

# THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

JESUS CHRIST  
THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE  
EPHESIANS 2:20

A.D.

*Life in the Holy Spirit*  
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## about the author

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## how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God's Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section "preach." God's Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God's Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God's Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.

## introduction

The study of the Holy Spirit has proven challenging for Christians of every age. Even some first century saints wrestled with this subject—as one can find in reading Paul’s first letter (actually his second letter) to the Christians in Corinth. Today, we hear various teachings about the Spirit. Some of these teachings have a charismatic foundation, while others are founded in *cessationism* (the belief that the Spirit’s work was completed with the written Word of God). Where one stands has much to do with his expected experience of the Spirit’s indwelling.

It is my hope that this series of lessons motivates readers to probe more deeply into the matter of understanding the Holy Spirit. The lessons are designed to provoke deeper thought as well as to lead to a clear expectation of the Spirit’s work in our lives.

## God in Three Persons

### *Genesis 1:26*

#### FOUNDATION

The person of the Holy Spirit is a mystery to some and deemed completely incomprehensible to others. Though spoken of frequently, the Holy Spirit is so lightly understood. We begin our series in search of a better understanding of the Holy Spirit. However, one cannot seek an understanding of the Spirit in isolation from an understanding of the nature of God. What we think about God is crucial, for it will determine how we will live our lives.

#### *Key Concepts*

Theology is the study of the nature of God. There are four historical approaches to understanding the nature of God. One approach is *Tritheism*. This is the belief that there are three gods. A second approach is *Arianism*. This is the belief that there is one God. It further asserts that God created Jesus and that Jesus created the Holy Spirit. A third approach is *Modalism*. This is the belief that there is one God who successively takes on three different roles. The fourth approach is *Trinity*. This is the belief that God eternally exists in three persons as one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trinity is the orthodox position being presented throughout this study.

The “Godhead” is a term that speaks to the nature of God. This term is used in connection with the concept of Trinity.



### *A Biblical View of God*

We all tend to do theology in that we function from our understanding of God. The way in which we view the world is tied to what we think about God. This is what makes theology a vitally important study. As we examine the Scriptures, we first learn of the unity of God. This is something that is recited in the *Shema*—the statement of Judaism that declares the oneness of God (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Trinitarian view of God is that three persons exist as one. This oneness is known as the Godhead. It is this unity of God that helps us avoid the path of polytheism—a way of thinking that was prominent in both the Old and New Testament worlds. It is crucial that we understand God as one. However, there is another dimension to understanding God that we must consider.

The Godhead exists in unity, and the Godhead also exists in diversity. There is diversity in God. God the Father is not God the Son. God the Son is not God the Holy Spirit. Each is a distinct personality. The Scriptures capture this thought for us in the scene of the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17). In that scene, Jesus (God the Son) is being baptized. God the Father speaks words of approval. The Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove. Another such reference to the Godhead as three unified but distinct persons is revealed in the Great Commission Jesus gave to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus instructed that those who would come to Him in faith should be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit. This means that the baptized persons would enter into relationship with the Godhead.

The Godhead also exists in equality. Perhaps this is quite difficult for us to picture. However, a reflection on the opening of John's gospel account can help us digest this concept. John describes Jesus as being with God the Father in the beginning as well as being recognized as God (John 1:1-14). In addition to this, Paul's letter to the church at Philippi includes teaching concerning the equality of the Father and the Son (Philippians 2:1-11). Further, in the sad occasion of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as equal with the Father (Acts 5:3, 4). Each of these texts and instances points to the equality that exists in the Godhead.

The nature of God is complex. However, by faith, we can accept this Trinitarian nature as three distinct persons existing as one. There is unity, diversity, and equality in the Godhead. There is a relational harmony that eternally exists. The nature of God reveals much about how we have been created.

### *A Biblical View of Humanity*

God declared that man be made in the image of the Godhead. Humanity was created to share in the nature of God. We were created to enjoy the life of the Godhead in human form. There are some tremendous principles for daily life that come from this understanding.

God created us to be unified beings. The term "humankind" reflects this understanding. It distinguishes human beings from other creatures. It collects all of us into one group of God's creation. Tragically, human history reveals instances where this fact has been ignored. People of various races, ethnicities, and cultures have been denied this creation-given status. Women and children have faced times of being treated as less than human. Perhaps even more tragic is the person so trapped in sin that he willfully chooses to live

as less than human. No society can afford to lose sight of the value of every human, simply because God created us as a unified species. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit eternally exist as God. The Godhead created us to exist as unified humanity.

God created us as diverse beings (Genesis 1:27). We are male and female. We are of various races, ethnicities, and cultures. We are of various sizes and shapes. We are even of diverse temperaments. However, God never intended that our diversity be used as impetus for our divisiveness. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist in a unified diversity. Humankind was created to enjoy the same.

The impact of this unity-in-diversity concept is staggering. Consider the struggles we experience daily that are directly related to our differences. This is the source of conflict in society, in communities, in homes, and even in churches. These issues plague our legal system, our politics, our schools, and our jobs. Constant battles disturb our relational peace. Such peace can only be experienced as we recognize and accept the unity-in-diversity design that is the intent of God's creation.

God created us as equal beings. As the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal, humankind is created to be equal. We should recognize ourselves as equal in the sight of God, but we should also recognize this equality among ourselves. This is not a matter of legality. This is a matter of God's creation intent. The equality within the Godhead exists despite the fact of the unique functions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This principle helps us understand that humans are uniquely gifted, yet remain equal beings. Our differences of gender and race are to be celebrated, not used as reasons for division.



In each of these areas we can see the wisdom of God. We were created to enjoy a god-like existence in human form. Tragically, humanity's fall into sin resulted in the forfeiture of an existence of unity, peaceful diversity, and equality. Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome paints the dark, disturbing picture of the existence we experience as opposed to what we were created to experience (Romans 1:18-32). However, the good news of Jesus is that we were created to enjoy the life that God created us to enjoy (John 3:3-5; 10:10). His church is designed to be the community in which a foretaste of God's creation intent is experienced (Galatians 3:26-28). Because of our fallen nature, we cannot enjoy all that God created us to enjoy in this life. The full experience of the life God created us to enjoy awaits us in eternity. However, within the community of Christ, we can have the joy of sharing a degree of what is in store. The indwelling Holy Spirit brings about this experience within the community of believers.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why is it so important to have a proper understanding of God?
2. How does our understanding of God impact our day-to-day living?
3. What is the basic understanding of Trinity?
4. What are some examples of the breakdown of human relationships since the fall of man?
5. How can we be diverse and yet unified?
6. What do the concepts of unity, diversity, and equality mean to our home life?
7. What do the concepts of unity, diversity, and equality mean to our church life?

8. What are some reasons we tend to struggle with the concepts of unity, diversity, and equality?
9. What is the meaning of foretaste?
10. In what ways does the church exhibit the life God intended for humans to experience?

*Just for Further Thought*

1. Discuss how Jesus can be equal with the Father while also being subject to the Father.
2. Discuss whether human diversity was intended before Adam and Eve's fall, or is it the result of their fall.