

Taking God Seriously

A note on method in approaching the subjects that follow. When looking at specific themes and concepts of theology, one must look across the totality of Scripture, and not necessarily for an individual text of Scripture to prove the case. There may not be a specific text that teaches everything one wants to know about a specific doctrine (the Trinity for instance), but that does not mean the concept is not biblical. When thinking about God, rarely will the Bible speak directly, but rather give the reader hints and implications throughout the entirety of Scripture. The unfolding story will reveal God as He is, though never exhaustively. Faithfulness to God requires His followers to submit to the way He has revealed Himself, and not complain that this is not the way in which we would prefer.

The Existence of God

1. Scripture presupposes the existence of God, stating that the creation itself testifies to the reality of God (Gen. 1:1; Rom. 1:19-21).
 - a. This is the starting point for Christians.
 - b. Scripture itself only makes sense if there is a Creator God who speaks (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21).
 - c. Scripture assumes, since there is creation, there must be a Creator.
 - d. Therefore, it never seeks to prove the existence of God in the way that many would desire.
 - e. This does not mean that there are no signs that are pointing to the His existence embedded in nature and in logic itself.
2. Is believing in God rational? Arguments for the existence of God:
 - a. Ontological Argument¹:
 - i. God, by definition, is the Being that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, or the Being that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.
 1. If you can conceive of a Being greater than God, than that Being is God.
 - ii. A being that exists is greater than a being that is only a thought.
 1. A painting completed by an artist is greater than the same painting that resides only in the mind of the artist.
 2. The Mona Lisa in reality, hanging on a museum wall, is greater than the Mona Lisa in the mind of Leonardo da Vinci
 - iii. Since God is the Being that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, He must exist because existence is greater than non-existence, and nothing greater can be conceived.
 - iv. Therefore, God exists.
 1. Some may object that this does not prove the existence of God since, as an example, believing in an island that is greater than every other island does not mean it is real. However, the

¹ This is argument was formulated by Anselm in *Proslogion*. Found in Anselm, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 87-88.

argument is not to be applied to anything other than God. It remains logically true when thinking of God, for He is the Being that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

b. Cosmological Argument²:

i. Thomas Aquinas formulates three ways in which the existence of God can be explained cosmologically (i.e., the structure of the universe):

1. The Unmoved Mover:

- a. The law of inertia or “Newton’s first law states that, if a body is at rest or moving at a constant speed in a straight line, it will remain at rest or keep moving in a straight line at constant speed unless it is acted upon by a force.”³ A golf ball will remain on the tee until it is acted upon from the outside force of the club being swung by the golfer.⁴ The same golf ball will also continue on forever unless gravity, and the ground act upon it to bring it to a halt. If these two things didn’t happen, then golf would not exist.
- b. Since creation is in motion (this is perceptible with our senses), there must be a cause for this motion. Sunrises and sunsets testify to the reality of motion in the world.
- c. Since nothing can move itself, but must be moved from the outside, there must be something to move it.
- d. There cannot be an infinite regression of movers, for everything in motion must have a source of the motion. There must be a starting point.
- e. Aquinas concludes, “We are therefore bound to arrive at a first mover which is not moved by anything, and all men understand that this is God.”⁵
- f. This is the Unmoved Mover. A Being that moves everything else but is moved by nothing outside itself. If there is no Mover, then motion would not take place.

2. Uncaused Cause:

- a. The law of causality states: every effect must have a cause.⁶

² This argument is found in Thomas Aquinas, *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A. M. Fairweather (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 54-55.

³ “Newton’s Laws of Motion,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 15, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/Newtons-laws-of-motion>.

⁴ This illustration is found in R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: an Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 128-129.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A. M. Fairweather (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 54.

⁶ R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: an Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 51.

- b. Similar to the Unmoved Mover, Aquinas argues that the presence of effects must be traced back to an Uncaused Cause, since an infinite regression is not possible.
 - c. Humans see effects and can trace the cause by the effects. Milk on the floor means a spill took place.
 - d. Since an effect cannot cause itself, there must be a First Cause that is itself uncaused.
 - e. He ends his thought by saying, "We are therefore bound to suppose that there is a first efficient cause. And all men call this God."⁷
 - i. It is crucial to note that the definition states, 'every effect must have a cause' and not 'everything must have a cause'.
 - ii. If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. However, He is uncaused.
 - iii. God is not an effect and, therefore, does not need a cause for His existence.
3. Absolute Necessity of Being:
- a. There are things that exist in the world that do not have to exist (i.e., cars do not have to exist, rocks do not have to exist, animals and humans do not have to exist...etc.). This can be seen by their temporal nature. They have a beginning and an end. They do not last forever.
 - b. We can imagine a world in which the pen in my hand does not exist. They are contingent, which means they rely on something else for their existence.
 - i. I, as an individual, am contingent because I cannot exist apart from my parents. If they never existed, then I would not exist. Even if my parents existed, it was not necessary for me to exist. They didn't have to have children.
 - c. Because there are contingent beings, there must be a Being that exists necessarily.
 - d. William Lane Craig describes this argument further, "all beings cannot be contingent beings, for if everything were merely contingent, then at some point in time everything would cease to exist."⁸
 - e. If everything was possible, but nothing actual, then nothing would exist. Since something exists, including the author, then something, by necessity, must exist.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A. M. Fairweather (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 55.

⁸ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 98.

- i. If it were possible that nothing could exist, then nothing would exist.
 - ii. Therefore, since something exists, there must be one who exists *by necessity*.
 - iii. If ever there were a moment where nothing existed, nothing would exist. Therefore, there must be something that exists necessarily. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, out of nothing, nothing comes.
 - f. An infinite regression of beings is not possible, so there must be one Being who is the cause of all other things that exist to come into existence. This Being is what we call God.
- ii. Is the universe its own cause, or is a Creator necessary?
 - 1. These three arguments lead to a discussion with atheists who would disagree with these lines of thinking:
 - a. The universe came into existence through the Big Bang, which as a point of singularity in which all of the matter and energy of the universe was compressed into a single point, and then expanded rapidly, and is still expanding, into the universe that we observe today.
 - b. This theory rules out the possibility of a Creator God. However, there is one glaring hole in this theory that is not addressed: where did this point of singularity originate?
 - c. Sproul lists four possibilities to explain the universe, which answers the above question⁹:
 - i. Illusion: the universe is simply an illusion and is not real.
 - 1. Descartes's famous conclusion, "I think therefore I am" eliminates the possibility for illusion because one can reason for their own existence through thinking, and in his case, through doubting. The line of thinking is as follows: If I am doubting then I am thinking; if I am thinking then I exist because an illusion cannot think; therefore, I exist.¹⁰
 - 2. If something exists, then the universe is not an illusion. If something exists, then there needs to be an explanation for this something.

⁹ These are found in chapters 11-15 of R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: an Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: an Introduction to Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 105.

- ii. The universe is self-creating.
 1. This cannot be because it violates the law of noncontradiction, because the universe must exist before it creates itself in order to have the power. Therefore, it must exist and not exist at the same time and in the same relationship. This is absurd.
 2. Though it may not be readily admitted, the theory of the Big Bang would fall into this category with no explanation given for its origin.
 - iii. There is a self-existent Being.
 1. This does not violate the law of noncontradiction because the Being is not creating itself, but rather has life in itself (this idea is known as the aseity of God and will be discussed further under the attributes of God).
 2. This self-existent Being is the source of all else that exists.
 3. This being must be eternal, for if there was ever a time when it did not exist, nothing would now exist.
 - iv. The universe is self-existent.
 1. The universe would necessarily be eternal, but to look at the universe is to see it constantly changing. What part of it, then, is eternal?
 2. Whatever part of the universe that is self-existent must transcend that which is not (i.e., the immaterial, eternal, portion within a tree or man or something else).
 3. This leads to the conclusion that there is a transcendent something that created everything else, which is the third option.
 - d. It is absurd to reason the self-generation of the universe, as well as it being an illusion. The only viable option is the presence of a self-existent Creator God, which aligns perfectly with the Genesis account of creation.
- c. Teleological Argument:
 - i. The argument succinctly put is this: the world around us looks designed. It operates according to laws that are intelligent, consistent, and harmonious. Therefore, there must be a designer behind it.
 - ii. Telos means an end. There is a goal in creation, a design behind it.

- iii. Craig writes, “it infers an intelligent designer of the universe, just as we infer an intelligent designer for any product in which we discern evidence of purposeful adaptation of means to some end (*telos*).”¹¹
 - 1. If a man is walking in a forest and sees a rock, he may not think that someone purposely put it there. It is natural for the rock to be present. However, if a man found a watch in the forest, he would not assume it was there on its own, but rather it had been left behind. Why is this the case? Because the watch is intricately designed, it would not be reasonable to believe it evolved in the forest. The intelligence and skill needed to craft a watch displays the presence of a watchmaker.
 - 2. In the same way, the universe, in its order, complexity, and efficiency declares a Designer.
- iv. Within this argument, there is a subcategory known as the Fine-Tuning argument.
 - 1. This proof argues for the existence of God based on how the earth has been fine tuned in such a way that life is suitable for humans. If the earth were closer to the sun, humans would burn. If the earth were farther from the sun, humans would freeze. The earth is in the perfect position to sustain life.
 - 2. Though this is not definite proof, and many atheists would simply call the earth a ‘coincidence’, this is surely a sign of a Designer.
 - 3. Keller writes, “It is technically possible that we just happened to be in the one universe in which organic life occurred. Though you could not prove that the fine-tuning of the universe was due to some sort of design, it would be unreasonable to draw the conclusion that it wasn’t. Although organic life could have just happened without a Creator, does it make sense to live as if that infinitely remote chance is true?”¹²
 - 4. It is reasonable, when one sees the complexity of the eye or the ear, to conclude that there is an intentional design to it; and it is not the product of chance.
- d. Moral Argument
 - i. The moral argument states: there is an absolute standard of right and wrong because there is a Lawgiver who is Himself absolutely right and good.
 - ii. Craig defines this argument saying, “[it] implies the existence of a Being that is the embodiment of the ultimate Good, which is the source of the objective moral values we experience in the world.”¹³

¹¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 99-100.

¹² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 136.

¹³ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 104.

- iii. The words 'good and bad' or 'right and wrong' imply a standard to which all else is to be compared. The lack of a standard entails a lack of objective right or wrong.
 - 1. To argue against this standard, namely God, is to lose all ability to ground morality.
 - iv. Aquinas notes that the use of terms true implies the truest, good implies the most good, noble implies the noblest, with the fullest granting the properties to the lesser.¹⁴
 - 1. The good in humans are only good as they are compared to the goodness of God. Thus, God is the standard.
 - v. God is the standard of that which is good.
 - 1. To be evil is to go away from the Person of God.
 - 2. Right, wrong, good, and bad are words that can be used honestly, and with a particular standard, by those who believe in a transcendent, good God.
 - vi. If there were no standard, then the preference of the individual is what takes precedence.
 - 1. This relativistic notion is common, and yet there remains a sense of ought that transcends even still.
 - 2. C. S. Lewis writes, "If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other, there would be no sense in preferring civilized morality to savage morality, or Christian morality to Nazi morality. In fact, of course, we all do believe some moralities are better than others."¹⁵
 - 3. Without God, we cannot argue that what the Nazis did was absolutely wrong, but rather something that I disagree with. This argument will be disdained by the modern culture, but the loss of the absolute standard leads only to relativism.
3. Why do Christians need arguments such as this?
- a. Arguments for the existence of God are not essential for salvation, which is through faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9).
 - b. is impossible to have faith in God without believing that He exists. Therefore, they may be of use for pre-evangelism, removing obstacles for faith in Christ, or granting confidence to disciples who may be experiencing doubts (Heb. 11:6).
 - c. Christians are to be ready to give a defense for the hope that is within them, and these arguments could be helpful in this act, though the sharing of the gospel is of primary importance (1 Pet. 3:15).
 - d. When facing individuals who do not believe in God, it can be helpful to solidify one's confidence by having rational arguments for the existence of God. Again,

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A. M. Fairweather (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 55

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: a Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books Broadcast Talks, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 13.

these arguments cannot save. However, it can help greatly to know that it is rational to believe in a Creator God.

- e. Some of these arguments may not be as convincing as others to any particular individual, however, seen in their totality, they are weighty signposts pointing to a Creator God.
4. A final note:
- a. It is true that these arguments alone do not necessarily entail the God the Bible. However, the descriptions given certainly reflect consistency with the way in which God has revealed Himself in His Word.
 - b. This is why Christians are dependent upon the inspired, inerrant Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament, for clarity on who God is.
 - c. Nature and logic require a God, and the Bible is His Word to man.

The Attributes of God

1. Types of Attributes:

- a. Incommunicable: The attributes of God that are unique to God and are not shared, or comprehended entirely, with creatures (e.g., aseity, simplicity, eternity...etc.).
- b. Communicable: The attributes of God that are shared with His creatures (e.g., love, justice, mercy).¹⁶
 - i. Followers of Christ, in being called to live like Christ, are to live in conformity to the communicable attributes of God (Mt. 5:48; Rom. 8:29, 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 2:20; 1 Jn. 2:6).
 - ii. Man will never be perfect in these attributes but strive to be holy because God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16).

2. Incomprehensibility of God

- a. Mystery must be expected when speaking of God in His Being. Humility is required.
 - i. Bavinck writes, "The distance between God and us is the gulf between the Infinite and the finite between eternity and time, between being and becoming, between the All and the nothing... While Holy Scripture affirms this truth in the strongest terms, it nevertheless sets forth a doctrine of God that fully upholds his knowability."¹⁷
 - 1. Scripture is clear that believers can and do know God truly, but never comprehensively.
 - ii. Augustine succinctly states, "We are speaking of God. Is it any wonder if you do not comprehend? *For if you comprehend, it is not God you comprehend.* Let it be a pious confession of ignorance rather than a rash

¹⁶ Definitions are found in Michael Scott Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 75.

¹⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 30.

profession of knowledge. To attain some slight knowledge of God is a great blessing; to comprehend him, however, is totally impossible.”¹⁸

1. Job’s response to God answering his charge is: Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further (Job 40:4-5).
 2. Humility is necessary.
 3. Worship and awe should rightly ensue.
- b. Though man will not know God exhaustively, He can still be known truly.
- i. How can man speak of God in true ways if the God cannot be fully comprehended? Three uses of language to describe:¹⁹
 1. Equivocal: Something or someone is totally different from something or someone else; there is no relation. There is complete discontinuity. If applied to knowledge of God, we would know nothing true of God.
 2. Univocal: Something has the same, identical meaning as something else. There is complete continuity. If applied to knowledge of God, this would mean we can know God as he is in himself, in his essence. We would know something just as God knows it.
 3. Analogical: Describes something or someone that shares likenesses and continuity with that which it resembles. There is neither total continuity nor total discontinuity, but a similarity between the two. In relation to God, the creature’s knowledge of God and language for God is analogical.
 - ii. God can be known analogically, though with the understanding that He is of a different kind of Being.
- c. God is not of a different quantity with man but is of a different quality entirely. It is not a difference in degree, but in kind.
- i. God is not simply stronger, smarter, and bigger than man, but is of a different kind of Being. God is not Superman.
 1. Man tends to look at himself, then to God for a comparison, rather than the biblical idea of looking to God in order to understand himself. This is idolatry.
 - ii. There is a fundamental difference between the Creator and the creature.²⁰ (Gen. 1-2; Is. 55:8-9)
- d. Man, as a finite creature, will never exhaust God (Ps. 147:5; Is. 40:28, 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-35).

¹⁸ Augustine, *Lectures on the gospel of John*, tract. 38 quoted in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 48.

¹⁹ Definitions found in glossary of Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 247-256.

²⁰ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 22.

- e. True knowledge of God is available because God has graciously revealed Himself (See session 1 of Taking God Seriously).
 - f. God cannot be comprehended exhaustively, so any image of God will fall short and is forbidden (Ex. 20:4; Lev. 26:1).
 - i. Calvin notes, “[Isaiah] teaches that God’s majesty is sullied by an unfitting and absurd fiction, when the incorporeal is made to resemble corporeal matter, the invisible a visible likeness, the spirit an inanimate object, the immeasurable a puny bit of wood, stone, or gold [Isa. 40:18-20 and 411:7, 29; 45:9; 46:5-7].”²¹
 - ii. An idol is seeking to capture the essence of God in some type of material item, which betrays His incomprehensibility. It is the height of folly.
 - iii. This is why God is so adamantly against making idols, for they will never capture His fullness, and will actually distort one’s thinking of God.
 - 1. The golden calf for Israel distorted their understanding of God so that, when they begin to worship God, they worshiped the idol. This is why God was so swift to judge (Ex. 32).
3. The Infinity/Perfection of God
- a. Definitions:
 - i. Without boundaries or limitations.
 - ii. This can also be described as His ‘perfection’ (Mt. 5:48).
 - b. God is not limited, but boundless in his wisdom, power, and character²² (1 Chr. 29:11; Ps. 145:3; Is. 40:15, 17; Rom. 11:33).
 - i. Barrett notes, “God’s essence is unbounded, immeasurable, unfathomable, and inestimable in every way. He cannot be his attributes more than he already is.”²³
 - ii. To be infinite, or perfect, means there is no possibility for improvement, for it is already perfect, nor possibility of diminishment. Nothing can be lost in God.
 - iii. Whatever God is, He is in full.
 - iv. He is pure actuality, no potentiality.
 - c. Every other attribute of God must be understood as infinite or perfect.
 - i. Infinity is time is eternity.
 - ii. Infinity in space is omnipresence (or immensity).
 - iii. Infinity in power is omnipotence.
 - iv. Bavinck writes, “God is unlimited in his virtues, that in him every virtue is present in an absolute degree.”²⁴

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 101.

²² Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: a Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2020), 34.

²³ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 48.

²⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 160.

1. What a wonderful thought, the virtues of God, His goodness, love, mercy, and grace, are unbounded in God and know no limits.
- d. The perfection of God is linked to the goodness of God.
 - i. The attributes of God can be seen as horrible if in the hands of a despot. However, each attribute is perfect and in accordance with His character, which is good (1 Chr. 16:34; Ps. 31:19; 34:8; 86:5; 100:5; 107:1; 135:3; 145:7 Nah. 1:7; Mk. 10:18; Rm. 2:4; Jam. 1:17).
 - ii. His virtues are infinite, and He has no vices.
 - iii. This leads Christians to praise the God who is infinite.
4. The Aseity/Independence of God
 - a. Definition:
 - i. God is independent of the created order, self-sufficient, and self-existent. Put positively, he is life in and of himself.²⁵
 - ii. *A se* (of Himself).
 - iii. God has life in himself, which is why He is the Unmoved Mover, Uncaused Cause, and the Absolute Necessary Being.
 - b. God's name declares His independence (Ex. 3:14).
 - i. God eternally is, and will be, what He has always been.
 1. This acts as the foundation of trust for Moses in bringing Israel out of Egypt.
 - ii. He is always present tense.
 - iii. He possesses Being in Himself.
 - c. God is dependent upon no one outside of Himself for anything.
 - i. Bavinck writes, "God exclusively from himself, not in the sense of being self-caused but being from eternity to eternity who he is, being not becoming. God is absolute being, the fullness of being, and therefore also eternally and absolutely independent in his existence, in his perfections, in all his works, the first and the last, the sole cause and final goal of all things."²⁶
 - ii. He was not created by an outside force, nor created Himself.
 - d. There was never a time when God was not (Ps. 90:2).
 - i. As the source of all of life, if there was ever a moment when nothing existed, nothing would remain.
 1. Philosophically, this is known through the dictum "ex nihilo nihil fit", which means out of nothing, nothing comes.
 2. This must be remembered when thinking of the origins of the universe from a modern (generally secular) scientist who may claim a spontaneous self-generation in the Big Bang. This is

²⁵ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 248.

²⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 152.

illogical and, therefore, untrue. (See the above section on the arguments for the existence of God).

- ii. Sproul notes, "To say that God is self-existent simply means that there was no time when God started to exist. He has always been. He is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. Nothing caused God to come into existence. God did not make Himself. He made us."²⁷
- e. God is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1-2).
 - i. Because God is the Creator of all, He is also the owner of everything (Gen. 14:19; Ps. 50:10-12).
 - ii. Therefore, all that man has is given by God and rightfully belongs to Him (Acts 17:25; 1 Cor. 4:7).
 - iii. Therefore, when man gives an offering to God, he is not giving anything to Him that He does not already own; and, therefore, God is not obligated to recompense (Lk. 17:10). This does not imply that God is cold toward our offerings and is not abundantly gracious and merciful; it does, however, remind man that God is not required to be.
 - 1. When a young child asks his dad for money to buy him a birthday present, the father may do so gladly and, when he receives the gift sees it as precious because the child gave it to him. However, this does not change the fact that the father paid for it to begin. The child depended on the father for the resources to give the gift.
 - iv. God owes His creatures nothing (Job 41:11; Dan. 4:35; Rom. 11:35-36), though man owes God everything.
 - v. God has no needs (Ps. 50:8-15; Acts 17:24-25).²⁸
- f. Man is completely dependent.
 - i. Every individual is dependent upon others, especially parents who came before.
 - 1. If humans do not eat or drink, they will die.
 - 2. If humans do not have oxygen, they will die.
 - ii. In God, man lives and moves and has his being (Acts 17:28).
 - iii. The breath in the lungs of every individual is given by God, Who is under no obligation to him.
 - iv. This should rightly bring humility.
- g. God did not create the world by necessity, but rather out of love.²⁹
 - i. In the Trinity, God would have remained eternally happy if He had chosen not to create.
 - ii. Humans add nothing to God in His Being (Ps. 50:12; Rom. 11:34-35).

²⁷ R. C. Sproul, *Discovering the God Who Is: His Character and Being, His Power and Personality* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 25.

²⁸ This line of argument came from John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 603-606.

²⁹ Michael Scott Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 76-77.

1. This should lead the Christian not to feelings of worthlessness, but rather to praising God who chose to enter the creation in order to save (Ps. 8:4; Jn. 3:16).
 - iii. God did not have to create but chose to. He was under no obligation to save sinners but chose to out of love. There is no entitlement or rights in man before God. There is love, mercy, and grace overflowing in God.
 - h. Summary: Since God is infinite, He has life without limits within Him and depends on no one or nothing outside of Himself for anything. He has no needs. He is completely independent.
5. The Simplicity of God
- a. Definition:
 - i. God is not composed of parts.³⁰
 - ii. Simple is not used as the opposite of complex, but rather as that of the compound.
 - b. God does not become God by being a collection of different attributes.
 - i. To depend on parts in order for God to be God would mean that God is dependent on something outside of Himself in order to be God. This violates His aseity and His independence.
 - ii. Turretin writes, “nothing can be composed by itself, but whatever is composed must necessarily be composed by another; now God is the first and independent being, recognizing no other prior to himself.”³¹
 1. If something is composed of parts, then there was something outside of it to assemble those parts. This would imply there is something more simple than God necessarily in order for God to be compiled.
 - iii. Dolezal summarizes, “Because God cannot depend on what is not God in order to be God, theologians traditionally insist that all that is in God is God.”³²
 - c. God cannot be subcategorized by His specific parts, for He has no parts to categorize
 - i. Science classifies creatures into separate categories based on the similarity of parts shared by those in the group.
 - ii. Examples:
 1. Animals and plants can be divided into genus and species as one proceeds with greater specificity.
 2. Automobiles can be decomposed based on their parts and qualities (trucks, sedans, SUV’s...etc.).
 - d. The presence of parts allows for the opportunity for parts to be taken away.

³⁰ James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 40.

³¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publications, 1992), 191.

³² James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 41.

- i. Barrett writes, “Whenever there is a plurality of parts, that which is made up of those parts is vulnerable to being dissolved.”³³
 - 1. If there are parts to God that have been assembled to make God, then those parts can be taken away, lost, or dissolved.
 - 2. A cake is not a cake if the eggs, flour, and sugar is taken away.
 - 3. Therefore, God must not be made of parts by necessity.
- e. Though distinctions are made by Christians of the attributes of God, there are no differences between them in God.
 - i. Berkhof notes, “Scripture does not explicitly assert it, but implies it where it speaks of God as righteousness, truth, wisdom, light, life, love, and so on, and thus indicates that each of these properties, because of their absolute perfection is identical with His Being.”³⁴
 - 1. God does not simply possess righteousness. He is righteous in His Being.
 - 2. God does not hold all truth and understand it. He is truth in His essence (Jn. 14:6).
 - 3. God does not value and extend love, He is love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16).
 - 4. They are not parts of God that make up God, but God is His attributes.
 - 5. may see the outworking of them and understand them as different, but within God there is no difference, for He always acts as God. When He acts in judgment, He is acting as God. When man sees His love, He is acting as God.
 - ii. John Owen describes God in this way: “*The attributes of God, which alone seem to be distinct things in the essence of God, are all of them essentially the same with one another, and every one the same with the essence of God itself. For, first, they are all spoken one of another as well as of God... And, secondly, they are either infinite and infinitely perfect, or they are not. If they are, then if they are not the same with God, there are more things infinite than one, and consequently more Gods; for that which is absolutely infinite is absolutely perfect, and consequently God.*”³⁵
 - 1. Owen helpfully points out that if there are more than one infinite things, then there are more than one God, for God is infinite. Therefore, since God is infinite, all His infinite attributes must be the same as His Being.
 - 2. If infinite love or righteousness or justice exists outside of God, then there are multiple infinite Beings, which would mean there is more than one God. This cannot be.

³³ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 75.

³⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 62.

³⁵ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold, vol. 12 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 72.

- f. This can be difficult for Christians to grasp in their finite minds.
 - i. Christians intuitively believe that the goodness of God is different from the wrath of God and the love of God. However, this understanding comes from an understanding of man, rather than an understanding of God.
 - 1. One man can be loving, while another is not. Love, then, is distinct from both. The same can be said for goodness, mercy, and any other attribute.
 - 2. However, man cannot force the categories of man back on to God. God is love. God is righteous. They are not distinct from Him.
 - ii. God acts in time and space in a variety of ways and speaks to man in a way that he can understand (as discussed in the previous session). Though His actions are different and are interpreted by man in human categories, the Godhead has not changed.
 - 1. This means when God calls for judgment on the enemies of Israel, He is acting in what man would describe as justice, as God. When God spares the city of Nineveh who repented, He is acting in what is described as mercy, though He is still the same God.
 - 2. The distinctions are made in the minds of man so that man might understand. The distinctions and divisions are not found in God.
 - 3. An example can be seen in the reign of Saul. In 1 Samuel 15 God is said to regret making Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11). However, a few verses later, the author says, “the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret” (1 Sam. 15:29). Scripture is not contradicting itself. Rather, God acts in such a way that man would perceive it as regret, while God Himself has not changed. It is man’s perception that sees this change of action as regret. In God, there is none.
 - 4. This relieves the tension felt between the justice of God and the mercy of God, because there is no difference between the two in the Godhead. God is merciful and He is just. They cannot be pitted against one another.
- g. The simplicity of God is crucial for understanding the attributes of God in an orthodox manner.
 - i. In the Trinity, each Person of the Godhead is truly God and, therefore, cannot be separated from the other Members. Distinctions can be made, but divisions cannot.
- h. Is this doctrine practical to Christians?
 - i. Petrus Van Mastricht lists several practical implications for this doctrine.³⁶

³⁶ The following list and information is found in Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R Beeke and Michael T Spangler, trans. Todd M Rester, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 148-152.

1. The omnimodal simplicity of God discloses to us the foundation of every perfection in God and of every imperfection in the creatures.
 - a. Christians can seek to glorify God in all things because God is simple. He can trust that God will keep His promises and will be loving toward His people in all situations because it is who He is (1 Jn. 2:8, 16). Along with this, He not only grants salvation to His people, but is salvation (Ps. 27:1). He not only gives eternal life but is eternal life (1 Jn. 5:20). Therefore, Christians can believe every other doctrine of God because God is simple.
2. It teaches us to lean in simple rest upon God alone.
 - a. God is simple, He gives simply (Jam. 1:5). Christians can approach the throne of grace with confidence, believing they will not be turned away (Heb. 4:16).
3. It reminds us that we should attend to divine worship with a simple heart.
 - a. Christians are to worship God with a sincere heart that is set on Him. It frees the believer to worship in a variety of means because it is the heart that is attuned to God and not the outward circumstance (Phil. 1:20-21). Those who are of a pure heart are called blessed by Christ (Mt. 5:8).
4. It urges sincerity in our manner of life.
 - a. Because God is simple, being sincere and true, Christians should strive to live in accordance. Christians are not to be hypocritical, nor be false in their words (Mt. 5:37).
5. It moves us to the study of contentment.
 - a. Because God is simple, Christians ought to be content with living simply. The more possessions, status, and other realities Christians possess and desire, the more distraction can creep in, and the more that can be lost. Therefore, contentment in the simple God should lead the Christian to live simply (Lk. 10:41; Phil. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:6).

6. The Immutability of God

a. Definition:

- i. God does not change.
- ii. Vos writes, "That perfection in God whereby He is exalted above all becoming and development, as well as above all diminution, and remains the same eternally."³⁷

³⁷ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: Theology Proper*, ed. To-ho Pak, Annemie Godbehere, and Roelof van Ijken, trans. Richard B. Gaffin, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 13.

1. Because God is perfect, He is above all development or diminishment. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8; Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).
- b. Perfection necessitates immutability.
 - i. To change is to increase or to decrease in some manner, whether growing greater or diminishing.
 - ii. In either case, God is either becoming greater, implying a lack in some way, or diminishing, implying a lessening of His person compromises His perfection.
 - iii. As the Father of lights, there is no shadow of variation or change in Him (Jas. 1:17).
 - c. God's character is trustworthy because He is immutable.
 - i. God is love; and this will not change (1 Jn. 4:8, 16).
 1. Jonathan Edwards writes, "The apostle tells us that "God is love;" and therefore, seeing he is an infinite being it follows that he is an infinite fountain of love. Seeing he is an all-sufficient being, it follows that he is a full and overflowing, and inexhaustible fountain of love. And in that he is an unchangeable and eternal being, he is an unchangeable and eternal fountain of love."³⁸
 - ii. God is holy and just; and this will not change (Deut. 32:4; Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8)
 1. The standard of holiness will not be changed, for it is according to the unchanging character of God.
 - a. A judge in the US court system who changes the standards of the law would be disbarred for tampering with justice.
 2. The wicked will be punished for their sin.
 - a. Barrett notes, "If God's justice is immutable, then so is his knowledge, for an immutable justice demands that God never forget the sins of the wicked (Hos. 7:2)."³⁹
 3. The forgiveness found in Christ will not change.
 - a. Passages such as Isaiah 43:35 speak of the Lord forgetting the sins of His people. This is speaking of the forgiveness of God in a way that man can relate to. He will no longer hold it against believers to the point that it appears He has 'forgotten' them.
 - d. Because God does not change, His promises are secure.
 - i. It is because the Lord does not change that He did not consume His covenant people (Mal. 3:6).
 - ii. The work of Christ will not change because God does not change (Jn. 19:30).

³⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits: Christian Love as Manifested in the Heart and Life*, ed. Tryon Edwards (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 327.

³⁹ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 102.

- iii. He will complete the work of salvation that He started (Ph. 1:6).
 - iv. The covenant given to the people of God is based upon the unchangeable character of God (Heb. 6:17-18).
 - 1. This passage is meant to grant assurance to the believer that he might hold fast to the hope set before him (Heb. 6:18).
 - v. If it were possible for God to change, then there would be no certainty that He would keep His promises to His people; but God is not like man who lies or changes His mind (Num. 23:19).
 - e. Immutability does not imply that God is immobile in the world.
 - i. The Bible is clear that God acts in the world.
 - ii. Poythress notes, “God himself finds no “difficulty” in remaining the same God and in acting in the world in a multitude of ways. He acts in each situation in harmony with his unchanging character. His character as the good God, a just God, a merciful God, leads to action (see Ex. 34:6-7).”⁴⁰
 - iii. Barrett also speaks to this reality, writing, “Perhaps it appears counterintuitive, but only an immutable God can be supremely alive, active, and vibrant. Should he change, we would have no assurance that his vitality would continue or that his vibrancy would remain pure and perfect.”⁴¹
 - iv. God’s immutability does not mean He is impersonal and inactive in the world. Rather, it guarantees that He will consistently act according to who He is.
7. The Eternity of God
- a. Definition:
 - i. Keathley succinctly defines it as, “God’s nature without beginning or end.”⁴²
 - b. His eternity is evident through His name.
 - i. Charnock notes, “I Am, is his proper name. This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past, nor future; if it were *he was*, it would intimate he were not now what he once was; if it were *he will be*, it would intimate he were not yet what he will be”.⁴³
 - ii. The present tense of His name denotes His eternity. He will not become something that He previously was not. He is eternally the same.
 - c. God is God from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2).
 - i. He has no beginning and will have no end because He has life in Himself.
 - ii. He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last (Rev. 22:13).
 - d. God’s eternity is crucial to understanding His other attributes.

⁴⁰ Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: a Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2020), 59.

⁴¹ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 104.

⁴² Kenneth Keathley, *Systematic Theology I: Class Notes* (Raleigh, NC: SEBTS, 2006-2007), 87.

⁴³ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God: Two Volumes in One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 287.

- i. Charnock lists several attributes that are connected to God’s eternity⁴⁴:
 - 1. Aseity
 - a. God could not have life in Himself if He were not eternal.
 - b. If he ceased to have life, all of creation would cease to have life for He sustains it all (Acts 17:28; Heb. 1:3).
 - c. If there was ever a time before God was, He would not now exist. Therefore, to be self-existing, He must be eternal.
 - 2. Immutability
 - a. Charnock notes, “It is contrary to the nature of immutability to be without eternity; for whatsoever begins, is changed in its passing from not being to being. It began to be what it was not; and if it ends, it ceaseth to be what it was; it cannot therefore be said to be God, if there were neither beginning or ending, or succession in it (Mal. 3:6)”.⁴⁵
 - b. For something to be eternal it must remain the same. If it changes, it is not eternal. Therefore, for God to truly be immutable, He must be eternal.
 - 3. Perfection
 - a. “Whatsoever is contracted within the limits of time, cannot swallow up all perfections in itself.”⁴⁶
 - b. Time is a limit for creatures, but God is perfect. He has no limits. He is independent and not bound by anything or anyone in His Being. Therefore, God is eternal.
 - 4. Omnipotence
 - a. God could not be omnipotent, or almighty (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Ex. 6:3; Num. 24:4, 16; Ps. 91:1; 2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8), if His power began to be or could cease to be.
 - b. Temporary power, even incredible temporary power, is not omnipotence.
 - c. For God to be omnipotent, He must be eternal.
- 8. The Immensity/ Omnipresence of God
 - a. Definition:
 - i. God is not subject to limitations of space
 - 1. He is not confined to a particular location, nor is there a any place where he cannot be found.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ These are several points found in Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God: Two Volumes in One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 288-290.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 289

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ This definition is found in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 243.

2. God is not stretched and present more so in one location than another. He is fully present everywhere, at all times.
- ii. Finite objects are limited to a particular place at a particular time.
 1. If a cup is on the table it cannot, at the same time, also be in the sink.
- b. The immensity of God sets Him apart from false gods.
 - i. Jeremiah 23:23-24, “Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.”
 1. Erickson notes on this passage, “The implication seems to be that being a god at hand does not preclude his being afar off as well. He fills the whole heaven and earth.”⁴⁸
 2. God being near to His people does not mean that He is not also, at the same moment, filling every other space as well.
 - ii. Elijah mockingly asks the prophets of Baal if their god was on a journey and could not hear them (1 Kgs. 18:27).
 1. It is implied that if Baal was on a journey, then he could not be present to hear the prophets’ prayers and see the sacrifice being offered.
 2. God is set in contrast because He is ever present and will hear the prayers of His people.
- c. The immensity of God brings comfort to believers and fear to unbelievers.
 - i. God’s presence in all spaces brings comfort to believers, as Jesus tells His disciples that He will be with them always, to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20 cf., Ps. 23:4; Is. 43:2).
 - ii. The psalmist answers the question of hiding in Psalm 139 when he writes, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.”
 1. There is nowhere to hide for those who are seeking to run from God.
- d. God’s may be present in a special way, in a special location, but this does not imply He is not present everywhere else.
 - i. God led the people of Israel out of Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:17-22)
 - ii. God’s glory descended on the temple built by Solomon (2 Chr. 7:1-3)
 - iii. God’s glory departed from the temple (Ez. 10).

⁴⁸ Ibid. 244.

- iv. In the new heavens and new earth, there is no need for a light for the glory of God will give it light (Rev. 21:23).
 - e. God is not being stretched as He fills the earth.
 - i. God's presence is not like butter being spread across a piece of toast.
 - ii. God is infinite and, therefore, He is not limited or stretched by space.
9. Omnipotence
- a. Definition:
 - i. God is all-powerful.⁴⁹
 - b. This consists of two, closely related biblical ideas⁵⁰:
 - i. God can do anything He pleases (Job. 23:13; Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Is. 14:24-27; 55:11; Dan. 4:35).
 - ii. Nothing is too hard for God (Gen. 18:14; Num. 11:23; Job 42:2; Jer. 32:17; Zech. 8:6; Mt. 19:26; Mk. 10:27; Lk. 1:37; 18:37).
 - 1. Included in this list, and one eternally wonderful reason to praise God, is that He is able to save His church who are unable to save themselves.
 - c. Are there things that God cannot do?
 - i. Frame lists six kinds of actions that God cannot do⁵¹:
 - 1. Logically contradictory actions.
 - a. God cannot save and then condemn the same individual.
 - b. God cannot make a square circle.
 - c. Frame notes, "it is a mark of his great power that he always acts and thinks consistently, that he can never be pushed into the inconsistencies that plague human life."⁵²
 - 2. Immoral actions
 - a. God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2).
 - b. God cannot be tempted with evil (Jam. 1:13).
 - c. Since God is the standard of holiness and righteousness for humans to follow, He cannot live contrary to His character (1 Pet. 1:16; cf., Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; Mt. 5:48).
 - d. This is not a weakness, but rather admirable. He is always morally excellent and consistent.
 - 3. Actions appropriate only to finite creatures
 - a. Frame notes actions such as "buying shoes, celebrating one's birthday, or taking medicine for a cough". He further details that "His "inability" exists only in his nonincarnate state, and in that state, the reasons he "cannot" do these things pertain to his strengths, and not to his weakness."⁵³

⁴⁹ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 253.

⁵⁰ These ideas are located in John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 515-518.

⁵¹ This list is found in *Ibid.* 518-521.

⁵² *Ibid.* 518-519.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 520.

- b. Because God is Spirit, there are many actions humans do regularly that God has no need to. However, these show God's strength and man's weakness, not the reverse. Man has a need to eat, drink, and sleep to retain his strength; God has no need of such actions (Ps. 50:7-15; 121:4).
 - 4. Actions denying his own nature as God
 - a. God cannot abandon His own attributes or nature.
 - b. God cannot create an equal god.
 - c. God cannot absorb the universe into His being.
 - d. Any of these actions would compromise God as the One True and Living God.
 - 5. Changing His eternal plan
 - a. God established His plan from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-14).
 - b. He works "all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11).
 - c. The past cannot be changed, and the future plan is set.
 - 6. Making a stone so large that he cannot lift it
 - a. This is a famous paradox that is often hurled at believers who seek to disprove God.
 - b. Though there is no contradiction present within the formulation, it seems the inability to lift something too heavy is an action appropriate only to finite creatures. Man can make items that are too heavy for him to lift on his own.
 - c. In order for God to create a stone that He could not lift, it would mean He must compromise His infinity, which is a strength and not a weakness.⁵⁴
- d. A necessary distinction:
- i. Absolute power of God
 - 1. Barrett defines this as, "God's ability to do all things, including those things that are possible for God but that God, for any variety of reasons, chooses not to do."⁵⁵
 - ii. Ordinate power of God
 - 1. This refers to those things that God has ordained, decreed, and willed to do.⁵⁶
 - iii. The ordinate power of God is contained within the absolute power of God. It is because God has absolute power that God is able to do whatever He desires to do.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 521.

⁵⁵ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 189.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

1. An example of the distinction can be seen in the universal flood (Gen. 6-8). After the flood had subsided God promised that He would never again flood the earth, though it is clear that wickedness still pervaded the earth (Gen. 9:15; cf., 8:21). Does God lack the power today to flood the earth? Certainly not. However, He has promised to never do so again, and this promise stands.
- e. This is a doctrine that should bring confidence to the believer.
 - i. The omnipotent God that started the work of salvation will see to its completion (Phil. 1:6).
 - ii. The sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd and follow Him are kept safe in God's hand (Jn. 10:27-30).
 - iii. Since God has justified a believer, no one can condemn or bring a charge against them (Rom. 8:33-34).
 - iv. Romans 8:29-30 describes a chain of salvation that cannot be broken. Those who are truly saved will be truly saved by the omnipotent God.
 - v. Every action of God is good and righteous because He is good and righteous and cannot act against His nature. This means, even when man does not understand why God acts in a certain way, he can trust that God understands and is acting rightly (example is the destruction of the people of Canaan).
 - f. Perfection and independence demand omnipotence.
 - i. If God were impotent in anything that He would like to accomplish then He is not perfect. Perfection entails complete ability to accomplish His will. Otherwise, He would be lacking and, therefore, imperfect.
 - g. Final definition:
 - i. Frame writes, "we are confident that he can do everything Scripture describes him as doing, and much more. And we know that the only preventers are his own truth, righteousness, faithfulness, and so on. That fact should assure us that God is entirely competent to accomplish all his righteous, loving purposes."⁵⁷
10. Omniscience/ Omnisapience
- a. Definition:
 - i. God is all-knowing.⁵⁸
 - ii. God is all-wise⁵⁹
 - b. Nothing, whether big or small, is outside of the knowledge of God.
 - i. The hairs of an individual's head are all numbered by God (Mt. 10:30).
 - ii. A sparrow does not fall without God's knowledge (Mt. 10:29).
 - iii. No creature is hidden from His sight (Heb. 4:13).

⁵⁷ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 523.

⁵⁸ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: the Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 253.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

- iv. He determines the numbers of stars and gives to all of them their names (Ps. 147:4).
- c. Prophecies made and fulfilled in Scripture demonstrate God's knowledge of the future.
 - i. God calls Cyrus by name in Isaiah 44-45 almost two hundred years before he arrived in history.
 - ii. God predicted the type of death that Christ would endure in Isaiah 53.
 - iii. God prophesied a virgin giving birth to the Messiah in Isaiah 7.
 - iv. God spoke of Bethlehem being the birthplace of Christ (Mic. 5:2; cf., Mt. 2:6).
- d. God, as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, "confers upon them all whatever they have of knowledge and cognition."⁶⁰
 - i. Everything that man has, he has received from the Lord (1 Cor. 4:7). This means he has no grounds for boasting, but it also implies that God has knowledge of all things for He has given knowledge to man.
 - ii. Romans 11:36 says that all things are "from him and through him and to him". This would include knowledge.
- e. Because God is independent and perfect, it is impossible for Him to learn any new information.
 - i. The sheer majesty of God in His sovereignty leads to Paul exclaiming, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" (Rom. 11:33-35).
 - 1. No one has taught the Lord for the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God are infinite.
 - ii. Much like God's omnipotence and immensity, if God were lacking any knowledge and was dependent upon man in order to learn, His perfection is compromised.
 - 1. Turretin notes, "for if the knowledge of future things is a perfection in creatures, much more will it be so in God."⁶¹
 - iii. His understanding is beyond measure (Ps. 147:5).
- f. What about future contingencies?
 - i. Turretin succinctly writes, "the orthodox maintain that future contingent things fall under the infallible knowledge of God."⁶²
 - ii. Since God is eternal and not bound by time, it is impossible for something to take place for which He is not already present.

⁶⁰ Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Faith in the Triune God*, ed. Joel R Beeke and Michael T Spangler, trans. Todd M Rester, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 260.

⁶¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publications, 1992), 210.

⁶² *Ibid.* 208.

1. Augustine rightly writes, “For what is foreknowledge if not knowledge of future events? But can anything be future to God, who surpasses all times? For if God’s knowledge includes these very things themselves, they are not future to him but present; and for this reason we should no longer speak of God’s foreknowledge but simply of God’s knowledge.”⁶³
2. What then should Christians do with foreknowledge in Scripture, such as Romans 8:29?
 - a. The Christian must recognize that God is speaking in a way that man can understand. When God speaks of future events, in the mind of man this is known as foreknowledge. However, in the mind of God, there is no distinction for He is outside of time with all things being present. What God foreknows will certainly take place. Therefore, He not only foreknows it, but He simply knows it.
 - iii. To suggest otherwise would be to compromise the infinity of God, the immensity of God, the independence of God, and the perfection of God.
 - iv. Isaiah 46:10 says God “declar[es] the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’.
- g. Omniscience sets God apart from all idols.
 - i. God speaks against idolatry because they are impotent and have no knowledge.
 1. God challenges the false gods to declare the future in order to know that they are gods (Is. 41:23). The implication is the false gods cannot, while the True and Living God can.
 2. Jeremiah 10:8 says they are stupid and foolish for their instruction is but wood.
 3. They have eyes and ears but are unable to see or hear (Deut. 4:28; Ps. 115:5; 135:16).
 4. Daniel speaks against Balshazzar while interpreting the handwriting on the wall for he has “praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored” (Dan. 5:23).
 - ii. God is worthy of worship because He sees and knows all things (Ps. 145:3).
- h. What is the difference between omniscience and omnisapience?
 - i. Knowledge is simply knowing, but wisdom is knowing and applying in the correct manner.

⁶³ Augustine, *Ad Simplicianum*, II, 2. Quoted in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 197.

1. This is the distinction between knowledge and wisdom and can even be seen in the lives of humans.
- ii. God's righteousness and holiness ensures that He is all-wise (Ps. 36:6; 71:19; 116:3; Is.5:16; 6:3)
- iii. God will judge in righteousness (Ps. 7:11; 50:6), assuring that He judges in equity and without partiality (Ps. 58:11; Eccl. 3:17)
 1. James teaches against the sin of partiality (Jam. 2:9).
 2. If it is a sin, then it is against the character of God. If it is against the character of God, then God does not show partiality, but judges rightly.
- iv. Even if Christians do not understand what God is doing, or why He is acting in a particular manner, they can have confidence that the Judge of all the earth will do what is just (Gen. 18:25)
 1. Job is the prime example in Scripture of understanding that God knows and is acting rightly even when man does not comprehend.
- i. The knowledge and wisdom of God is meant to alleviate anxiety in the believer.
 - i. Since God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the grass of the field, Christians can be confident that He will take care of them (Mt. 6:25-34). Therefore, believers are commanded not to be anxious.
 - ii. If God has numbered the hairs on every individual's head, then He will not forget about His people (Mt. 10:26-33).

11. What is the point?

- a. Christians must understand the Creator-creature distinction.
 - i. God is not simply a bigger and better version of man, but rather of a whole different Kind.
 1. He is the Lord, and there is no other (Is. 45:5).
 2. His thoughts are not the same as man's thoughts but are infinitely higher (Is. 55:8-9).
 - ii. Christians must submit to the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible, as He has revealed Himself.
 1. To seek to make God more like man in phrases such as "My God wouldn't do this or that" is to make a god in one's own image, which is idolatry.
 2. It is arguable that this phraseology trespasses the first three of the Ten Commandments, as one has a god that is not the true God, makes this god to fit his desires, and uses the Lord's name in vain by claiming this false god to be the true God (Ex. 20:3-7).
 - iii. Christians should not be casual in their relationship with God but recognize His majesty and glory.
 1. The people of Israel trembled when they met God on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16)
 2. Isaiah called down a curse upon Himself when he stood in the presence of God (Is. 6:5).
 - iv. Christians are to worship God.

1. Calvin writes, “the knowledge of God set forth for us in the Scripture is destined for the very same goal as the knowledge whose imprint shines in his creatures, in that it invites us first to fear God, then to trust in him. By this we can learn to worship him both with perfect innocence of life and with unfeigned obedience, then to depend wholly upon his goodness.”⁶⁴
2. The knowledge of God is to lead Christians to a deeper worship of God. It rightly leads to humility, as he sees the magnificence of God, and his own frailty in comparison. Only in seeing God rightly will man see himself rightly.
3. The heart of the believer should be that of Moses which exclaimed, ““Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Ex. 15:11).
- v. When Christians rightly worship God, they see the deep need to share the gospel with the nations that others might worship Him.
 1. There is a day soon coming when the “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).
 2. People from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation will gather around the throne of God to worship (Rev. 7:9).
 3. It is the love for God that leads to obedience to Him (Jn. 14:15), which includes making disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:18-20).

God as Trinity

1. Why is clarity important?
 - a. Christians are to desire to know and worship God as He is.
 - b. The doctrine of the Trinity has been manipulated over the last two centuries and used to fit a particular agenda in the name of making the Trinity ‘relevant’⁶⁵:
 - i. God is not a single monarch, nor is there a hierarchy in the Trinity, therefore, because there is an equality among persons, the government should reflect this in socialism.
 - ii. Because a plurality exists in the unified Godhead, religious pluralism should be accepted in society.
 - iii. Because there is equality among the Persons of the Godhead, this reflects an absolute equality in human society within genders. Therefore, society must be egalitarian.

⁶⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 98.

⁶⁵ This list is found in in Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 28-30.

- iv. Because there is a distinction of roles in the Persons of the Godhead, this is to reflect the difference in roles between males and females. Therefore, society is to be complementarian.
 - v. Because differences in the Godhead does not preclude equality, so too should the differences between heterosexual and homosexual couples. Because the Persons retain their personal identities in equality, so should homosexual couples retain theirs in society.
 - c. In each of these cases (and more could be listed), it is clear the Trinity has been used to further the agenda of different groups, which is not the point of the Trinity.
 - d. The Trinity is not to be manipulated to fulfill the desires of man, but rather is who God has revealed Himself to be and is to stir worship in the heart of man.
 - i. Barrett comments about this recent trend, saying, “The Trinity itself has even redefined as social to ensure these social agendas have traction. Our endless quests to make the Trinity relevant to society result in one thing: the triune God in eternity has been swallowed up by who we want him to be for us in history.”⁶⁶
2. Difficult definitions
- a. There are several statements that help enable the Christian to understand in small part what the Trinity is:
 - i. There is one God.
 - ii. The Father is God.
 - iii. The Son is God.
 - iv. The Holy Spirit is God.
 - v. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit.
 - vi. The Son is not the Father or Spirit.
 - vii. The Spirit is not the Father or Son.
 - viii. God is One.
 - b. To understand the Trinity, it is not enough to simply compile a list of proof texts that demonstrate the divinity of each Person and the oneness of God and believe, like a math problem, that the Trinity has been defined.
3. Eternal Relations of Origins: Distinctions are in order
- a. Definitions⁶⁷:
 - i. The Father is *unbegotten*: The Bible calls the Father *Father* because he begets his Son (paternity), though he himself is begotten by no one.
 - ii. The Son is *begotten (generated)*: The Bible calls the Son *Son* because he is begotten by his Father (filiation).
 - iii. The Spirit is *spirated*: The Bible calls the Spirit *Spirit* because he is breathed out by the Father and Son (spiration).
 - iv. This alone is what differentiates one Person of the Trinity from Another, for each is God, and yet there is one God.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 31.

⁶⁷ These definitions are found in Ibid. 59.

- b. Synonyms: These are three different ways to describe the biblical doctrine of eternal generation.
 - i. Eternal relations of origin
 - 1. Relations: this refers not to relationships of separate individuals but to each Person's eternal origins.
 - ii. Modes of subsistence
 - 1. Turretin writes, "Now although all these species of distinction come far short of the sublimity of this great mystery, still no one seems to us to approach nearer to it than the modal distinction (*distinction modali*) by which the mode is said to be distinguished from some thing. For the personal properties by which the persons are distinguished from the essence are certain modes by which it may be characterized".⁶⁸
 - 2. The essence remains the same, unchanging, eternal, infinite, but the mode of subsistence is what distinguishes the Persons of the Trinity.
 - 3. Subsistence is simply another way of referring to the divine *person*.⁶⁹
 - iii. Personal properties
 - 1. The personal properties here that distinguish Persons are noted above: paternity, filiation, and spiration.
 - c. The only thing that marks each person in distinction from the others are modes of subsistence, eternal relations, or personal properties.⁷⁰
 - i. Calvin notes, "For in each hypostasis [Person] the whole divine nature is understood, with this qualification—that to each belongs his own peculiar quality."⁷¹
 - ii. This crucial to understand because there is one God with three Persons.
 - iii. This truth is not irrational, but rather infinitely above the mind of man. It should not be surprising that man cannot understand completely the Being of God. After all, He is incomprehensible.
 - d. It is crucial to understand that 'begotten' and 'spiration' do not imply creation. The Father did not create the Son and Holy Spirit, for He has always been Triune.
4. A case for orthodoxy: the Nicene theology of God
- a. In the early fourth century, a controversy erupted over whether the Word was to be viewed as coeternal with the Father, with Arius at the center.⁷²

⁶⁸ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publications, 1992), 278.

⁶⁹ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 325.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 60.

⁷¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 143.

⁷² Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 184.

- i. Arius believed the Word to be the first and greatest of all creation, but still a creature. His motto became: there was when He was not.⁷³
 - 1. Arius believed this was the only way to uphold monotheism, namely that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4). The personification of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 was key to his thinking.
 - 2. He believed that to insist on the Word being God, there must be two gods.
 - 3. In this assertion, Jesus was subordinated to the Father and, therefore, inferior.
 - 4. He was careful to say not to say, “there was a time when he was not”, for Arius believed the Son’s creation to take place before time.⁷⁴ This does not change His status as a creature.
 - 5. Noll notes, and Christians must pay heed to this, “Arius’s teaching, which survives only in fragments and in quotations from the works of his opponents, communicates great respect for Jesus, patient attention to the Scriptures, and overwhelming awe at the being of God. For those reasons its subversion of Christian teaching was all the more serious.”⁷⁵
 - a. Heretics can quote Scripture.
 - b. Just because someone quotes a Bible passage does not mean he is correct in his understanding of this passage, nor carries the authority of God.
- ii. On the others side, Alexander argued that the Word was divine, and therefore could not be created, but rather was coeternal with the Father.⁷⁶
 - 1. He understood that to say the Word is not divine is also to say that Jesus is not divine (contra Jn. 1:1-4, 14; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2-4).
 - 2. Salvation itself depended upon Jesus being truly God.
- iii. In 325 Constantine called a council in order to decide the issue.
- iv. The crux of the matter came down to the difference of a single letter.
 - 1. Ousia means essence in Greek
 - a. The question is whether the Son of God was of the same essence as God, which would make Him God and equal to the Father, or of a similar essence, which would make Him less than God and inferior to the Father.
 - 2. Homoousia: of the same essence
 - 3. Homoiousia: of a similar essence

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 45

⁷⁵ Ibid, 44.

⁷⁶ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 184.

- v. Noll marks four key assertions of the Council of Nicea⁷⁷:
 - 1. Christ was true God from true God.
 - 2. Christ was consubstantial [of one substance] with the Father.
 - a. This is where homoousia comes into play.
 - 3. Christ was begotten, not made.
 - 4. Christ became human for us humans and for our salvation.
 - vi. Therefore, the council used the language of the Son being “begotten from God before all ages”, “God from God”, “Light from Light”, and “True God from True God”. They describe the Son as “begotten, not made”, which displays the eternal generation of the Son.
 - vii. This understanding was defined in the Nicene Creed, which was then expanded in its definition to include a clearer understanding of the Holy Spirit as consubstantial in 381 (see the end of the notes for a copy of these creeds).
 - 1. This includes: He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
 - 2. The Holy Spirit is to be worshiped because He proceeds from God the Father and God the Son and is Himself truly God.
 - viii. This creed is the foundational understanding of the teaching of Scripture in regard to the Triune nature of God, as well as the divinity of Christ in particular. To stray in belief from this creed is to place oneself outside of historic Christianity.
 - ix. The Athanasian Creed further defines the Trinity and is found attached below.
 - x. Side note: the Jehovah’s Witnesses adhere to a modern view that is consistent with Arianism.
5. I and the Father are One: John 10 in understanding begottenness.
- a. The story:
 - i. Jesus is approached by the religious leaders and told to “tell us plainly” if He is truly the Christ (Jn. 10:24).
 - ii. Jesus responds by saying the works that He has done in His Father’s name bear witness to His identity, finishing His statement on the security of those who believe by saying, “I and the Father are one” (Jn. 10:30).
 - iii. The religious leaders understood exactly what He was declaring, for they then picked up stones to stone Him for blasphemy (Jn. 10:31-33).
 - iv. Jesus questions their actions by appealing to the works that He has been doing before them all, which are a clear indication that He is from the Father.
 - v. Jesus finishes with the statement: The Father is in me and I am in the Father (Jn. 10:38).
 - b. What does it mean for the Son to be in the Father and the Father is in the Son?

⁷⁷ These are found in Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 48-49.

- i. Because there is one essence of God, to see one Person of the Trinity is to see the other Two, for each Person is truly God.
 - ii. This reality is called perichoresis, which is defined as, “Father, Son, and Spirit mutually indwell or interpenetrate one another.”⁷⁸ This is why Jesus can say that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. This statement certainly would not exclude the Holy Spirit but could be extended to include Him.
 - iii. Augustine writes, “when the Father is shown, the Son who is in him is shown also, and when the Son is shown, the Father who is in him is shown too.”⁷⁹
 - 1. This is also in harmony with Jesus’s statement to Philip in John 14, in which He says, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (Jn. 14:9-10).
 - 2. Carson notes on this passage that it is “precisely this degree of unity that ensures Jesus reveals God to us”.⁸⁰
 - 3. Why can believers trust that the God Christ revealed to them is the true God? It is because Christ is the Son of God and God the Son. He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Therefore, His testimony is sure.
 - iv. There are rare occasions when the Triune God appears in full or part, such as the baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:12-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22), or the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-13; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36). However, this does not discount the words of Jesus in John 10 and 14.
6. Procession from the Father and the Son: The Holy Spirit
- a. According to the Nicene Creed, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
 - i. He is not begotten from the Father in the same sense as the Son.
 - ii. He is not begotten from the Son, for this would make the Son the Father and the Father the Grandfather. This is unthinkable.
 - b. He is sent in the name of the Son, and not the Father alone.
 - i. John 14:26: The Father will send the Spirit to the disciples in the name of the Son.
 - ii. John 15:26: Christ will send the Spirit from the Father.
 - iii. John 16:7: It is to the advantage of the disciples that Christ returns to heaven, for He will send the Spirit in His place.

⁷⁸ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 323.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *The Trinity: The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 82.

⁸⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 494.

1. Turretin comments, "He therefore ought to proceed from him because he cannot be sent by the Son unless he proceeds from him."⁸¹
- iv. John 20:22: Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit". This is a symbolic act, demonstrating the spiration (breathing out) of the Spirit from the Son.
- v. The Spirit is called the Spirit of the Son in Galatians 4:6.
- c. Spiration is the only way to distinguish the Spirit from the Son as His eternal relations of origin.
 - i. The Holy Spirit is not generated from the Father, the Son is. The Son is not spirated, the Spirit is, from both the Father and the Son.
 1. Barrett explains why this is important: If we say the Spirit is generated, then we have not distinguished the Spirit from the Son in relation to the Father. If we say the Spirit is generated, then the Spirit might replace the Son and lose its distinct personhood altogether. If we say that the Spirit is generated, we might also turn the Spirit into a second Son, which would make the Spirit a brother to the Son.⁸²
 2. If Christians fail to distinguish the relations of origins, then the distinctions themselves are lost. The Son is no different from the Spirit if there is no difference in personal properties. If both are generated from the Father, then the Father does not have an Only-Begotten Son, but rather has two sons. Therefore, a distinction must be made.
 3. Anselm writes, "For the Son is from his Father, that is, from God who is his Father, while the Holy Spirit is not from God as his Father but only from God who is Father."⁸³
 4. God the Father is the Father, but this does not mean the relations to each Person of the Trinity is identical. He is the Father of the Son. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son.
 - ii. The Spirit proceeding from the Father and Son in time mirror the eternal relations of spiration, though the Holy Spirit is coequal in divinity, glory, power, and authority as God.
 1. The objection can be made that the procession is only in the economic Trinity and has no bearing on the immanent Trinity (these terms are defined below).

⁸¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publications, 1992), 309.

⁸² Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 271.

⁸³ Anselm, *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit in The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 391.

2. Barrett answers this objection, “the only reason the Spirit can be sent by the Father and the Son to save a lost humanity is because he proceeds from the Father and the Son from all eternity.”⁸⁴
 3. In the same way the Son is sent in time because He is the Son, the Spirit proceeds in time to apply the salvation of Christ to sinners because He proceeds from the Father and Son in eternity. He could not be sent from them in time if it was not the case internally.
7. All things were made through Him: Creation demonstrating the Triune God.
- a. Genesis 1:1-2 gives a glimpse, though still shrouded in mystery, of the Triune nature of God, as the name God is in the plural, to denote His utter majesty, but to give a hint of what is to be revealed throughout redemptive history. Not only this, but the Spirit of God is said to hover over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2).
 - b. How does God create in this narrative? It is through the spoken Word. This Word, according to John 1:1-4 is both with God and is Himself God. It is this Word that became flesh and dwelt among men.
 - c. Colossians 1:16 says by Christ, “all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”
 - i. All things could not be created by Him if He were Himself a created being. Therefore, Arianism is refuted.
 - d. Therefore, the Father, Son, and Spirit were present and active in the creation of all things.
8. God would be Triune whether creation exists or not.
- a. A distinction must be made between two understandings of the Trinity:
 - i. Immanent Trinity: *opera ad intra*. This is who the Triune God is in eternity, apart from creation.
 1. The Father is the Father because He has begotten the Son.
 2. The Son is the Son because He is begotten by the Father.
 3. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit because He proceeds from the Father and Son.
 4. If this were not so eternally, then the Father would not be the Father, the Son the Son, and the Spirit the Spirit.
 - ii. Economic Trinity: *opera ad extra*. This is the Triune God’s external operations in creation, providence, and redemption.⁸⁵
 1. The Father sends the Son because He is the Son.
 2. The Father is not sent to become incarnate.
 3. The Spirit is spirated by the Father and the Son in time.
 4. These reflect eternal realities, but do not create them.

⁸⁴ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 271.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 112.

- b. The economic Trinity can reveal truth about the immanent Trinity. However, one cannot force the economic back onto the immanent.
 - i. In the immanent Trinity all Persons are equal in authority and power.
 - ii. In the economic Trinity, the Son submits to the Father in order to accomplish salvation. Because God the Son acts in this way in creation does not imply, indeed must not imply, that He is subordinate to the Father. This would create a hierarchy in the Godhead.
 - iii. It is true that the Son submits to the Father in time (Mt. 26:39, 42; Mk. 14:36; Jn. 6:38), but in eternity, He is equal with the Father.
 - iv. In the same way, the Spirit is said not to speak of His own authority but speaks what He hears, with the intention of glorifying the Son (Jn. 16:13-14). In eternity, the Spirit is of equal authority, though He acts in this way in time. It should also be noted, since all three Persons possess the divine essence and are One, for the Spirit to glorify the Son is not to exclude the glory of the Father and Spirit. There is one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the Persons, nor dividing the divine Being.⁸⁶
- c. If God is not Triune, salvation is not possible.
 - i. It is the Father who sends the Son (Jn. 3:16).
 - ii. The Word of God, who is God, takes on flesh and dwells among men (Jn. 1:1-4, 14).
 - iii. The Son reveals the Father (Lk. 10:22).
 - iv. The Son willingly lays down His life in order to save and has received this charge from His Father (Jn. 10:18).
 - v. It is the Son who dies as a propitiation for sin (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2: 4:10).
 - 1. Only an infinite God can bear the wrath of the infinitely holy God.
 - vi. The Son is delivered for the believer's transgressions and is raised for his justification (Rom. 4:25). Justification does not take place apart from the death and resurrection of the Son of God.
 - vii. It was the will of the Father to crush Him, in order to save (Is. 53:10).
 - viii. The Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 8:11).
 - 1. If Christ is not raised, man is without hope (1 Cor. 15:12-19).
 - ix. The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to the believer.
 - 1. The Spirit acts as the seal of salvation guarantee of the inheritance that is to come (Eph. 1:13-14).
 - 2. Christians have received the Spirit of adoption as sons of God (Rom. 8:15).
 - x. The Holy Spirit regenerates the heart of believers in the new birth, which is necessary for salvation (Jn. 3:3, 5).
 - xi. God Himself must bear the wrath of God, for man is unable to do so.
 - xii. The work of salvation, planned and purposed in eternity, takes place in time and will carry into eternity through the triune God.

⁸⁶ This is the Athanasian creed located in Ibid. 152. There is also a copy attached below.

9. Simplicity is key

a. Each Person is wholly God and not a part of God.

i. There is one essence in God that is indivisible, immutable, eternal, and infinite. This is described above under The Attributes of God: The Simplicity of God.

1. John of Damascus writes, “each of the three has a perfect subsistence, that we may understand not one compound perfect nature made up of three imperfect elements, but one simple essence, surpassing and preceding perfection, existing in three perfect subsistences. For all that is composed of imperfect elements must necessarily be compound. But from perfect subsistences no compound can arise.”⁸⁷

2. John makes clear that if each Person of the Trinity made up, as a sum, a whole perfect Godhead, then individually each Person is imperfect. A truly perfect being cannot be made of parts but must be simple. Therefore, each of the three is a perfect subsistence of the Trinity for God must be simple because He is perfect.

ii. Simplicity assures that each member of the Trinity is equal in power, authority, majesty, and glory.

1. Barrett writes, “the three persons are subsistences of the one, undivided divine essence or nature, so that the three persons, distinct as they may be as Father, Son, and Spirit, nevertheless hold the one divine essence in common.”⁸⁸

a. Because they are undivided and hold the divine essence in common, each member of the Trinity is equal in power, authority, attributes, glory, majesty, for there is no hierarchy in the Godhead in essence.

b. The differences are alone found in the personal properties of paternity, filiation, and spiration. This alone is the distinguishing mark.

2. Each Person is not less glorious as individual Persons as they are as the Trinity, for each is truly and fully God, possessing the same divine essence.

3. Augustine writes, “Father and son together are not more being than Father alone or Son alone, but those three substances or persons together, if that is what they must be called, are equal to each one singly”.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ John of Damascus, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: a Select Library of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 10.

⁸⁸ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 139.

⁸⁹ Augustine, *The Trinity: The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 234.

4. By this Augustine means that the Father and Son together are not more God than the Father or Son is alone. All three Persons are together God and separately God, for each are a subsistence of the Triune Godhead.
 - a. Augustine uses the illustration of gold statues of men as an unhelpful analogy to describe the Trinity. Each gold statue has the same essence, gold, and each are separate persons, the men they were shaped to be. However, there is more gold when two are combined than if one is left alone. This would mean that the whole is greater than the parts, which is untrue of the Trinity, for God is simple and all that is in God is God. Each Person of the Trinity is truly, completely, equally God, though there is still one God.⁹⁰
 - iii. Barrett summarizes this when he writes, “In sum, sometimes Scripture speaks of the Father, sometimes of the Son, and sometimes of the Spirit, but whenever it refers to any one person it assumes that person is consubstantial with all the others, coeternal and coequal in divinity, holding the one divine essence in common.”⁹¹
 - b. This means the Trinity is one in will, consciousness, and power.
 - i. Isaiah 46:9-10 and Ephesians 1:11 speak of the purpose of God and the counsel of God in a singular word, meaning there are not multiple purposes or counsels in the Godhead, but rather one.
 1. Poythress notes, “The will of God is unified. The purpose of God is unified. And this purpose is the purpose of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father plans and purposes all things. The Son plans and purposes all things. The Spirit plans and purposes all things. Yet there are not three plans and purposes, but one God who plans.”⁹²
 2. There is no internal struggle within the Godhead. There are no instances in which the Father desires something in which the Son and Holy Spirit disagree. This also means the Son, though propitiating the wrath of God for sinners, is not doing so against the will of the Father.
 3. When Jesus, in Luke 22:42, says, “not my will but yours be done”, this is touching His humanity and not His deity. The Godhead was not in disharmony.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 233-234.

⁹¹ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 135

⁹² Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: a Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2020), 572.

- ii. Barrett writes, “Since God has one essence, he has one will. He must if he has any hope of remaining undivided and unified in his own being.”⁹³
 - 1. If each Person has a separate will, then God is divisible and therefore, no longer simple or unified.
 - 2. He quotes Augustine saying, “The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are inseparably united in themselves” since “this Trinity is one God,” and therefore “all the works of the one God are the works of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”⁹⁴
- iii. Augustine writes, “that one of the persons of the trinity is frequently mentioned in such a way that the others also are to be taken as being included.”⁹⁵
 - 1. Here he is speaking of the love of the God such that, when Jesus says, “for the Father himself loves you” (Jn. 16:27), He is not excluding the other members of the Trinity, for they are all of one will.
 - 2. Therefore, when the text says the Father loves believers, it is implied that the Son and the Holy Spirit also love them.
 - 3. There is no disharmony in the Trinity.
- iv. In the economic Trinity, diversity in the Persons can be seen.
 - 1. This is known as *appropriation*.
 - a. This “attributes action or an effect to a divine person in a *special way*, without excluding the two others.”⁹⁶
 - b. This mirrors Scripture as it often places a spotlight on One Person of the Trinity as acting in a special way, though it certainly does not exclude the others at the same time.
 - c. Barrett continues, “while every act of God in creation, providence, and redemption is the *single* act of the *triune* God, nevertheless, certain acts may terminate on certain persons, or be “appropriated” by one particular person of the Trinity in a special manner.”⁹⁷
 - d. There are not acts of God springing from a divided will. Every act, though it may be affected by a particular Person, is carried out by the single will of the simple and unified God.
 - 2. In His incarnate state, the Son carries out the purpose of the Father (Jn. 5:19,30; 12:49-50).

⁹³ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 291.

⁹⁴ Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 20.13 quoted in *Ibid*.

⁹⁵ Augustine, *The Trinity: The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 85.

⁹⁶ Emery, *The Trinity*, 165 quoted in Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 297.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

3. The Son is sent, while the Father sends (Jn. 3:16).
 4. The Holy Spirit speaks only what He hears (Jn. 16:13-15).
 - a. Poythress notes that, "since the Spirit is immutable, his hearing is an eternal hearing."⁹⁸
 - b. This is a reminder that the Spirit, possessing the divine nature, is speaking the truth of God in time what He has known from eternity.
 5. It must be noted that these functional differentiations do not reflect the internal, immanent Trinity.
- c. If God is not simple, this opens the door to two heretical ideas:
- i. Tritheism: there are three gods.
 1. If God is three infinite beings working together with each possessing his own will and power, then there is not one God, but three separate gods.
 - ii. Subordinationism: If there are parts, then the Father would take priority because He is the Father. This would leave the Son and the Holy Spirit in a place of inferiority.
 1. Barrett explains why the simplicity of God refutes this, "Inferiority cannot exist where each person is a subsistence of the same, identical divine nature. No person is eternally subordinate to the next because no one person is less divine than the next."⁹⁹
 2. Therefore, to ensure each Person is totally divine, simplicity is confessed.
10. The Deity of the Son (the work of the Son will be discussed in a separate lecture)
- a. There are four main passages that describe the deity of Christ:
 - i. John 1:1-4, 14
 1. The Word is with God (distinct from God) and is God. It is this God that took on flesh and dwelt among men. This displays the immanent Trinity, for the Word was with God and was Himself God from all eternity and apart from creation, as well as the economic Trinity, for the Son took on flesh and entered into time and creation.
 - ii. Philippians 2:6-11
 1. Christ was in the form of God (is God) and emptied Himself, not by relinquishing His deity, but rather by taking on the form of a servant. He did not lose His God-ness when He became incarnate.
 2. Christ is to be confessed as Lord, which is the name that is reserved for God alone. It would not only be inappropriate, but

⁹⁸ Vern S. Poythress, *The Mystery of the Trinity: a Trinitarian Approach to the Attributes of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2020), 573.

⁹⁹ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 151.

blasphemous to attribute Lordship, in an absolute sense, to any but God Himself. Therefore, the Son is God.

iii. Colossians 1:15-20

1. Christ is called the image of the invisible God. John 4:24 says God is spirit, which means He does not have a body. In Christ, the spiritual has taken on the physical such that the Son is called the image of the unseeable God.
2. He is the firstborn of all creation, not in an Arian sense of being a creature, but rather as the One who has absolute priority.
3. All things were made through Him, which would itself be false if He were a creature (contra Arianism). The act of creation is ascribed to God, and if Christ is the Creator, then Christ is God.
4. He upholds and sustains the universe, which displays omnipotence, an attribute of God alone.
5. In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, which describes the eternal generation of the Son. All of God is in the Son of God. He is not a portion of God, like a slice out of a pie, but all the fullness of God is in the Son. He is eternally Begotten from the Father.
6. He has reconciled to Himself all things through the blood of His cross. The deity of the Son is the foundation for the salvation that is found in Him.

iv. Hebrews 1:3-4

1. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature. He is truly God and displays the glory of God fully. He is the exact imprint of the nature of God because there is one essence of God.
 2. He upholds the universe by the word of His power. In much the same way as Colossians 1, this displays the omnipotence of the Son, something that can only be attributed to God.
 3. This reality is the foundation of the salvation found in Christ.
 4. He is superior to the angels and all other creatures because He is the uncreated Creator.
- b. The purpose of the book of John, as given in John 20:30-31, is “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”
- c. 1 John 5:20 says, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”
- i. The question can arise of who the “He” is in this particular passage: is it the Father or the Son?
 - ii. In either case, believers understand that eternal life is found in Christ (Jn. 3:16; 20:31; Rom. 8:1; Eph. 2:8-9), that eternal life is knowing the Father

and the Son (Jn. 17:3), and that Christ is the truth (Jn. 14:6). Therefore, this passage can rightly be applied to the Son.

- d. Eternality is applied to Jesus Christ.
 - i. Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” This means that He is eternal, which is a divine attribute reserved for God alone. Therefore, the Son of God is truly God.
 - e. Jesus’s miracles were signs to His identity as the Son of God.
 - i. Mark 2:1-12 is the story of Jesus forgiving the sins of a paralytic before healing the man of his infirmity. The scribes looking on ask in their heart why Jesus is speaking in this manner, forgiving the man’s sins, for God alone can forgive sins. Jesus knows what is in their hearts and heals the man of his disease in order that they would see that “the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mk. 2:10).
 - ii. The works of Jesus in the book of John are called signs, in order to point the reader to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God.
11. The Deity of the Holy Spirit (the work of the Spirit will be discussed in a separate lecture)
- a. To begin, it must be noted that the Holy Spirit is a He, not an it. He is a Person of the Trinity and not an impersonal force or power.
 - b. The Spirit is said to “search the depths of God”, and Paul continues by saying that “no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:10-11). The Spirit as God, having one essence as truly God, understands the depths of God and teaches man.
 - c. Christians are temples of God in their bodies and are to live accordingly (1 Cor. 3:16-17). God’s Spirit is the One who dwells within the temple of God in the lives of believers, which means the Holy Spirit is God.
 - i. Calvin notes, “For, while God indeed frequently promises that he will choose us as a temple for himself, this promise is not otherwise fulfilled than by his Spirit dwelling in us.”¹⁰⁰
 - ii. God fulfills His promise to dwell in man by sending the Holy Spirit. This must mean the Holy Spirit is truly God, or else God has failed to keep His promise to dwell in man.
 - d. Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts 5, are judged and struck down for lying to God over the amount of money for which a piece of property was sold.
 - i. Ananias that he has “lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:4).
 - ii. Sapphira comes in shortly thereafter and is struck down because she has with her husband “agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord” (Acts 5:9).
 - iii. Lying to God is the same testing the Spirit of God in this narrative, which only makes sense if the Holy Spirit is truly God.

¹⁰⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 139.

- e. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:17), while God is said to be true (Jn. 3:33) and the Son has been called the truth (Jn. 14:6). Each Person is true because each Person is truly God.
 - f. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father in the name of Christ, in His place (Jn. 14:26). For the Father to send a creature would be unworthy of the name of the Son. However, for God to send the Spirit displays an equality of glory, though a difference in mode of subsistence.
 - i. Jesus says that it is to the advantage of the disciples for Him to go to heaven and have the Spirit come (Jn. 16:7). It is inconceivable for it to be of the advantage of believers to have the Son of God leave and a creature be given in His place. This statement only makes sense if the Holy Spirit is God.
 - g. Isaiah 11:2 attributes divine attributes to the Spirit. These include:
 - i. Wisdom
 - ii. Understanding
 - iii. Counsel
 - iv. Might
 - v. Knowledge
 - h. Christ is conceived in the womb of Mary through having the Holy Spirit coming upon her (Lk. 1:35).
12. Distinctions in Persons displayed: The Father is not the Son or Spirit, the Son is not the Father or Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or Son.
- a. It is clear from John 3:16 that the Father sent the Son to become incarnate. It is the Word that became flesh (Jn. 1:14). The Father is not sent into the world to take on flesh, nor is the Spirit. Therefore, there must be a distinction between the Persons.
 - b. Jesus displays the unique relationship between He and the Father in John 20:17 saying, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." His relationship with the Father is distinct from the relationship the Father has with the disciples. Though Christians are to pray to "Our Father in heaven" (Mt. 6:9) and have been adopted into the family of God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:7; 1 Jn. 3:1-2), they do not possess the same relationship as that which is shared between the Unbegotten and the Only-Begotten.
 - c. The Son submitted to the plan of the Father (Mt. 26:39; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 22:42; Jn. 6:38). There are not separate wills in the Godhead, but rather one will. In His incarnation, the Son submitted Himself as an obedient Son to the Father.
 - d. On the cross, Jesus commits His spirit (His human life) into the hands of the Father (Lk. 23:46). The Son did not commit His spirit into the hands of the Holy Spirit, but to the Father.
 - e. It is after Christ has ascended into heaven that the Holy Spirit is sent to dwell in believers (Acts 2:1-4). Jesus makes it clear that the disciples will receive power when the Spirit comes upon them, which is something different than having the Son before them (Acts 1:8). Along with this, Stephen is called full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5) and when he is martyred, he sees the Son standing at the right

hand of God (Acts 7:56). The Spirit was still indwelling him when he saw the Son. The two Persons were distinct.

- f. At the end, Paul writes that Christ will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). There is a distinction between the Persons, and the focus is on creation being subjected to God, which displays the economic Trinity. The Son is equal in power and authority and will rule as the Son of the Father.
13. Analogies lead to heresies.
- a. Christians can only speak analogically about God, and this is the only way we can convey truth about Him. However, there are no perfect analogies that can be used to describe the Trinity. In fact, most analogies do not lead to clarity, but to a heresy condemned by the church.
 - i. Egg: The Trinity is like an egg with the shell, white, and yolk comprising the egg. This can also include a three-leaf clover.
 - 1. This is the heresy known as partialism in which each Person of the Trinity are a part of God, or one-third, and together they make God. This compromises the simplicity of God
 - ii. Water: The Trinity is like water which can be in three forms: ice, water, and steam
 - 1. This is the heresy known as Sabellianism which teaches that God is not three persons but one person who merely changes into three different forms.¹⁰¹
 - iii. Sun: The Trinity is like the sun which has the star itself, and also has heat and light from it.
 - 1. This is the heresy of Arianism because the heat and light are distinct from the sun and are not the sun itself. In the Trinity, each Person is truly God.
 - iv. A man can be a father, son, and uncle at the same time, and yet is one man.
 - 1. This is back to modalism because father, son, and uncle are simply descriptions of the same man, while the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons in the Godhead.
 - b. The safest route in describing the Trinity is to confess the mystery, speak of One God in three Persons, with each Person being truly and completely God, and leaving the mystery in the hands of God. Our confession of this truth does not necessitate complete comprehension of the truth. It is enough for followers of Christ to trust the Word of God and submit to its teaching.
 - i. The best route would be to teach our children about the mystery of the Trinity, rather than seeking to make it easier, but inaccurately.

14. Traces in the Old Testament

¹⁰¹ Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: the Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 145.

- a. Vos indicates three reasons one should not seek decisive proof for the Trinity in the Old Testament¹⁰²:
 - i. Because the Old Testament revelation was not finished but only preparatory. The perfect comes only at the end.
 - ii. Under the Old Testament's dispensation the concept of the oneness of God had to be deeply impressed upon Israel's consciousness in the face of all the polytheistic inclinations.
 - iii. We must not imagine that the Old Testament saints were able to read in the Old Testament everything that we can read there in the light of the New. Yet, what we read in it is clearly the purpose of the Holy Spirit, for He had the Scripture of the Old Testament written not only for the then but also for now.
 - b. Vos then lists several traces of the Trinity that are to be discovered in the Old Testament:¹⁰³
 - i. The distinction between the names of Elohim and Yahweh.
 - ii. Plural form of Elohim
 - iii. The angel of the Lord
 - 1. The Angel speaks with God's authority (Gen. 16:13)
 - 2. He is addressed as God (Gen. 16:13)
 - 3. He does divine works (Ex. 23:20).
 - 4. He has divine attributes (Gen. 16:8).
 - 5. He accepts divine honor (Josh. 5:14).
 - 6. He is distinguished from a created angel, Exodus 33, where the Angel of the Presence is distinguished from an ordinary angel (Is. 63:9; Deut. 4:37).
 - 7. His name alternates with the name Elohim (Zech. 12:8).
 - iv. Wisdom personified in Job 28:12-27 and Proverbs 8
 - v. Word of God also personified; ascribed divine attributes (Ps. 33:4; 119:105; Is. 40:8).
 - vi. Spirit of God
 - vii. God speaks of Himself in the plural
 - viii. Multiple divine persons named (Ps. 45:6-7; 110:1).
 - ix. Three persons named.
15. Scriptural passages displaying the Trinity clearly
- a. Christians are to baptize new believers in the name (singular) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:18-20).
 - b. All three members of the Trinity are present at the baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:12-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22).

¹⁰² These are found in Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: Theology Proper*, ed. To-ho Pak, Annemie Godbehere, and Roelof van Ijken, trans. Richard B. Gaffin, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 38.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 38-41.

- c. Luke 10:21-22 speaks of Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, and then He proceeds to pray to the Father. All three Persons are explicitly present in this short narrative.
 - d. All three Persons are present in Paul's benediction in the second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 13:14). It is a final blessing given in the name of God.
16. The word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible: objection answered.
- a. It is true the word 'Trinity' is not found in the pages of Scripture, but that does not mean the idea is not present.
 - b. 'Discipleship', 'evangelism', and 'student ministry' are words not found in the Bible, but the realities are clearly present.
 - c. God is not mentioned specifically in the book of Esther. This does not imply that He was absent or uninvolved during that particular time in the history of Israel.
 - d. Timothy George summarizes this when he writes, "In sum, while the word *trinitas* is not found anywhere in the Bible, the Scriptures from first to last are thoroughly trinitarian. What was foreshadowed in the Old Testament became explicit in the New with the historical reality of God "manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16 NKJV)." ¹⁰⁴
17. Summary:
- a. The Triune nature of God is mysterious to us but is also clearly revealed in Scripture. We can learn and speak rightly about the Trinity, but we will never know Him exhaustively.
 - b. We must be humble. God is infinitely above us, and yet has graciously revealed Himself, not because man is great, but because He is. This should stir in man a right sense of worthiness and unworthiness.
 - c. Therefore, we are to glory in the God that has loved us and redeemed us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and seek to know Him and obey Him in all we do.

Discussion Questions (based on the lectures):

1. Which argument for the existence of God did you find most persuasive?
2. Are there other arguments not listed that you found helpful?
3. Have you considered how our culture attempts to keep a moral standard while discarding the Source of the standard?
4. What attribute of God most surprised you to learn about?
5. Why is the distinction between incommunicable and communicable attributes so important?
6. How should the incomprehensibility of God actually help the Christian in his walk with Christ?
7. How does the infinitude of God relate to other attributes of God?

¹⁰⁴ Daniel L. Akin, ed., *Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2014), 165.

8. Can you explain the simplicity of God simply?
9. How have you seen the doctrine of the Trinity used to fit an agenda in your own life?
10. Can you explain the distinctions in the Persons of the Trinity (paternity, filiation, and spiration)?
11. Have you heard of the Nicene Creed before tonight?
12. Why is important to understand that heretics can quote Scripture?
13. How can creeds help the believer in his faithfulness to God?
14. Why is simplicity important for the Trinity?
15. Can you list some passages of Scripture that speak of the deity of the Son and Holy Spirit?
16. How should the Trinity affect how a Christian live his life?
17. Why is the Trinity necessary for salvation?
18. Can you think of any other instances of Scripture where the Trinity is working that are not listed?
19. Why are analogies a bad idea when speaking on the Trinity?
20. Why is humility necessary for all study of God?

Recommended Reading:

- *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer
- *The Holiness of God* by R. C. Sproul
- *None Greater and Simply Trinity* by Matthew Barrett
- *Delighting in the Trinity* by Michael Reeves
- *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis
- *The Reason for God* by Timothy Keller
- *Reasonable Faith* by William Lane Craig
- *All That Is in God* by James Dolezal

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Nicene Creed (325)¹⁰⁵

We believe in one God
 the Father all-powerful,
 Maker of all things
 both seen and unseen.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
 the Son of God,
 the Only-begotten begotten from the Father,
 God from God,
 light from light,
 true God from true God,
 begotten not made,
 consubstantial with the Father,
 through whom all things came to be,
 both those in heaven and those in earth;
 for us humans and for our salvation
 he came down and became incarnate,
 became human,
 suffered and rose up on the third day,
 went up into the heavens,
 is coming to judge the living and the dead.
And in the Holy Spirit.

Nicene Creed (381)

We believe in one God,
 the Father almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth,
 of all things visible and invisible.

¹⁰⁵ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 50.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Athanasian Creed

Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith.
Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.
Now this is the catholic faith:

That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,
neither blending their persons
nor dividing their essence.
For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
the person of the Son is another,
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.

But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.

What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.

The Father is uncreated,
the Son is uncreated,
the Holy Spirit is uncreated.

The Father is immeasurable,
the Son is immeasurable,
the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal,
the Son is eternal,
the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eternal beings;
there is but one eternal being.
So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;
there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty,
the Son is almighty,
the Holy Spirit is almighty.
Yet there are not three almighty beings;
there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God,
the Son is God,
the Holy Spirit is God.
Yet there are not three gods;
there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord,
the Son is Lord,
the Holy Spirit is Lord.
Yet there are not three lords;
there is but one Lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us
to confess each person individually
as both God and Lord,
so catholic religion forbids us
to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.
The Son was neither made nor created;
he was begotten from the Father alone.
The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten;
he proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers;
there is one Son, not three sons;
there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

Nothing in this trinity is before or after,
nothing is greater or smaller;
in their entirety the three persons
are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So in everything, as was said earlier,
we must worship their trinity in their unity
and their unity in their trinity.

Anyone then who desires to be saved
should think thus about the trinity.

But it is necessary for eternal salvation
that one also believe in the incarnation
of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Now this is the true faith:

That we believe and confess
that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son,
is both God and human, equally.

He is God from the essence of the Father,
begotten before time;
and he is human from the essence of his mother,
born in time;
completely God, completely human,
with a rational soul and human flesh;
equal to the Father as regards divinity,
less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and human,
yet Christ is not two, but one.
He is one, however,
not by his divinity being turned into flesh,
but by God's taking humanity to himself.

He is one,
certainly not by the blending of his essence,
but by the unity of his person.
For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh,
so too the one Christ is both God and human.

He suffered for our salvation;
he descended to hell;
he arose from the dead;
he ascended to heaven;
he is seated at the Father's right hand;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
At his coming all people will arise bodily
and give an accounting of their own deeds.
Those who have done good will enter eternal life,
and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith:
one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.