

Back to Basics: How Does God Work?

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

27 July, 2025

Children's Talk: Three in One

Things that come in threes:

Triangles

Goldilocks and the 3 Bears

Beginning, Middle, End

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Past, Present, Future

Goal, Plan, Doing It

3 = Complete, everything you need, from beginning to the end

Jesus Resurrected after 3 Days

3 Gifts of the Wisemen

Peter denied the Lord 3 times

The New Jerusalem had 3 gates on each side

Jonah in the Whale for 3 Days

3 Parts to us, and to God

Soul, Body, Actions

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Back to Basics: How Does God Work?

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Back in February I did a sermon series called “Back to Basics.” We covered some of the core beliefs of the New Church, trying to answer questions like, “Who is God? What is salvation? How does the Bible work?” We’re going to come back around to that first question today, “Who is God?” There’s a pretty simple answer, and we’ve chosen it as the first and most important of our core beliefs as a church: there is one God, the Lord Jesus Christ. So I suppose we can all go home now, having answered the question of who God is! But actually, it gets more complicated than that: the Word, when it talks about God, talks about a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit. This understanding of God is called “the Trinity.” Where does all that fit together? How does God actually work, if He is both the Lord Jesus Christ as well as the Father and the Holy Spirit?

A clear instance of this threefold or trinitarian way of talking about God comes at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew, after Jesus had risen from the grave and appeared to the Disciples:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. *Amen.*” (Matthew 28:18-20)

So here we have a pretty clear example of God as three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But interestingly, we *also* have an image (although more subtly) of God as one, that is, as Jesus Christ. First, this is Jesus Himself talking, and He says that *all* authority in heaven and earth is His; and then He concludes by saying “*I* am with you,” not “*we* are with you.” And it turns out, when the Disciples carried out the command to baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they did it by

baptizing in the name of the Lord Jesus (see Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5).

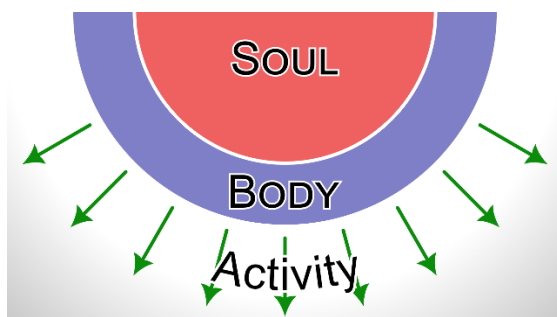
Apparently then, based on the words the apostles used when they baptized people, whether we say “the Lord Jesus” or “the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” we are talking about the same thing, the same God, the same person.

Why then use the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at all? If God is one, why three terms? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit describe three distinct aspects of God, and each one adds to our understanding of who God is. Without this three-piece understanding, something is missing, and so if we leave one out, God cannot be fully God for us. The Teachings of the New Church explain this by comparing it to how we work as people:

When it is said that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three essentials of one God, like the soul, body and activity in a person, it appears to the human mind as if these three essentials were three Persons, which is impossible; but when it is understood that the Divine of the Father which makes the soul, and the Divine of the Son which makes the body, and the Divine of the Holy Spirit or the Divine going forth which makes the activity, are the three essentials of one God, the statement becomes comprehensible. (*True Christian Religion* §168)

In other words, every person is made up of a soul, body, and the things that he does. Every single human being is in the image and likeness of God, so if we understand how people work we can start to get an image or idea of how God works.

So let's first think of about with a regular person before moving on to God. To do this I want a volunteer. I promise that I won't ask you to do much more than just



stand here as I point out a few things. I won't even point out any of your flaws. So let's think about Jim. We know Jim. What could we say about Jim (all good things

please!) Those are the real Jim, the things he loves and cares about, the things he

thinks. When the body is done and gone, the real Jim, who we know, will carry on in heaven.

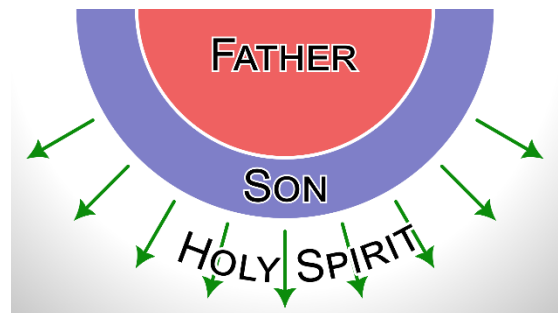
But even though those are the things that matter, Jim also has a body. Jim, could you come forward and stand up here. What matters is all those things we said a moment ago; the body doesn't matter so much. But that does not mean that we can treat this as *just* a body. Yes, it's a few bits of flesh and blood. But it is not a mere object. If we mistreat it, we mistreat Jim. If the body enters a room, suddenly Jim is present. When we think of Jim we picture this. Without this body we would have no access to the real Jim, we would have no communication or connection with him. Nor would he with anyone else. We cannot encounter anyone without bodies moving about and doing things in the world.

At the same time, Jim has an impact that lasts beyond just his presence. Jim, could you write in nice big letters here a message, maybe just, "I love you!" You can go sit down. Even though Jim is no longer standing here, his message remains. He has an influence on the world, he makes the world different. He does things that leave a mark and so last. When Jim leaves work and goes home, the work that he did does not disappear or cease to exist. When he drops his kids off at school their sense of his care for them and the ways he has provided for them does not evaporate. Those parts of Jim go out into the world and stick with people.

So to recap, we have the real Jim: his loves and motivations; we have the body of Jim that gives a focal point through which he can express that love and through which we in turn can reciprocate love back to Jim; and we have his activities, the things he has done in the world. If any one of those is taken away, it's not really Jim anymore. Without the soul, that inner love and mind, he would be an empty robot. Without the body he would be an ethereal concept with no presence. Without

the activity he would be an isolated being, cut off from the rest of the world. But even though these three pieces are all necessary, there are not three Jims: there is only one.

That's how God works. What in ourselves we call the soul, in God is called the Father. What for us we call the body, in God we call the Son. And what with us we call our activity, in God we call the Holy Spirit. We could also label them like this in God:



- The Father refers to the underlying essence of God, His Divine love that motivates everything that He is and that He does. It is the Divine source from which everything in the world was created and is sustained. Without this, God would be powerless and unloving.
- The Son refers to the being of God in Human form, the body as it were. It is the expression of that Divine Love in a Human form, that we can picture in our minds eye, and pray to, and relate to, and understand as a being who knows us and loves us personally. Without this God would be unknowable, incomprehensible, and unable to connect with us.
- The Holy Spirit refers to the activity of God, the ways that He reaches out and influences the world, and guides the world, and connects with each and every person in their hearts and mind. It is His Divine Providence. Without this God



would be distant and cold, unable to help us, or change us, or lead us through challenges.

For God to be complete, He must be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At the end of the day though God is one, and that is a crucially important idea. We find our access to all these parts of God through a relationship with the one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through picturing God as the Lord, and interacting with Him as Lord, that we connect to the Love of the Father and open up ourselves to the influence of His Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus said,

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."
Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."
Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:6-9)

To see the fullness of God, we go to the Lord. We can all picture Him in our own way in our minds. I have here a picture of Jesus Christ. It's not just about an image though: we have to work to add the fullness of God, the



Father and Holy Spirit, to the image in our own hearts and minds. Partly that is by thinking thoughts; but also by responding to God as if He does have that essence within Him: trusting Him, expressing gratitude to Him, praising Him, especially in obeying Him and carrying out His commandments. It also means remembering that He is with us at every moment, that His presence is in our lives, that His Holy Spirit is always available for us to call on and be influenced by.