

Who is God?

The nature, attributes, and existence
of the Triune God

Review

- Why seek to know and understand God?
 - An unknown God cannot be loved, trusted, served, or worshiped.
 - Chapter 2.3 of the Confession states that the knowledge of God in the Trinity *“is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.”*
- *Sensus divinitatis* – the ‘sense of divinity’.
 - But sin has turned this knowledge of God into the rope by which we hang ourselves.
- Sinful men have turned to mysticism, morality, and philosophical speculation.
 - Polytheism, Pantheism, Panentheism, Deism, or Atheism.

Review

- Because of sin, **the basic starting point** for all sound theology comes from God's revelation in Christ.
 - We start with the gospel, not by proving a deity.
 - For the gospel is the full revelation of God, and God outside of Christ is bad news to sinners.
- Creator-Creator distinction:
 - God is very different from us, as we are creatures.
 - There is a **quantitative** difference between us and God,
 - But also a **qualitative** difference between us and God
- God is:
 - **Incomprehensible**
 - **Transcendent**
 - **Immanent**
 - And God has **condescended**

Today's Agenda

1. The doctrine of analogy

- How it prepares us to consider how God is described in scripture.

2. The story of scripture

- How the drama of redemption is the soil from which the doctrine emerges.

3. The incommunicable attributes of God

1. Simplicity

2. Aseity

3. Immutability (Introduction)

Doctrine of Analogy

- **Accommodation:**
 - God speaking beneath his godly majesty. Using ‘baby talk’ so we can understand. (Calvin)
- So the language in scripture is analogical; an analogy.
 - Example: God is a rock, a fortress, etc.
 - These are analogies giving us an idea about what God is like: he is unmovable, a firm foundation; eternal.
 - And yet – God is not stagnant, stoic, made up of matter.
 - The ‘rock’ is true in one sense, and **yet it isn’t true in every sense.**
 - Example: the freedom of God
 - We have a measure of freedom as creatures, but we don’t have even 1% of the freedom that God has.
- Analogies assume both similarity and difference.

The Importance of Analogy

1. We can affirm **everything** that God says in the bible:
 - We are not embarrassed by the passages that say things such as, ‘God repented’.
 - Repentance prescribed to God is an analogy because, from our perspective, God does what a penitent man usually does.
 - We don’t act as if these passages don’t exist; we simply interpret them as they are: analogies that only communicate part of who He is.
 - All of the passages, not some, are God’s condescension to us, and cannot communicate ALL of who He is.
2. This keeps us from settling on one of the analogies to the exclusion of the others, and bowing down to it.
 - Example: God is love, God is holy, or God is sovereign.
 - There is no ‘most important’ attribute of God.
 - He is simultaneously all of these things we read of Him in scripture.

The Story of Scripture

- The drama of redemption, the story, is the soil from which the doctrine emerges.
 - Example: we read the story of the Exodus and we can infer many things about who God is: Mighty, sovereign, powerful.
- But God doesn't leave it to us to read the story and then make our own assessment.
 - He defines the story for us and tells us what it meant.
 - Example: Jesus Christ was crucified, died, and was raised.
 - Starting with the book of Acts and then into the epistles, God in scripture tells us what this means: He died for our sins and was raised for our justification.

The Story of Scripture

Strong verbs and adverbs:

- Brought you out
 - Redeemed
 - Delivered
- Killed/judged
- Struck down
 - Revealed
- Mightily/powerfully

Therefore He is: (stable nouns)

- Strong
- Redeemer
- Compassionate
- Righteous
- Conqueror
- Merciful
- Sovereign

The Names of God

- From the story we see His character, then God defines the story for us, beginning with His name.
- The name of God is his self revelation, as he exists in relation to man.
 - His name = His character so far as he's been pleased to make it known to us.
- “Yahweh” – I Am. The self-existent one.
 - Lord is title; Yahweh is a proper name.
 - Our Yahweh is THE adoni (Lord)
 - He is the only sovereign of the universe.
 - Only to Israel did God reveal his personal name.
- God's name is a sign of his transcendence.
 - Misusing His name was a capital offense in Israel.

The Point

- Reveals who God is and why this is relevant to us.
 - No such thing as ‘dead orthodoxy’ or ‘head-knowledge apart from heart-knowledge’.
- We’re drawn in by the story to understand the doctrine.
 - Through doxology (praise, worship, adoration, etc.), this doctrine becomes internalized and drives us to practice.
 - Michael Horton has put it this way: God’s mighty acts in the drama were done for us (doctrine), are enveloped in us (worship), and thus shapes the way we live in the world (discipleship).
- Who God is and what He has done in the past shapes every area of our lives.

The Incommunicable Attributes of God

- To be distinguished from the *communicable* attributes of God.
 - **Incommunicable** are those to which there is nothing analogous in the creature.
 - **Communicable** are those to which the properties of the human spirit bear some analogy (as power, goodness, mercy, righteousness, etc.)
 - Example: God is free. We have a level of freedom too, thus we (in a limited, creaturely sense) share this attribute with God by way of analogy.
- So **incommunicable** are attributes that we do not share with God.

Simplicity

- God is simple:
 - He isn't synthetic (like a synthetic jacket which is made up of different materials); He isn't made up of various parts.
 - Humans are made up of parts like souls and bodies; but God is Spirit.
- Simplicity means that His existence and His attributes are identical
 - God cannot be different than He is.
 - If He ceases to be eternal, for example, He ceases to be God.
 - So His character/attributes are not things He has different choices of:
 - He can't choose to not be sovereign, to not be loving, etc.
 - To exist as God, He must be 100% of what He is without change
 - For humans, existence and attributes are not identical:
 - We can have different characteristics that are not essential to our existence as human beings.
 - For example: we don't cease to be human if we cease to be good.

Simplicity

- We affirm simplicity when we say: ‘God is one in essence’.
- This is important because it means that God can’t choose between His love and His justice, etc.
 - Example: Some imply that God’s love is greater than some of His attributes! (The book: ‘Love Wins’).
 - But God was no less loving when he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah than when He sent His son to the cross, for God is free to show mercy and compassion on whomever He will.
- So in everything He does, God is simultaneously all His attributes:
 - At Sodom and Gomorrah: He was 100% love and 100% justice.

Simplicity

- Romans 3:21-27
 - *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 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.”*
- Here, in the crucifixion of Christ, we see the greatest possible conflict in his inner being, and yet ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself’.
 - God was ‘the just and the justifier of the those who have faith’.
 - He can only be both of these if he cannot overlook his justice when he has love and mercy.

Simplicity

- Keeps us from singling out one attribute over another
 - To do so is, essentially, to create an idol.
- Keeps us from the error of saying that God can limit himself:
 - For example: Open Theists who say ‘God is sovereign but has chosen not to be sovereign in certain matters’.
 - Or ‘God is impassible except for when He chooses to be passible’.
 - It is impossible for Him to limit himself anymore than it is impossible to make himself not eternal.
- He cannot be other than Himself, the sum total of His attributes, or He ceases to be God.