

- I. Session 38: The Simplicity of God 1: Definitions and Summary of Proofs
- a. What is Divine simplicity?
- i. Irony of the name “Divine Simplicity”
1. At the surface it sounds wrong to call God “simple” since He is far from “simple” in the sense that He is more wise, and infinite than we are.
  2. It also sounds wrong to say God is simple at the surface when a proper study of God leads us to realize that the things of God is more deep than we can comprehend or understand.
  3. The other irony of the name is the fact that the doctrine of divine simplicity is one of the more complicated doctrine of God in Christian theology!
  4. So clearly there is something about the meaning of simplicity that we need to pay more close attention to since simple here does not simply mean “easy;” what then is the doctrine of Divine Simplicity?
- ii. Defining Divine Simplicity
1. The doctrine of divine simplicity is the idea that God is not composed of parts.
    - a. “Parts” here is also defined as components of a whole that is in of itself less than the whole and therefore “parts” is not itself the thing itself that is the whole.
    - b. Given that this can sound very abstract here’s an illustration: Water is made up of H<sub>2</sub>O. The parts of the water, hydrogen and Oxygen, is not water. Thus water is made up of things that is not water.
  2. John Frame: “To say that God is simple, in scholastic philosophy, is to say that there is no composition in his being. Specifically, there is no composition of physical parts, form and matter, actual and potential, genus and differentia, substance and accident, God and his essence, essence and attributes, attributes and one another, or essence and *esse*. God is not, then, in any sense made up of parts.”<sup>1</sup>
  3. James Dolezal is a leading theologian on Divine Simplicity:
    - a. Simple definition: “There is nothing in God that is not God.”<sup>2</sup>
    - b. Longer definition: “In short, the doctrine teaches that all that is in God is God. God is not built up of parts that are more basic than his divinity. Thus, God is not only loving, wise, good, and just, for example—but he is also love, wisdom, goodness, and justice. He is identical with each of this attributes. If this were not the case then God’s being would depend on something other than

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<sup>1</sup> John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 225.

<sup>2</sup> James Dolezal, *God Without Parts* (Eugene, OR: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2011), 2.

himself. Furthermore, God's essence is identical with his existence; that is, he does not receive his existence from another, but exists in and through his own nature. It is his nature to exist."<sup>3</sup>

4. Another way of stating Divine Simplicity is that God is not a composite being; that is, He is not made up of components that is not God.
  5. If we understand God's Simplicity we understand that He is personally His attributes, and that His attributes are not somehow something not "God," bits that is composed together to make God.
- b. The controversy of the doctrine of Divine Simplicity
- i. It is rarely taught even among churches that profess it: "Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists all confessed that God is "without parts" and the Belgic Confession even made divine simplicity its opening affirmation: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God." Nowadays, we hear very little about God's simplicity. Many seminaries either don't teach it or mention it only in order to disparage it as a needlessly abstruse and nonsensical doctrine."<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. It is seen as too philosophical.
  - iii. It is seen as not true.
- c. Is Divine Simplicity Biblical?
- i. Discussion of method: There is not be one verse that says "God is simple," but Divine Simplicity like the Trinity requires various truths of various doctrines from various verses to come together much in the same way with the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus we need to explore the relationship of various attributes of God and also how Divine Simplicity gives explanatory power for what's going on in various passages of Scripture.
  - ii. Divine Simplicity follows from the fact that God is Spirit and not a physical body
    1. This is probably the most obvious argument: God does not have physical body parts because He is Spirit.
    2. The Proof that God is Spirit
      - a. "*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*" (John 4:24)
        - i. Plainly stated: God is Spirit.
        - ii. Noted this is Jesus' answer to the Samaritan woman's discussion about physical places of worship (John 4:19) and thus showing a contrast

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<sup>3</sup> From <http://www.placefortruth.org/content/why-divine-simplicity-matters-0>.

<sup>4</sup> From <http://www.placefortruth.org/content/why-divine-simplicity-matters-0>.

- of God being as Spirit in contrast to merely being physical.
- b. *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (2 Corinthians 3:17)*
  3. Since God is Spirit, He is not in essence a physical being that requires physical parts that are not Himself.
  - iii. Divine Simplicity follows from the aseity of God
    1. Remember the definition of aseity of God: It reference to the independence and self-sufficiency of God.
    2. The Proof for aseity
      - a. *“Or who has first given to Him [a]that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory [b]forever. Amen” (Romans 11:35-36)*
        - i. God does not owe anything to anyone or anything because no one or nothing gave something to God.
        - ii. Instead all things owe their existence to God.
      - b. Recall this verse from our earlier series: *“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;” (Acts 17:24-25)*
        - i. God does not need to dwell in man made locations (Acts 17:24)
        - ii. Notice God is not “served by human hands” (Acts 17:25)
        - iii. Notice God also does not “needed anything” (Acts 17:25)
    3. Since God is independent and self-sufficient, therefore He does not need anything that is not God, to make Him God.
  - iv. Divine Simplicity follows from the Sovereignty of God
    1. Illustration of how something depends on its parts: A person’s good health is dependent upon his liver, lungs, heart, etc.
    2. We have already established that God is Sovereign.
    3. If God is sovereign, then He must be Sovereign over Himself and not be dependent upon parts.
  - v. Divine Simplicity follows from God’s name is Himself
    1. What follows was established from our earlier series.
    2. Our worship (including our exaltation) should be only of God: *“Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’” (Luke 4:8)*
    3. Yet we also see should exalt His name: *“O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.” (Psalm 34:3)*
      - a. Note the object of exaltation is “His name”

- b. **How can this be?** The only way we can do this without worshipping something that is not God is that His name is synonymous with Himself.
    - 4. Other passages that shows worship directed towards His Name
      - a. Sing praise to the Name (**Psalm 7:17, 9:2, 18:49**)
      - b. Glory is due to His Name (**Psalm 29:2**)
      - c. Fear His Name (**Psalm 61:5**)
  - vi. Divine Simplicity follows from God's swearing in His Holiness is swearing to Himself<sup>5</sup>
    - 1. **Psalm 89:35, Amos 4:2** talks about God swearing by His Holiness.
    - 2. But **Hebrews 6:13** states "*For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,*"
    - 3. Thus Holiness is Himself
- d. Why is Divine Simplicity important?
  - i. It shows that God is truly sufficient and does not need us. Instead as creatures we need Him.
  - ii. It shows that God is always personal; that every attribute is personal.

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<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 228.