

The Uniqueness and Centrality of Jesus

Dr. Steve Schell | Week 4 Essential Doctrines

1. Believing the truth about Jesus is just as important as believing in what He did, because only the real Jesus could have done what He did.

2. Who is He?

Excerpt from *Study Verse by Verse: John (Jn 1:1-3)*

v1: The book of Genesis opens with the words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” and then goes on to describe God speaking creation into existence over the course of six days (Ge 1:3-31). John opens his gospel with those same words, “In the beginning,” but then describes someone whom he calls “the Word” and says this Person was the active agent through whom creation took place. There’s no mistaking his point: he’s introducing us to Jesus. He’s telling us that Jesus is God, not in a way that supplants God the Father, but God in that He is the Father’s divine Son and as such was present with the Father when the creation of the universe took place. John is taking us back to the moment when everything other than God began, and he says there were at least two Persons present.

vs1-2: Here’s how John says this: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with (beside, facing toward) God, and God was the Word” (literal). Then, so we won’t miss his point, he says again, “This One (the Word) was in the beginning with (beside, facing toward) God” (literal). This means God the Father was not alone before He created all things. Another divine Person was present with Him, and I believe John calls that Person “the Word” because it was through that Person that the Father spoke all things into being and has continued to communicate with His creation ever since. When John wrote the words “In the beginning,” he used the same two Greek words found in Genesis 1:1 in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint, which had been in use for nearly three centuries by the time he wrote this. The word in the Septuagint which we translate as “beginning” describes the source, the origin, the very first cause of something. There is another Greek word which John might have used instead, but that word means “beginning” in the sense of being the first one in a series of things. But John couldn’t use that word because he was talking about the moment when all things, other than God, began. And Jesus, the Word, wasn’t part of that moment because He isn’t a created being. He is divine. He existed before creation began.

v3: Again, so no one would mistake his point, John adds this statement: “All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being which has come into being.” So Jesus was present at the moment of creation and personally participated in every aspect of it. This is a stunning thing to say about a man, a human being, whom John knew personally and followed as His disciple for two and a half years. But John is not alone in declaring Jesus to be divine as well as human. Paul clearly says the same thing: “...there is [but] one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we [exist] for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we [exist] through Him” (1Co 8:6). To the church in Colossae Paul wrote: “For by Him (Jesus) all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17). The author of Hebrews gives us further insight

into Jesus as “the Word” when he wrote, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb 1:1-2). And as his gospel continues, John will repeatedly show us by the things Jesus said and did that He is both divine and human.

Excerpt from *Preaching Through John*, “Radically Good” (Jn 1:1-5)

I think we find God’s ways mysterious, not because they are so complex that we can’t understand them, but because they are so good, and we are not, they just don’t make sense to us. God is good at a level that at times shocks us or, to be honest, may even trouble us. He does things we have never even thought of doing. I believe it’s because we don’t hate sin like He hates it, and we don’t love people like He loves them, and frankly, most of us are way too proud to humble ourselves to the extent that He did—which is why this opening passage in the gospel of John is so difficult to comprehend. There may be no portion of the Bible which has been more furiously debated, picked apart, retranslated or explained in the most bizarre ways than this. Apparently the truth it contains disturbs a lot of people; they feel compelled to “correct” John’s theology, which is ironic because John wrote these words to correct their theology. So instead of trying to reinterpret what John reveals about God, let’s listen to him with an open mind and let him show us things that will amaze us, that will drive us to ask the question: What kind of God would do such a thing?

Peering into eternity

With these few verses John pulls back the curtain and allows us to peer into eternity and behold the very moment when all creation began. He doesn’t try to explain the physical mechanics of how God did all of this; he simply reveals the spiritual source behind it. He tells us who made it. As we gaze into heaven, we see the Father and Someone John calls the “Word” to remind us that all this Person had to do was speak, and the universe came forth out of nothing. He only needed to say, “Let there be light...” and there was light (Ge 1:3). Let’s listen carefully to these verses:

Read John 1:1-5

John makes simple, declarative statements. He doesn’t try to convince us with arguments. He puts the truth in front of us and invites us to believe. There’s something about truth, real truth, that resonates inside the human heart. It doesn’t need a lot of argument or philosophical defense. Why? Because it’s true.

Radically good

When John pulls back the curtain and lets us look into heaven, what do we see? We see the Father and Son relating to one another in ways we would never expect. They’re showing us by the way they treat each other (at least in part) what true goodness looks like. In passages like this we discover what the word “holy” really means. We find it means God is radically good, far beyond anything we’ve ever seen in this fallen world. Within the very heart of God, we observe:

- Unity (Jn 14:6-11)

The Father and Son work together seamlessly. There is only one agenda: the Father’s will, which they pursue together in perfect harmony. There aren’t two wills struggling against each other. There’s no competition or jealousy, and that’s not because the Father dominates the Son; it’s

because the Son loves the Father and delights to do His will.

The problem for us as humans is that we have never seen nor participated in this kind of loving unity. It's completely foreign to us. When we think of two persons, we can only think of two competing agendas, two egos, both needing attention and striving for control because that's how we function. But here's how the Father and Son function: John 14:6-11.

- Humility (Php 2:5-8)

John reveals who Jesus really is and the price He paid to leave heaven and come to earth. He's showing us a level of humility and selfless love that leaves us speechless. It really is shocking. The divine Son, who spoke the worlds into being, became a baby. This Glorious One left a face-to-face fellowship with the Father. He set aside His divine glory to become a human, and He can never go back. To save us, He had to become one of us, and that change is irreversible.

- Submission (1Co 15:24-28)

Though He is divine, equal in nature to His Father, the Son willingly, lovingly, joyfully surrenders His will to the Father. Listen:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son does in like manner" (Jn 5:19).

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn 6:38).

And this willing, loving, joyful submission of the Son to the Father didn't end when Jesus returned to heaven. It will last forever. Listen: 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

- Love (Jn 3:16)

All of this presses us to ask the questions: Why did the Father send His Son? And why did the Son willingly surrender such glory to become one of us? The answer begins to be revealed by John's description of Jesus as the "Light of Men" (Jn 1:4) but later on is completely exposed by this statement:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

So God's radical goodness includes these four elements along with many others: unity, humility, submission and love. And remember, God wants these same qualities formed in us as well. His goal is for us to become just like Him, and John is showing us who He is and how heaven operates.

A place to stand

Living on this planet forces every one of us to live by faith whether we are religious or not. Each of us must find a starting point, something we believe is true. To live in a world with no absolutes, to question everything, is to move toward insanity. People who end up there become terribly despondent, often wishing they could die. And the problem is that nothing can be absolutely proven

beyond the shadow of a doubt. If we pursue truth through philosophy or science, sooner or later we discover human knowledge always hits a wall. Even physics and math, when you progress further and further into them, end up with theories that sound suspiciously spiritual.

By showing us the moment of creation, John presents certain truths and invites us to choose them as the foundation for our lives. He asks us to believe that there is a God who made everything, everything good that is. He asks us to believe that God the Father has a Son who is as divine as He is, and it was through this Son that the Father spoke the physical world, and even the spiritual world, into existence. He asks us to believe God sent that Son to save us. Such great truths are not something we'll ever fully grasp this side of eternity, and maybe not there either; but whether or not we can fully understand them, we can still choose to believe them and build our lives on them. To do so requires us at some point to stop questioning everything and humbly accept the revelation we've been given. And when we do, the confusion, the insanity of living in a world where nothing is true, finally comes to an end. We find our feet standing on a solid rock. The great questions of life begin to be answered. But the God to whom John is introducing us never leaves us standing in one place. He keeps revealing Himself to us, drawing us closer. Our first step of faith opens a door for the next, and then the next, until we find ourselves beholding His glorious goodness, amazed at who He is and what He's done and why He did it.

Response

Above all else John wants us to see who Jesus is. He wants us to understand that the man who died on the cross for us existed before all things were created, that the man they drove nails into was the One who had spoken His executioners into existence. John has also shown us the beautiful unity between the Father and the Son, and the incomprehensible humility it took for Jesus to leave heaven and come to earth. He's shown us that submission is in no way connected to inferiority but is something holy which belongs first of all in heaven. And finally, he's shown us the motive behind it all, why the Father sent His Son and why Jesus gladly came: It was because of love.

Now that we've seen these things, there's a question that confronts us all: Do we really believe? Will we accept these truths by faith? Now that John has pulled the curtain aside, do we "...believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..." and that by believing in Him "we will have life in His name" (Jn 20:31)?

Excerpt from *Preaching Through John*, "God's Mysterious Laws" (Jn 1:5-14)

There are spiritual laws which God has put into place to govern spiritual matters just as surely as there are physical laws which govern the natural world. The spiritual world is not a land of make believe. It's very real and has its own order. There are things that can be done and things that cannot be done. Even God submits Himself to the spiritual laws He has established. But many people don't realize this. They think of Him as a chaotic tyrant who can and will do whatever He wishes. All sorts of silly assumptions have been made about Him, and one of the worst is that He happily "sends people to hell." Those who believe this picture Him as an arbitrary judge who decides who He will and won't let into heaven. And the standard they believe He uses is frighteningly vague. They think He weighs our good deeds and our bad deeds, that He examines our lives to see if we've been religious enough and picks those He likes. It's no wonder that many people openly or secretly fear and even hate Him. They think His will is arbitrary and that His future kingdom will be a place where every aspect of a person's

life is controlled by a harsh dictator.

These assumptions haven't arisen in a vacuum. There's been so much false teaching about God. Many have been taught these things since they were children, and to make matters worse there seems to be a perverse impulse in us that tends to blame God for everything bad and credit ourselves for everything good. And something strange happens to our minds when we feel shame. It causes us to assume that everyone is judging us, and that leaves us defensive and angry. But no one gets more blame for the guilt we feel than God, which is why we desperately need someone to introduce us to the true God. And that's what John is doing in these opening verses to his gospel. He's destroying these lies by showing us the amazing steps God took to save us. We discover a very different God from the false image so many carry in their minds.

Read John 1:5-14

From heaven to earth

Every one of the terms John uses in this passage is so full of meaning it's hard to summarize what He's saying. But there's no missing the fact that the Son of God left heaven and came to earth to rescue us. God didn't lay out a standard of holiness and demand that we climb up to Him. He has come to us and invited us to welcome Him, to receive Him, to believe in Him. That means God is not the one who's doing the rejecting; it's us. He initiates the relationship; He comes after us; He knocks on our door. And He had to do this according to His own spiritual laws.

God's mysterious laws

When the Father, through Jesus, spoke the physical and spiritual worlds into existence, He established laws to govern those worlds, and those laws reflect His character. They are an expression of who He is, so they are unchangeable; they are eternal.

Since He knows all things, God knew before He made us that if He gave us a free will and an opportunity to rebel, we would walk away from Him. So when He laid into the foundations of the universe the deep laws that would govern everything, He secretly put into place a plan to rescue us. He alone knew how He would do this, and He hid His plan from "the rulers of this age," and the prophets, and I think, even the angels. Listen:

"As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that [would come] to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pe 1:10-12).

"...we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden [wisdom] which God predestined before the ages to our glory; [the wisdom] which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1Co 2:7-9).

Yet now when we look back at the Old Testament from the perspective of the New, we discover that those deep spiritual laws were already at work from Adam and Eve onward. Here are some that we can now recognize:

- Sin produces physical and spiritual death (separation). In physical death the soul (biological life) is separated from the body. In spiritual death the spirit (the conscious person with intellect, will and emotions) is separated from God.
- It is possible for the guilt of one person's sin to be transferred to someone else, providing that there is a suitable substitute. The penalty of death can be transferred so that another may die in our place.
- The substitute to whom our sin is transferred must meet very exact qualifications. He must be:
 - Sinless: Death has no claim on him
 - Identical: One of us
 - Infinite: Possessing a worth greater than our weight of sin
 - Willing: Chooses this role, not a victim
 - Tested: Someone who is genuinely good, who has overcome the temptations we face
 - Costly: God the Father must pay the ultimate price (Ge 22:1-18).
- No one will be forced to love God. We can reject Him. He gives free will and respects our choices because He wants children, not slaves. He invites us to join Him in the eternal love, unity and joy He shares with His Son.
- God initiates relationship. He comes to us and is willing to endure rejection.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to Him and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20).

True spiritual union

There is one more spiritual law which is so important it deserves a category of its own: By faith we can be spiritually joined to another person. A real spiritual union can be formed, and we can become one with someone else. That means when we put our faith in Jesus, we can become as “one” with Him, just as He and the Father are one. Listen:

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us...” (Jn 17:21).

This means that by faith we can die with Him, and by faith we can participate in His resurrection. Literally, His death becomes our death, and when He escaped the grave, we escaped with Him (Colossians 2:11-14).

The last Adam (1Co 15:21-22, 45)

Knowing that Adam, by his sin, would bring death to all humans, God, from the foundations of the world, ordained that the reverse could also be true: that the death of one man, a man who would meet His exact qualifications, could restore life to all humans. Listen:

“For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1Co 15:21-22).

“So also it is written, ‘The first Adam became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1Co 15:45).

The “first Adam” was composed of body (dust), soul (breath) and spirit (image of God), and began his existence in full spiritual fellowship with God. His flesh had normal appetites, but his spirit was still in control of his body. He was not helplessly overwhelmed by temptation as we are now. But once he rebelled, the power of the Holy Spirit left him; he became spiritually “naked” and alone. Once that break in relationship took place, Adam and all his children became helpless victims of temptations too great for us to resist. And that was true of every human until “the Word became flesh.”

Paul calls Jesus the “Last Adam” because He came to earth and became a man in a spiritual condition similar to Adam’s before he fell. Jesus experienced the same temptations we experience, but like the “first Adam” before he sinned, Jesus’ spirit was not separated from God. His temptations were real, and because He did not yield to them, they were more ferocious than ours. He could have sinned, but He did not; He resisted; He remained holy so that when He died, death had no right to hold Him. Death gets a “grip” on us when we sin, but Jesus never sinned, which made Him the one unique Person who could become our substitute.

Our perfect substitute

No one else could do this. No one, no human or angel, is capable of meeting the God-ordained standards which were established at the moment of creation. Either God would send His Son, or the human race would perish, not because God is a harsh judge, but because we humans have sold ourselves into a terrible bondage, and there are righteous laws that demand our death.

But God did send His Son. The “Word of God” became flesh and tabernacled among us so that He could become the “Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world,” so that the “life in Him” could become “the Light of Men.”

Children of God (Jn 1:12-13)

God’s goal has never changed. He created the human race because He wanted “children.” Yes, He always had a begotten Son, but the love the Father and Son share is limitless, so it overflows. The Father longed for more sons and daughters to fill His household, and because we had sinned, He sent His Son to die for us, and because Jesus loves the Father and us, He willingly came so He could give those who believe in Him “the right to become children of God.”

Excerpt from *Preaching Through John*, “Trusting the Father” (Jn 1:18)

I don’t think anyone goes through life without experiencing events that make us ask the question, “Where was God?” We’ve all prayed prayers that seem to go unanswered. We’ve all observed suffering and evil that seem to go unopposed. But to be fair, we’d have to admit that we’ve also seen things that are beautiful and very good, and that there have been times our prayers were answered quickly and powerfully. Yet it’s the apparent failures and the darkness that seem to capture our attention. And whether we admit it or not, those things can shake our faith. They can make us question the goodness of God.

And there’s something else that can shake our faith in the goodness of God. It’s those passages in the

Bible that tend to make Him look cruel or unfair, particularly in the Old Testament. Yes, such passages also exist in the New Testament, but since most are in the Old Testament, some people have concluded that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. Some assume that it's God the Father whom we meet in the Old Testament, and that God the Son, whose name is Jesus, only arrives in the New Testament. And this Jesus seems to have a very different personality from His temperamental Father. He's kind, loving and merciful while the Father is... well, mean. If that view of the Father becomes part of a person's thinking, it becomes very hard to trust Him. The bold statement of John 3:16 comes as a shock: "For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son." We might think of Jesus as loving us, but we don't think of the Father the same way. He's the One who does all those mean things in the Old Testament, yet John 3:16 says our salvation is the Father's idea and that He sent Jesus because He loved every human being so much. So who is He really? Is He mean, or is He loving like Jesus?

Today, using only one verse, John will reveal a truth that destroys false assumptions about the Father and the Son. He explains something that will help us trust our heavenly Father even when bad things happen, even when we read passages in the Bible that we find troubling. This single truth will steady us when doubts try to shake our confidence in the goodness of God. What an important verse! Let's look at it carefully.

Read John 1:18

The only begotten God

Jesus is not the Father. But as John has shown us, He came forth from the Father and is as fully God as His Father. When He became a man and lived among us, He made the invisible Father visible. He "explained" Him. That means Jesus is the supreme revelation of the heart and character of God. He is just like the Father, and the Father is just like Jesus. That's why when confusion arises, and I begin to doubt the character of God, I can always come back to this truth: I can trust the God I cannot see because I trust His Son whom I have seen.

Whom did they see?

If we look closely at this verse, we'll also discover that John is revealing another truth. He says the Father has never shown Himself to the human race, yet the Old Testament records numerous appearances of a divine Person, a Person people worshiped and even called God. If it wasn't the Father, then who was it?

And John is not alone in making that statement. Jesus said the very same thing. Listen:

"And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form" (Jn 5:37).

And again:

"Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father" (Jn 6:45-46).

Paul calls Jesus "the image of the invisible (unseen) God" (Col 1:15). In a burst of praise in a letter to Timothy, he addressed the Father as "the King, eternal, immortal, invisible (unseen)..." (1Ti 1:17).

Explaining God

In other words, Jesus does not suddenly appear in the New Testament. As the pre-incarnate Son of God He was the divine Person people met in the Old Testament, and as we said earlier, that revelation changes the way we think about the Father and the Son. It means we can't picture the God of the Old Testament one way and Jesus of the New Testament another way, and that raises an important question of its own: How can we reconcile some of the very troubling passages we find in the Old Testament with the loving Son of God we meet in the New Testament? And the answer to that question has everything to do with the truth John is declaring in this verse. He says Jesus "explains" God. That means when I see Jesus, I am seeing the supreme revelation of the heart and character of God. And when I read passages that don't make sense to me, I can always come back to this fact. It allows me to say, "I don't understand why that happened, or why God felt it necessary to do that, but I still trust Him. There must be a good reason, and I just don't know it yet, but I do know this: He's a good God, and He never changes." Rather than find fault with Him every time I come across a tough passage or something bad happens in life, I can choose to trust my heavenly Father and put that matter aside until the day He explains it to me.

Reading the Old Testament

Because John has revealed these truths to me, I am able to read the entire Old Testament differently. I know Jesus is there too, and His heart is unchanged. And when I come across difficult passages, I now assume that there are reasonable explanations for what I am reading, that if I could see the situation from God's perspective, and my heart were as good as His, I would recognize that what He did or said was right in each case. What may seem to me on the surface to be unfair or cruel was indeed necessary for reasons I don't recognize yet.

I also know I must be careful to distinguish between things God specifically told people to do and those things which the Bible simply reports that they did. If we look closely, we'll see that there were a lot of events in the Bible that God doesn't endorse or recommend. The Bible simply says they happened. The same holds true for things people said. Not everything said in the Bible is supposed to be heard as, "Thus sayeth the Lord!" Many times what we have is simply a record of words someone happened to say, but that doesn't mean that God wanted him or her to say it or agrees with what was said. Some statements are simply part of a history God wanted recorded so we would understand why things are the way they are.

The world of the Old Testament was a very different world from the one we live in now. It was a wild, primitive world, and people didn't have access to the Bible or the power of the Holy Spirit like we do. During much of the era of the Old Testament, people didn't have access to many of the books of the Old Testament because they hadn't been written yet. Most humans were full of wrong attitudes and had invited powerful demonic spirits into their lives, and those spirits weren't a figment of their imaginations. Meanwhile, God was preparing a nation who would walk in faith with Him and through whom He could send His Son into the world as its Savior.

God has put spiritual laws in place that not even He can ignore. And a very important example of this is the freedom He gave to humans to choose whether or not to repent and believe, and He won't take that freedom away. So there is a real war going on between dark and light, good and evil. God does not manipulate this world as if people and events are simply His puppets. Of course He is directing history toward an ultimate end, but meanwhile He's fighting to save as many souls as possible, and at times the process can seem cruel. But that's not because He's that way; it's because there's an enemy

who's evil and powerful, and humans have given that enemy a deep hold on their minds and bodies.

Choosing to trust

When what we see doesn't match the Person we know, we can choose to trust the Person we know. Humans sometimes surprise us and do things we never thought they were capable of doing, but God is not like a human. He doesn't change, and there is no dark, hidden side to His heart (Jas 1:17). When He sent His Son, Jesus, the Father completely revealed His heart to us, and it's a heart we can trust. It's not only a good heart; it's a heart that is far better than ours. How do we know this? We've seen Him in a way that we humans can finally understand. The "Word," the divine Son, became a man. Such truth is amazing; it's humbling, but most of all it's comforting. It means no matter what, we can trust our heavenly Father. Listen:

"Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, "Show us the Father?" Do you not believe that I am in the Father (perfectly representing Him, expressing His nature, submitted to His will), and the Father is in Me (guiding, empowering, revealing Himself)? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works'" (Jn 14:8-10).

We don't know if Philip really understood what Jesus was trying to show him at the time, but the important question for us today is do you and I? Because if we do, this revelation will protect and strengthen us for the rest of our lives.

Excerpt from *The Promise of the Father*, pp. 20-21

It is when we come to the gospel of John that the person and role of the Holy Spirit are seen most clearly. Through John we hear Jesus announce that after He has been raised from the dead, His disciples would have God's presence dwelling within them by means of the Holy Spirit (Jn 4:14; 7:37-39; 14:16-20, 23). And it's in John's gospel that we hear Him describe the Holy Spirit as a person distinct from the Father and Himself. In John 14:16 He makes that distinction indisputably clear. He refers to the Holy Spirit as "another Helper" (Greek: *allon parakleton*) using the Greek word which means "another of the same kind" (*allos*) rather than the word which means "another of a different kind" (*heteros*). And He repeatedly uses the masculine, demonstrative pronoun ("that one") when referring to the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). He promises His followers that He will ask the Father for the Spirit so that He can send Him to them (Jn 14:16). And then after being resurrected He breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit," symbolizing that the Holy Spirit would be given to them through Him (Jn 20:22), and that the gift began to arrive on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:1-4).

And here is an important point to remember: Since Jesus is the only-begotten God (Jn 1:14, 18), the divine Son, who came from heaven to become a man (Jn 3:13, 16), when He reveals a spiritual truth, those of us who believe in Him must consider that truth to be a settled matter. So whether or not we fully understand all that He has revealed to us about the Holy Spirit, we still choose to believe everything He said. And He said the Holy Spirit is another person of God, distinct from the Father and Himself. So though there are many passages in the Bible that teach us about the Holy Spirit, it is Jesus Himself who finally removes all doubt that there are three persons within the presence and power whom we call God: There is a Father from whom all things have come and for whom all

things exist; there is a Son who was begotten by the Father and so fully shares His divine nature; and there is a Holy Spirit who is also fully divine but whose origin remains a mystery. In John 15:26 Jesus gives us one of the most revealing statements found in Scripture. He says the Holy Spirit, whom He calls “the Spirit of Truth,” proceeds from the Father. The Greek literally reads: “He goes out from beside the Father.” We learn from this verse that the Holy Spirit has been sent to us from the Father, through the Son, and that His presence within us enables us to represent and declare Jesus accurately and powerfully (Jn 15:26-27; 16:13-15).

Once we recognize that Jesus has revealed that our God is a community of three persons who are all of the same divine nature and capacity, then we must recognize that each of those persons has a different role. The Father is the Source of all things and the One for whom all things exist, which is why the goal of the entire Bible is to restore our relationship with Him. The Son is the One through whom the Father spoke creation into existence (Jn 1:2-3, 10) and to whom, because of His willing sacrifice of Himself on the cross, the Father now commands all creation to submit (Php 2:9-11). And as the resurrected Lord He is now in the process of bringing all creation into submission to Himself so that when His work is finished, He can present a restored creation back to the Father so that the Father will receive the supreme honor that belongs to Him (1Co 15:24-28). The Holy Spirit is the One by whom many of the works of God are performed, whether it be the creation of the material world, the forming of godly character in a believer’s life, the provision of supernatural gifts to enable the believer to minister effectively, or the glorious transformation of this planet in the age to come. He is the “Hand” of God by whom these works are accomplished. And it is His presence within us that continually assists our human spirit to pray accurately (Jn 14:20, 23; Ro 8:26-27). He is the One who actively comforts, guides, convicts and counsels us, but He does so in such a way that our experience of God is seamless. Because there is perfect unity between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is no difference between them in will, capacity or character. Among them there is only one will, and that is the will of the Father. The Son constantly points us to the Father, and the Holy Spirit constantly helps us understand and obey the Son. So we experience God as one, consistent person. And as we’ve seen, Scripture shows that within this One, whom we call God, there is a community of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are one in nature and one in purpose.

Restoring what was lost

You and I were designed by God to live in the presence of the Holy Spirit like fish immersed in water. He placed the first man and woman in a garden full of His presence, and the beautiful light of that presence may have served to “clothe” them because they didn’t discover they were naked until after they sinned (Ge 3:7). By making them in His own image and likeness, God made them intelligent, rational and (initially) pure beings. He gave them the capacity to make choices, whether right or wrong, as well as genuine emotions so they could feel joy, sorrow and, above all, love. But with that gift of freedom came the danger that they would not obey Him. Yet because His goal for them was that they would become truly good, not just innocent, they had to be given the opportunity to make moral choices. It’s very important to note that God did not create humans without a will or place them in an environment where they had no opportunity to disobey.

Excerpt from *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, Revised, p. 74:

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God—And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Son of God, begotten of the Father, light of light,

very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father—And we believe in the Holy Ghost, who is the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and Son, is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.

3. The cross is the center point of history. God saw the cross before He created the universe (Eph 1:3-6).

4. How were people saved before Jesus Christ came? By repentance and faith in the true God, just as we are now. Before Jesus, people didn't know how God would make atonement for their sins but they knew it required the death of an animal as a substitute for their death. So by faith they confessed their sins, transferred them onto the animal by laying their hands on the animal, killed the animal and burned it on an altar as a way of asking for mercy. They believed that as the smoke of their offering went up, God would hear their plea and forgive them.

5. Now, after the cross and resurrection, and after the gospel has come to us, we still repent and believe, but we do so with much more knowledge about how God made our atonement possible. Now we know about Jesus and have the Word of God so our repentance and faith are filled with much more understanding.

- The Lord's Supper
- There is a difference between atonement and forgiveness. Forgiveness means I am released from my penalty. Atonement means someone else paid my penalty.