

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Why do we Baptists believe what we believe? What makes us any different from our Catholic friends or the Church of Christ or any other Christian denominations out there? Over the next 13 weeks we'll be looking at key Baptist doctrines. We're not going to talk about petty things like dancing and drinking. Instead, we are going to focus on those beliefs we hold near and dear to our faith.

We Baptists view the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. So that will be our primary source for what we believe. I will also make reference occasionally to the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), which is basically a statement of faith. We will look at both, but the Bible will be our primary source.

Why take the time to do this? Our church has a new member's orientation class. Isn't that enough? I feel like it's important every now and then that we are reminded of God's truth and how it applies to our life as believers. A study like this reinforces what we say that we believe. I have provided a handout. I encourage you to follow along. You can answer the questions and fill in the blanks if you want to, or not. This is mainly for your reference.

THE TRINITY

The Trinity. You've heard the term before. It refers to God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. *[Question 1]* The term "Trinity" **is not** found in the Bible. But the concept of the Trinity is certainly scriptural. Tertullian, a 3rd Century theologian, was the first to use the term Trinity to explain that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are, as he put it, "one in essence - not one in Person."

Genesis Chapter 1, the very beginning of the Bible starts like this: “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” (Genesis 1:1-2).

[Question 2] This passage speaks of the original creation of the earth. It records that **God the Father**, by speaking, created the physical world into existence. The Old Testament views God as being the Father in most cases. At creation you also see **God the Holy Spirit** (the “Spirit of God”) hovering over the waters.

So then, we see that the Father and the Holy Spirit were involved in the original creation. What about the Son? Well, I’m glad you asked. Go to John Chapter 1 for that, which parallels Genesis Chapter 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 [the Father]. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3). And then you skip ahead to verse 14 and John tells us who the Word is: “And the Word became flesh [human] and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

[Question 3] This passage tells us that the creation of the world also involved the work of **God the Son**, the “Word” as John calls Him, who later became flesh. John, of course is speaking of Jesus, who was with God and was God from the beginning. So clearly, all three persons of the Trinity were involved in creation.

In the Bible we see many times where the three Persons of the Trinity interact with each another. It happens a lot throughout the Bible. We just talked about one of them, creation.

[Question 4] I’ve given several other examples from the New Testament – 2 Corinthians 5:19, Matthew 3:16-17, John 14:16-17 and Luke 4:18. Look those up and answer them on your own. It is

interesting to see the interaction between the three Persons of the Trinity.

For centuries people have tried to explain the unique nature of the Trinity. But here's the problem - nothing we see, touch, feel or even think can adequately explain the concept of the Trinity. The two analogies that come to mind which people try to use to explain the Trinity are: (1) the various roles I as one person act in - I'm a husband, I'm a brother and I'm a grandfather all at the same time. Well, that analogy falls short because the Trinity is more than just one person assuming three roles. GOD is three distinct persons interacting as one; (2) water, H₂O - it can exist as either a liquid, solid or a vapor. But this analogy is also weak because water cannot take on all three of these forms at the same time. So then, nothing that we can see really explains the nature of the Trinity. And that answers the next question.

[Question 5] True or false? We can explain the concept of the Trinity by using earthly analogies. I just said that we CANNOT. So, the first one is **False**. If you study the history of the church, during the first few centuries a number of theologians tried to describe the nature of the Trinity. The result was that a number of heresies sprang up that were later denounced.

True or false? The three Persons of the Trinity are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We've already established this, so it is **True**.

True or false? The three Persons of the Trinity work independently of one another. We just said that they work together interacting with each other, NOT independently. So, that one is **False**.

True or false? The one God functions as three distinct Persons. We saw that this is **True**.

I want to go to the Baptist Faith and Message and see what it says about the Trinity. It's interesting that it doesn't actually call

the three persons the Trinity. It says “the triune God.” Same thing. Here’s what it says under the heading “God”: “The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.” So, there you have a summary of the Trinity. It is not an easy concept to grasp, but it’s an essential one.

GOD THE FATHER

This Trinitarian concept of one God being three distinct persons is not really clear in the Old Testament. The language is there, but it is rather veiled. You have verses like Genesis 1:26 where God speaks to Himself in the plural and says, “Let US make man in OUR image.” You have references to the Spirit of God (Genesis 6:3) and even to the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11). You see a lot of times in the Old Testament where God’s Spirit comes on different people for various reasons. You have references to God the Son in Psalm 2:7 and 2:12. Many theologians point to pre-incarnate appearances of God the Son in passages such as Genesis 18:1 to Abraham, Joshua 5:13 to Joshua, and Daniel 3:24 in the fiery furnace. But even here the so-called experts disagree about those examples being Jesus appearing prior to becoming flesh. Some will say, “That’s Jesus” while others will say, “No, that’s something else.”

So, while the various Persons of the Trinity are certainly evident in the Old Testament, they are not real clear. The references are sort of fuzzy. It isn’t until the New Testament that the three Persons of the Trinity come into clear focus as three distinct Persons. The Old Testament talks about God generally as Yahweh (Jehovah), as the LORD God. Jesus talks about all three Persons in His teachings and then the other New Testament writers pick up on that and talk about the three Persons of the Trinity.

In the Gospels, Jesus spoke often about His Father. He called God His Father more than 50 times and the voice of God identified Jesus as His “beloved Son” twice (Matthew 3:17 at His baptism and Matthew 17:5 at the Transfiguration up on the mountain). So, in the New Testament you have the distinction between God the Father and God the Son. Yes, they are mentioned in Psalms, but their relationship becomes more clearly defined in the New Testament.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray... “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name’” (Matthew 6:9). Jesus wanted them (and us as His followers) to know God the Father as OUR heavenly Father.

In His own prayer life Jesus used the intimate, tender term, “Abba, Father” when talking to the Father (Mark 14:36). The English equivalent is “daddy” or “papa” or a similar term of endearment.

[Question 6] In John 20:21 Jesus spoke of being **sent** from the Father. In John 10:30 He spoke of being **one** with the Father. In John 4:34 He spoke of doing the **work** of His Father. Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” In other words, “My very essence, that which sustains me, the whole reason I’m here, everything I’m about is to do the work of the Father.” That’s what He is saying. In John 16:28 Jesus spoke of **returning** to His Father. He said, “I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” Jesus knows that He’s about to go to the cross but He’s promising His disciples that He will send a Helper.

This next section about God the Father is a subject we don’t like to talk very about very much. It’s the subject of discipline. Hebrews 12 tells us that it is God the Father who disciplines. As God’s children, when we disobey God, He must discipline us, just like any loving parent would discipline their children. Why did you

or why do you discipline children today? Because you love them and you're trying to prevent bad behavior; from making bad decisions and poor choices. You love them and don't want them to turn out to be rotten kids!

This is from Hebrews Chapter 12: "My son [and daughter], do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" (Hebrews 12:5-7). This is normal. If you are not disciplined, you are not really His children, verse 8. Earthly fathers discipline and the heavenly Father does as well. "For they [our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He [the LORD] disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). In verse 11 he adds "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" that we receive.

[Question 7] From this passage we know that the heavenly Father's discipline is:

(1) **always just**; Verse 5 in the New Living Translation says, "don't give up when He corrects you," He's correcting you for a reason, because you've done something wrong. So, don't look at it as a negative thing. Don't give up. He's trying to get you to do what is right.

(2) **always done for our own good**; Verse 10 says, "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness." Verse 11 adds that we have "the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

(3) **always done out of love**; Verse 6 says, "The Lord disciplines the one He loves." Verse 7 tells us that "God is treating you as sons." He is treating us as His sons and daughters, as His own children.

(4) **always fair**; Verse 6 says that God “chastises every son whom He receives.” God doesn’t play favorites. If you or I mess up, He’s going to chastise us. He will discipline us. I just wanted to point that out. While God’s discipline is not a subject that we like to talk much about, we need to understand this aspect of God’s character and how it relates to us.

In one of Jesus’s parables, Matthew Chapter 7, He uses these extremes to make a point about the nature of God the Father. It’s a good passage to read after having just looked at Hebrews 12.

Jesus is talking to His disciples about earthly fathers. He says, “Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:9-11).

[Question 8] So the answers to the question are **stone** and **serpent**. If an earthly father (who is imperfect and sinful) knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more does our loving heavenly Father give good gifts to His children?

[Question 9] God the Father is **more loving and gracious** to His children than an earthly father is to his children. It’s not even that He’s just as gracious. He’s more gracious! That’s the emphasis Jesus is making there about our heavenly Father. So then, we see this one side of Him as a disciplinarian. But we also see this loving and gracious side as well.

There is a person in the Old Testament that really had a good understanding of God’s nature and that was David. Psalm 145 paints this beautiful portrait of God the Father’s loving and gracious character. David describes God this way: “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Psalm 145:8).

David had great insight into the loving character of God. He had experienced firsthand God's grace and mercy. If you know anything about David's life, he had been chastised by God several times for doing things that weren't right. You can read the story about his life and his disobedience. He took a census one time which displeased God. Then of course, there was his sin with Bathsheba and then the killing of her husband Uriah. David did all these things that he shouldn't have done and was chastised multiple times for his disobedience. David knew that God would have been justified to have killed him for what he had done. But instead, God forgave David. That was mercy. Not only that but then God blessed David. That was grace. So, David understood first-hand this aspect of God's loving character.