

# “Reformed Basics”

2. God Himself





Holy, there is no one like You  
There is none beside You  
Open up my eyes in wonder

And I will build my life upon Your love  
It is a firm foundation

For I the LORD do not change;  
therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

# This topic draws on the Tradition



Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.13.2



Augustine: *On the Trinity*

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM**.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’” 15 God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The **LORD** [YHWH], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Ex 3:13-15)

And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The **LORD**’: [YHWH] And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. (Ex 33:19)

For I the **LORD** do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. (Mal 3:6)

# God is singular: there is no one like Him

- Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deut 6:4)
- To whom then will you liken God,  
or what likeness compare with him? (Isa 40:18)
- God cannot be compared to anything else.
  - Not a member of a category “God”
  - God exists in himself; he gives existence to all things
  - He exists necessarily and absolutely

# God is simple: He has no “parts”

- There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, **without body, parts, or passions**; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute... (WCF 2.1)

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# God is simple

God is not man, that he should lie,  
or a son of man, that he should change his mind.

Has he said, and will he not do it?

Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (Num 23:19)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,  
coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there  
is no variation or shadow due to change. (Jas 1:17)

All the perfections of God are really one thing. -Aquinas

# God's essential attribute

He is **a se**, of Himself, hence **aseity**

- God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. (WCF 2.2)
- The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength. (Isa 40:28–29)
- Because God depends on nothing outside Himself, he never tires

# God's relative attributes

God's effects on creatures vary as do the creatures

- God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. (WSC 4)
- The same sunlight has different effects upon things it hits. It causes plants to grow; it causes corpses to rot. (Turretin)
- God's attributes are not "in balance" or in competition with each other.
  - The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. (Psalm 145:17)

# “But God feels things all the time!”

- The word of the LORD came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” ... And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. (1 Sam 15:11, 35)
- Interpret the less plain Scriptures by the more plain:
  - “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel **will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.**” (15:28)
  - God is often portrayed **anthropomorphically**. Yet He reveals himself to be absolute.

# God is the Holy Trinity

The Lord Jesus is fully God.

- And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” … “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home. (Mk 2:5-11)
- “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” (Matt 8:26-27)
- So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM**.” (John 8:58-59)

# The Holy Spirit is also a divine Person

Not a mere “influence”

- While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)
- For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. (1 John 5:7-9)

# The Trinity: Church responds to God's revelation

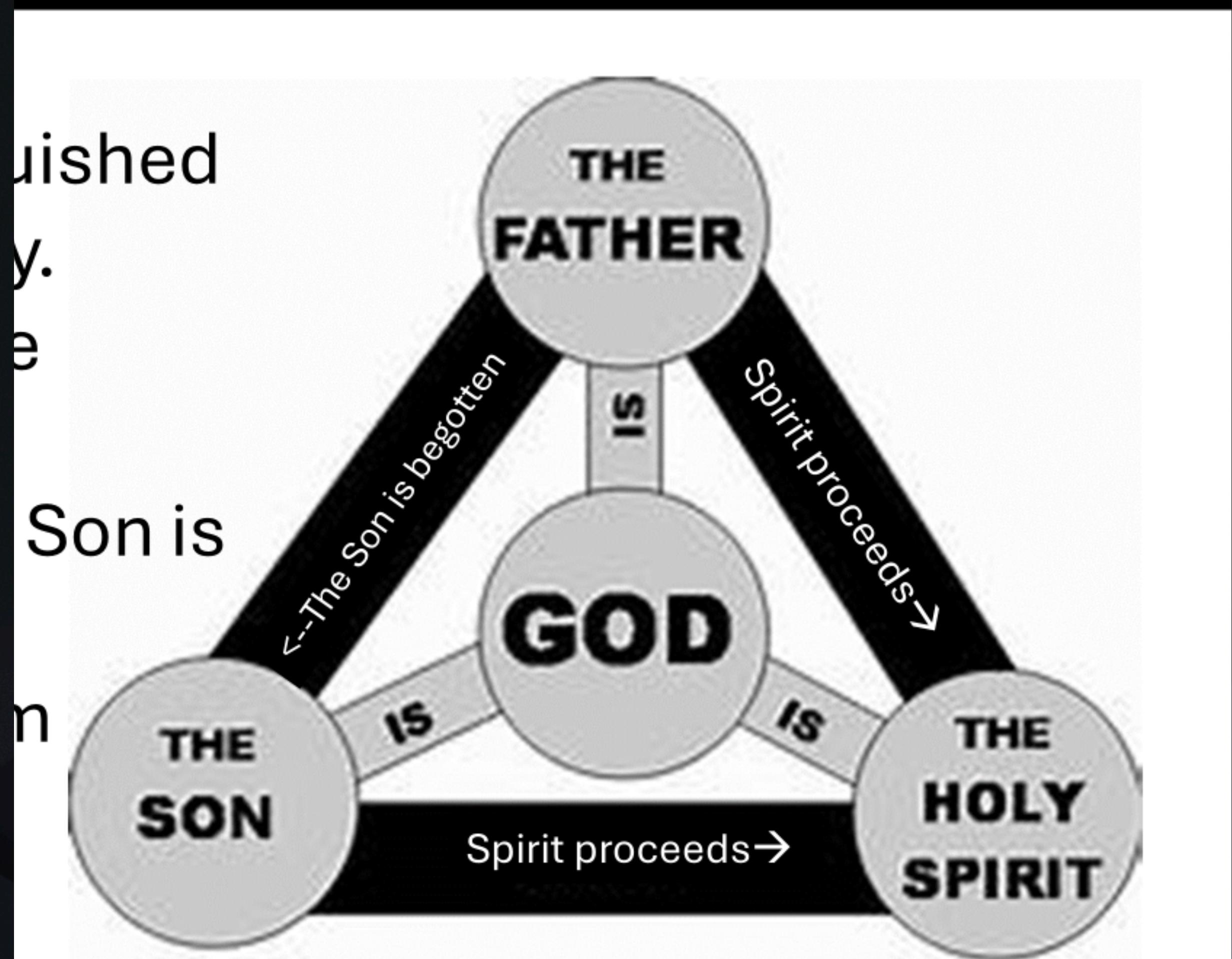
- The Father reveals Himself. The Lord Jesus identifies with YHWH. The Holy Spirit is God and personal.
- In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of **one substance**, power, and eternity:
  - God the **Father**, God the **Son**, and God the **Holy Ghost**:
  - the Father **is of none**, neither begotten, nor proceeding;
  - the Son is **eternally begotten** of the Father;
  - the Holy Ghost **eternally proceeding** from the Father and the Son. (WCF 2.3)

# One in substance

Persons distinguished by their relations

- One in substance: in being; in power (they act together); in eternity
  - Each Person is the one God, in all His fullness
  - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished by their relations.
  - Their relations to each other, not their relations to us

# Relations among the Persons



The One God acts according to each Person:  
the Father originates (plans, wills), the Son accomplishes, the Spirit applies.

# Errors to avoid

- **Tri-theism**: “there are three Gods”: we say that the Persons have only one essence
- **Modalism**: “God appears to act in different modes”: we say that the distinctions between Persons are real in God
- **Arianism** or subordinationism: “the Son is subordinate to the Father”: we say that the Persons have one will. “Relations of origin” not subordination.

# So what's the point of the Trinity?

- God has been characterized by relational, personal love for all eternity
  - The problem of the one-and-many is solved in God Himself
- Your salvation is a consequence of a cooperative plan all along:
  - The Father wills it (the Incarnation, the Atonement)
  - The Son accomplishes it
  - The Spirit applies it



For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. (Mal 3:6)