

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

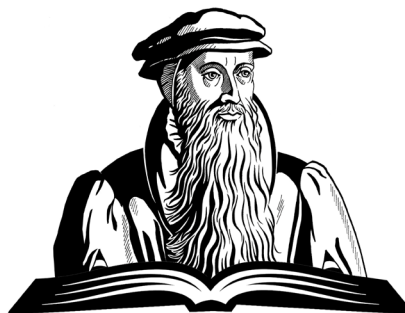
## Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

# STUDY GUIDE

*Module 2:*  
**THE DOCTRINE OF GOD**

*Lecture 8:*  
**THE TRINITY**



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

## **John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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## STUDY GUIDE

### Module 2

### *The Doctrine of God*

1. Introduction
2. The Nature, Limits, and Means of Knowing God
3. The Names of God
4. God's Being
5. The Attributes of God, Part 1
6. The Attributes of God, Part 2
7. The Attributes of God, Part 3
- 8. The Trinity**
9. God's Decree
10. Predestination
11. Creation
12. Providence

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## STUDY GUIDE

### Module 2: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

### Lecture 8: The Trinity

#### ***Introduction***

Some things are easy to learn and other things are more challenging. But the more we study, and the deeper we dig, the more we find our minds stretched to comprehend all that God is in his glory. That is especially true when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity. We can affirm simple statements like, “God is three in one,” which is good and appropriate. But when we begin to dig further, we find more complex truths. And this is further reinforced when seeking to distinguish sound doctrine from false heresies. This requires careful reflection.

**Theme:** *The Doctrine of the Trinity—one God who subsists in three persons.*

#### **I. Scriptural Basis**

*“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18–20)*

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” (2 Corinthians 13:14)*

1. The revelation of the Trinity comes in connection with the revelation of the gospel.
2. The Trinity is tied to baptism.
3. The believer is baptized into the *name* (singular), *of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* (plural).

*“But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” (1 Corinthians 8:6).*

4. There is one God, and there are three who are equal, who perform divine works, and who are worthy of worship and obedience.
5. One God in three persons.

**Questions:**

1. Where in the Scriptures do we see the Trinity in connection with the gospel? Can you find more evidences of this in the Bible?

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2. Where in the Bible do we see references to the Trinity in relation to baptism?

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**II. Doctrinal Overview**

As summarized in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 2, paragraph 3:

*“In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father: the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”*

1. The word “person” in the Trinity:
  - a. Refers to an uncreated person, devoid of the limitations and finitude of a human personality.
  - b. An uncreated person is the divine essence subsisting in a relative property.
2. “Subsistence” is another word for “person” in the Trinity.
  - a. It means a manner or way of existing.
  - b. It is the way in which the one God—the divine essence—exists:
    - 1) The Father eternally begetting the Son.
    - 2) The Son being eternally begotten.
    - 3) The Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

3. Relative properties.
  - a. The personal *internal* distinguishing acts of each person in the divine essence.
    - 1) One who eternally begets the second—*generation, or begetting*.
    - 2) One who is eternally begotten of the first—*affiliation, or being begotten*.
    - 3) One who proceeds eternally from the first and the second—*procession*.
4. Personal relations.
  - a. The Father has his name from his paternal relation to the Son.
    - 1) The Father eternally begets the Son (John 1:14, 18).
  - b. The Son has his name in relation to the Father.
    - 1) The Son is eternally begotten by the Father (John 10:30; 14:11).
  - c. The Holy Spirit has his name in relation to the Father and the Son.
    - 1) The Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son (John 15:26; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6).
5. The unity of the Trinity.
  - a. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Each has the whole divine essence.
  - b. We reject tri-theism. There are not three eternal, or three omnipotents, but one eternal omnipotent God subsisting in three persons.
6. The external works of the Trinity—their actions regarding creation.
  - a. The Father sending the Son—*Christ's incarnation*.
  - b. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
7. The external operations of God are indivisible.
  - a. All three persons jointly carry out the works of God:
    - 1) in creation,
    - 2) in redemption,
    - 3) in the application of salvation.
  - b. There is no hierarchy or subordination within the Godhead.

### Questions:

1. What is the definition of the term “person” with regards to the Trinity? How is this different from thinking about a human person?

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2. What does “subsistence” refer to in regard to the Trinity? What is the manner of God’s existence? Is God divided into different parts?

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3. What does the phrase “relative properties” mean, in regard to the Trinity? Can this be used to describe any part of creation? What are the relative properties of the Triune God?

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4. What are the “personal relations” within the three persons of the Trinity?

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5. Why is it very important to affirm the unity of the three persons of the Trinity? What is the primary heretical error that we should reject regarding this doctrine?

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6. What is the doctrine of “perichoresis”? How do the Scriptures teach and support this doctrine?

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7. What are the external works or acts of the Trinity? What are the two missions where we see that it is God who is sending God?

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8. What are the three great external operations of God that are carried out indivisibly by the three persons of the Trinity? Why does the Scripture bring to the forefront particular persons of the Trinity in connection with particular external operations?

### **III. Polemical Exposition**

1. We must resist and reject all human analogies or illustrations from the created world which attempt to explain the Trinity.

2. Two opposite errors:

- a. Modalism—says that God appears in different modes.
- b. Tri-theism—says that there are three gods, or three divine essences.

3. The error of subordination within the Trinity.

4. Some objections to the technical vocabulary regard the doctrine of the Trinity.

#### **Questions:**

1. What are some of the human analogies or illustrations commonly used to try to explain the Trinity? Why are they all heretical? What should we stick to in explaining the Trinity?

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2. Describe the two opposite errors of modalism and tri-theism.

3. How do we know that there is no hierarchy or subordination within the three persons of the Trinity? How are we to understand this in light of the subordination shown by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels?

4. Why is it necessary to use detailed technical vocabulary when discussing the doctrine of the Trinity?

#### **IV. Practical Exposition**

1. The Trinity is the foundation of the Christian's salvation.
2. The Trinity is the foundation of all of our worship.
3. The believer's obedience is tied to the Trinity.
4. The believer is brought into union and communion with the Triune God.

#### **Questions:**

1. What is meant when we say that the Trinity is the foundation of the Christian's salvation? How do we see this taught in the Bible?

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2. In what practical ways do we see that the Trinity is the foundation of all of our worship?

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3. How is the believer's obedience tied to the Trinity? What does that mean?

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4. What is meant by the phrase "union and communion with the Triune God"?

### **V. Self-Reflection**

Please meditate once again on the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18–20. What are his commands? What does he require? What promises does the Lord Jesus give to his disciples? How does the doctrine of the Trinity affect the Great Commission? How should these truths press upon the conscience of the church regarding its duty to reach the world with the truth of Christ? How can these truths encourage you to join in this work with hope, confidence, and perseverance? How do these truths affect us in the task of faithfully fulfilling this great work?