it mean that the Spirit is both divine and personal? How might this fact be used as you teach and disciple others?
7. What happened at Pentecost? Does anything similar happen today? Explain your answer.
8. Do you think doctrinal statements such as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed are still important for the church today? Why or why not?
9. Describe some of the worship practices in your church and whether they do or do not include the Holy Spirit. Should the way we worship the Holy Spirit be different from the way we worship the Father and the Son? Explain your answer.
10. What is the Holy Spirit’s role in the Trinity? How has your understanding of the Holy Spirit’s role in the Trinity changed over the course of this lesson?
11. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

Apostles' Creed – A statement of the Christian faith formulated and written to unify the basic tenets of essential Christian theology (ca. 2nd to 6th centuries A.D.)

Arianism/Arian heresy – Heresy developed in the fourth century A.D. that denied the Son's full membership in the Godhead and rejected Trinitarian doctrine.

Basil of Caesarea – (A.D. 330-379) Bishop of Caesarea elected in A.D. 370 who defended the Scriptures as the final authority in doctrine

Council of Nicea – Church council held in the city of Nicea in A.D. 325 that affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity and refuted Arianism

Council of Sirmium – Church council held in A.D. 357 that affirmed the Arian heresy

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

economic – Term meaning “relating to household management”; used when speaking of how the three persons of the Trinity relate to each other

Farewell Discourse – Jesus' final words to the eleven faithful apostles found in John 14–16

filioque – Latin term meaning “and the Son”; included in the version of the Nicene Creed used by most Western churches

First Council of Constantinople – Church council held in A.D. 381 that rejected the Arian heresy and defended and expanded the Nicene Creed

Great Commission – Christ's appointment of the eleven faithful apostles as his authoritative representatives and his charge to spread the kingdom of God throughout the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20)

logos – Greek term (transliteration) meaning "word" or "study"; title assigned to Christ (John 1:1)

Nicene Creed – Creed written by a council held in Nicaea in A.D. 325; an expansion of the Apostles' Creed that affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity and refuted Arianism

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed – Name that is sometimes used for the updated and expanded Nicene Creed to distinguish it from the original Nicene Creed

ontological – Term meaning “related to being”; used to refer to the fact that all three persons of the Trinity possess the same divine attributes and essence

persona – Latin term meaning “person”; used by Tertullian to refer to the distinct persons of the Trinity

pneuma – Greek term (transliteration) for spirit; breath; wind

Pneumatology – The doctrine of the Holy Spirit

qodesh – Hebrew term (transliteration) for holiness

ruach – Hebrew term (transliteration) for spirit; breath; wind

substantia – Latin term meaning “substance” or “essence”; used by Tertullian to refer to the oneness of God's being

suzerain – A powerful emperor or king that ruled over smaller nations; the more powerful party of a covenant, the one to whom it was necessary to submit

Tertullian – (ca. A.D. 155 - 230) Early Christian writer and church father from Carthage who wrote *Against Marcion* and popularized the Latin terminology used to discuss the Trinity

Trinitarian formula – Biblical language that names all three persons of the Trinity in a way that points to their joint membership in the Godhead

trinitas – Latin term meaning “three” or “triad”; translated “Trinity” when referring to the Godhead

Trinity – Theological term used to express the fact that God is one essence in three persons

vassal – A king or nation that must submit to a more powerful emperor or king (suzerain)

Warfield, Benjamin B. – (1851-1921) Professor of theology at Princeton Seminary from 1887-1921 whose primary work was on the authority of Scripture, particularly its inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility

Westminster Shorter Catechism – An ecumenical doctrinal summary composed by the Westminster Assembly of Divines and published in 1647

Yahweh – Hebrew name for God that comes from the phrase, "I Am that I Am"; often translated "LORD"