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R.C. SPROUL

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Ligonier Ministries

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Chapter One

Monotheism

The concept of the Trinity has emerged as a touchstone of truth, a non-negotiable article of Christian orthodoxy. However, it has been a source of controversy throughout church history, and there remains much confusion about it to this day, with many people misunderstanding it in very serious ways.

Some people think that the doctrine of the Trinity means that Christians believe in three gods. This is the idea of tritheism, which the church has categorically rejected throughout

its history. Others see the Trinity as the church's retreat into contradiction. For instance, I once had a conversation with a man who had a PhD in philosophy, and he objected to Christianity on the grounds that the doctrine of the Trinity represented a manifest contradiction—the idea that one can also be three—at the heart of the Christian faith. Apparently this professor of philosophy was not familiar with the law of non-contradiction. That law states, "A cannot be A and non-A at the same time and in the same relationship." When we confess our faith in the Trinity, we affirm that God is one in essence and three in person. Thus, God is one in A and three in B. If we said that He is one in essence and three in essence, that would be a contradiction. If we said He is one in person and three in person, that also would be a contradiction. But as mysterious as the Trinity is, perhaps even above and beyond our capacity to understand it in its fullness, the historic formula is not a contradiction.

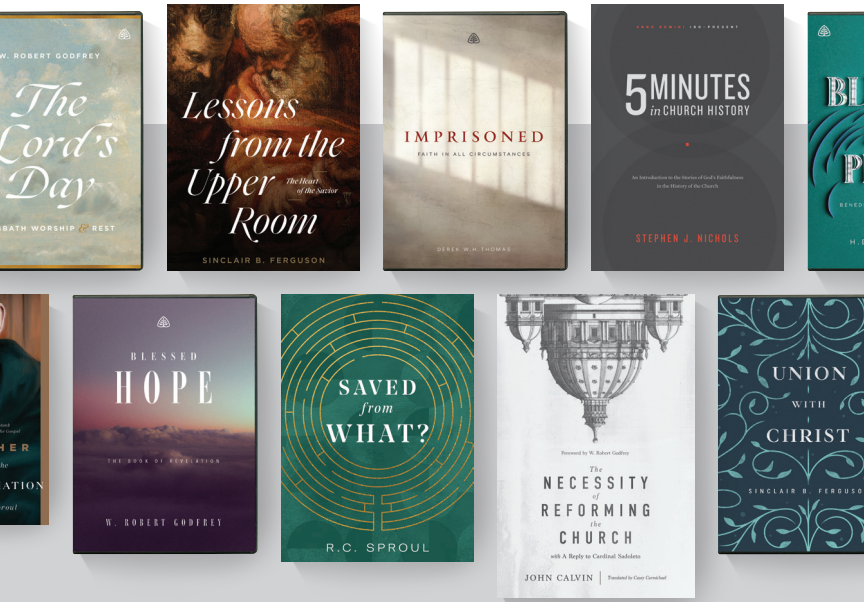
Before we can talk about the Trinity, we have to talk about unity, because the word *Trinity* means "tri-unity." Behind the concept of unity is the biblical affirmation of monotheism. The prefix *mono* means "one or single," while the root word *theism* has to do with God. So, *monotheism* conveys the idea that there is only one God.

The Evolution of Religions

The issue of whether the Bible is uniformly monotheistic came into question in the fields of religion and philosophy during the nineteenth century. One of the most dominant philosophers of the nineteenth century was Friedrich Hegel. He developed a complex and speculative philosophy of history that had at its core a concept of historical development or evolution. In the nineteenth century, thinkers were preoccupied with the concept of evolution, but not simply with respect to biology. *Evolution* became almost a buzzword in the academic world and in the scientific community, and it was applied not only to the development of living things, but also to political institutions. For instance, so-called social Darwinism understood human history as the progress of civilizations.

Hegel's followers also applied these evolutionary ideas to the development of religious concepts. They worked with this assumption: All spheres of creation, including religion, follow the pattern of evolution we see in the biological realm, which is evolution from the simple to the complex. In the case of religion, this means that all developed religions evolved from the simple form of animism. The term *animism* denotes the idea that there are living

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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