

**King's Online Bible School**  
**Doctrine 101: Learning about God**

**11. The Triunity of God** (adapted from R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*)

The doctrine of the Trinity is difficult and perplexing to us. Sometimes it is thought that Christianity teaches the absurd notion that  $1+1+1=1$ . That is clearly a false equation. The term *Trinity* describes a relationship not of three gods, but of one God who is three Persons. The word *Trinity* is used in an effort to define the fullness of the Godhead both in terms of His unity and diversity.

God is one in essence and three in Person. The unity of the Godhead is affirmed in terms of essence or being, while the diversity of the Godhead is expressed in terms of person.

Though the term *Trinity* is not found in the Bible, the concept is clearly there. On the one hand the Bible strongly affirms the unity of God (Deuteronomy 6:4). On the other hand the Bible clearly affirms the full deity of the three persons of the Godhead: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The church has rejected the heresies of Modalism and Tritheism. Modalism denies the distinction of persons within the Godhead, claiming that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are just ways in which God expresses Himself. Tritheism, on the other hand, falsely declares that there are three beings who together make up God.

The term *person* does not mean a distinction in essence but a different *subsistence* in the Godhead. A subsistence in the Godhead is a *real* difference but not an *essential* difference in the sense of a difference in being. Each Person subsists or exists "under" the pure essence of deity. Subsistence is a difference within the scope of being, not a separate being or essence. All Persons in the Godhead have all the attributes of deity.

There is also a distinction in the work done by each member of the Trinity. The work of salvation is in one sense common to all three Persons of the Trinity. Yet in the manner of activity, there are differing operations assumed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father initiates creation and redemption; the Son redeems the creation; and the Holy Spirit regenerates and sanctifies, applying redemption to believers.

The Trinity does not refer to parts of God or even to roles. Human analogies such as one man who is a father, son, and a husband fail to capture the mystery of the nature of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not fully explain the mysterious character of God. Rather, it sets the boundaries outside of which we must not step. It defines the limits of our reflection. It demands that we be faithful to the biblical revelation that in one sense God is one and in a different sense He is three.

**Summary**

1. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms the triunity of God.
2. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a contradiction: God is one in essence and three in person.
3. The Bible affirms both the oneness of God and the deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
4. The Trinity is distinguished by the work assumed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
5. The doctrine of the Trinity sets the limits of human speculation about the nature of God.

**Biblical passages for reflection:**

Deuteronomy 6:4   Matthew 3:16-17   Matthew 28:19   2 Corinthians 13:14   1 Peter 1:2