

# Fathom Academy: Christian Theology

**WEEK 1: GOD AS TRINITY**

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# Week 1: The Being of God – God as Trinity

**“In no other doctrine is error more dangerous, the research more laborious, and the discovery of the truth more rewarding.”**

**- Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate***

**“The Trinity is not merely the appendix to the doctrine of God, then, but the primary and distinctive way in which Christians should think about God.”**

**- Kevin Vanhoozer, “*The triune God of the gospel*”**

## Part I: A (Brief) Introduction to Theology

- **Silence before the mystery of God**
  - **Where God dwells is “wrapped in darkness, cloud, and doom” [Deuteronomy 4-5]**
  - **“No one has ever seen God” [1 John 1:18a]**
  - **“[The King of kings and Lord of lords] dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” [1 Timothy 6:15-16]**
  - **Revelation: only God speaks truthfully about God**
- **Speech before the mystery of God**



- **“Mystery is the lifeblood of dogmatics. . . [God] can be apprehended; he cannot be comprehended. There is some knowledge, but not thorough grasp of God. This is how the case is put throughout Scripture and all of theology. And when a shallow rationalism considered a fully adequate knowledge of God a possibility, Christian theology always opposed the idea in the strongest terms.”**

**- Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics***

- **The Discipline of Theology**
  - **Etymology: *theos* & *logos***
  - **Range of meaning**
    - **Narrow (“theology proper”): Doctrine of God**
    - **Broad: everything *sub ratione Dei* (Thomas Aquinas [1225-1274])**
    - ***Theo-Logic* (Prologue of John’s Gospel)**
- **The Sources of Theology**
  - **Scripture**
  - **Tradition**
  - **Reason**
  - **Experience**

## **Part II: Biblical Basis**

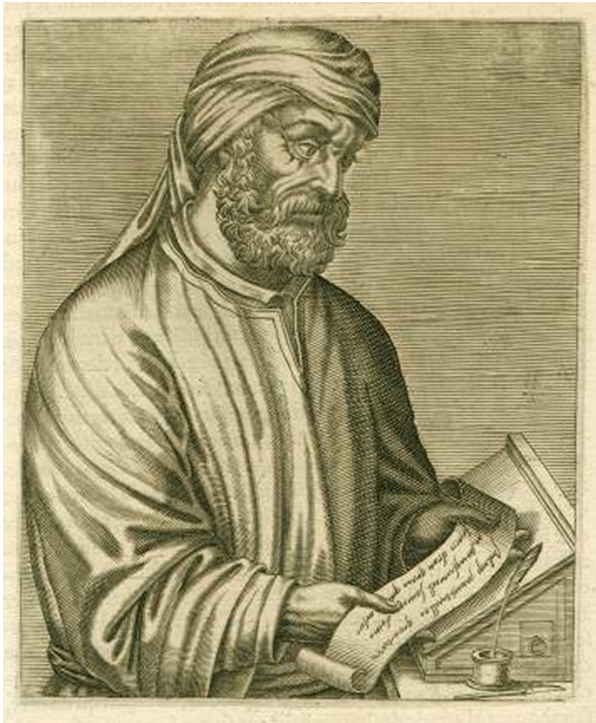
- **Implicit Trinitarianism in the Old Testament**
  - **Scripture attests that *God is one, and there is no other***
    - **Genesis 1:1**
    - **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**
    - **Prohibitions of Idolatry: Isaiah 44:6-7**
  - **Intimations of the Trinity in the Old Testament**
    - **Genesis 1:26: “Let *us* make humankind in *our image*, in *our likeness* . . .”**
    - **References to the “Spirit of God” (Genesis 1:2)**
    - **Angelic Theophanies**
- **Incipient Trinitarianism in the New Testament**
  - **Trinitarian Narratives**
    - **Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16ff)**
    - **The Son, sent from the Father, gifts the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22)**
    - **Bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3-7)**
  - **Trinitarian Formulae and Benedictions**
    - **Baptismal Formula (Matthew 28:19)**
    - **Pauline Benediction (2 Corinthians 13:14)**

- **Unfolding Trinitarianism**
  - **“The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the deity of the Holy Spirit. Now the Spirit himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself. For it was not safe, when the Godhead was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was yet received to burden us further...with the Holy Spirit....It was necessary that, increasing little by little, and, as David says, by ascensions from glory to glory, the full splendor of the Trinity should gradually shine forth.”**  
- Gregory Nazianzen [329-390]

### **Part III: Historical Development**

- **A definition of heresy**
  - **Heresy is teaching that looks authentically Christian on a superficial level but ultimately undermines Christianity’s essence (F.D.E. Schleiermacher)**
  - **Characteristics of Heresy**
    - **Heresy over-simplifies**
    - **Heresy accommodates:**
      - **Culture**
      - **Rational Norms**
- **Trinitarian Heresies**
  - **Arianism (Adoptionism)**
  - **Modalism**
  - **Partialism**
  - **Tri-theism**
  - **Subordinationism (Monarchianism or Unitarianism)**

- **Trinitarian Vocabulary**



- **Tertullian of Carthage [c. 150-225]**
  - ***Trinitas***
  - ***Persona* [Greek = *hypostasis*]**
  - ***Substantia* [Greek = *ousia*]**
    - ***Homoiousia vs. homoousia***

#### **Part IV: Doctrinal Formulation**

- **Trinitarian Grammar**

- **Nicene Creed (325)**

**“I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance [*homoousios*] with the Father, by whom all things were made.**

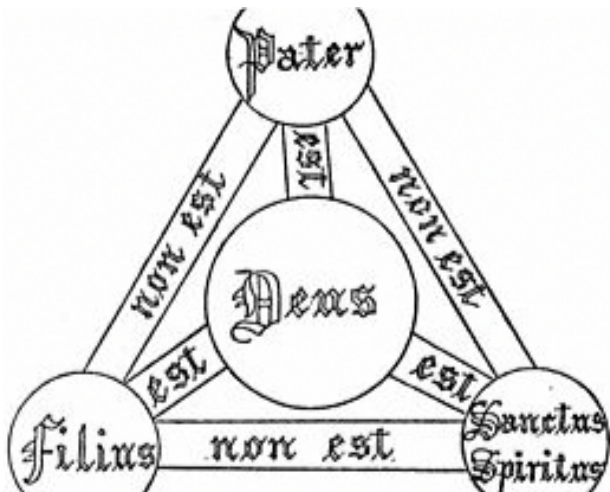
**And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.”**

- **Athanasian Creed (late 5th–early 6th century)**

**“The catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father is eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet there are not three eternals; but one eternal. . . . So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet there are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. . . . And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.”**

- **Summary**

- **Summary: The Trinity is the one God [one divine *substantia* / *ousia*] existing in three Persons [*persona* / *hypostasis*]**



- **Consubstantial/Co-essential**
- **Co-equal**
- **Co-eternal**

- **Omnipotent**
- ***Perichoresis***– “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14)