

Does The Trinity Teach Three Gods Exist?

Some wrongly assume that the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that *three* Gods exist when it uses the word “Persons.”

They say the following: If God the Father is really a “Person” then He is a God in His own right [having the characteristics of being divine].

He would count as “one” God.

The same could be said about the Son and Holy Spirit.

Thus, there would be three separate Gods.

This is a common misconception about Trinitarian thinking.

Actually, the Trinity doctrine would definitely *not* say that either Father, Son or Holy Spirit each complete within themselves the total essence of God.

We must not confuse tritheism with the Trinity.

What the Trinity says is that God is one with respect to His essence but is three with respect to the internal *distinctions* of that essence.

Here is how Christian scholar **Emery Bancroft** described it in his book ‘Christian Theology’; pages 87-88:

“The Father is not God as such; for God is not only Father, but also Son and Holy Spirit. The term ‘Father’ designates that personal distinction in the divine nature in virtue of which God is related to the Son and, through the Son and the Spirit, to the church.

The Son is not God as such; for God is not only Son, but also Father and Holy Spirit. The Son designates that distinction in virtue of which God is related to the Father, and is sent by the Father to redeem the world, and with the Father sends the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not God as such; for God is not only Holy Spirit, but also Father and Son. The Holy Spirit designates that distinction in virtue of which God is related to the Father and the Son, and is sent by them to accomplish the work of renewing the ungodly and sanctifying the church.”

When we are seeking to understand the Trinity doctrine, we need to be quite careful how we use and understand the word “God.”

For example, whatever the New Testament says about the oneness of God, it also draws a distinction between Jesus Christ and God the Father.

This is where the above formula from Bancroft is helpful.

To be precise, we should speak of “God the Father,” “God the Son” and “God the Holy Spirit” when we are referring to each hypostasis or “Person” of the Godhead.

It is certainly legitimate to speak about the “limitations” of using analogies or otherwise trying to explain the nature of God.

This problem is well understood by Christian scholars.

In his article *'The Point of Trinitarian Theology'* [4/2 1988 *Toronto Journal of Theology*], **Roger Haight**, a professor at the Toronto School of Theology, discusses this limitation.

He is frank in admitting some of the problems in the theology of the Trinity, but he also explains how **the Trinity is a powerful explanation of the nature of God, as far as we limited human beings can grasp that nature.**

Millard Erickson, a highly respected theologian and professor of theology, also admits this limitation.

He refers in his book, *'God in Three Persons'*, to another scholar's admission of "ignorance" and his own on page 258.

[Stephen] Davis has examined the major contemporary explanations [of the Trinity], and, having found them not to accomplish what they claim to do, has been honest in acknowledging that he feels he is dealing with a mystery.

In so doing, he has perhaps been more candid than many of us, who when pressed may have to admit that we really do not know in what way God is one and in what different way He is three.

Do we really understand how God can be one and three simultaneously?

Of course not.

We have no experiential knowledge of God as He is.

Not only is our experience limited, but so is our language. Using the word "*Persons*" for the hypostases of God is a compromise.

We need a word that emphasises the personal nature of our God and in some way contains the concept of distinctiveness.

Unfortunately, the word "*person*" also contains the notion of separateness when applied to human persons.

Trinitarians understand that God is not made up of the kind of persons that a group of people might be.

But what is a "*God-kind*" of person?

We have no answer.

We use the word "*Person*" for each hypostasis of God because it is a personal word, and above all, God is a personal being in His dealings with us.

If one rejects the theology of the Trinity, he or she has no explanation that preserves the oneness of God, an absolute biblical requirement.

That is why Christians formulated the doctrine.

They accepted the truth that God was one.

But they also wanted to explain that Jesus Christ is also spoken of in terms of divinity in Scripture.

And so is the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity doctrine was developed precisely with the intent to explain as well as human words and thought would allow how God could be both one and yet three, simultaneously.

Other explanations of the nature of God have been put forth through the ages.

Arianism is one example.

This theory claimed that the Son was a created being so that the oneness of God could be preserved.

Unfortunately, the Arian conclusion was fundamentally flawed in that the Son cannot be a created being and still be God.

All other theories advanced to explain God's nature in terms of the revelation of the Son and Holy Spirit have proved not only defective, but to possess terminal error.

That's why the doctrine of the Trinity has survived for centuries as the explanation of God's nature that preserves the truth of the biblical witness.