

# Theology

## *The Trinity*



# God in Three Persons: The Trinity

How can God be three persons, yet  
one God?

# Introduction

The previous lessons have covered many attributes of God. However, if we only understand His attributes, we will not rightly understand God, since God has always existed as three persons, yet He is one God.

It is important to remember the doctrine of the Trinity in connection with the study of God's attributes. In thinking of God as eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, etc., people often tend to think only of God the Father having these attributes.

The Bible teaches us that all of God's attributes are true of all three persons, because each is fully God. Thus, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are also eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely loving, omniscient, and so forth.

# The Trinity

**Trinity** (“tri-unity” or “three-in-oneness”) means that the one divine nature of God is a unity of three persons, that God is revealed as three *distinct* persons, and that these three are equal: **Father, Son** and **Holy Spirit**.

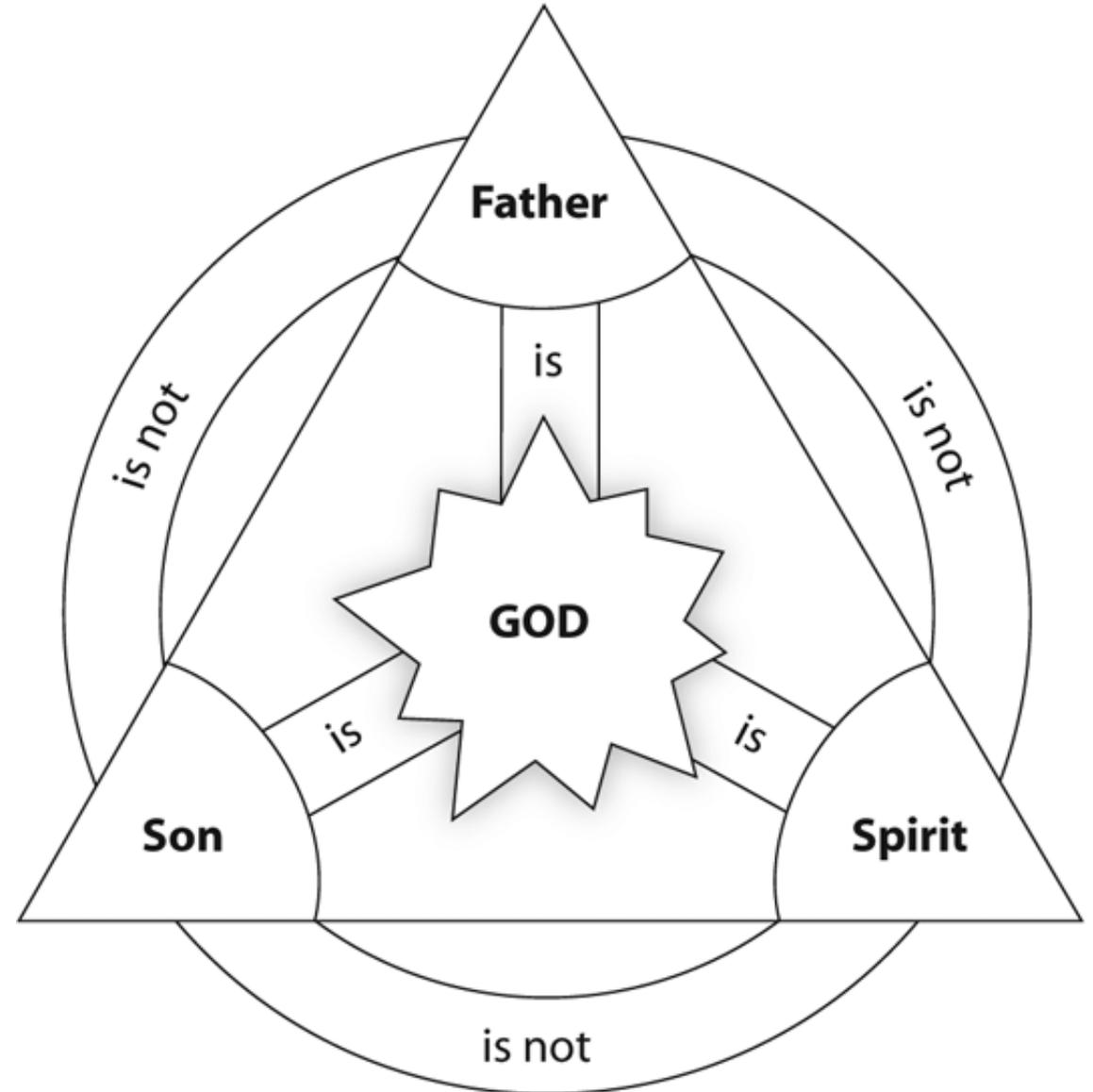
The ultimate basis for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity lies in the divine self-disclosure in Jesus, who as the Son revealed the Father and poured out the Holy Spirit.

This tri-unity of the Godhead is exclusively a truth of revelation. The word *trinity* is never found in the Bible, though the idea represented by the word is taught in many places.

# The Trinity

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Ancient Diagram of the Holy Trinity



# Doctrine of the Trinity

In one sense the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we will never be able to understand *fully*. However, we can understand something of its truth by summarizing the teaching of Scripture in three statements:

1. God is three persons.
2. Each person is fully God.
3. There is one God.

# Essential Elements of the Doctrine of the Trinity

## #1 - *God is three persons*

**The Father is not the Son; the Father is not the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Holy Spirit. They are all distinct persons.**

- [John 1:1-2](#). The fact that the Word (who is seen to be Christ in [vv. 9-18](#)) is “with” God shows distinction from God the Father.
- [John 17:24](#). This verse shows distinction of persons, sharing of glory, and a relationship of love between the Father and the Son before the world was created.
- [John 14:26](#). Here, the Holy Spirit (the Helper) will be sent by the Father. Also, [Rom. 8:27](#) shows that the Holy Spirit intercedes (prays) for us. These verses show a distinction between the Holy Spirit and God the Father.
- [John 16:7](#). This passage indicates that Christ went back to heaven and then sent the Holy Spirit to the church.
- [Matt. 28:19](#); [1 Cor. 12:4-6](#); [2 Cor. 13:14](#); [Eph. 4:4-6](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#). These verses indicate the Holy Spirit in a coordinate relationship with the Father and the Son.
  - N.B. [2 Cor. 3:17](#) has puzzled people. Interpreters often assume that “the Lord” here must mean Christ because Paul frequently uses “the Lord” to refer to Christ. But that is probably not the case since a good argument can be made from grammar and context to say that this verse is better translated with the Holy Spirit as subject, “Now the Spirit is the Lord.” In this case, Paul would be saying that the Holy Spirit is also “Yahweh” (or “Jehovah”), the Lord of the Old Testament (note the clear Old Testament background of this context, beginning at v. 7). Theologically this would be acceptable, for it could truly be said that just as God the Father is “Lord” and God the Son is “Lord” (in the full Old Testament sense of “Lord” as a name for God), so also the Holy Spirit is the one called “Lord” in the Old Testament—and it is the Holy Spirit who especially manifests the presence of the Lord to us in the new covenant age.

# Essential Elements of the Doctrine of the Trinity

## #2 - *Each person is fully God*

### God the Father is clearly God.

This is evident from the first verse of the Bible, where God created the heaven and the earth. It is evident through the Old and New Testaments, where God the Father is clearly viewed as sovereign Lord over all and where Jesus prays to his Father in heaven.

### God the Son is fully God.

- [John 1:1-4](#) clearly affirms the full deity of Christ. This text echoes the opening words of [Genesis 1:1](#) and reminds us that John is talking about something that was true before the world was made. God the Son was always fully God.
- [Colossians 2:9](#) affirms that the “whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” in Christ.
- [Heb. 1:3](#). Here the author says that Christ is the “exact imprint” of the nature or being of God—meaning that God the Son exactly duplicates the being or nature of God the Father in every way: whatever attributes or power God the Father has, God the Son has them as well. The author goes on to refer to the Son as “God” in [v. 8](#) and in [v. 10](#) (quoting [Ps. 102:25](#)) he attributes the creation of the heavens and the laying of the foundation of the earth to Christ.
- Other important references: [Rom. 9:5](#); [Isaiah 9:6](#); [Matt. 3:3](#) (which echoes [Isaiah 40:3](#)).

### God the Holy Spirit is fully God.

- [Matt. 28:19](#) shows the Holy Spirit classified on an equal level with the Father and the Son. Note also the other Trinitarian passages: [1 Cor. 12:4-6](#); [2 Cor. 13:14](#); [Eph. 4:4-6](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#); [Jude 20-21](#).
- [Acts 5:3-4](#). According to Peter’s words, to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God.
- [John 3:5-7](#). The activity of giving new birth to everyone who is born again is the work of the Holy Spirit, but the work of giving new spiritual life to people when they become Christians is something that only God can do (cf. [1 John 3:9](#)).

The Father is recognized as authoritative and supreme ([1 Cor. 8:6](#)); the Son is also recognized as equal to the Father in every respect ([John 5:21-23](#)); the Spirit is likewise recognized as equal to the Father and the Son (see [Matt. 12:31](#)). The function of one member of the Trinity may for a time be subordinate to one or both of the other members, but that does not mean he is in any way inferior in essence. Each of the three persons of the Trinity has had, for a period of time, a particular function unique to himself. This is to be understood as a temporary role for the purpose of accomplishing a given end, not a change in status or essence. The Son did not become less than the Father during his earthly incarnation, but he did subordinate himself functionally to the Father’s will. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is now subordinated to the ministry of the Son (see [John 14-16](#)) as well as to the will of the Father, but this does not imply that he is less than they are.

# Essential Elements of the Doctrine of the Trinity

## #3 - *There is one God*

**There is one and only one God. The three different persons of the Trinity are one in purpose and one in essence. God is only one being. There are not three Gods. There is only one God.**

- [Deut. 6:4-5](#); [Ex. 15:11](#); [1 Kings 8:60](#); [Isa. 45:5-6](#); [Isa. 45:21-22](#); [Isa. 44:6-8](#) - these OT verses all point to the fact that there is one God and He is unique. There is no one like Him and there can be no one like Him.
- [1 Tim. 2:5](#); [Rom. 3:30](#); [1 Cor. 8:6](#); [James 2:19](#) - The same is confirmed in the NT.
- Oneness in essence also emphasizes that the three Persons of the Trinity do not act independently of one another. This was a constant theme of Jesus in rebuffing the charges of the Jews (see [John 5:19](#); [8:28](#); [12:49](#); [14:10](#)).
- This unity within three Persons is seen in Old Testament passages such as [Isaiah 48:16](#) where the Father has sent the Messiah and the Spirit to speak to the restored nation. In [Isaiah 61:1](#) the Father has anointed the Messiah with the Spirit for His mission. These references emphasize both the equality and the unity of the three Persons.

# Conclusion: Doctrine of the Trinity

In the final analysis, the Trinity is incomprehensible. We cannot fully understand its mystery. When someday we see God, we shall see Him as He is, and understand Him better than we do now. Yet even then we will not totally comprehend Him.

Because He is the unlimited God and we are limited in our capacity to know and understand, He will always exceed our knowledge and understanding. We will always be human beings, even though perfected human beings. We will never become God. Those aspects of God that we will never fully comprehend should be regarded as mysteries exceeding our reason rather than as paradoxes that conflict with reason.

# References

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