

WE BELIEVE

By Dr. John D. Morrison

Foreword by Dr. Tyler Smiley

We Believe
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CREED

WE BELIEVE in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ the Only-begotten Son of God, begotten by the Father before all ages, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, one essence with the Father, through whom all things were made,

Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, became a man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered and was buried and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and ascended into the heavens and is seated at the right hand of the Father and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the prophets;

And in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; we wait for the resurrection of the dead and for life in the age to come. Amen.

FOREWORD

As a Christian, have you ever been asked by another person, “What do you believe?” Or maybe some situation or moment in life has caused you to ask this question of yourself, “What *do* I believe?” Or maybe you give emphasis to a different word in the sentence, “What *do I* believe?” and, in the way that the English language seems to work, this new emphasis makes the question feel more personal and pressing. One way or another, every Christian will be compelled to answer this question about what it is that we believe. The answer may come in an effort to share your faith with another person, or defend the faith to others, or it may come in a personal effort to deepen or strengthen one’s own faith.

I am happy to report that we are not left to our own devices in answering this question. By God’s grace we have been given God’s Spirit and God’s Word so that we can know and understand all that the Lord has revealed to us. And, we have been given God’s church, and this is not only our own local church, but the history of the church filled with God’s Spirit where faithful and godly men and women have given themselves to the studying God’s Word. In fact, one particular assistance from the history of the church came when a group of Christians collaborated to provide a summary statement of the Christian faith in a document that began with these words, “We believe...” This document has come to be called the Nicene Creed.

A simple definition of a creed is this— “Creeds proclaim the common faith of the entire church throughout history, a faith in the Father, Son, and Spirit.”¹ Creeds are neither meant to take the place of Scripture, nor are they to be treated as divinely inspired writings in the same way that the Old and New Testaments are inspired by the Holy Spirit. One of the earliest and most broadly used is the Nicene Creed, and, as John Morrison explains below, “the Nicene Creed summarizes and explains Scripture. This creed adds nothing new to the Bible but reflects the truth that is already there.”²

¹Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions: Tracing the Development of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 9.

²See page 20 below.

Some Christians may be skeptical of utilizing creeds because they feel that a creed is a threat to the authority of Scripture. While it is commendable to strongly uphold the authority and unique nature of Scripture, the Christian will be encouraged to know that the creed was never meant to take the place of Scripture. In fact, many of our anxieties may be eased if we consider the Nicene Creed as a brief statement of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed in Scripture, which has been reviewed and affirmed by millions of Christians around the world over the last 1,700 years. Put another way, this Nicene statement is the effort of faithful Christians to help us better understand the truth of Scripture. We do well to maintain the sole authority of the Bible over all matters of faith and life, but we go too far if we think that we individually maintain the sole authority over how to interpret and understand all that is written. We need the help of other Christians. Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others."³ In the Nicene Creed we find help from those Christians who have gone before so that we might better understand what the Lord has revealed in Scripture.

This 6-Week Study called, "We Believe," is intended as a help to answer two pressing questions that come at the Christian on a near daily basis: 1. What do you believe? and/or 2. What do I believe? The aim in this study is not merely to memorize or get to know a summary statement of the Christian faith. The aim is to know more fully the true God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to better comprehend the biblical witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This study is meant as a help to get God's word deeper into our hearts and farther out into the world.

You will find here a remarkable accomplishment of John Morrison in creating the content of this study. He weaved together historical and biblical commentary into a single piece of work that serves as a resource for Christian theology, as an individual devotional guide, and as a group discussion guide. Above all, this resource helps the church better understand what "We Believe" in an age where the truth of the gospel needs strong affirmation. Joy Willis has designed the book,

³Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 4 vols. (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1881–1893), 4.1.

cover-to-cover. With each new publication from Lakewood Press, Joy proves over and over again her superb ability in her work.

I pray this work will deepen and sharpen your faith in the one true God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Tyler H. Smiley, Ph.D.
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MEMORY VERSES:

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4–6

WEEK I

KEY TRUTH

There is one God
who has always been
and will always be
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

MEMORY VERSES

There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

WEEK 1 DAY 1

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19–20

Following his resurrection, Jesus stands before his followers and charges them to go into all the world in order to make disciples. Here, Jesus reminds us of God’s heart. Our God is the God who saves. He promises again and again, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33). In Jesus, he is making for himself a “people for his own possession” (Titus 2:14). Our God is on a mission to redeem his people and to make all things new.

As Jesus commissions us as his followers to join in God’s mission, he reveals that the mission of God flows from the nature of God. Our God desires to save because of *who* he is: one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Notice in Matthew 28:19 that we are baptized into the one name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—not three names but one name because God is one. We summarize this truth by confessing that our God is Tri-unity. He is our Trinity.

Often, we relegate study of the Trinity to those advanced theological students who like to ponder esoteric truths. But here in Matthew 28, Jesus embeds this truth into the marching orders of the church. In fact, we all begin our life in the faith by being baptized into this one name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From the beginning of our faith to joining in God’s mission, God’s trinitarian nature is central to all we believe and do. Our faith will be trinitarian because our God is triune.

One foundational verse can help us see the importance of God’s trinitarian nature to our faith. If we were asked to explain in the most straightforward terms who God is, we would do well to respond with Scripture, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16). This truth is a trinitarian truth. If God were a singular solitary figure, he could not always have been love, for there would have been no one for him to love before he created. Such a god might be all-powerful, but he would not be the God of the Bible who is marked by his steadfast, eternal,

and unbreakable love. God has always been and will always be love because he is Father, Son, and Spirit.

The foundational truth of our faith is that there is one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this study, our goal is to grow in the grace and knowledge of God through a study of how he reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To guide us in our study of the Bible, we will work through a historic confession of faith, the Nicene Creed. Our Spirit-filled forebearers in the faith wrestled with God's Word to summarize faithfully what Scripture teaches about God. It will help guide us through God's Word, as we ourselves search the Bible to come to know God better and to love him more.

REFLECT

1. What comfort and encouragement do you find in the truth that God, by his very nature, has always and will always be love?

2. Why would Jesus emphasize God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Great Commission?

WEEK 1 DAY 2

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Deuteronomy 6:4–5

A foundational truth established in Scripture is that there is only one God. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). There is only one God, the creator of heaven and earth. As God revealed himself to his people, he emphasized that he alone is the one, true, and living God. One of the key passages for ancient Israel was the Shema, their confession of faith, found in Deuteronomy 6. It begins, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

The Old Testament resounds with the truth that the Lord is the one, true God. Isaiah, for example, declares, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god” (Isa 44:6). God alone is God. There is none like him. The New Testament affirms this same truth: there is only one God. Jesus approvingly quotes Deuteronomy 6 (Mk 12:29), and the Apostle Paul plainly states, “There is only one God” (1 Tim 2:5).

Scripture consistently declares that there is only one God; at the same time, it makes plain that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. God is three-in-one and one-in-three. As we seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of the God of the Bible, we hold together the truth of the threeness of God and his oneness. These truths are not discordant sounds; rather, when heard together, they declare the harmonious truth of Scripture.

The early church father Gregory of Nazianzus reflects on the challenge of holding together these truths of God’s threeness and oneness:

No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of any one of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the

three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.

As we consider our God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ, our minds must go back and forth between his oneness and his threeness. We know that our finite minds cannot grasp God fully. Yet, we can know him truly as he speaks to us by his Spirit in his Word. On the basis of Scripture, we worship and adore the one God who has always been and will always be the Father, Son, and Spirit.

REFLECT

1. How are your prayers and worship shaped by the truth that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

2. What truths about God have you read in Scripture for which you can praise him?

WEEK 1 DAY 3

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Romans 10:9–10

At its core, our Christian faith is faith in Jesus. Paul gets to the heart of what it means to trust in Jesus when he exhorts, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Here is the call of the gospel: confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead. Notice that this familiar and straightforward gospel call is undergirded by the reality of who God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Romans 10:9-10 only makes sense in light of the Trinity. Indeed, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the trinitarian gospel.

When Scripture calls upon us to confess that Jesus is Lord, it is calling us to confess that he is the one, true, and living God. Paul goes on in Romans 10:13 to quote the prophet Joel: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” In Joel 2:32, when the prophet first recorded these words, he used the Hebrew word *Yahweh*, which our English versions translate as LORD. *Yahweh* is the personal, covenantal name of God in the Old Testament. This is the name God gave to Moses in the burning bush. When Paul tells us that we are to confess that Jesus is Lord, he is calling upon us to confess that he is God almighty, the sovereign one who rules and reigns over all things. He is the God who redeemed his people from Egypt and delivered them into the promised land. He is the one, true, and living God.

Then, as Paul continues in Romans 10:9, he also calls upon us to believe “that God raised him from the dead.” If Jesus is Lord—the one, true, and living God—then who is this God who raised him from the dead? Here we begin to see our need for a trinitarian understanding of God. When Paul writes, “God,” he typically has in mind the Father (cf. Eph 1:2-3). To confess Romans 10:9-10 is to confess that Jesus is fully God and that the Father is fully God.

This confession is one that we can only make by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor

12:3). The truth of the gospel is “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). We can only discern it by the Holy Spirit. God the Spirit must move in our hearts to lead us to confess that Jesus is Lord and to believe that God raised him from the dead. Furthermore, Scripture adds that it is the Father who draws us to the Son (Jn 6:44), and it is the Son who chooses to reveal the Father (Mt 11:27). The gospel confession that Jesus is Lord is a work of the entire Trinity in our lives.

Jesus is Lord. God raised him from the dead. These two truths are the heart of our faith, and they flow from the reality of who our one God is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The good news of Jesus Christ is the gospel of our Triune God.

REFLECT

1. How does the confession that Jesus is Lord give you hope in this life?

2. How does the confession that Jesus is Lord shape how you live?

WEEK 1 DAY 4

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

Romans 1:1–5

The gospel of God announces the good news of God’s saving work, and as Paul unpacks that gospel in the first verses of Romans, it becomes clear that we are redeemed through the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God works inseparably as one to save his people, but each person of the Trinity plays a specific role.

God the Father promised this gospel through his prophets in what we know as the Old Testament (Rom 1:2). God created us for communion with him, but as our sin separated us from him, God began to promise to do a great work to redeem his people. From Jesus, we hear that all of Scripture points to him (Lk 24:27). Not only has God promised this work from long ago, but it was his plan since before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). The Father planned and promised, and then he sent his Son to accomplish this great work of redemption.

The Father sent his eternal Son (Rom 1:3). This is the Son who was with God in the beginning and has always been God (Jn 1:1-4). He came and united himself to a complete human nature—both body and soul—and was descended in his human form from King David (Rom 1:3; Mt 1:1). By his resurrection, he was vindicated as God’s Son (Rom 1:4; 1 Tim 3:16). Through him, our Lord Jesus Christ, we receive grace to live by faith for his glory (Rom 1:5).

The Spirit, too, is active in our redemption. Paul highlights the Holy Spirit’s work in Christ’s resurrection (Rom 1:4). The Spirit’s work in Jesus’s earthly life began long before the resurrection. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18), The Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism (Mt 3:16) and led him into the wilderness (Mt 4:1). It was

in the power of the Spirit that Jesus ministered during his life (Lk 4:14). Indeed, Jesus himself quotes Isaiah to testify to the fact of the Spirit's empowering work in his life and ministry (Lk 4:18). In Hebrews 9:14 we learn that it was "through the eternal Spirit" that Jesus "offered himself without blemish to God." In Christ's atoning death, the Spirit was at work, and in his resurrection, the Father worked through the Spirit (Rom 8:11; cf. Eph 1:18-23). Even now, the Spirit is at work in our lives. Through the Spirit, "God's love has been poured into our hearts" (Rom 5:5).

The gospel is the good news of what God has done for us in Christ. The work of Jesus Christ is, in truth, the work of the entire Trinity. With Scripture, we confess, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Ps 3:8), and we know that our Lord is the one, true, and living God who has always been and will always be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

REFLECT

1. How would you briefly summarize the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in saving you?

2. What comfort do you find in knowing that the redemption God freely offers in Jesus Christ is the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

WEEK 1 DAY 5

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Revelation 5:8-14

In Revelation 4-5, John recounts his vision of the heavenly throne room. The worship of God resonates throughout these chapters. Those who are closest to God spend their days worshiping him. Greater knowledge of God leads to greater worship of God. In other words, theology leads to doxology. The study of God and his ways should lead us to worship him more and more. Thus, the goal of studying what we believe does not stop with knowledge, but it is that we would grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in such a way that leads us to the praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

John's vision reveals that worship in heaven is distinctively trinitarian. In these verses, we find the highest expression of human worship ever recorded, and it is worship of the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. John begins by describing God the Father being worshiped on his throne for his holiness, his sovereignty, and his eternity (4:8). Then, he is worshiped for being the creator and sustainer of all things (4:11).

Chapter 5 begins with the question of who has the authority and

right to open the seals—to bring about God’s plan of redemption and judgment in the world. The answer is Jesus Christ, who is at once the Lion of Judah (5:5) and the Lamb who was slain (5:6). He, too, is worshiped. The host in heaven praises him for his great work of redemption, purchasing a people for God by his own blood (5:9-10). Then, the chapter ends with the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne being praised together (5:13).

With the exalted praise of the Father and the Son, it is easy to overlook the role of the Spirit in this section. These chapters demonstrate that the Spirit shares in the power and glory of the Father and the Son. John speaks of the Holy Spirit as “the seven spirits of God” (4:5; 5:6) in order to describe the completeness and fullness of the Spirit. The location of the Spirit before the throne alludes to his power and authority as God. The rest of heaven gathers around to worship the Father on the throne, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and the Spirit before the throne. Additionally, it is the Spirit who is sent out into all the earth to accomplish God’s purposes through the Lamb. Father, Son, and Spirit work together to redeem God’s people. Finally, we should note that John’s vision happens “in the Spirit” (4:2). This parallels the reality for us that we can only worship God in and by the Spirit. As Jesus teaches, “True worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth” (Jn 4:23).

Jesus teaches us to pray for the Father’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10). One way we live out this prayer is by worshiping our God as we see him worshiped in heaven. We praise, worship, and adore the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

REFLECT

1. How have you experienced the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shaping your worship of him? How has God's nature shaped the way you pray?
2. Consider taking time to praise Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for how each has worked in saving you.

HISTORICAL REFLECTION

If you are familiar with the Bible, you know that you will not find the term "Trinity" or the words of the Nicene Creed in Scripture. For those with a high view of Scripture and its authority in our lives, this fact can raise some concerns about the use of such words. While these words are not in the Bible, they do in fact summarize and explain the teaching of Scripture.

Each week this study will offer a brief reflection on the historical events surrounding the development of this creed. This creed arose as controversy raged in the fourth century over who the Bible reveals God to be. What will become clear is that new words were needed precisely because the debates were over the meaning of Scripture. As one historian explains, "The theologians of the Christian Church were slowly driven to a realization that the deepest questions which face Christianity cannot be answered in purely biblical language, because the questions are about the meaning of biblical language itself." For example, the controversy of the fourth century started over questions about who Jesus is. All sides agreed that he is the Son. However, the Arians wrongly asserted that his being God's Son meant that he is less

than the Father. On the other hand, the Orthodox rightly taught that Jesus's sonship meant he shared his Father's nature and is one with his Father. Christians needed a biblical explanation to understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Son of God, and such an explanation required new words and expressions.

As the study takes you through biblical teaching about God, you will come to see that the Nicene Creed summarizes and explains Scripture. This creed adds nothing new to the Bible but reflects the truth that is already there. Two Christian theologians compare this reality to the difference between being able to speak a language and being able to describe the grammar of that same language. Most of us can speak English fluently without being able to remember how to diagram a sentence or explain a past participle. We speak fluently and communicate clearly with little knowledge of grammar—much to our English teachers' disappointment! Similarly, Scripture speaks trinitarian language fluently; the truth that there is one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit flows as freely from the Bible as words in our native language flow from our tongues. The development of trinitarian theology in the early church—with new words like "Trinity" and new expressions like the Nicene Creed—is the grammar of trinitarian thought. It explains the Bible to us so that we can become fluent in the truth of Scripture.

God has always been and will always be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is our one God who is our creator, redeemer, and reward. He alone is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise. This is the testimony of Scripture that our fellow believers many years ago sought to summarize and explain in the Nicene Creed.

Review Memory Verses:

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4–6

WEEK 1 GROUP DISCUSSION

Key Truth

There is one God who has always been and will always be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Focal Passages

Matthew 28:19-20 & Revelation 5:8-14

Discussion Questions:

We can easily be overwhelmed when we begin to consider the nature of God. He is, after all, our infinite Creator, and we are his finite creatures. Yet, even if we will not know him fully, we can know him truly because he has revealed himself to us in his Word.

- Does it surprise you that Jesus would engrain the Trinity into the earliest days of our journeys in faith (Matthew 28:19-20)?
- Consider Matthew 3:13-17. How was the whole Trinity present at Jesus's baptism?

Most of us are far better at practicing our trinitarian faith than we are at explaining it. Reflect on how you pray, read the Bible, and worship: how is God as Trinity at work in those activities? How do you see the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in those activities?

- Mission and worship are two of the great activities we are able to join in as God's people in this world.
- How does the truth of the Trinity shape our worship of God?
- How does the truth of the Trinity give rise to mission?
- Look at Matthew 28:17. What happens before Jesus commissions his disciples? How does biblical worship fuel us join God in his mission?

WEEK 2

WE BELIEVE

in one God
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things
visible and invisible.

KEY TRUTH

Through Jesus Christ, our God, who is the
almighty creator and sustainer of the
universe, becomes our Father.

MEMORY VERSES

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4-6

WEEK 2 DAY 1

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

The truths that Paul articulates in Ephesians 4:4-6 are confessed and explained in the Nicene Creed. While the order differs from Paul's, the creed also includes the themes of church, Holy Spirit, future hope, the Lord Jesus, our shared faith, baptism, and God the Father. Like Paul, this confession follows the typical New Testament pattern of calling God the Father, "God," and God the Son, "Lord." As will become evident, the authors of the Nicene Creed wanted to make clear that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each fully God, and at the same time, affirm that there is only one God. To do this, they follow the biblical pattern of how God has revealed himself.

In God's wisdom, he began by revealing himself as one, and then only with the sending of the Son, does he reveal that his oneness is a Trinity. Throughout the Old Testament the emphasis remains on the truth that God is one. For example, God declares, "To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him. . . . Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other" (Deut 4:35, 39). God first revealed his oneness to ancient Israel, for his people in that day were surrounded by various forms of paganism that claimed to worship many gods. His people were distinct from the surrounding world, for they confessed their faith in only one God.

Following the biblical pattern, the Nicene Creed begins by leading us to confess that there is one God. The truth that there is only one living and true God is evident from the beginning of Scripture. Genesis 1:1 states, "In the beginning, God. . ." Not multiple gods, but one God existed in the beginning, and he is the one who created all things. Scripture continues to affirm this truth all the way through to the New Testament, where we are reminded, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

Such teaching reminds us of the exclusivity of the gospel—there is

WEEK 2 DAY 2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

Our one God created everyone and everything. He has existed from eternity past, without beginning or end. He has created all things, things visible and invisible. The entire cosmos is his handiwork. This includes humanity. He created us. He is the creator, and we are his creatures.

The Old Testament hints at what the New Testament makes clear: the creation of the world was the work of our Triune God. The psalmist praises God, saying, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Ps 33:6). By his Word and by his Spirit, God made this world. This is a poetic encapsulation of Genesis 1 where God speaks the world into existence by his Word, and his Spirit hovers over the face of the water. The New Testament will make plain that this Word is the Son of God, and the Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Spirit worked as one to bring everything into existence.

Since God is our creator, we owe him our obedience. This is his world, and as such, his Word is the way of life. In his wisdom, grace, and love, he has created this world and given us commands that lead to our flourishing. He created this world in his wisdom (Prov 8:22-31), and he gives us his wisdom to live in this world (Prov 8:32-36). He gives us his wisdom in his Word; as the psalmist declares: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105).

His work as creator also means that he is worthy of our worship and praise (Rom 1:25). We owe our lives to him. He is the one who made this world with all its beauty, pleasures, and blessings for us to enjoy. He did not need to create, for he was perfectly complete in himself. God himself is life and love, and his life and love overflowed by his grace into our creation, and so we worship and adore him as our creator.

The Bible is clear that grave consequences await us when we reject God’s wisdom and we turn from worshiping him. As Paul warns, “For

WEEK 2 DAY 3

So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Matthew 5:45

God not only created all things, but he also sustains all things. He is our creator and our sustainer. The world continues to exist because he wants it to continue.

Our heavenly Father is involved intimately in our world. Notice in Matthew 5:45 that God works in the world daily to sustain life. He controls the sun and the rain. The sources of life—from an earthly perspective—are under his watchful eye and gracious care. Our Father is not so busy running the universe that he forgets us. Rather, as Jesus teaches, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt 10:29-30). Out of his love for us, he knows us completely.

God’s creating and sustaining the world are works of his grace. His love and care for this world are evident in the passages above from Matthew’s Gospel. Even when it seems to us that God is slow to act—when there is suffering and injustice—the Bible reminds us that even his timing flows from his love: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). We trust our God, who is both sovereign and good.

Just as the Father created through the Son, even so, he sustains the world through Jesus. It is in the Son that all things hold together (Col 1:17), and it is the Son who “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3). All of creation is held together in Christ the Son. One day, the Father will make all things new by uniting all things in heaven and on earth together in Christ (Eph 1:10). All things will be summed up and completed in him.

The truth of God’s sustaining this world should comfort us. He is not far off. He is near. He sustains this world day in and day out. He is

working to redeem all of his creation. We can confess with the hymn:

*This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.*

*This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!*

God has not left us alone, but he actively sustains the entire universe, governs it by his providence, and will one day make all things new.

REFLECT

1. How does the truth of God's sustaining this world comfort and encourage you?

2. Where in your life are you struggling to believe that God is both good and in control? Consider taking time now to pray your feelings to God and pray for his help to trust him.

WEEK 2 DAY 4

Our God is heaven; he does all that he pleases.

Psalm 115:3

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Job 42:2

We confess that our God is almighty because this is what Scripture teaches. He is all-powerful, exercising his good and gracious control over all things. He is God most high, the sovereign creator and sustainer, and ruler of the world. As the psalmist declares: “Our God is in heaven; he does all that he pleases” (Ps 115:3).

On the other side of his encounter with God, Job confesses the same truth to the Lord: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). God can do all things. Nothing can stop his purposes. No one can thwart his will. Even the sufferings of Job are under God’s control.

Even though we know that God is both good and in control of all things, that does not mean that we understand pain, suffering, and evil in the world. Nor does it mean that these things suddenly become good. Job suffered incredible physical and emotional pain, and he was never told why he had to endure it. In this life, we may never be able to make sense of how God is at work in our pain.

Yet, sometimes we are given glimpses of God’s purposes in suffering. After all that he endured from his brothers, Joseph was able to tell them, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen 50:20). Our God is so powerful that he can even work through people’s evil intentions to bring about his good purposes.

By itself, the truth that God is almighty provides little comfort. Only when we remember his character alongside his power, can we find great comfort and hope for this life. God’s power is good news because his love is so great.

REFLECT

1. Why is it comforting for you to know that God is almighty?

2. Consider Romans 8:18, 28-30. What good is God working in our lives? How have you seen God working such good in your life?

WEEK 2 DAY 5

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Galatians 4:4-6

We believe in God the Father. Our faith as Christians is built upon the truth that God is, always has been, and always will be one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father has always been the Father. Humanly speaking, a man does not become a father until he has a son, but God the Father has always been the Father because God the Son has always been the Son.

In Galatians 4, Paul teaches the remarkable truth that the Father sent his Son to free us from our sins and to adopt us as sons. He rescued us and brought us into his family so that we could now share in the relationship that the Son has always had with the Father. On the night before his crucifixion, our Lord Jesus prayed for us in the upper room, asking our heavenly Father for our unity as believers in Christ “so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (Jn 17:24). Jesus tells us that just as the Father loves him, so too, the Father loves us. This is the divine adoption we receive by faith: we share in the Father’s relationship to the Son to such an extent that God the Father now loves us as he loves his one and only Son, Jesus.

Not only do we now share in the Father’s relationship to the Son by adoption, but God has also sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption, into our hearts. The Spirit testifies to us that we are indeed adopted by the Father, and the Spirit enables us to call God our Father. When we pray, God the Father hears us as his children. Then, he answers us out of his love, wisdom, and power.

We confess that God is the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, and we rejoice that through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, he has become our heavenly Father who loves us as his own children.

REFLECT

1. How do we become children of God? See Galatians 3:13-14 and John 1:9-12.

2. Consider Romans 8:31-39. Can anything—even our own actions—separate us from God’s love? If you have been adopted through faith in Christ, how great is God’s love for you?

HISTORICAL REFLECTION

The Christian faith has emphasized from its inception that there is only one true and living God. In the context of Greco-Roman paganism with its multitude of gods, Christians were often labeled as atheists for their denial of the pantheon of traditional gods. One of the challenges for early Christians in the Mediterranean world was maintaining their distinctive belief in one God while they lived in a society where many so-called gods were worshiped.

It was one thing to address these false beliefs from those outside the church, but it proved to be an even greater challenge when people who claimed to follow Jesus also claimed that there were multiple gods. Marcion (c. 85-160) was one such false teacher. He found the God of the New Testament completely incompatible with the God of the Old Testament. He argued that they were two different Gods. One of these gods was petty, jealous, and vindictive, and the other was loving and merciful. Marcion argued that there was complete discontinuity between the two Testaments and between Christianity and Judaism.

Key early Christian thinkers strongly opposed Marcion. One early Christian leader, Polycarp, denounced Marcion as the “firstborn of Satan.” The reason for such opposition was the biblical teaching that the God who created the world is the same God who is redeeming the world. Irenaeus, another important voice in the early church, condemned Marcion because “he removed much of the teaching of the Lord’s utterances, in which the Lord is recorded as confessing most clearly that his Father is the Maker of the universe. He also persuaded his followers that he himself was more truthful than those Apostles who have handed down the gospel; and he furnished them not with the gospel but with a small part of the gospel.” To deny that there is one God who is both Creator and Redeemer is to deny an essential biblical element of the gospel.

Christians today face a similar challenge to Marcion. Few who claim to follow Christ would be so bold as to suggest there are two Gods, but many believers today treat the Old Testament as if it were inspired by another God altogether. Yet, we know that these divinely-inspired books have much to teach us when we read through the lens of

Jesus Christ. It is the writings that we call the Old Testament that Paul commends to Timothy as being “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). There is only one true God, who is the God of the Old Testament and the New. He has inspired all Scripture and given it to us that we might know him and grow in his grace.

Review Memory Verses:

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4–6

WEEK 2 GROUP DISCUSSION

Key Truth

Through Jesus Christ, our God, who is the almighty creator and sustainer of the universe, becomes our Father.

Focal Passages

Genesis 1:1 & Galatians 4:4-6

Discussion Questions

With the Nicene Creed, we affirm that God is the creator of all things.

- Why is it foundational to the gospel message that God is the creator of all things?
- According to Paul in Romans 1:18-25, what can be known about God in creation?
- If these truths are evident in creation, what truth do people need to hear from us as followers of Jesus?

We also believe that God is Almighty.

- What hope do you find in knowing that God is almighty?
- Where do you struggle to believe that God is all-powerful?
- What passages from this week were the most challenging to you in this regard?

God becomes our heavenly Father by adopting us through Jesus Christ.

- Read Ephesians 1:4-6 and Galatians 4:4-6.
- How do we receive adoption?
- What does it mean for us that we are adopted into God's family?
- How does God now view us as his adopted children?

WEEK 3

WE BELIEVE

in one Lord Jesus Christ the Only-begotten Son of God,
begotten by the Father before all ages,
Light from light, true God from true God,
begotten not made, one essence with the Father,
through whom all things were made.

KEY TRUTH

Jesus Christ is fully God.

MEMORY VERSES

There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

WEEK 3 DAY 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5

The Nicene Creed's confession of Jesus as Lord takes us to eternity past to consider who the Son of God has always been. The biblical truth confessed here is that the Son is, always has been, and always will be fully God. All the descriptors of Christ Jesus in this section were chosen to highlight that he, as the Son of God, has always been God.

The Apostle John begins his Gospel by emphasizing the same truth of the Son's complete divinity. Calling to mind the words of Genesis 1, John starts by taking his readers back to the beginning. There, he tells us, was the Word, which is a way that John often speaks of the Son of God. John explains that the Word existed in the beginning, even before the creation of the world, and the Word was with God. Not only was the Word with God, but John declares that the Word was God. Here, John highlights something of both the unity of God and the distinction within in the Godhead. God is one, and both the Father and the Son are fully God. Yet, there are not two Gods but only one.

John draws a line between the Creator and the creation. There are the things which were created, and there is the One who did the creating. The Son is totally on the Creator side of this distinction. He is the one through whom all things were made (1:3). He is life and light itself (1:4). His active role in creating all things points to the reality that he is God. This is the biblical truth we confess in these lines of the creed: our Lord Jesus Christ is fully and completely God. Whatever is true of God is true of our Lord. Even before he came to earth, the Son of God was fully God.

Our salvation depends on the fact that Jesus Christ is fully God. He did not come into the world merely to be a faithful teacher or a good example to follow. He came to shine the light of his glory into the darkness of evil. He came to bring the power of his life to the death

brought by sin. As Hebrews explains, Christ was able to redeem us “by the power of an indestructible life” (Heb 7:16). He brings life to us because he himself is life. Our Lord Jesus saves because he is God.

REFLECT

1. When you think of Jesus Christ are you more prone to think of him as human or God? Why do we need to keep both truths before us?
2. What are some ways you can praise our Lord Jesus for being truly God?

WEEK 3 DAY 2

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Corinthians 8:6

When the New Testament authors speak of Jesus as “Lord,” they are identifying him as the one, true, and living God. The divine title of Lord has deep roots in the Old Testament. When God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush, he declares his name to be *Yahweh*, which in Hebrew means “I am who I am.” When the books we know as the Old Testament were translated into Greek, the Hebrew name *Yahweh* was translated into the Greek word *Kyrios*, which in English means Lord. When Paul and the other authors of the New Testament call Jesus “Lord,” they are declaring him to be *Yahweh*.

To confess that Jesus is Lord is to say that Jesus is the God Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God of Israel. He is the one, true, and living God who redeemed his people from Egypt and delivered them into the Promised Land.

What proves particularly remarkable for the New Testament writers who named Jesus as Lord is that they were all raised in Judaism with a strict belief in one God. Their daily confession was “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4). Before his conversion, Paul saw himself as faithfully following the religion of his ancestors by putting followers of Jesus to death for the blasphemy of thinking Jesus was God. Yet, these same men, when confronted with the truth of who Jesus is, testify that he is Lord.

Not only do they call Jesus “Lord,” but they also worship him as God. Numerous hymns and prayers are addressed to Jesus, and some of the richest are found in the book of Revelation. John twice tries to bow down and worship angels, but the angels stop him (Rev 19:10; 22:9). Yet, Jesus is worshiped often throughout the book. Revelation 5:12-14 is a prime example, and in this passage, the heavenly host worships Jesus together with God the Father, who is seated on his throne.

The Father and the Son are worshiped together. They share in the

same glory, and yet, they are worshiped as distinct persons. This worship speaks to the same truth that Paul highlights in 1 Corinthians 8:6. He calls the Father “God” and Jesus “Lord.” Both titles speak to their shared divinity, and yet Paul also wants to show the distinction between the two.

When we confess that Jesus is Lord, we confess that he is God himself and is worthy of our worship. For the Christian, worship is not reserved to one hour a week but is a way of life. Scripture calls us “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). As Lord, Jesus deserves the worship of our lives being lived in devotion to him.

REFLECT

1. Why is it significant that Jesus is worshiped in the New Testament?
2. Consider Romans 12:1. How can you, by God’s grace, offer your life in worship to our Lord?

WEEK 3 DAY 3

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

As Christians, we confess that Jesus is the Son of God. The focus for the first two days of this week has been on how this belief means that the Son is fully God. Today, we turn to John 3:16 to consider what this revelation of Jesus as God the Son means about his relationship to God the Father.

Our understanding of healthy father and son relationships on the human level is a great starting point for helping us understand this relationship within God. The connection between the human and divine versions of this relationship flows from the fact that God has created people in his image and that the love in this world reflects the eternal love the Father, Son, and Spirit have always had for one another. Also, God's use of the father and son relationship to reveal his nature points to his grace in revealing himself in ways we can understand. He is the God who makes himself known to us. Like the earthly version, the relationship between God the Father and God the Son is one marked by remarkable love and a shared nature.

However, the relationship between the Father and the Son did not start like a human father and son relationship. In fact, the divine Father-Son relationship did not have a beginning; it has always been. From eternity past, the Father has been the Father and the Son the Son (and the Spirit the Spirit, as we will see in coming weeks). The Nicene Creed describes this relationship with the biblical language of begotten: the Father has begotten the Son. This begetting is not like a human relationship. Begotten is used as a technical term to describe the Father's relationship to the Son. The Creed explicitly contrasts "begotten" with being "made." The Father did not create the Son; he did not make him. Rather, we speak of the Father begetting the Son. This did not happen at any certain point but has always been the relationship. Orthodox theologians since the fourth century have thus confessed that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. Delving into the weeds of theological terminology from a fourth-century debate might not seem important to our faith today, but this

language helps us better comprehend the heart of the gospel. The Father has always loved his Son. From eternity past, Father, Son, and Spirit have lived in the perfect harmony of their love for one another. This love was so great and so perfect that it overflowed into the creation and redemption of the world. It is into this love that we are invited through the work of Jesus Christ.

We receive the invitation into God's love by faith—knowing the truth about Jesus, believing this truth, and trusting in him. When we believe in Christ Jesus, God brings us to share in his life and love, and so we begin to live in the eternal life promised through the gospel.

REFLECT

1. How does God revealing himself as Father and Son help us better understand that relationship?

2. What does it mean for you to be able to share in the Father and Son's relationship by faith?

WEEK 3 DAY 4

I and the Father are one.

John 10:30

Jesus and his Father are one. In Scripture, Jesus Christ repeatedly testifies to the unity he shares with God the Father. While Father and Son are certainly united in purpose and in work, this unity goes far beyond that. The religious leaders in Jesus's day saw this; they wanted to kill him because "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (Jn 5:18). As Christ makes clear, he and the Father are not equal but separate. They are equal because they are the one, true, and living God. Father and Son are so united as one that Jesus testifies, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn 12:44-45). Similarly, Jesus responds to Thomas, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (Jn 14:7). The Father and the Son are one God.

The Nicene Creed's description of the Lord Jesus being "one essence with the Father" testifies to the biblical truth that the Father and Son are one. They are one God. They share the same nature and attributes. They have one will. Whatever is true of the Father is true of the Son, except his being Father. Christ the Son shares in the same authority, power, and glory as the Father. He is worthy of the same worship and adoration. As the book of Revelation makes clear, the worship of the Father and the worship of the Son are inextricably linked (Rev 5:13). Similarly, Paul records that the exaltation of Jesus glorifies God the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

The work of Christ invites us to share in the oneness of the Father and the Son. When we trust in Jesus, we come to share in this oneness with other believers (Jn 17:21). God unites us together so that we become one people, and our unity serves as a witness of his redeeming work in our lives (Jn 17:21). Believers experience love and unity with one another across all human differences. This love for one another glorifies God and is a witness of his work to the world (Jn 13:35; Eph 3:10).

When believers are united to Christ by the Spirit, we are brought into

the oneness of the Father and Son. Jesus prays to his Father for us, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (Jn 17:22-23). By grace, we come to share in the Son’s relationship to the Father. We are so united to Christ that the Father looks on us and sees his Son. We are loved like the Son, as children of our heavenly Father.

REFLECT

1. What comfort do you find in knowing that the Father loves you as he loves the Son? How can you remind yourself that God’s opinion of you is the most important?

2. Where can you work to grow the unity we share in Christ? Consider Ephesians 4:1-6.

WEEK 3 DAY 5

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 1:3

The clear testimony of Scripture is that all things were made through the Son. We believe in “one Lord Jesus Christ. . . through whom all things were made.” His role in creation underscores the truth that he is fully God. As God, he is worthy of all worship and is able to redeem his people.

The New Testament consistently affirms Christ’s active role in creation. Paul testifies concerning Jesus: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible” (Col 1:16). Likewise, John declares about the Son: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (Jn 1:3; cf. Heb 1:3). The teaching of the New Testament also elucidates the work of Christ in the Old Testament. Genesis 1 describes God speaking the world into existence, and the psalmist proclaims about creation: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made” (Ps 33:6). Looking back through the New Testament, it becomes clear that when the Father spoke, he spoke not just any words but the Word who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

The Nicene Creed emphasizes our Lord Jesus’s work in creation to demonstrate that he is God. The authors do this by putting two truths near each in the confession: First, Jesus was “not made.” Second, he is the one “through whom all things were made.” He was not made; he is the maker. He was not created; he is the Creator. Our Lord Jesus Christ is God.

As our Creator—which is to say as our God—Christ Jesus is worthy of our worship. Throughout Scripture God is praised as our creator. The Psalms are full of praises to God for being the creator of all things:

“Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all

the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens" (Ps 96:1-5).

Christ himself is worthy of such praise.

Not only does our Lord Jesus deserve our praise for our creation but also for our redemption. As the heavenly host exclaims in Revelation, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev 5:12). Christ's ability to redeem flows from the truth that he is truly and fully God. Next week, this study turns to look at Jesus's saving work, and we will do well to remember that he is able to save to the uttermost because he is God (Heb 7:25). Truly, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Ps 3:8).

REFLECT

1. Why is it essential to affirm that all things were made through Christ? What would be lost if we did not believe this?

2. Consider taking time to praise Jesus Christ for his work in creation.

HISTORICAL REFLECTION

The early church wrestled with how Jesus Christ related to God the Father. Following the teaching of Scripture, they adamantly affirmed their belief in one God, and they also embraced the biblical pattern of worshipping Jesus as Lord. How could there be one God and the Father and the Son both be God? The biblical explanation of these truths was encapsulated in the Nicene Creed and was supported by the Trinitarian theology developed in the fourth century. Two other explanations gained prominence in the early years of Christianity but were ultimately rejected as unbiblical.

The first of these unbiblical lines of thinking was called modalism. In short, modalism taught that there was only one God who appeared in three different “modes” at different times. Modalists argued that God was like water. Water is sometimes ice, liquid, or steam but is always the same water. Modalists wrongly argued that God is sometimes Father, sometimes Son, and sometimes Holy Spirit. This view cannot make sense of Jesus’s baptism. At his baptism, Jesus is joined by the Spirit and his Father speaks from heaven. Modalism cannot adequately explain biblical truth.

The second approach, which was ultimately rejected as unbiblical, is known as subordinationism. This heresy teaches that Jesus is subordinate to God. The Son is less than the Father. In this line of thinking, Christ Jesus is incredibly important, and some even call him divine. However, he is not, they falsely claim, fully God like the Father is fully God. Such a view fails to account sufficiently for how Jesus is worshiped in the New Testament, and it undermines our hope of salvation.

Arius (256-336) and Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. 341) were two of the major proponents of subordinationist views in the fourth century. It was the long controversy with them, and those who promoted similar views, that led to the clarifying of Trinitarian theology that is summarized in the Nicene Creed. Athanasius (c. 296-373) rightly understood that to deny that Christ Jesus is fully God means that the church has been idolatrous for worshipping him since its inception. Furthermore, a Jesus who is less than God would not have the power to save his people from sin, death, and the devil.

Theologies that claim our Lord Jesus is less than fully God continue in various forms today. A number of religions who claim to follow Christ deny the fundamental biblical truth that he is fully God. To deny Christ's divinity is to reject the teaching of Scripture and to repudiate the gospel. Even within Evangelical Christianity in recent years, an idolatry of power has led some to suggest a hierarchy within God that subordinates the Son to the Father. Despite claims to the contrary, any teaching that treats the Son as less than the Father is moving away from biblical Christianity.

Review Memory Verses:

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4–6

WEEK 3 GROUP DISCUSSION

Key Truth

Jesus Christ is fully God.

Focal Passages

John 1:1-5

Discussion Questions:

The key truth affirmed this week is that Jesus Christ is fully God.

- What evidence from Scripture supports our belief in Christ's divinity?
- Why does it matter that Jesus is God?

We also believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

- What do the names "Father" and "Son" reveal to us about their relationship?
- How is the relationship both like and unlike an earthly father and son relationship?
- How does understanding our salvation as adoption help us gain a richer picture of what God is doing in our lives?

One of the practical responses to the truth that our Lord Jesus is God is that we are to worship him.

- Where do we see Jesus worshiped in Scripture?
- What stands out to you as reasons for worshiping him?
- How does the truth studied this week enhance your worship as you gather each week with the church?
- How does this week's truth enhance your daily life of worship, as Paul outlines in Romans 12:1?

WEEK 4

WE BELIEVE in one Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, became a man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered and was buried and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and ascended into the heavens and is seated at the right hand of the Father and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

KEY TRUTH

Jesus Christ is fully human.

MEMORY VERSES

There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

WEEK 4 DAY 1

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Phil 2:5-7

Last week covered the truth that our Lord Jesus has been and will always be God. Now, we turn to our belief that he has become fully human in order to rescue his people. This week covers the work of Jesus from his birth until he comes again and makes all things new. Philippians 2:5-11 will guide our discussion as this passage succinctly moves from who Jesus was before he came to earth, through his work on earth, and finishes discussing his everlasting reign.

As Paul recounts the life of Jesus in Philippians 2, he begins with who Jesus was before he came to earth: “He was in the form of God” (Phil 2:6). Here, Paul testifies to the truth that Christ Jesus has always been God. Yet, “he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Phil 2:6), which means that he did not exploit or take advantage of his position as God. Rather, he “emptied himself” and was “born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7). Christ the Son became fully human.

Jesus Christ became human through the power of the Holy Spirit. As the angel told Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary. While his conception was supernatural, he was born as we are born and is human just as we are human. Like us, as a child he grew physically and mentally: “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52). Our Lord Jesus became tired (Jn 4:6), hungry (Matt 4:2), and thirsty (Jn 19:28). He is the one “who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). The Son left his Father’s side in heaven and became fully human.

As we confess in the Nicene Creed, our Lord Jesus became human “for us and for our salvation.” He became like us in order to redeem us and to restore us to the Father. Paul emphasizes the need for Jesus

to be fully human, when he describes our Savior as a new Adam who was faithful where the first Adam failed: “But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. . . . For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:15, 17). Christ Jesus became fully human like us, in order that through him we could become the children of God.

REFLECT

1. Where in Scripture do you see that Jesus is fully human?

2. How does it encourage you to know that Jesus lived in this world as fully human?

WEEK 4 DAY 2

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:8

Our Lord Jesus Christ became fully human just as we are, and he died an atoning death on the cross. The cross of Christ stands at the center of his ministry and is the turning point of human history. Jesus explains about himself, “Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). He came to serve, and his preeminent act of service was giving his life on the cross as a ransom for many.

The New Testament as a whole testifies to the centrality of the cross. At the heart of Peter’s sermon on Pentecost was “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Paul reports about his own ministry in Corinth, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). For Paul, the message of the cross was central. He reminded the Corinthian church, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor 15:3-5). As John is given a vision of the heavenly throne room, he sees Christ Jesus being worshiped for his redeeming work on the cross: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Rev 5:12).

We confess that Jesus “was crucified for us.” His work on the cross was for us who believe. It was for us because he suffered and died in our place. Our rejection of God and rebellion against him—what the Bible calls sin—brings death to us (Rom 6:23). The Lord Jesus became our substitute. “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3). His substitutionary death flows from God’s love for us: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8).

The cross of Christ both challenges us and comforts us. It challenges us to recognize the depth of our own sin and our desperate need for God’s grace to us in Christ. We cannot treat our own sin as

WEEK 4 DAY 3

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

Philippians 2:9

The death of Jesus Christ is not the end of the story. He was buried, but he rose again and ascended into heaven. While we rightly focus on Christ's work on the cross, his resurrection and ascension are essential to his saving work for us. Paul plainly states the necessity of the resurrection: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). Peter praises God because "he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3). In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter proclaims about Jesus, "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has put death to death so that we might have life in him.

Through his resurrection, Jesus not only defeated death but also defeated sin and all Satanic forces. John explains, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8). Speaking of Christ's resurrection, Paul announces, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Col 2:15). Paul challenges believers to live out this new resurrection reality in our lives: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). In fact, Paul will explain elsewhere that the same power that was at work in raising Christ from the dead is now at work in believers (Eph 1:19-23).

Christ's resurrection promises us new life and challenges us to live in the power of that resurrection now. Consider how the resurrection shapes Paul's thinking about life in this world:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:7-11).

All things in life are nothing compared with the hope of knowing Christ and sharing in his resurrection. Indeed, Paul embraces the opportunities to share in the sufferings of Christ and to become like him in his death, so that he can share in his resurrection.

REFLECT

1. Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important for his saving work?

2. How does the power of the resurrection shape the way we live in this world?

WEEK 4 DAY 4

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

Philippians 2:9

God the Father has exalted Jesus Christ to his right hand. The resurrected Jesus did not remain on earth, but he ascended bodily into heaven (Acts 1:6-11). His sitting down at the Father's right hand signifies that his atoning work has been accomplished (Heb 1:3; 12:2). Yet, his ministry for us continues as he intercedes for us with the Father (Heb 4:14-16; 7:25), pours out the Holy Spirit on his people (Acts 2:33), and rules and reigns over all things (Eph 1:20-23).

As our ascended Lord, Jesus continues to be both fully God and fully human. He is seated at his Father's right hand as the incarnate Christ. That is to say, he continues to live in his resurrection body. According to Hebrews, we have in Jesus a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weakness, which gives us confidence to draw near to God through him (Heb 4:14-16).

Furthermore, since God the Son continues to be united to a complete human nature, we are able to be united to him by the Holy Spirit. Union with Christ means that we share in his death, resurrection, and now his ascension. According to the New Testament, God has "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). In a real sense, we now are seated with Christ at his Father's right hand, and so we can enjoy true communion with him. We enjoy this now, but we do not experience it fully. For we are seated with Christ, and yet, we live on earth. Thus, we heed Paul's call on our lives: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:1-2).

Christ's ascension and exaltation provide great hope for life in this world because he now reigns over all things (Eph 1:20-23). He has been seated "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Eph 1:21). The ascended Christ reigns as King over

all, but he is like a king recovering his territory from a rebellion. The author of Hebrews explains, “Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb 2:8). Nothing is outside of his control, and yet not everything has been brought back into rightful subjection to him (1 Cor 15:20-28).

Our confidence remains in the plan of God, for we know that God will fulfill his purpose to unite all things in Christ Jesus and make all things new (Eph 1:10). The exalted Christ reigns over all things. In his sovereignty and goodness, he has the power to superintend even the worst evil to bring about his good purposes. In fact, he has taken the worst evil the world has ever seen—his own crucifixion—and turned it for our good. We take heart no matter what we face, knowing that the exalted Christ reigns. “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4).

REFLECT

1. In Christ, you are seated at the right hand of the Father. Does your relationship with God reflect this intimacy? How can you grow in the depth of that relationship?

2. How can you apply the truth of Christ’s reign to combat your worry and anxiety?

WEEK 4 DAY 5

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

Philippians 2:9-11

Christ Jesus came to earth, took on a complete human nature, lived a perfect life, and died an atoning death. The grave could not hold him, but he rose from the dead on the third day, he ascended into heaven, and sits at his Father's right hand, where he reigns over all. This brief summary covers the past and present of Jesus's ministry, but we also know there is a future to his work. One day, he will return.

With the Nicene Creed, we confess that we believe in our Lord Jesus who "will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end." Christ will return to the earth to judge and to make all things new. During his ministry on earth, Jesus said much about his return. Many parables call on his followers to be ready for his return. He comforts his disciples as he is about to be crucified, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn 14:3). The Apostles write often in the New Testament about his return, speaking of "the coming of the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess 3:13), the time "when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4:13), and "our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). His return will be personal; he himself will come in his resurrected body. He will return suddenly and triumphantly.

When he returns, Christ Jesus will judge. As the Bible declares, Jesus is the one "who is to judge the living and the dead" (2 Tim 4:1). Likewise, Peter testifies about Jesus, "he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). For believers, God has declared not guilty and righteous all those who have been found in Christ. Jesus declares to us, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn 5:24). For those trusting in Jesus, he has already borne the punishment for their sin so that they can be righteous before God, and at the same time,

he will grant degrees of rewards for how his people lived in this world (2 Cor 5:10). For those who have not trusted in the Lord, Christ will punish them for their sin (Jn 3:36).

This judgment is part of our Lord Jesus's work to make all things new. He rids the world of sin and evil, and he ushers in the new creation. The whole of creation will be renewed by Jesus Christ. As John reports in Revelation: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 20:3-4). Christ's return should fill us with much hope, as we long to see the day when we dwell with God and enjoy him forever.

REFLECT

1. How does the future hope of Christ's return fuel our following him today?

2. Do you long for Jesus's return or want it to be delayed? Why?

HISTORICAL REFLECTION

Early Christianity faced the challenges of some who would deny that Jesus was fully God and others who would deny that he was fully human. Some of the earliest denials that Jesus was truly human came from docetism. This name is derived from the Greek word that means “to seem” or “to appear to be,” for in this false line of thinking Jesus only appeared to be human. The Gospels, however, emphasize the truth of Jesus’s humanity: he was born, he grew, he ate, he got tired, he slept, he had a body, and he died. He was fully human.

Ireaneus addressed these false teachings in the second century. He argued from Scripture that Christ Jesus was truly human. More than that, he was the second Adam. Where the first Adam had failed, Christ perfectly obeyed. Orthodox Christians continued to emphasize the importance of Jesus’s human nature, and in the fourth century, Athanasius wrote a key work entitled *On the Incarnation*. In this book, he demonstrated from Scripture the necessity of the Son becoming fully human in order for us to be redeemed.

As the church settled in this shared conviction that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully God, questions arose over how those natures related to one another: Did Christ have a human and divine will? Did he have a human soul or was that replaced by his divinity? The church came to understand the biblical teaching that Jesus is fully human to mean that he shares in whatever it means for us to be human. Since all humans have a human will then Christ, too, must have a human will. In the same way, since all humans have a human soul, then Jesus also has a human soul.

Theologians at this time summarized this truth with the axiom, “What was not assumed cannot be healed.” By this phrase, they meant that Jesus was only able to redeem the aspects of our nature that he took on. If he had not had a human soul, then he would not have redeemed our souls. If he had not had a human will, then our wills would not have been rescued from sin. Part of the great news of his work is that he has redeemed us in the entirety of our being: body, soul, will, and mind. He took on a complete human nature in order to deliver us completely.

Jesus Christ’s full humanity not only gives us hope for our redemption,

but this truth also comforts us as he continues to intercede for us at his Father's right hand. As the author of Hebrews encourages, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:15-16). Our Lord Jesus shares completely in our human nature, and so we can draw near to him with confidence.

Review Memory Verses:

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4-6

WEEK 4 GROUP DISCUSSION

Key Truth

Jesus Christ is fully human.

Focal Passages

Philippians 2:5-11

Discussion Questions

As Christians, we affirm that Christ Jesus is both fully human and fully God. At the incarnation, the Son of God took on a complete human nature and will remain united to his human nature for all eternity.

- What evidence of Jesus's humanity do you find in the New Testament?
- Why is Christ's humanity essential to his redeeming work?
- How does his humanity comfort and encourage you?

As fully God and fully human, Jesus worked for us and for our salvation. The Nicene Creed outlines a number of aspects of his work. For each of the following, discuss the work, its significance, and how you can live in light of it.

- Incarnation
- Crucifixion
- Resurrection
- Ascension
- Return

WEEK 5

WE BELIEVE

in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who is worshiped
and glorified together
with the Father and the Son,
who spoke by the prophets.

MEMORY VERSES

There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

KEY TRUTH

The Holy Spirit is fully God and is
one of the three persons of the Trinity.

WEEK 5 DAY 1

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

As Christians, we confess that the Holy Spirit is Lord. To confess that he is Lord is to confess that he is fully God just as the Father and Son are fully God. Each is fully God, and together they are not three Gods, but one. We confess that the Spirit is God because the New Testament reveals this truth.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, Paul comments on Exodus 34:29-35. This passage is when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the tablets of stone and his face shone from being with the Lord. This is the Lord, who had earlier revealed himself to Moses as “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14). This is God himself, who declared, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). This is the Lord with whom Moses spoke and caused his face to shine with his glory. In explaining this passage, Paul declares that this Lord is the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18). According to Paul, it was God the Holy Spirit who was present among the Israelites during the Exodus.

Paul’s teaching here accords with the rest of the New Testament witness about the Holy Spirit. The description of the Spirit as Holy points to his divinity. Likewise, the Spirit does the things that only God can do, such as give life. The New Testament also speaks directly of the Spirit as God. When Paul speaks of the church, he draws the explicit connection between God and the Spirit: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16). In the Old Testament, God’s temple was where he dwelled among his people, and now, the Spirit of God dwells in the church. The Spirit of God is God. For example, when Peter confronts Ananais, he questions, “Ananais, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:3-4).

The fact that the Holy Spirit is fully God undergirds the hope of

the gospel. The freedom Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 3:17 is the freedom of an unhindered relationship with God. The promise of the gospel is that God will be our God and that we will be his people. No longer does the veil of unbelief cover our hearts, but through the proclamation of the gospel and the work of the Spirit, we come to believe in Christ. Like Moses who was able to go into the Tabernacle and meet with God, so now all who trust in Christ have a face-to-face relationship with the same God, who is the Holy Spirit. As we continue to behold the glory of God, the Spirit works to transform us into that glory, conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:29).

REFLECT

1. Are you prone to see the Holy Spirit as less than the Father and the Son? Why?

2. Why is it essential that the Holy Spirit be fully God?

WEEK 5 DAY 2

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:3-8

The Holy Spirit is the giver of life, both in creation and redemption. Life and new life come through him. Since he gives life in both creation and redemption, the Spirit is God.

The Spirit was active in the creation of the world. The Bible starts by noting his active presence: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:1-2). The psalmist reflects poetically on the creation account: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host" (Ps 33:6). Scripture often refers to the Spirit of God as the "breath of God" because the same Hebrew word is used for "breath" and "Spirit." Thus, it is right to see the Spirit's work in the creation of humanity: "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gen 2:7). The Spirit is the giver of life in creation.

In redemption also, the Spirit gives new life. As Jesus teaches Nicodemus in John 3, one must be born again by the Spirit of God. The Bible speaks of this new birth as regeneration, and just as our creation was a work of God the Spirit so too is our being born again. As Paul explained:

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in

righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 2:4-7).

Paul explains elsewhere that our response to the gospel is a work of the Spirit: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not only for ourselves but is to flow out of our lives to others. As those who trust in Christ, we are empowered by the Spirit to join God in his mission in this world. Jesus sends us out into the world, as he sent his first disciples: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). Immediately upon this commission, “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:22). The Father sent the Son in the power of the Spirit, and now the Son sends his people in the power of the Spirit. We know that the mission of declaring the riches of God’s grace in Christ is beyond anything we ourselves could achieve. We echo Paul’s hope, “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:5-6).

REFLECT

1. Read Ezekiel 36:22-37:28. How do you see Ezekiel’s prophecy fulfilled in the work of the Spirit in New Testament believers like us? What does this prophecy help you understand better about the Spirit’s work?
2. As the Spirit empowers God’s people to join in his mission, consider how the Spirit is equipping you to join in this mission. To whom has God sent and empowered you to both tell and show the gospel?

WEEK 5 DAY 3

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

John 15:26

We confess that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This describes the eternal relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is known as the “eternal procession” of the Spirit. Just as the Father has always been the Father and the Son the Son, so too, the Spirit has always been the Spirit. Our God has always been and will always be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The language of procession attempts to describe the eternal relationship that the Father has with the Son and Spirit.

John 15:26 serves as the biblical basis for speaking of the Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son. In this verse, Jesus describes the Spirit as the one “who proceeds from the Father.” In Romans 8:9, Paul speaks of the Spirit as both “the Spirit of God” and “the Spirit of Christ.” That is to say, the Spirit is both the Spirit of God the Father and the Spirit of Christ the Son. When the truths of John 15:26 and Romans 8:9 are brought together, we confess that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. The language of procession speaks of both the oneness of the Father, Son, and Spirit as one God. At the same time, this language highlights the distinctiveness of each person of the Trinity, for it is only the Spirit who proceeds.

In addition to speaking of the Spirit’s procession in John 15:26, Jesus also points forward to when he and the Father will send the Holy Spirit. This sending of the Holy Spirit occurs in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. Jesus promises both that the Father (Jn 14:26) and he (Jn 15:26; 16:7) will send the Spirit. In his Pentecost sermon, Peter elaborates on the role that the Father and Son play in this sending. Speaking of Christ Jesus, Peter proclaims, “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33). Father and Son have now sent the Spirit into this world on the mission to bring life to God’s people and to make all things new.

These truths remind us that the Spirit who dwells within us as believers is God himself. It is the Spirit who strengthens us in our inner beings, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts and we can be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:16-18). It is only because the Spirit is God himself that he can accomplish such work in our lives. With such comfort, we can embrace Paul’s admonition: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (Eph 6:10), because the Holy Spirit lives within us.

REFLECT

1. Why is it such good news that God has always and will always be the same?

2. How do you receive the Holy Spirit? Consider Ephesians 1:13.

WEEK 5 DAY 4

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and Truth.

John 4:23-24

As the Holy Spirit is fully God, he is to be worshiped and glorified with God the Father and God the Son. The Spirit deserves all honor and praise. When we pray privately or gather corporately, it is good and right for us to praise the Holy Spirit for who he is and to glorify him for the work he has done and is doing.

When we worship God, we praise him for who he is and what he does. That is to say, we honor him for his character and his work. Since the Holy Spirit is fully God, he shares all the attributes of God. He is almighty, all-knowing, holy, and righteous. His steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness knows no end. We particularly praise God for his work in creating and redeeming the world. The Spirit is the Lord and giver of life. He actively works in creating and sustaining the world. He, too, plays an essential role in our salvation. The Holy Spirit is worthy to be worshiped and glorified with the Father and Son, for he shares in their perfect attributes and together they work inseparably in our creation and redemption.

The Spirit is not only a proper object for worship, but he also works to empower our worship. Paul testifies that we “worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus” (Php 3:3). A few verses earlier, Paul exclaims concerning Christ, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Php 2:9-11). These two passages point us in the direction of New Testament worship: we are to glorify God by exalting Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ draws attention to the triune nature of worship in his discussion with the women at the well in John’s Gospel. He calls us to “worship the Father in Spirit and Truth” (Jn 4:23). True worship is in

and through the Holy Spirit who indwells God's people and makes us God's temple (1 Cor 3:16). "Truth" in the Gospel of John is a person. Jesus Christ is, as he himself testifies, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6). True worship of the Father happens in the Holy Spirit and glories in Christ.

Worship in the Spirit should not be reserved for Sunday mornings; rather, Scripture calls us to make it our way of life. Paul tells us that our *spiritual* worship—our worship by the Spirit—is "to present your bodies as a living and sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). Thus, he exhorts, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

REFLECT

1. Why is it right to worship the Holy Spirit? How should we do that?

2. How does the Spirit help us worship Father and Son in our daily lives?

WEEK 5 DAY 5

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21

The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures. The writings of both the Old and New Testaments came to be through the work of the Spirit. As such, the Bible is God's Word, and so it is true, powerful, sufficient, and authoritative.

As Peter explains, "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pt 1:21). Scripture does not have its origin in a person's will but comes about as the human authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Thus, Peter says that these writers "spoke from God." Likewise, Paul teaches, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Given the close connection between God's breath and God's Spirit, Paul too links Scripture with the work of the Spirit.

When Peter and Paul speak of Scripture they have in mind what we call the Old Testament. It becomes clear that these same truths extend to the New Testament as well. Concerning Paul's writings, Peter comments, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16). Peter puts Paul's writings in the same category as all other Scripture. Like Peter did with Paul's writings, believers who were filled with the Holy Spirit came to recognize that the rest of the New Testament writings were also inspired by the Spirit.

The divine inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit means that the Scriptures possess four key qualities. First, since God never lies, his Word to us is always true (Titus 1:2). Second, his Word is powerful. It accomplishes all that he desires (Isa 55:10-11) and continues to be living and active (Heb 4:12). Third, God's Word is sufficient. In the Scriptures, God has given us everything we need to know him and follow Christ (Isa 55:10-11; 2 Pet 1:3). Fourth, God's Word is the final authority in our lives. As Psalm 119 describes it, God's Word is our

standard, our guide, and our rule.

The fact that the Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible means that the Scriptures are essential to our spiritual growth. A key way to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is through hiding God's Word in our hearts through reading, hearing, and meditating on it. God's Word is our only rule of faith and practice. It has ultimate authority over our traditions, inclinations, feelings, or desires. Furthermore, the Spirit's role in authoring Scripture also means that the Word and Spirit will always speak with one voice.

REFLECT

1. How are you regularly reading and meditating on Scripture?

2. What is going well with your reading and meditating on Scripture? What needs to change? What step can you take in order to more regularly be in God's Word?

HISTORICAL REFLECTION

When the Trinitarian controversy began in the early fourth century, the debates centered on who Jesus is and how he relates to the Father. The creed formulated at the first council of Nicaea in 325 begins with a brief statement about the Father and spends the bulk of its time on the Son. It ends with the brief assertion of belief in the Spirit: “And in the Holy Spirit.” The question of the Holy Spirit and how he relates to Father and Son would only be raised later in the century.

As consensus began to be reached on what it meant to affirm that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully God, some opposition arose to the biblical truth that the Holy Spirit is also fully God. This controversy seems to have arisen in the late 360s and 370s. These opponents were known variously as Macedonians (named after an exiled bishop Macedonius) or as *Pneumatochaoi* (which means ‘Spirit-fighters’). In their faulty thinking, the Holy Spirit was less than God.

In 375, Basil the Great (330-379) wrote *On the Holy Spirit*, which is the definitive fourth-century defense of the biblical truth that the Holy Spirit is fully God. Like Father and Son, the Spirit shares in the one divine nature. A key theological insight from this period is that the Spirit works inseparably from the Father and the Son. When the Spirit works, it is the work of God. Sanctification, for example, is a work that the Holy Spirit works with the Father and the Son.

While we today affirm that the Spirit is God, our understanding of who he is often fails on two points. First, we easily forget that the Spirit is a person. We often treat him as an “it” rather than a “he.” He can be treated as if he is some sort of cosmic force that we need to tap into in order to experience growth in faith and a better life. While Scripture often connects the Spirit with the power of God, this power is personal. He is a person. He is God himself, worthy of our worship.

Second, we can slip into a subtle diminishing of the Spirit and his work. We fail to appreciate that to have the Spirit dwell within us is to have God himself in our lives. To be a temple of the Holy Spirit is to be filled with all the fullness of God. On the one hand, this truth should challenge us to seek to walk by the Spirit, that is to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, and to pray and work for the Spirit’s fruit

to ripen in our lives. On the other hand, this truth should also prove a great comfort to us. Through the Spirit, God himself—Father, Son, and Spirit—is always with us and will never leave us. We are not forgotten but are filled with the Spirit, and through him God pours his love into our hearts.

Review Memory Verses:

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4–6

WEEK 5 GROUP DISCUSSION

Key Truth

The Holy Spirit is fully God and is one of the three persons of the Trinity.

Focal Passages

2 Corinthians 13:14

Discussion Questions

The Holy Spirit is fully God.

- Are there ways you are prone to think of the Spirit as less than the Father or the Son?
- What evidence from Scripture points to the full divinity of the Holy Spirit?
- Why is it so important for our salvation that the Holy Spirit is God?

The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Trinity. He is a person, like the Father and the Son. The Spirit is a “he,” not an “it.”

- Have you ever been prone to view the Spirit as merely a force or a power, rather than a person? How is this detrimental to our faith?
- Why is it such good news that the Spirit is a person? Consider John 14:15-31.

WEEK 6

WE BELIEVE

in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins;
we wait for the resurrection of the dead
and for life in the age to come. Amen.

MEMORY VERSES

There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

KEY TRUTH

We live out our faith with the church as we
wait expectantly for the New Creation.

WEEK 6 DAY 1

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42

The church is an essential feature of the Christian life. While faith in Christ is a personal matter, nowhere does Scripture give the impression that it is a private matter. Instead, the Christian life is communal. We follow Jesus in community. The community Christ has given his followers is his body, the church.

Following Jesus's resurrection and then ascension into heaven, he sent his Holy Spirit on his first followers on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2 records how Peter boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem on that day. Acts 2:41 describes how many in the crowd responded: "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Those who received his word—that is those who believed in the message of Christ's death and resurrection—were baptized.

Luke then explains what these new believers did: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). They are doing the things that believers do when they join together; they are being the church. The next five verses elaborate on this activity, but at its core these new believers are forming the early Christian community of the church.

It is not much of a stretch to see in Acts 2:42 the life of the church today. We devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching as we study their words to us in Scripture. Fellowship and community are key elements of our life together. We break bread together, both eating meals together and celebrating the Lord's Supper. We regularly pray together and for one another.

However, when we say that we believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, we can feel like we are speaking a new language. Yet, each of these four adjectives describes a biblical truth about the church. While the Church of Jesus Christ has many visible and different

expressions on earth, there is ultimately one body of Christ, the church united in him in heaven and on earth. The church is holy because we have been set apart by Christ to be his bride. Paul can even describe the church at Corinth with all their problems as those who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” and “called to be holy ones together with all those in every place” (1 Cor 1:2). Catholic means universal; it includes “all those in every place,” and will one day include people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). The church is apostolic because through the Bible it is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20).

The community of faith that God has given us in the church is not an optional addition for those who are particularly serious about their faith. Christ has given the church to us and has given us to the church, so that “we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

REFLECT

1. Do you see the church as essential or optional for your Christian walk? Why or why not?

2. How has your faith grown through your involvement in a local church?

WEEK 6 DAY 2

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 3:27

In the New Testament, baptism is closely linked to saving faith in our Lord Jesus. When people heard the gospel and responded in faith, they were immersed in water in the one name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This water baptism was a physical manifestation of three key realities of the faith.

First, baptism represents forgiveness. Through the blood of Christ, we are forgiven of our sins. Just as we use water to clean in our everyday lives, so in baptism the water points to our being cleansed from all unrighteousness. In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter closely links baptism and forgiveness, calling on the crowd, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Peter understands belief, baptism, and the receiving of the Spirit to be so closely related that he nearly speaks of them as one event.

Second, baptism demonstrates the believer’s union with Christ. All those who trust in Christ Jesus are united to him by faith (2 Cor 5:17; Jn 15:4-5) and Christ is in them (Col 1:27; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17). Concerning this union, Jesus declares, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). Baptism symbolizes our being buried with Christ in his death, but then we are raised out of the water to walk in new life in Christ (Rom 6:1-4). If you have been united to Jesus through faith in him, you have “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). God no longer looks on you and sees your sin, but he counts Christ’s righteousness as your own. On the cross, Jesus bore your sin, and now as a believer, you have his righteousness. “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).

Third, baptism is closely connected with the sending of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit is closely connected with water in Scripture (Gen 1:2; Jn 7:38-39). The Bible describes Christ’s sending of the Spirit upon believers as a baptism (Jn 1:33). When the Lord Jesus ascended to his Father’s right hand, he sent the Holy Spirit to cleanse, to give

new life, to remove our hearts of stone, and to give us hearts that love the Lord (Ezk 36:22-32).

Jesus's earthly ministry began with baptism (Matt 3:13-17) and ended with his commissioning his disciples to go into all the world, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to follow him (Matt 28:16-20). Baptism bookends his earthly ministry, and as Jesus's earliest followers continued his mission through the power of the Holy Spirit, they continued to follow his example and baptize new believers. For followers of Christ today, baptism continues to stand as a significant way believers follow Jesus.

For those who have been baptized, Paul challenges us to remember that in our baptism we died with Christ to our old way of life. Raised with him, we now walk in new life (Rom 6:1-4). Sin no longer has power over those who are united to Christ Jesus by faith.

REFLECT

1. Why is water baptism an important part of your Christian journey?

2. Consider Romans 6:1-4. What truth from this passage do you need to embrace and live out in your daily life?

WEEK 6 DAY 3

To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Acts 10:43

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. Scripture clearly testifies about each and every person, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). The Bible, and indeed our own experience, teach us: “None is righteous, no not one” (Rom 3:10). Our sin and unrighteousness are no small matter. Rather, apart from Christ, Scripture paints a bleak picture of status:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph 2:1-3).

Without the Lord Jesus, we were dead in sin, following demonic forces, and objects of God’s righteous wrath. We deserved and were headed for eternal death, an unending existence separated from God.

The hope of the gospel is that Christ bore the punishment for our sins that we might receive forgiveness and the hope of life everlasting. It is in Christ and through his blood that we are redeemed and forgiven (Eph 1:7). His death on the cross made forgiveness available to us, for “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22). Out of his great love for us, the Father sent his only begotten Son, and on the cross, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

As Peter testifies in Acts 10:43, this forgiveness is through the name of Christ Jesus, and it is given to any who believes in him. Forgiveness of sin is a gift from God that we receive by confessing our need for it; it is a free gift from him. We look to Christ and trust in him, praying “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Lk 18:13)

We begin the Christian life in repentance, seeking forgiveness in Christ;

even once we have been justified and have been declared righteous before God, we still stand in need of forgiveness. John the Apostle starkly warns any Christian who denies his or her need for forgiveness: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). John does not leave us there, but in the next verse, he encourages, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). Our merciful and loving God stands ready to forgive.

REFLECT

1. Do you have trouble believing that God can forgive you? What passages of the Bible encourage you in this regard?
2. Read Matthew 18:15-35. Whom do you need to forgive? Pray for the desire to want to forgive and the grace to be able to forgive.

WEEK 6 DAY 4

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

John 5:28-29

The resurrection stands as an essential component of our faith. Certainly, Christianity is indispensable for life in this world, but it proves to have such value in this life because of the future hope our faith brings. Apart from this future hope, our faith is worthless. Paul forcefully makes this point as he takes on opponents who denied the resurrection. “For if the dead are not raised,” Paul avers, “not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:16-17). Christ’s resurrection brings his power over sin and death to our lives and blazes the trail for our own resurrection.

For the believer, the resurrection brings hope. Paul points to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus to help us understand our own resurrection. He is the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). Just as Christ was physically raised from the dead, so too will all people be. Paul explains, “So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42–44). Jesus Christ was raised physically, and yet his resurrected body was clearly different than our earthly bodies. He could be touched, and he ate food. Yet, he also vanished from before his followers (Lk 24:30-31). There is both continuity and discontinuity with our current existence. In the resurrection, we will be made fully into the image of the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:49).

For those who do not know Christ, the prospect of the resurrection brings not hope but dread. Jesus teaches that all people will be raised from the dead, but for those who do not know him, it will be “the resurrection of judgment” (Jn 5:28-29). Those who die outside of Christ will be raised to be judged by him and to be cast into unending bodily

existence apart from God. The hope of the gospel is that our Lord Jesus already took the punishment that we rightly deserve on himself. He has defeated sin and death, so that we can be raised to the “resurrection of life” (Jn 5:29).

The hope of the resurrection changes how we live in this world because in union with Christ we have already died and been raised with him. Fueled by this hope, we heed Paul’s admonition:

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:1-5).

In light of the resurrection, we take the long view and trust in the goodness and sovereignty of God in all circumstances.

REFLECT

1. Why is the resurrection a key element of our faith?

2. How does your future hope in the resurrection change the way you live today?

WEEK 6 DAY 5

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John 17:3

We wait for life in the age to come. Scripture speaks of two ages: the present age and the age to come. Currently, we live in the overlap of these two ages. The first coming of Christ began the age to come, but it will not come in its complete form until our Lord Jesus returns. We now live in the present age. Yet, for those who are made new in Christ, we have also begun life in the age to come (2 Cor 5:17). We live in between two worlds.

The Bible is clear that “the present form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). God’s plan is not for this world or the entire created order to disappear or to be destroyed. Rather, he declares from his throne, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). John was given a vision of this new creation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth passed away” (Rev 21:1). God is working to make all things new and to usher in a new creation.

God’s presence will be the distinguishing feature of the new creation. In his heavenly vision, John hears of this future hope: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). The world will become what God has always intended it to be: the place where he dwells among his people. As Habakkuk prophesied, “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14). We will enjoy union and communion with God forever.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus describes everlasting life this same way: “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). Eternal life—life in the age to come—is not something we have to wait to begin to experience. We can begin to enjoy everlasting life now. We grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior by pursuing him through the means he has given us: his Word, prayer, and gathering with the church to worship.

While we wait for the fulfillment of this life in the age to come, the Bible challenges us to actively engage in life in this world. Peter exhorts, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:11-12). As we wait for our future home, we, too, can heed the call of Jeremiah to God’s people in exile in his day, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer 29:7). While this world is not our home, we work for the good of our neighbors, knowing that God is making all things new.

REFLECT

1. Do you hope for life in the age to come, or are you focused merely on trying to create the best life possible for yourself now? What does that reveal about your understanding of the gospel?

2. How does our future hope fuel faithfulness in this life?

HISTORICAL REFLECTION

The final section of the Nicene Creed articulates key elements of Christian belief. Most of these truths prove uncontroversial among believers today. We are grateful for the forgiveness of sin, and we look forward to life in the age to come. However, in our age that rejects institutions and authority, it might seem like a relic of the past to assert that we believe in the church.

However, the testimony of Scripture and the experience of Christ followers for the last 2000 years points to the necessity of local churches for our Christian lives. Our faith is meant to be lived out in community. In one sense, we can say that God is saving a people, not merely a collection of individuals. As Paul testifies, our God and Savior Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). When our God saves us, he saves us into his people, the church. This universal church finds expression in a multitude of local congregations around the world.

Believers in the first few centuries of our faith were bold to assert that outside of the church there was no salvation. Cyprian (c. 210-258), who led churches in North Africa proclaimed, “He cannot have God for his Father who has not the church for his mother.” He goes on in the same statement to compare the church to Noah’s Ark: “If any one was able to escape outside of Noah’s ark, then he also escapes who is outside the doors of the church.” Just as in the flood, God made provision to save his people through Noah and his boat; so now, God has ordained to save his people through the church. The people of God gathered together as the body of Christ on earth prove to be the means God has chosen to make the gospel known and to grow us in our faith.

The necessity of joining in Christian community to gather as one to hear the Scriptures proclaimed, to pray and to sing together, to celebrate the ordinances, and to join with one another on God’s mission should drive us to join a local church. However, as we grow in Christ, community becomes more than a mere necessity or bare duty; it becomes a delight. We come to delight to be with God’s people because as we grow in our love for Jesus, we come to love who and what he loves. The cross stands as the great testament of his love for his

church. “Christ,” Paul explains, “loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25-27). Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, not because we were holy and without blemish, but to make us so because he loved us. Likewise, we love the church, not because the church is holy and without blemish, but because Christ Jesus loves his church. If we love him, we will love what he loves.

Review Memory Verses:

*There is one body and one Spirit—
just as you were called to the one hope
that belongs to your call—
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:4–6

WEEK 6 GROUP DISCUSSION

Key Truth

We live out our faith with the church as we wait expectantly for the New Creation.

Focal Passages

Ephesians 4:4-6

Discussion Questions:

God intends for his people to live out their faith in community. The community he has given us is the church.

- Why is the community of the church so important for the Christian life?
- Why are we prone to neglect such community? Is this a new phenomenon? Consider Hebrews 10:25.
- How do we remind ourselves of the importance of the church? How do we demonstrate its importance to others?

Following the example of Jesus, the pattern for believers in the New Testament was to be baptized. This baptism would follow their profession of faith in Christ. Whenever people believed, they were baptized.

- Do you think baptism is important or unimportant in your Christian walk?
- How does your view line up with the New Testament's example?
- What is the biblical case for the importance of baptism?

As Christians, we hope for life in the age to come. We believe that the forgiveness we enjoy through Christ now, will lead to our being resurrected to everlasting life with him.

- Why are we so prone to neglect our future hope as Christians?
- Why is this hope so important for living in faith now? How does this hope help in the face of injustice? How does this hope help in the midst of affluence?
- How can you live in light of this everlasting hope?

