

CHAPTER 2

GOD

Who He Is

In our discussion of essential teachings, we begin with God because the Bible begins with God. ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1). Rather than trying to prove the existence of God, the Bible simply assumes it.

The Attributes of God

Every relationship is built on mutual knowledge. If you want to have a relationship with the God who exists, then you need to know something about Him. The Bible describes God in different ways. It ascribes different qualities or attributes to Him. Since there are so many attributes, we will focus on a few found in WCF Chapter 2.

‘Infinite in being and perfection’ means having no limits. ‘Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?’ (Job 11:7). This is a rhetorical question. The answer is ‘Of course you can’t!’ God isn’t limited by space

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(omnipresence). “Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” (Jer. 23:24). Nor is God limited by time (eternality). Moses mused about this in Psalm 90:1-2: ‘Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.’ Infinity, however, goes beyond space and time. God is infinitely knowledgeable, infinitely truthful, and infinitely powerful.

And we shouldn’t think that God simply has more knowledge, truthfulness, and power than we have. It’s not a matter of quantity, but quality. He is infinitely greater than anything else in the universe. He is the creator and we are mere creatures. And the chasm between the two is wider than we could ever imagine. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). The Apostle Paul put it another way:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? (Rom. 11:33-34)

The Confession calls this quality *incomprehensible*. It means that God cannot be known exhaustively. And what we can know He makes known through special revelation. Deuteronomy 29:29 explains this important principle: ‘The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.’ As creatures, we can’t

know everything about God. Apart from His revelation; we can't know anything about God. His revelation tells us what we *need* to know.

If God is infinitely powerful, then He has 'sovereign dominion' or full control over all things. As we have seen in Genesis 1:1, God is sovereign in *creation*. He created all things 'out of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good' (WSC 9). God is also sovereign in *providence*, 'the preserving and governing of all of his creatures and all of their actions' (WSC 11). He is in such control of nature that not even a sparrow will fall to ground apart from His will (Matt. 10:29). Moreover, He incorporates the actions of men into His sovereign plan. When Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, they were expecting the worst. Instead, he taught them something about God's providence:

And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. ... You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. (Gen. 45:7-8; 50:20)

Here, the providence of God extends to wicked men without participating in their wicked actions. If this were the case, it would violate another one of His attributes. He is 'most holy' which means perfect and pure, set apart from all creation.

The prophet Isaiah was an eyewitness to the holiness of God. He saw the Lord sitting on a throne, with heavenly attendants crying out, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' How did this prophet respond to such glory? 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!' (Isa. 6:3-5). Isaiah recognized his lack of holiness

when confronted by a God of infinite holiness. Such an encounter spells doom for the lesser party!

God's holiness is inseparable from His righteousness. The confession declares Him to be 'most just, and terrible in his judgments hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty' (WCF 2.1). Since God is infinitely righteous, He demands perfect obedience to His Law. Here the scene shifts from temple to courtroom. 'The heavens declare his righteousness,' writes Asaph, 'for God himself is judge' (Ps. 50:6). 'Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne,' warns another writer (Ps. 97:2). Such a God shouldn't be taken lightly. There is no room for disobedience to His commands. He must punish the guilty.

A most holy and righteous God is hardly approachable. Isaiah found that out the hard way. These moral qualities, however, do not exhaust His attributes. God is also 'most loving' – the greatest attribute communicated to man (see 1 Cor. 13). Indeed, God not only loves, but God is the very principle of love (1 John 4:8).

The Trinity

This last attribute raises a few questions. How can God embody love when love is relational? How could He love before He created objects of love? Well, there's another attribute that shows God's love from all eternity. We call it the mystery of the *Trinity* – one God in three persons.

The Bible speaks of one God. Moses said, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one' (Deut. 6:4) while Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30). And this one God also reveals Himself in three persons. After Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the gospel writer Mark describes the interaction between the three persons of the Trinity in these words:

When he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’ (Mark 1:10-11).

Here, the participants aren’t three separate gods (tritheism), for that would destroy their ‘oneness’. Nor are they three appearances of the same God (modalism), for that would destroy their unique personalities and make the story nonsensical. Instead, we see three *persons* – who are all one God – interacting with each other. Just because we can’t fully wrap our minds around it doesn’t make it any less true.

We have already seen how the Father spoke to Jesus at His baptism. Throughout the gospels, Jesus conversed with Him and told others about their relationship. While the divinity of Father has always been accepted, the divinity of the Son is another matter. There are groups today who deny the deity of Christ, but the Bible is not on their side. The following statements about Jesus provide sufficient testimony to this truth. ‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God’ (John 1:1). ‘For in him the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily’ (Col. 2:9). ‘He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature’ (Heb. 1:3). Identifying Himself with God’s self-disclosure, ‘I am who I am’ (Exod. 3:14), Jesus made the following claims about Himself: ‘I am the bread of life’ (John 6:48), ‘I am the light of the world’ (John 8:12), ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ (John 11:25), ‘Before Abraham was, I am’ (John 8:58).

The Apostle John, in particular, leaves us without any doubt about the divinity of Jesus in the Book of Revelation. First he recorded, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8). Then upon seeing ‘one like a son of man’

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in a vision, he ‘fell at his feet as though dead’ (Rev. 1:13, 17a). This reminds us of Isaiah’s experience, the typical reaction to seeing God through impure eyes. John’s vision, however, wasn’t finished: ‘But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades”’ (Rev. 1:17b-18). Notice how the ‘son of man’ used the same language as the Lord God to describe Himself (e.g., ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’) with one exception: He also mentioned that He *died*. God the Father never died, but His Son Jesus Christ died on the Cross and was raised from the dead. What does this mean? It means that John encountered Jesus in his vision. It means that Jesus is the Eternal One, even the Infinite One. He is God.

Why is this important? It matters a great deal in the plan of salvation, but for now it serves a specific purpose: the Son reveals the Father to His people. We wouldn’t know God and His salvation if Jesus hadn’t come. He said as much in John 14:6-7:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.

For centuries, people have desired to see God. The countless statues and images that fill our museums testify to this truth. Jesus, however, had a different answer for His disciples: ‘If you want to see God, you’re looking right at him!’

So the Father is God and the Son is God. Yet there is still one more person in the Trinity. He is called the Holy Spirit. Some groups consider Him nothing more than a force, but the Bible doesn’t support such an idea. When the Apostle Peter confronted Ananias about his deception, he mentioned

this specific person of the Trinity. He said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ... You have not lied to men but to God’ (Acts 5:3-4). Notice that Peter specifically referred to the Spirit as God. Also notice that he considered the Spirit a *person*. Only a person can be lied to and only a person can be grieved (Eph. 4:30). The Spirit is just as personal as the Father and the Son.

But isn’t it enough to have the Father and the Son? Why do we need the Spirit? Again, this will be discussed in more detail, but for now He serves a specific purpose: the Spirit reveals the Son to His people. Jesus said, ‘But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me’ (John 15:26). Paul reminded his readers that ‘no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:3).

The Trinity is essential in understanding who God is. The problem is that many Christians don’t know what to do with it. Many regard it as intellectual dogma with few practical benefits. As we will see, the Trinity isn’t some irrelevant doctrine to be acknowledged and then ignored. Rather, it describes God’s love from all eternity, three persons working together for the good of God’s people, demonstrated in the gospel.

Questions for Review and Discussion



1. What are the attributes of God?
2. What does it mean for God to be infinite? Describe different aspects of this attribute.
3. What does it mean for God to be incomprehensible?



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4. What does God's sovereign dominion describe? Provide examples from nature and history.
5. What does it mean for God to be most holy? How does this attribute affect those who are not most holy?
6. What does it mean for God to be most righteous? What are His expectations for law-keeping?
7. What does it mean for God to be most loving? What is the eternal expression of this attribute?
8. What is the Trinity?
9. How is the Son divine? What purpose does He serve?
10. How is the Spirit divine and a person? What purpose does He serve?