

# Who God Is

## THE HOLY TRINITY

We cannot discover God by human reason or insight: “Canst thou by searching find out God?” (Job 11:7). All we can know about Him is what He reveals about Himself: “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matt. 11:27).

The great question therefore is, “What does God have to say about Himself?” The

answer is simple to state but impossible fully to comprehend for in Scripture God has revealed that He is eternally a trinity-in-unity.

### Defining Our Terms

**Trinity.** Trinity means “three in one,” or *tri-unity*, and signifies that the single, simple (that is, not made up of or divisible into parts) divine essence exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Person.** In John Calvin’s words, a divine person is “a subsistence in the divine essence—a subsistence which, while related to the other two, is distinguished from them by incommunicable properties.” That is, each person of the Trinity has some characteristic that cannot be attributed to the other two.

### Deniers of the Trinity

Historically there has been much opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity. This unitarianism arose from the age-old folly of man demanding the right to define God in terms his own mind could comprehend. The folly in doing this is that it makes the mind of man in some ways superior to God. Early in church history three forms of unitarianism caused division in the church.

*Arians* taught that the Son of God was a created being, though the first and best of creatures. He existed prior to Christ’s birth in Bethlehem but He was not eternal.

*Dynamic Monarchians*, in later times known as Socinians, denied the deity of Christ, whom they held to be a mere man with no existence prior to His perfectly

natural birth in Bethlehem. They also denied the deity of the Holy Spirit, whom they reduced to a mere influence.

*Sabellians* held that *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* were different names for the one divine person under different relations or fulfilling different offices.

The great champion of the orthodox cause in the fourth-century battles for trinitarian orthodoxy was Athanasius. God favoured his crusade with success, but heretics persisted in their opposition. They were active throughout the Middle Ages and at the time of the Reformation. Some Anabaptists were unitarian, following the ideas of Faustus Socinus whose name has provided the common designation of unitarianism, *Socinianism*. Socinianism is the dogma of cults such as the self-styled “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” and of some denominations that have consciously given up historic Christian orthodoxy, such as Northern Ireland’s Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church. Sabellianism is the dogma of various (mostly Pentecostal) oneness or “Jesus Only” groups.

**One God, Not Three.** A common unitarian objection is that the doctrine of the Trinity makes three Gods, while the Scripture teaches, “There is one God.” Another objection is that God cannot be both one and three. Such objections either miss the point or set out to misrepresent the orthodox position.

The doctrine of the Trinity emphasizes the unity of the indivisible divine essence. Each trinitarian person possesses the undivided essence, not a fragment of it. To imagine the three persons of the Godhead each having a third of the divine essence is absurd, for infinity cannot be fragmented or fractionalized. As the *Shorter Catechism* puts it, “There are three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory” (Question 6).

### ***Three in One and One in Three.***

Again, the doctrine of the Trinity does not teach that God is one and three in the same sense. That would be a blatant contradiction. However, there is no contradiction in saying that God is one as to His eternal, spiritual essence and that that divine essence has three eternal modes of existence, each of which is spoken of in Scripture in personal terms.

Furthermore, we do not hold that God is three *and* one, but that He is three *in* one, and one *in* three. We state the doctrine this way, not because we can understand it, but because the Scripture data demand such statements.

### **Scripture Proof of the Doctrine of the Trinity**

To establish the doctrine of the Trinity we need prove only the following propositions from Scripture:

- ❖ *God is one.* “The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- ❖ *The Father is truly God.* “There is one God the Father” (1 Corinthians 8:6).
- ❖ *The Son is truly God.* “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1–3).
- ❖ *The Holy Spirit is truly God.* In Acts 5:3 Peter describes the sin of Ananias and Sapphira as lying to the Holy Ghost and in verse five states that this was lying to God.
- ❖ *Yet the Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Father; and neither of them is the Holy Spirit.* Consider the following evidence:

*Genesis 1:26:* “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

This is the language of consultation. With whom is God taking counsel? We answer, with Himself, in the persons of the blessed Trinity. Some object that He is consulting with angels. Absurd! Where do

the Scriptures ever teach that angels had a part in the creation of man? They do teach, however, that the divine persons in the Godhead were active in creation (see Genesis 1:2, referring to the Holy Spirit, and John 1:1–3, referring to the Son). Genesis 1:27 proves that God consulted with Himself and not with angels: “So God created man in his own image”—with no mention of angels at all.

If God consulted with Himself, what can the significance of the *us* be, except to emphasize a real plurality of persons in the Godhead?

*Isaiah 48:16:* “The Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me.”

The context after Isaiah 48:12 shows that the speaker is Messiah. He is clearly a divine person (v. 12 compared with Revelation 1:8, 11–13). In verse 16 He says, “From the time it was, there am I and now the Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent me.” What stronger evidence could be given of three divine persons—the Lord God (the Father), His Spirit, and *me* (Messiah, the Son).

In many other Scriptures we find the Father speaking to the Son and vice versa, proving that the Father and the Son are so far distinguished as to be able to hold conversation one with another.

Thus we have the glorious truth of the Trinity—one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each indwelling the other and each possessing, not in part, but entirely, the infinite essence of the one divine being. Contemplating such a majestic mystery we can only cry out with heaven’s seraphim, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:3). ■

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