**Explaining the Question "Who is God?"**

**Using Three Doctrines of Evangelical Christianity and Names of God**

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# **Introduction**

The profound question "Who is God?" serves as the cornerstone of theological exploration, especially within evangelical Christianity, a vibrant movement rooted in Protestantism that emphasizes personal faith, biblical authority, and the transformative power of the Gospel. Evangelicals, deriving their name from the Greek word "euangelion" meaning "good news," affirm that God is not a distant or abstract entity but a personal, relational being who actively reveals Himself to humanity for the purpose of salvation and fellowship (National Association of Evangelicals, n.d.). This revelation occurs primarily through the Bible, which evangelicals regard as the inspired, infallible Word of God, providing the definitive lens for understanding divine identity (Pew Research Center, 2011). Core to evangelical belief is the conviction that God is the eternal, sovereign Creator who exists as a Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—while being holy, loving, just, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent (The Gospel Coalition, n.d.). Unlike anthropomorphic depictions that might limit God to human forms, evangelicals reject such notions, viewing God as spirit (John 4:24[[1]](#footnote-1)) yet incarnate in Jesus Christ, who is fully divine and human, embodying God's redemptive plan. However, recent surveys highlight doctrinal challenges, with some self-identified evangelicals holding views contrary to historic orthodoxy, such as denying Jesus' full deity—a reminder of the need for robust biblical teaching (LifeWay Research, 2020; Eternal Perspective Ministries, 2022). Despite these variances, mainstream evangelical theology, as articulated in statements like the National Association of Evangelicals' faith declaration, upholds the triune God as central (National Association of Evangelicals, n.d.).

This paper delves into this question through three pivotal doctrines: the Trinity, God's sovereignty, and God's holiness and justice. Each doctrine is illuminated by biblical names of God, which serve as revelatory descriptors enriching our comprehension of His nature. Scriptures are cited from the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible to align with evangelical commitments to scriptural primacy. Drawing from systematic theologies like Grudem (1994) and Akin (2014), as well as practical applications in Tripp (2021), this exploration demonstrates how these doctrines not only define God's essence but also inform worship, ethics, and daily living. Insights from Laniak (2006) on shepherd leadership underscore God's relational rule, while Smith (2009) connects doctrinal understanding to cultural formation through worship practices. Even secular analogies from Zimmerli et al. (2007) on corporate ethics parallel divine governance, highlighting accountability and integrity. By integrating these perspectives, the paper illustrates that knowing God transcends intellectual assent, fostering a life-altering relationship that addresses human sinfulness through Christ's atonement and empowers believers for mission in a broken world.

Understanding who God is forms the bedrock of Christian leadership, as it equips leaders with a divine perspective that transcends human limitations and aligns their actions with eternal purposes. Biblical foundations reveal that effective leadership begins with a profound knowledge of God's character, as seen in the creation narrative where humanity is commissioned to rule as stewards under divine authority (Genesis 1:26-28), fostering qualities like humility, accountability, and vision. This awareness cultivates servant leadership modeled after Christ, who led by submission to the Father, emphasizing that true influence stems from intimacy with God through prayer and Scripture, as leaders reflect His image in guiding others toward flourishing. In evangelical contexts, such understanding prevents self-centered ambition, instead promoting a missional approach where leaders prioritize God's kingdom, inspiring followers through authenticity and dependence on divine wisdom.

# **Doctrine 1: The Trinity (God as One in Three Persons)**

This foundational evangelical doctrine asserts that God is eternally one in essence yet subsists as three distinct, co-equal, and co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who share the same divine nature while fulfilling complementary roles in creation, redemption, and sanctification (Grudem, 1994). As articulated in Akin's edited volume, Trinitarian thought provides the basic structure in which all theology should operate, uniting Christians in the affirmation that God exists as three persons in one essence, clearly taught in Scripture and affirmed throughout church history (Akin, 2014). This mystery, while not explicitly named "Trinity" in Scripture, is inferred from biblical texts that reveal God's unified plurality, such as "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Deut. 6:4) and the baptismal formula: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Additional support includes the apostolic benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). The Trinity answers "Who is God?" by portraying Him as inherently relational and communal within Himself, avoiding both unitarian simplicity and polytheistic division, and emphasizing that divine love existed eternally among the persons before creation (Bowman, n.d.). In practical terms, as Tripp emphasizes, the Trinity models all Christian relationships, with Jesus praying for believers' unity mirroring the Father-Son bond (John 17), transforming everyday interactions through doctrinal belief (Tripp, 2021). The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology provides comprehensive entries that underscore the Trinity's biblical and historical foundations, reinforcing its centrality in evangelical thought (Treier & Elwell, 2017).

To elucidate this using names of God, consider *Abba* (Aramaic for Father), which highlights the Father's intimate, paternal role in initiating salvation and providing care, as Jesus prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36), and believers echo, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom. 8:15). *Yeshua* (Jesus, meaning "Yahweh saves" from Hebrew roots), represents the Son's incarnate mission to redeem humanity through His life, death, and resurrection, as "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). *Ruach Hakodesh* (Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of Holiness"), signifies the Spirit's role in convicting, regenerating, and empowering believers, manifesting God's indwelling presence, as David pleaded, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11), and Paul described Christ as "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Additional names like *Elohim* (a plural noun for God), suggest divine plurality while affirming unity, as in "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1) and "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26), often interpreted by evangelicals as an early hint of the Trinity's collaborative work in creation. *El Shaddai* (God Almighty), though not exclusively trinitarian, conveys the omnipotent strength shared among the persons, seen in the Father's promises: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless'" (Gen. 17:1). These names collectively depict God as a dynamic unity of love and purpose, essential for understanding salvation: the Father plans it, the Son accomplishes it, and the Spirit applies it (Grudem, 1994). Historically, this doctrine was formalized in creeds like the Nicene Creed (AD 325) to combat heresies, but evangelicals prioritize its biblical basis over creedal authority alone. Implications include worship directed to all three persons and the assurance that God's internal harmony models perfect community for believers. Smith's work on cultural formation indirectly supports this by viewing worship as shaping desires toward the triune God, though not explicitly detailing the doctrine (Smith, 2009).

The doctrine of the Trinity provides a foundational model for Christian leadership by exemplifying collaborative, relational authority where unity and diversity coexist in perfect harmony, guiding leaders to foster team-based ministry rather than individualistic control. Drawing from 1 Peter 5, Peter's Trinitarian framework underscores that leaders should emulate the Father's oversight, the Son's sacrificial service, and the Spirit's empowering presence, promoting shared decision-making and mutual submission among church elders. This triune pattern encourages leaders to build communities that reflect divine love, as the eternal fellowship within the Godhead serves as a blueprint for relational dynamics in leadership, ensuring that authority is exercised with humility and interdependence. Practically, it inspires educational and pastoral leaders to integrate Trinitarian principles into training, cultivating environments where members contribute uniquely yet cohesively toward God's mission.

# **Doctrine 2: God's Sovereignty (God as Supreme Ruler)**

In evangelical theology, God's sovereignty denotes His absolute, unrivaled authority and control over all creation, history, providence, and salvation, where nothing occurs outside His permissive or directive will (Frame, n.d.). This doctrine affirms that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and immutable, ensuring that all events serve His glory and the ultimate good of His people, as in "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11) and "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). It counters views of a limited deity by portraying God as the unchallengeable King who governs with perfect wisdom, even incorporating human choices and evil into His redemptive plan without being culpable for sin, such as in Joseph's story: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). Thus, "Who is God?" is answered as the ultimate, all-determining Authority whose rule provides security amid uncertainty, motivating prayer, evangelism, and trust in divine election (Grudem, 1994). Akin's theology affirms both God's sovereignty and human responsibility, presenting them as complementary truths that Southern Baptists should embrace without division (Akin, 2014). Laniak's exploration of pastoral traditions portrays God as the ultimate Shepherd-Ruler, with human leaders serving as undershepherds under His sovereign guidance, drawing from biblical metaphors where God leads His people through wilderness and promises faithful shepherds after His own heart (Jer. 3:15) (Laniak, 2006). The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology includes detailed entries on sovereignty, emphasizing God's control over life, death, and history (Treier & Elwell, 2017). Tripp stresses that belief in sovereignty transforms real life, offering comfort in trials by affirming God's control and goodness, even when circumstances seem chaotic (Tripp, 2021). While Zimmerli et al.'s work on corporate governance focuses on secular ethical leadership, it parallels divine sovereignty by advocating accountable, ethical oversight in organizations, which can analogize to God's just rule over creation, though without explicit theological ties (Zimmerli et al., 2007).

Illustrating this through names, *El Elyon* (God Most High), portrays God as exalted: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!'" (Gen. 14:18-20); and "I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me" (Ps. 57:2). *Adonai* (Lord or Master), demands human allegiance: "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'" (Ps. 110:1) and "'A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you'" (Mal. 1:6). Expanding with *Yahweh* (the LORD, derived from "I AM"), signifies God's self-existence: "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to you"'" (Ex. 3:14). *El Shaddai* (God Almighty), highlights all-sufficient power: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless'" (Gen. 17:1); and "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev. 1:8). *Jehovah Jireh* (the LORD Will Provide), demonstrates sovereignty in providence: "So Abraham called the name of that place, 'The Lord will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided'" (Gen. 22:14). These names reveal God's sovereignty as benevolent, reconciling it with evangelism: though God sovereignly saves, believers proclaim the Gospel as His means, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" (Rom. 10:14-15) (Grudem, 1994). This doctrine comforts in trials, fuels worship, and guards against anthropocentric views of faith.

God's sovereignty lays a crucial foundation for Christian leadership by assuring leaders of divine control over outcomes, freeing them to act boldly in faith while submitting to His overarching plan, thus balancing initiative with reliance on providence. Biblical examples, such as God's appointment of leaders like David (1 Samuel 16:1-13), illustrate that sovereignty empowers human responsibility without diminishing it, encouraging leaders to trust in God's orchestration amid uncertainties. This doctrine fosters resilient leadership, as seen in how it prepares individuals through spiritual formation to lead effectively, recognizing that all authority derives from God's supreme rule and serves His redemptive purposes. In practice, it motivates evangelistic efforts and organizational stewardship, as leaders draw comfort from knowing that their efforts align with an infallible divine will, promoting ethical governance and strategic vision rooted in humility.

# **Doctrine 3: God's Holiness and Justice (God as Perfect and Righteous)**

Evangelical Christianity upholds God's holiness as His intrinsic moral perfection and transcendence, meaning He is utterly pure, separate from all sin and evil, and the source of all goodness; from this flows His justice, where He upholds righteousness, punishes sin equitably, and vindicates the oppressed (Grudem, 1994). This is evident in "And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!'" (Isa. 6:3) and "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you" (Ps. 89:14). This doctrine reveals that God's holiness demands atonement for human sin, satisfied through Christ's propitiation: "whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25-26). It addresses "Who is God?" by depicting Him as the unapproachable standard of purity whose justice is retributive yet merciful, ensuring ultimate accountability while offering forgiveness. In Akin's theology, God's holiness is discussed alongside attributes like love and eternity, impacting church life through calls to ethical living (Akin, 2014). Smith's cultural liturgies framework connects worship to God's holiness, arguing that embodied practices shape desires toward authentic humanity in response to the holy God (Smith, 2009). The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology features entries on holiness and justice, highlighting their foundational role in God's character and human ethics (Treier & Elwell, 2017). Tripp views holiness as God's essence, driving sinners to the Savior for reconciliation, with practical implications for daily dependence on Christ (Tripp, 2021). Zimmerli et al.'s corporate governance text, while secular, explores ethical challenges in business, which can reflect divine justice by emphasizing accountability and moral integrity in leadership, akin to God's righteous rule (Zimmerli et al., 2007).

Using names to explain, *Yahweh Tsidkenu* (The LORD Our Righteousness), promises that God imputes His righteousness to sinners through faith in Christ: "In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (Jer. 23:6); similarly, "In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (Jer. 33:16). *El Qanna* (Jealous God), reflects His holy zeal: "You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Ex. 20:5) and "for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Ex. 34:14). Further names include *Qadosh Yisrael* (Holy One of Israel): "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged" (Isa. 1:4). *El Hakkadosh* (The Holy God): "But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness" (Isa. 5:16). *Shophet* (Judge): "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:25); and "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he" (Deut. 32:4). These names illustrate that God's holiness isn't abstract but relational, demanding human holiness: "since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:16). Practically, it inspires ethical living, social justice advocacy, and awe in worship, as seen in evangelical emphases on personal sanctification and divine wrath against unrepentant sin (Grudem, 1994).

The doctrines of God's holiness and justice establish a moral compass for Christian leadership, compelling leaders to embody purity and equity in their decisions, thereby modeling divine standards that inspire trust and transformation among followers. Holiness calls leaders to personal sanctification, separating them from compromise while justice demands fair treatment, as exemplified in commands to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8), ensuring that leadership reflects God's impartial righteousness. This foundation promotes servant-oriented authority, where leaders prioritize ethical integrity and advocacy for the marginalized, drawing from Christ's example of holy living and just dealings. In church and community settings, it equips leaders to address injustices biblically, fostering environments of accountability and grace that advance God's kingdom through transformed lives.

# **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the doctrines of the Trinity, sovereignty, and holiness and justice, enriched by biblical names such as *Abba*, *El Elyon*, and *Yahweh Tsidkenu*, offer a comprehensive response to "Who is God?" portraying Him as the relational, authoritative, and righteous Creator who initiates salvation through Jesus Christ. These tenets, firmly anchored in Scripture and championed by evangelical scholars, underscore God's self-revelation as both transcendent and immanent, inviting humanity into a covenant of grace amid a fallen world (The Gospel Coalition, n.d.). While surveys reveal that not all who identify as evangelical adhere strictly to these orthodox views—evidencing a need for renewed catechesis—the core teachings remain vital for authentic faith (LifeWay Research, 2020; Reddit, 2023). As Tripp (2021) articulates, these doctrines are not mere abstractions but life-changing truths that foster dependence on God, ethical integrity, and communal harmony. Smith's (2009) emphasis on worship as formative practice aligns with this, suggesting that engaging God's identity reshapes human desires and cultural engagements toward holiness. Laniak's (2006) shepherd imagery further illustrates sovereignty's pastoral dimension, while Zimmerli et al.'s (2007) governance principles echo justice's demand for accountability in all spheres. Ultimately, understanding God in this evangelical framework cultivates hope in His promises, resilience in suffering, and zeal for evangelism, compelling believers to proclaim the Gospel and live as reflections of His character in an increasingly secular society. This knowledge not only answers existential queries but empowers a missional life, echoing the Great Commission and anticipating Christ's return.

In synthesizing these doctrines, understanding who God is as triune, sovereign, holy, and just solidifies the foundation for Christian leadership, urging leaders to operate from a theocentric worldview that integrates divine attributes into practical governance and influence. This holistic grasp empowers leaders to navigate complexities with confidence, as biblical precedents show that knowing God's nature—through His Word and Spirit—equips them for servant-hearted rule that mirrors Christ's humility and authority. Ultimately, it transforms leadership from mere management to a redemptive calling, where leaders cultivate flourishing communities by aligning their vision with God's eternal purposes, ensuring legacy through faithful stewardship and missional impact.

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