

**Worshiping the Holy Trinity**  
**Lesson 8: The Trinity Before Time**  
**Eternal Relations, Personal Properties, Trinitarian Order**

**I. Setup and Significance: Framing the Issue**

1. The Trinity is not Three Brothers
2. The Missions Reveal the Eternal Relations (i.e. the persons act in character)

**II. Eternal Relations and Personal Properties—Examining the Persons**

1. Three Elderly Guides and Three Personal Properties
2. The Father before Time
3. The Son before Time
4. The Spirit before time

**Quotations Used in the Lesson**

“In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit...

the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding;

the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;

the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son;

all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God,

who is not to be divided in nature and being,

but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations...

**-1689 Baptist Confession (2:3)**

“The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten.

The Son is from the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Ghost is from the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another; but the whole three persons are co-eternal together and co-equal.”

**-The Athanasian Creed (c. 6<sup>th</sup> century)**

“We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one substance with the Father...

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]”

**-The Nicene Creed of 381 (Western Version)**

“Q. 9. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.

Q. 10. What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?

A. It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity.”

**-Westminster Larger Catechism**

“One of the creeds says that Christ is the Son of God 'begotten, not created'; and it adds 'begotten by his Father before all worlds'...What does it mean?

We don't use the words *begetting* or *begotten* much in modern English, but everyone still knows what they mean. **To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself.** A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. **But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself.** A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set...

Now that is the first thing to get clear. What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is.”

**C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity***

We must think of the Son always, so to speak, streaming forth from the Father, like light from a lamp, or heat from a fire, or thoughts from a mind. He is the self-expression of the Father-what the Father has to say. And there never was a time when He was not saying it.

**C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*** (for the two books illustration, see the opening paragraphs of “Good Infection” in *Mere Christianity*)

It is difficult to describe what is meant by the procession of the Spirit of God; we can do little more than repeat the words of Scripture, since the Scriptures do not explain this term. But it is remarkable that the Bible does not say that the Holy Spirit was begotten by the Father, as was Christ, nor that he was begotten by Christ. If that were true, then as the Church Fathers intimated, the Spirit would have been either a brother to Christ or a grandson to the Father.

**Edwin Palmer, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*** (1958 A.D.)

“We have learned that there is a difference between generation and procession, but the nature of that difference we in no wise understand.”

**John of Damascus** (8th century church father)

“What then is Procession? Do you tell me what is the Unbegottenness of the Father, and I will explain to you...the Generation of the Son and the Procession of the Spirit, and we shall both of us be frenzy-stricken for prying into the mystery of God.”

**Gregory of Nazianzus** (4th century church father)

“God’s fecundity is a beautiful theme, one that frequently recurs in the church fathers. God is no abstract, fixed, monadic, solitary substance, but a plenitude of life. It is his nature (οὐσία) to be generative (γεννητική) and fruitful (καρπογονός). It is capable of expansion, unfolding, and communication. Those who deny this fecund productivity fail to take seriously the fact that God is an infinite fullness of blessed life. All such people have left is an abstract deistic concept of God, or to compensate for this sterility, in pantheistic fashion they include the life of the world in the divine being. Apart from the Trinity even the act of creation becomes inconceivable. For if God cannot communicate himself, he is a darkened light, a dry spring, unable to exert himself outward to communicate himself to creatures.”

**Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics***

