

The Principles of Christian Religion

**A Study through the Baptist
Catechism using Benjamin
Beddome's *Scriptural Exposition***

Introduction

- “What is God?”
 - The Bible doesn’t give us a “definition” of God.
 - “God is love”
 - “God is light”
 - “God is a spirit”
 - How do you “define” something/someone beyond both apprehension by our senses and comprehension by our minds?
 - The best we can hope for is a true though finite *description* based on what has been revealed to us.

Outline of the BC

- I. Introductory Questions: 1-6
- II. What We are to Believe: 7-43
- III. What Duty God Requires: 44-114
 - A. The Law and our Inability: 44-89
 - B. The Gospel and the Means of Grace: 90-114

Question and Answer 7

Q. 7: What is God?

A. God is a Spirit,¹ infinite,² eternal,³ and unchangeable⁴ in His being,⁵ wisdom,⁶ power,⁷ holiness,⁸ justice, goodness, and truth.⁹

¹ John 4:24

² Job 11:7,8,9

³ Psalm 90:2

⁴ James 1:17

⁵ Exodus 3:14

⁶ Psalm 147:5

⁷ Revelation 4:8

⁸ Revelation 15:4

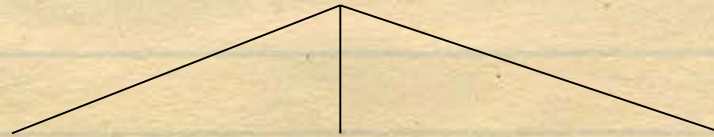
⁹ Exodus 34:6

Question and Answer 7

God

=

Spirit



Infinite

Eternal

In His Being	Unchangeable	In His Being
In His Wisdom	In His Wisdom	In His Wisdom
In His Power	In His Power	In His Power
In His Holiness	In His Holiness	In His Holiness
In His Justice	In His Justice	In His Justice
In His Goodness	In His Goodness	In His Goodness
In His Truth	In His Truth	In His Truth

Question and Answer 7

- The Attributes of God
 - Classical Distinctions
 - Incommunicable Attributes
 - Infinity, Eternality, Immutability
 - Communicable Attributes
 - Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness, Truth
 - The Simplicity of God
 - Berkhof: “the condition of being free from division into parts, and therefore from compositeness” (cf. 2LCF 2.1)
 - These distinctions do not reflect distinctions in God Himself, just in our understanding

Question and Answer 7

1. The Spirituality of God

– Explanation (John 4:24)

- Incorporeal and Invisible (John 5:37)
- Perfect (1 John 1:5)
- Active (John 5:17)
- Self-Sufficient and Independent (Exo. 3:14)
- Immortal (1 Tim. 6:16)
- Above all other spirits (Heb. 12:9)

Question and Answer 7

1. The Spirituality of God

– Implications

- We can form no adequate conception of the divine Being (Isa. 40:18; cf. Deut. 4:15-24).
- The organs of sense are improperly ascribed unto him (Job 10:4; “anthropomorphisms”).
- He cannot be gratified with carnal things (Psalm 50:9).
- He should be worshiped in a spiritual manner (Rom. 1:9; cf. John 4:24).
- We may expect spiritual blessings from him (Eph. 1:3).
- He is the only suitable portion for our spirits (Lam. 3:24).

Question and Answer 7

2. The Incommunicable Attributes

a. The Infinity of God

- “[T]hat perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations” – Berkhof
- God is infinite and omnipresent (Psa. 139:7).
 - God is in heaven (Psa. 139:8).
 - But he is not confined to heaven (2 Chr. 2:6).
 - His essence is diffused through the whole universe (Eph. 4:6).
 - » “... He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole being.” – Berkhof
 - He is near to every one of us (Acts 17:27).
 - » This truth is a support to the saints under their burden (Hag. 2:4).

Question and Answer 7

2. The Incommunicable Attributes

b. The Eternality of God

– “[T]hat perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present” – Berkhof

- God is eternal (Deut. 33:27).
- He was from everlasting (Hab. 1:12).
- He will be to everlasting (Psa. 90:2).
- He only is eternal (Isa. 44:6).
- He should therefore be feared (Jer. 10:10).
- He should therefore be trusted (Isa. 26:4).
- This truth is humbling to man (Job 38:4).
- This truth is glorious to God (1 Tim. 1:17).

Question and Answer 7

2. The Incommunicable Attributes

c. The Immutability of God

- “[T]hat perfection of God whereby He is devoid of all change, not only in His being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises” – Berkhof
- God is unchangeable (Psa. 102:27).
- He is absolutely unchangeable (Jam. 1:17) . . .
 - In His Nature and Perfections (Mal. 3:6)
 - In His Will (Isa. 46:10)
 - In His Love (Jer. 31:3)
 - In His Special Favors (Rom. 11:29)
- He cannot change through . . .
 - Some unforeseen accident (Acts 15:18).
 - Want of power to effect what he has determined (Gen. 17:1)
- It is well for us that God is unchangeable (Mal. 3:6).

Question and Answer 7

2. The Incommunicable Attributes

c. The Immutability of God

- If God is unchangeable in His will, what of those passages that seem to indicate that God changes His mind (Gen. 6:5-7; Exo. 32:10-14; Jon. 3:10)?
 - The logical extreme of this line of thought is the teaching of Open Theism: God doesn't know the future, and He's changing and growing and learning as He goes.
 - Remember the principles of Scriptural interpretation: interpret the obscure in light of the clear (Num. 23:19; Psa. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17).

Question and Answer 7

2. The Incommunicable Attributes

c. The Immutability of God

- If God is unchangeable in His will, what of those passages that seem to indicate that God changes His mind (Gen. 6:5-7; Exo. 32:10-14; Jon. 3:10)?
 - These passages are best understood as examples of “anthropopathisms.”
 - “And if Scripture speaks of His repenting, changing His intention, and altering His relation to sinner when they repent, we should remember that this is only an anthropopathic way of speaking. In reality the change is not in God, but in man and in man’s relations to God.”
 - Berkhof

Question and Answer 7

2. The Incommunicable Attributes

c. The Immutability of God

- The Impassibility of God

- “Impassibility is that divine attribute whereby God is said not to experience inner emotional changes of state, whether enacted freely from within or effected by his relationship to and interaction with human beings and the created order.” – NCE
- This is not a denial of divine *emotions*; it is a denial of divine *passions* (cf. 2LCF 2.1).
 - » A “passion,” as opposed to an emotion, is an emotional change that “happens” to someone.
 - » God’s emotions (of love, compassion, wrath, etc.) are settled and unchanging