

Systematic Theology session 18
The Doctrine of God, "I Am Who I Am," Part 12

- The divine attribute of love.
 - Love is part of God's very nature, as expressed by the phrase "God is love."
 - Three definitions of divine love:
 - "God's own expression of goodness toward His creation in grace, kindness, and care for the creation."
 - "That perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bountifully and kindly with all His creatures."
 - "The pleasure that God has in contemplating those creatures who reflect His moral image, and His granting of grace to His elect."
 - Two aspects of the definition of divine love:
 - The general love of God for mankind.
 - This general love of God is non-saving love.
 - The special saving love of God toward His elect, God's steadfast love (to be covered in the next session).
- The inter-Trinitarian love of God.
 - God, first and foremost, loves Himself.
 - This inter-Trinitarian love is timeless; it exists eternally, before there was a creation.
 - The Father loves the Son (John 3:35); the Son loves the Father (John 14:30-31); the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).
 - God knows Himself completely; Scripture states that the Persons of the Trinity love one another; the Persons of the Trinity glorify one another.
- The general love of God for humanity.
 - Expressed in mercy, grace, and patience.
 - This general mercy and grace is non-saving; it is outside the context of salvation.
 - Definition of divine mercy: "The love of God toward those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of what they truly deserve, exercised only in harmony with the justice of God, in view of the merits of Christ."
 - Mercy is not something God is forced to grant. Justice gives us what we deserve; God grants mercy out of divine love and His choice to do so.
 - This general mercy keeps mankind, for the time being, from the full effect, the full misery, that their sin and rebellion would lead to (Psalm 145:8-9).
 - God has a preference for, and delights in, mercy (what Luther called God's "proper work") compared to affliction and judgment (what Luther called God's "alien work"; Isaiah 28:21)
 - Definition of divine grace: "The unmerited love of God to those who have forfeited it, and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation."
 - God's gracious actions toward undeserving mankind is called "common grace," defined as: "God's universal, nonsaving grace in which blessings are given to humanity for physical sustenance, pleasure, learning, beauty, etc., as expressions of God's goodness. It is particularly contrasted in Reformed theology with God's special or saving grace."
 - Definition of divine patience: "The postponing of the merited judgment of God."
 - God's patience is meant to give sinful man space for repentance.
 - The general love of God for mankind (non-saving love) is for this life only; it will come to an end at the final day of judgment.