

Antioch School *Growing Disciples*

Christian Basics 3 Holy Spirit and Holy Trinity

The Holy Spirit

We have been thinking about how there is a God and how he has spoken in various ways, this self-revelation having become written down for us as Scripture. We have considered Jesus, the eternal Son of God who became the focus of revelation in human history “for us men and for our salvation.” We can grasp revelation in a human person, but how is God active in the world apart from the incarnation?

Deism was a popular view which arose in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Following the classical illustration of God as the clock-maker, used by Nicolaus of Oresmes in the fourteenth century, the Deists stated that God gave the world its initial impetus and then left it to run its course. As a result, divine providence, revelation and a supernatural scheme of salvation were all called into question. They believed in the evidence of nature that there is a God who started everything, but we are now alone to figure it all out.

That view is in strong contrast to the Biblical and Christian view. And the key to answering our original question lies in understanding the Holy Spirit.

The word “spirit” is *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. In both languages the same word is also used to refer to “breath” or “wind”. “The Spirit of the Lord” or “the Holy Spirit” refer to God invisible but always present and active in his creation and in the lives of people.

The *Nicene Creed* affirms, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.”

In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament the Spirit of the Lord is described as being active in creation. “The power of God (lit. the Spirit of God) was moving over the water” (Genesis 1.2; compare Job 33.4). The Spirit gives life. “God’s Spirit made me and gave me life” (Job 33.4; compare Genesis 2.7; Ezekiel 37.14).

The Spirit was at work in people in a variety of ways. He gave strength to Samson (Judges 14.6) and skill to Bezalel (Exodus 31.3). The Spirit of the Lord enabled Othniel and Jephthah to do their work as judges of the people (Judges 3.10; 11.29). He “took control of” the newly anointed David (1 Samuel 16.13).

Ezekiel says, “God’s Spirit entered me and raised me to my feet” (Ezekiel 2.2; 3.24) and describes his prophetic impulse in these words, “The Spirit of the Lord took control of me, and the Lord told me go give the people this message” (11.5a). The Spirit gave the message to other prophets too, such as Balaam (Numbers

24.2), Amasai (1 Chronicles 12.18), Zechariah son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24.20). Isaiah (61.1) and Micah (3.8) report similar experiences.

David, in repenting his sin with Bathsheba, feared the loss of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51.11). He had seen what had happened to Saul (1 Samuel 16.14) and knew that he needed the Holy Spirit to fulfil his task as king.

In these Old Testament references we see the Spirit filling specific people to enable them to do particular tasks. We do not read of the Spirit filling all of the Lord’s people, nor does that seem to be an expectation. There are, however, some references to a future time when this would be so. Ezekiel, for example, speaks to the Israelites – the Lord’s people who had disgraced his name and been taken into exile. “I will sprinkle clean water on you and make you clean from all your idols and everything else that has defiled you. I will give you a clean heart and a new mind. I will take away your stubborn heart of stone and give you an obedient heart. I will put my Spirit in you and see to it that you follow my laws and keep all the commands I have given you. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors. You will be my people and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36.24-28).

Joel also looks forward to a future time – “Afterwards I will pour out my Spirit on everyone: your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. At that time I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, both men and women... All who ask the Lord for help will be saved” (Joel 2.28-32, quoted by Peter in Acts 2.17-21).

In the New Testament



In the New Testament we begin to see a dramatic change. In the early chapters in the Gospels, the Spirit is still spoken of in an Old Testament manner (Luke 1.41,67). And, while Jesus himself was seen to be “full of the Holy Spirit” (4.1) and had been described by John the Baptist as the one who “will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (3.16c), the promised general out-pouring of the Spirit would not occur until after his suffering and resurrection. John makes this point in 7.39 after Jesus has spoken about streams of life-giving water pouring out from our heart, “Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believe in him were going to receive. At that time the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not been raised to glory.”

Jesus himself promised that the new era of the Holy Spirit would begin after those events. This is why they were to “wait in the city until the power from above comes down upon you” (Luke 24.49b). “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift I told you about, the gift my Father promised. John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1.4b-5; see also v.8). The words of Peter to the crowd at the first Christian Pentecost announce the new era – “Each of you must turn away from his sins and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God’s gift, the Holy Spirit. For God’s promise was made to you and your

children, and to all who are far away – all whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (2.38-39).

There are two particularly significant points about the New Testament teaching on and experience of the Holy Spirit – his universality among Christians and his bringing of strength for moral fulfilment.

First-century religions often held that a divine spirit would from time to time come upon men. But it was thought that this spirit would come only on a few notable people – akin to the way the Old Testament speaks about the Spirit. To be possessed by the spirit was a mark of superiority. But among Christians the presence of the Spirit was the characteristic mark. Paul wrote, “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are God’s sons. ...the Spirit makes you God’s children” (Romans 8.14,15). This reminds us of the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, “No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3.5). All of us have been “born out of water” (= “born physically”). Becoming a Christian involves a spiritual birth. So vital is this spiritual birth that Paul says, “Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Romans 8.9).

We note the incident recorded in Acts 19 where Paul met some Ephesian men described as “disciples” and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” (v.2) From Paul’s enquiry it became evident that these people had received the baptism of John as a sign of repentance but had not actually come to believe in Jesus who came after John (v.4). They were described as “disciples” and “believers”, but Paul could see that they were not in fact “Christians”. It was unthinkable that anyone should be a Christian and not have the Spirit.

(Incidentally, while we talk here about “having the Spirit”, it is really a question of whether the Spirit “has us”. Helmut Thielecke, a German theologian and preacher, observed in *Between Heaven and Earth* that no one in the Bible ever claimed to “be filled with the Spirit” – it was always something that others reported about them. He cautioned about speaking of the Spirit in a way that, in the end, is speaking about ourselves and not glorifying God at all!)

In the New Testament the church is regarded as a community indwelt by the Spirit of God. He is expected to be at work in believers constantly.

The second significant point about New Testament teaching on the Holy Spirit is that “the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control” (Galatians 5.22,23).

In the religions of the period generally, the presence of the divine spirit was expected to produce unusual ecstatic activity such as “whirling dervishes”. It was something new and radically different to see the Spirit’s presence revealed by the evidence of moral qualities. The New Testament Christians (and Christians today) experienced a wide range of “spiritual gifts” (see 1 Corinthians 12), but these were to be subordinated to love and the other “spiritual fruit” (v.31). We call the Spirit “Holy”, not simply to describe his nature, but to point to his particular function in the Christian life – to write the character of Christ into our personality. We need to recognise and exercise the gifts the Spirit gives us for

building up the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4.7-16). But they are never given to glorify us.

Apart from these two significant points, it is very important to note that the Spirit is personal, not a force or influence. Personal words are used of him (*parakletos*, “Helper”, is one of the words Jesus used – John 14.23-26). The activities associated with him are personal activities. He gives different gifts as he wishes (1 Corinthians 12.11). He leads believers and bears witness in them (Romans 8.14,16). He has knowledge (1 Corinthians 2.11) and thought (Romans 8.27). He loves (15.30), is made sad (Ephesians 4.30), pleads in prayer (Romans 8.26ff), cries out (Galatians 4.6). He is characterised by fellowship (2 Corinthians 13.13).

The New Testament writers clearly regard the Holy Spirit as divine. The linking of his name with the Father and the Son will be further considered as we think about the Trinity. Here we note that, in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), Peter speaks of a lie to the Holy Spirit in v.3 as a lie to God in v.4.

Jesus says the Spirit “comes from” the Father (John 15.26), is “given” by the Father at the Son’s request (14.16) and is “sent” by the Son.

At the Third Council of Toledo (589) the Western Church introduced the phrase *filioque* (Latin = “and the Son”) into the words of the *Nicene Creed* (they are bracketed in the back of the *Australian Hymn Book*). This became a matter of contention between the Western (or Roman) Church and the Eastern (Orthodox) Church and led to the first major division in the church in 1054. The Assembly of Uniting Church in Australia has agreed to delete these words as a gesture of love and fellowship towards the Orthodox Churches.

More important than the debate over the particular phrase is the understanding that the Spirit comes on people as a result of what Christ has done. We know and receive the Spirit only because we have been redeemed by Christ’s atoning death and brought into a whole new life in him. It is within that new life that we know the Spirit. This is the point that the *filioque* clause was protecting.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Already we have noted that in the Old Testament the Spirit is seen as God’s agent in Creation, as the one who gives special gifts to enable leaders, prophets, craftsmen... in their work, and as the promoter of holiness and spiritual life. John the Baptist spoke of a “baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3.11), alluding to the winnowing process – the separation of wheat from chaff and the burning of the chaff. We think of the Spirit here purifying and refining our character.

The teaching of Jesus is mainly found in his Last Supper discourses recorded in John 14-16. We have already briefly mentioned his particular reference to the *Parakletos*. This word literally means “one who is called alongside to help”. Jesus calls him “another Helper” (14.16). He would be all that Jesus had been to them, and yet even more. Jesus was restricted to one place at a time and was an “external” helper. It was to their benefit that Jesus left them so that the Spirit could come (16.7; cf 14.12). He will be not only “with you” but “in you” (14.17).

He is “the Spirit who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth” (16.13a). The apostolic church needed his teaching in a particular way as they came to understand the significance of Christ’s Person and Death, to carry the good news to the ends of the earth and to teach the converts how to live the Christian life. They also needed his help in being reminded of the words of Jesus himself (14.26b).

Jesus also described the Spirit as being at work in the lives of unbelievers for the purpose of bringing them to faith. “And when he comes, he will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin and about what is right and about God’s judgment. They are wrong about sin, because they do not believe in me; they are wrong about what is right, because I am going to the Father and you will not see me any more; and they are wrong about judgment, because the ruler of this world has already been judged” (16.8-11).

Paul’s letters recognise the work of the Spirit at every stage of personal Christian life. It is the Spirit who creates the faith by which people recognise and confess Jesus as Lord (1 Corinthians 12.3). The Spirit gives us the assurance that we are God’s children (Romans 8.16). The Holy Spirit is God’s “mark of ownership” on us (Ephesians (1.13). His work is to sanctify us, make us holy (Romans 15.16; 2 Thessalonians 2.13). He comes to help us in our weakness, “pleading with God for us in groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8.27). He produces the “fruit of the Spirit” in us (Galatians 5.22). The presence of the Holy Spirit is the first installment or “guarantee of all that he has in store for us” (2 Corinthians 1.22).

The Spirit has a special relation to the church, the Body of Christ. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that the diverse group of people become a body with a whole variety of gifts that can function together to nurture and build up the individual members, to enable the Body to grow and to fulfil the mission of Christ the Head in the world (see especially Ephesians 4.1-16; 1 Corinthians 12.12-31).

To return to our original question, God is active in the world through the Holy Spirit. If indeed he fashions us into the Body of Christ, this too is an incarnation through which the life of God will be active within this world.

For reflection...

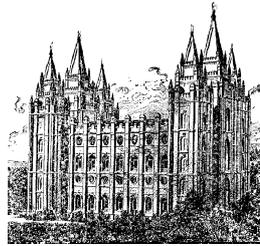
What is the difference between the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and in New Testament times?

Why is it important that the Holy Spirit is both personal and divine?

What is the significant of Pentecost for the church and for all believers?

- What is the significance of the Holy Spirit for my life as a Christian?
- What are the evidences of the Holy Spirit’s presence and activity in the church of today?

Understanding Mormonism



The “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” was founded by Joseph Smith (1805-1844) who was born in Sharon, Vermont. He was reared in ignorance, poverty and superstition. As early as 1820 and 1823 he claimed to have visions and divine revelations. It was in 1823 that the angel Moroni revealed to him the very spot where golden plates lay buried containing the history of ancient America in “reformed-Egyptian characters”. Smith did his “translation” of these plates with the aid of special spectacles known as “Urim and Thummim” provided by the angel and they were published as the *Book of Mormon* in 1830. The book contains some extensive quotations from the King James Version (1611), purports to give the story of ancient inhabitants of America, the ten “lost tribes” of Israel. Just as British Israelism looks to the fulfilment of promises to the northern kingdom of Israel in Britain, Mormonism sets up its own “scriptures” to support the same kind of fulfilment in America!

The *Book of Mormon* is officially recognised as being of equal authority with the Bible, though in practice it comes to have a higher place. There is strong evidence that it originates in Solomon Spaulding’s unpublished and stolen novel, *The Manuscript Found*, a piece of highly imaginative fiction which Spaulding’s neighbours later testified under oath to having heard read to them. Other sacred writings include *The Pearl of Great Price* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. The Mormon Church believe that the president of their church has a prophetic gift and may receive further revelations, all of which are accorded the same authority as Scripture.

Mormons deny most of the principal Christian doctrines. They reject the spirituality of God, claiming that God the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s. Further, they teach that there are a great many more gods in addition to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These are in an order of progression, some more advanced than others. They also teach that the gods were once men, and that men may become gods.

Mormonism teaches man’s pre-existence. All men existed as spirits before coming to earth. This pre-existent life was a period of probation. Those less faithful or less valiant are born on this earth with black sins. Further, in Mormon teaching, the fall of man is regarded as a fall upward for the benefit of the human race! “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2.25).

Though Christ is called divine, his divinity is not unique, since it is the same as that to which any man may attain. Nor is his incarnation unique, since all the gods, after having first existed as spirits, came to earth to receive bodies before they advanced to godhood. Salvation is said to be on the basis of works done in this life, not on the basis of Christ's atonement which only earns for all men the right to be raised from the dead.

The Mormon practice of polygamy which put them under strong persecution is still deeply held, though officially not practiced since 1889. A young Mormon missionary indicated recently that it will be practised again "when God commands it." The Mormon teaching is that marriage should be celebrated, not just for this life, but for eternity. The main task of the future life will be begetting spiritual children who may take human bodies. A man's glory in the future life depends on the number of wives he has, and a woman's place in eternity depends on her marriage. So, while polygamy may not be practised on earth at the moment, a Mormon man may go to a temple to be "sealed for eternity" with yet another woman with whom he feels an affinity.

Founded by Joseph Smith (1805-1844) who claimed visions and divine revelations.
1823 "golden plates" revealed.
1830 *Book of Mormon* published – says "10 lost tribes" of Israel came to America.
Key errors –

- Deny spirituality of God
- Accept three Gods + + +
- Teach human pre-existence
- Adam fell upward
- Christ not uniquely divine or incarnate
- Salvation by good works
- Polygamy

Holy Trinity

The Old Testament clearly teaches that there is one God. Yet the New Testament has shown us that Jesus Christ is God and that the Holy Spirit is God. In seeking to teach clearly what God has revealed of himself the church has formulated the doctrine of the Trinity – not the three Gods of Mormonism, nor Jehovah plus a lesser "god" called Jesus and a divine power called the Holy Spirit as Jehovah's Witnesses teach, but one God in three Persons.

Both the *Apostle's Creed* and *Nicene Creed* have a trinitarian framework. The Uniting Church sees the use of these creeds in worship "as acts of allegiance to the Holy Trinity" (*Basis* para.19).

John Wesley saw it as essential that believers grasp the fact of the Trinity rather than a particular explanation of it. He wrote (*Works*, VI. pp.205-206),

"The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith; with all vital religion.

"I do not say that every real Christian can say with the Marquis de Renty, 'I bear about with me continually an experimental verity, and a plenitude of the presence of the ever-blessed Trinity.' I apprehend this is not the experience of 'babes,' but rather 'fathers in Christ.'

"But I know not how any one can be a Christian believer till he 'hath,' as St. John speaks, 'the witness in himself,' till 'the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit that he is a child

of God;' that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son. And, having this witness, he honours the Son, and the blessed Spirit, 'even as he honours the Father.'

"Not that every Christian believer adverts to this; perhaps, at first, not one in twenty: But if you ask any of them a few questions, you will easily find it is implied in what he believes.

"Therefore, I do not see how it is possible for any to have vital religion who denies that these Three are One."

The belief that God is one, personal and triune is central to the Christian faith. It relates closely to belief in the personal nature of God, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the life in the Spirit, and finally to the relation of the redeemed to God in Christ. Trinitarian faith does not come from the early Church Fathers, but from the apostolic faith and teaching. The definitions produced through the debates of the first four centuries were the attempts of the church to grasp and express adequately the truths of divine revelation, and to guard against false teaching.

Biblical Teaching

The word "Trinity" does not itself occur in the Bible, but the doctrine is clearly implied.

The belief in one God is deeply embedded in both the Old and New Testaments.

What is known as the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6.4-9) is recited by the Jews as part of their daily prayer. It begins with the words, "Hear (Heb. *shema*), O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (NIV). This strongly and clearly states monotheism – there is only one God. It is reaffirmed many times throughout the Old Testament and is regarded as quite foundational for the Lord's people. In fact, much of the work of the prophets was directed to correcting these people when they turned away from the Lord to worship other gods instead of the Lord and when they tried to "have it both ways" – worshipping the Lord and other gods as well (notice the call of Elijah to the people in 1 Kings 18.21).

In the New Testament the oneness of God is reaffirmed. The words of the *Shema* are quoted approvingly by Jesus (Mark 12.29-31). James, concerned that faith proceed to a life of action, writes, "Do you believe there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe – and tremble with fear" (2.19).

While the doctrine of the Trinity has arisen from the fullness of revelation in the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament contains some interesting clues to plurality in this one God. The Hebrew word *El* means "god" in the widest sense, true or false, or even an image treated as a god (it is related to the Arabic word *allah*). It is used in talking about the Lord and is also combined with other words to form proper names – such as Bethel ("house of God").

But the word used most frequently is the plural form *Elohim* (some 2550 times!). Yet mostly it is treated as a singular and refers to God. Deuteronomy 5.9 in fact reads, "I the LORD (Yahweh) your God (*Elohim*) am a jealous God (*El*)."

Genesis 1.26 is striking – "Then God (*Elohim*) said, 'And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us.'" And 3.22 – "Then the LORD God (*Yahweh Elohim*) said, "Now the man has become like one of us..." Is this use of "we" and "us" just the royal plural?

Isaiah described the flaming creatures he saw in his vision calling out to each other, “Holy, holy, holy! The LORD Almighty is holy! His glory fills the world!” (6.3).

There are a number of other such “clues” in the Old Testament. They are, of course, just that – clues, not statements. More than that was not possible before the coming of God the Son into human history and the subsequent outpouring of God the Spirit on all his people.

Historically, the doctrine of the Trinity originated in the necessity Christians faced to distinguish Jesus from God, yet to identify him with God. While Jesus said, “The Father and I are one” (John 10.30) and “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14.9b), his prayer to the Father was real (Luke 6.12; John 17; Matthew 26.38) and his experience of separation from the Father on the cross was authentic (Matthew 27.46).

Jesus told his disciples to “baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28.19b) – three Persons are linked in one Name. And in the benediction of 2 Corinthians 13.13, the three Persons with their specific characteristics are linked in one blessing.

Through the Incarnation the first Christians learned to distinguish the Father and the Son while maintaining that both are God. The Fatherhood of God was known in the Old Testament. The distinctive New Testament teaching is that the Father and the Son are God, and that God is uniquely “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15.6; 2 Corinthians 1.3; Ephesians 1.3; 1 Peter 1.3).

Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity has originated from the truth of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is truly God the Son and distinctly God the Son (John 1.1,18; 20.28; Colossians 2.9; Titus 2.13; Hebrews 1.8,10).

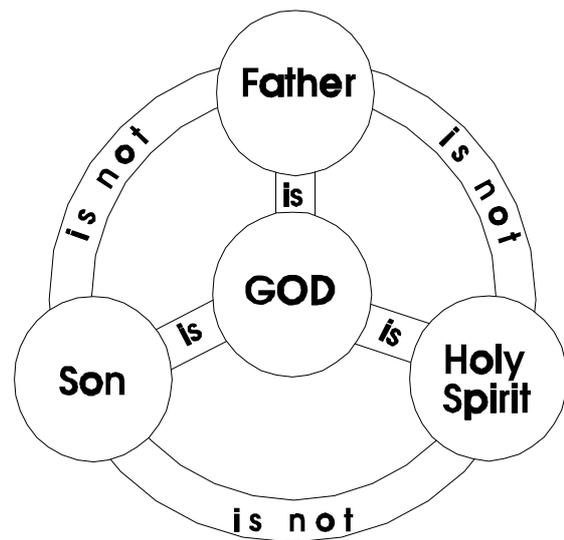
To complete the doctrine requires our understanding, not simply that the Holy Spirit is divine, but that he is personal and distinctly personal. To sin against the Holy Spirit is an “eternal sin” (Mark 3.29). When the disciples are brought before the authorities, “The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say” (Luke 12.12). Jesus spoke about him as “the Helper... who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father... he will speak about me” (John 15.26).

Three-in-One

In Session 3 and in the first part of this session, we have been made aware of the serious consequences for our understanding of God, his nature and his work if we do not fully grasp that Jesus is fully and truly God and that the Holy Spirit is fully and truly God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is really an attempt to express the various elements that together form the self-revelation of God. People have used a variety of illustrations, yet each is in some way unsatisfactory. St. Patrick used the shamrock with the Irish. Some have spoken of water in its solid, liquid and gaseous states. Others have drawn the comparison of our feeling, thinking and willing that together make one mind.

The diagram below is not intended to illustrate, but to set out the truths embodied in the doctrine. On the one hand, the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God. The three together are God, yet the three are distinguished – the Father is not the Son nor the Spirit, the Son is not the Father nor the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father nor the Son.



Perhaps it is also helpful to understand two Latin words used by the old theologians – *persona* (our “person”) and *substantia* (our “substance”). The *Athanasian Creed* (late fourth to fifth century) stated, “We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.” *Substantia* refers to the essential nature of the Godhead. *Persona* refers to the reality of each self-conscious Agent in the Trinity.

As John says, “God is love” (1 John 4.8b). Love is part of the Being of God in this Three-in-Oneness. He has made us in his image – with a capacity and need to love and to be loved.

For Reflection...

The German theologian Emil Brunner called the doctrine of the Trinity a “defence doctrine”. By this he meant that it gathers together a number of very important truths. All of them are basic to Christianity. Without any one of them, something serious is missing from our Christian faith. What are these truths?

Why are these truths so important?

- Reflect on your own life and the special ministry of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in your Christian experience.



Augustine of Hippo 354-430 A.D.

Augustine was born in 354 AD in Tagaste, a little town in what is now Algeria. His father, Patricius, was not a Christian, and had relatively little influence on him. His mother, Monica, was a devout Christian and played an important role in his life, even during the years when he rejected her Christianity.

In spite of limited means, his parents determined to give him the best education available. Thus, he went to school, first near home and then in the North African capital, Carthage.

From the time of his first visit to Carthage at the age of 16, he seldom lost an opportunity to pursue one sin after another, so he tells us in his *Confessions*. He took a mistress when he was 17 or 18 and fathered an illegitimate son before he was 20. They lived together for thirteen years. Augustine always felt that sex was his defiling passion. It coloured his view of sin and marked the depravity from which he later felt himself rescued by God's grace.

In his nineteenth year he read a treatise by the Latin author, Cicero, which convinced him intellectually that he should make truth his life's search. For a time he became interested in Manichaeism, a religious and philosophical system which claimed that two principles, Light and Dark, God and Matter, are eternal. It appeared to Augustine that this offered a superior answer to the problem of evil than he could find in his mother's Christianity. Also, because it made fewer moral demands, he could be a Manichean and continue to live as he pleased.

By his late twenties, he was beginning to have serious doubts about Manicheism. The leaders seemed unable to answer his questions. In 383 he crossed the Mediterranean to Rome with his mistress and son to teach rhetoric. But he left Rome for Milan in 384 for the more secure position of public orator. There he became friendly with Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who helped him to see that many of his objections to Christianity were based on misconceptions of the faith.

So Augustine rejected Manicheism to become a skeptic. During this period he studied the writings of the Platonists. This in fact helped to remove many of his remaining intellectual obstacles to becoming a Christian.

It was in 386, in a villa outside of Rome that he underwent a dramatic conversion (recorded in *Confessions*, book 8). After hearing a voice say, "Take up and read; take up and read," he picked up the volume of the Apostle - "I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell. 'No orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy. Take up the weapons of the Lord Jesus Christ; and stop giving attention to your sinful nature, to satisfy its desires.' I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of faith flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled."

In the years following his conversion, Augustine studied philosophy, theology and the Scriptures and wrote a number of short books. He was ordained in 391, and four years later was consecrated bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia in Roman North Africa.

In 400, he completed *The Confessions*. This is more than an autobiography - he was concerned that his readers understood the moral, intellectual and spiritual struggles he went through in his search for the truth about God and himself. He was using "confession" in two senses - to acknowledge his many sins, but also to glorify God who had delivered him from them.

Following the sacking of Rome in 410, he began writing *The City of God*. The major theme is the existence within the world of two cities or societies - the City of God and the City of Man. They coexist throughout human history and will only be separated at the final judgment so that they may go to their appropriate destinies.

Augustine's many other writings included a long and influential study of the Trinity. His writings massively influenced almost every sphere of Western thought in later centuries.



Next Week: The Body and Mission of Christ

- Acts 1.6-11
- Romans 12.1-8
- 1 Corinthians 12.1-11
- Ephesians 1.15-23
- 1 Corinthians 12.12-31
- Ephesians 4.7-16
- Ephesians 6.10-20