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Theology Proper The Doctrine of God

by

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- [Part 1: Evidence for God's Existence](#)
- [Part 2: What God is Like](#)
- [Part 3: What God Is Doing](#)

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[Top of Page](#)

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[TOC](#) [Next Page](#)

PART 1: EVIDENCE FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

- [Introductory Matters](#)
- [The Revelation of the Existence of God \(Opposed to Atheism\)](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

Introductory Matters

The Nature and Purpose of This Study

No doctrine or aspect of theology is more basic than the doctrine of God, sometimes referred to as Theology Proper. Since the term theology (the study of God) is often used of the study of other biblical subjects like the Bible, angels, man, salvation, and so on, Theology Proper is the designation sometimes used for just the study of God Himself. Rather than an exhaustive treatment, the study which follows is designed to be a general overview of the key features of what the Bible teaches about God, His existence, Persons, and attributes of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here is an essential part of the foundation needed for solid spiritual growth and insight into life in general and into the Christian life in particular.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord.

This study will be helpful for the new Christian or anyone who needs to get a handle on the essential elements of the doctrine of God. It will also benefit those looking for a review of these essentials, perhaps for Sunday school teachers in the preparation of material for their classes, or for those training disciples.

The Possibility of the Knowledge of God

The Bible gives witness to two facts regarding the knowledge God. First, it teaches us that God is **incomprehensible**, and but then it also declares that God is **knowable**. Both are true, but not in an absolute sense. To say that God is incomprehensible simply means that finite man cannot know everything there is to know about God who is an infinite being. To say that God is knowable means that, though incomprehensible, God can be known and man can grow in the knowledge of God, at least in a limited sense and to the degree that is needed for man to trust God and have a personal and growing relationship with Him.

God's incomprehensibility is declared in passages like Job 11:7 and Isaiah 40:18:

Job 11:7 Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?

Isaiah 40:18 To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

The fact that God is knowable is evidenced by the very gift of the Bible as God's revelation of Himself to man, but note also the following passages:

John 14:7 If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

The Importance of This Study

Unfortunately, many are turned off by the term "doctrine" or "theology." For many people these two terms mean something boring, impractical, and useless, but nothing could be more removed from the truth. Bible doctrine, the teaching of the Bible as God's supernatural revelation to man, is the necessary foundation for knowing and understanding God, His creation (including man himself), and His plan for mankind. People, whether they realize it or not, have a set of presuppositions which form their doctrinal viewpoint or theological perspective about God, the world, and man himself. And this viewpoint, whether picked up through formal instruction or simply by the process of osmosis from their culture, is not without serious repercussions on the way people think and act. People eventually become like whatever god they worship. Concerning idols, the Psalmist wrote, "Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them" (Ps. 115:8 NIV).

The late Francis Schaeffer wrote of the significance of one's world view, which, in the final analysis, represents one's doctrinal perspective about God and life:

There is a flow to history and culture. This flow is rooted and has its wellspring in the thoughts of people. People are unique in the inner life of the mind—what they are in their thought world determines how they act. This is true of their value systems and it is true of their creativity ...

People have presuppositions, and they will live more consistently on the basis of these presuppositions than even they themselves may realize. By *presuppositions* we mean the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic world view, the grid through which he sees the world. Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists. People's presuppositions lay a grid for all they bring forth into the external world. Their presuppositions also provide the basis for their values and their basis for their decisions.

"As a man thinketh, so is he," is really most profound. An individual is not just the product of the forces around him. He has a mind, an inner world ...

Most people catch their presuppositions from their family and surrounding society the way a child catches measles. But people with more understanding realize that their presuppositions should be chosen after a careful consideration of what world view is true ...

It is important to realize what a difference a people's world view makes in their strength as they are exposed to the pressure of life. That it was the Christians who were able to resist religious mixtures, syncretism, and the effects of the weakness of Roman culture speaks of the strength of the Christian world view. This strength rested on God's being an infinite-personal God and his speaking in the Old Testament, in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and in the gradually growing New Testament. He had spoken in ways people could understand. Thus the Christians not only had knowledge about the universe and mankind that people cannot find out by themselves, but they had absolute, universal values by which to live and by which to judge the society and the political state in which they lived ...¹

The many references in the New Testament to doctrine or teaching (83 times these words are found in the NASB New Testament) make it clear that doctrine or theology is not a cold and impotent force, but a vital element to the spiritual, moral, and social being of mankind (1 Tim. 1:3; 4:6, 16; 2 Tim. 3:10, 16; 4:2-3). Indeed, it is the difference between life and death, a sense of significance and happiness, and joy and peace. It is the doctrines of the Bible which bring people into a factual knowledge of the "true and living God" which must form the basis for knowing God personally. Only then

can people turn from all the false gods of the world to the one true and living God (1 Thess. 1:9).

A healthy relationship with God must begin with an intellectual knowledge of who He is, which then matures into a deeper personal experience of knowing God in life. God manifests Himself to us on the mountain peaks, in the valleys, in the swamps—in all aspects of our lives.²

The study of the knowledge of God, just one of the many doctrinal themes in Scripture, is the greatest theme that can engage the mind of man. Nothing can even begin to parallel it in its impact on a man's life. Undoubtedly, for this very reason, the very first words of the Bible introduce us to the reality of God as the source of the universe, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

These, the very first words of the Bible, are most basic to the understanding of the whole. No more important words have ever been uttered or written. Compton, the physicist, calls them the most wonderful words ever written. All else in the Bible stands or falls upon the validity and truthfulness of these words. Study of the person and work of God is of inestimable importance and value for all who would know the truth. Without a proper understanding of Him and His plan, everything else in the Bible and in life becomes hazy and meaningless.³

In his book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer writes:

The world becomes a strange, mad, and painful place and life in it is a disappointing and unpleasant business for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfold as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.⁴

In John 17:3 Christ prayed these instructive words, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Here was Christ's own definition of salvation and life. Christ who was sent to be both the revelation of God to man and the reconciliation of man to God declares that knowing God is the essence of eternal life. But by eternal life Christ was not simply speaking of gaining an entrance into heaven, but of knowing and experiencing an eternal quality of life now, a life of meaning, purpose, and usefulness to God and mankind with peace and joy. All the real issues and questions of life ultimately find their answer in the knowledge of God which comes to man through Jesus Christ and the Scripture, Genesis through Revelation.

Before moving into the specifics of the doctrine of God, a few things should be said about theology as a whole.

Definition of Theology

The term theology is a compound of two Greek words, *theos*, meaning "God," and *logos*, meaning "word, speech, expression, discourse." Both Jesus Christ as the Living Word and the Bible as the written word are the Logos of God. That which the living and written Word reveals is theology—a discourse on the specific subject of God. Though the word theology is never found in Scripture, it is Scriptural in character. In Romans 3:2 we have the words, *ta logia tou theou*, "the oracles of God," meaning the discourses or utterances of and about God. In 1 Peter 4:11 we find *logia theou*, meaning "the utterances of God," and in Luke 8:21 we find, *ton logon tou theou*, "the Word of God."

Distinctions in the Types of Theology

In the use of the term *theology* several types develop depending on how the Word is used.

(1) **A theological system:** The word theology may be used of an exponent of a theological system as Augustinian, Calvinistic, Arminian, Covenant, or Dispensational theology.

(2) **A method, source, or content of theology:** It may be used of the source or content of the theology or the method of theology as:

- **Natural theology**—Facts concerning God and His universe derived from nature or creation.
- **Revealed theology**—Facts concerning God and His universe derived from Scripture as a whole.

(3) **Biblical theology:** Facts concerning God and His universe as set forth in the various books of the Bible from whence we derive other classifications as Pauline, Johannine and Petrine theologies.

(4) **Historical theology:** The study of the historical development of doctrine as well as its variations and heretical departures.

(5) **Theology proper:** This is theology in its true and proper sense. Theology proper contemplates only the Person of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, existence and attributes without reference to the works of each person of the trinity. This is a part of systematic theology.

(6) **Systematic theology:** This is the collecting, scientifically arranging, and categorizing, comparing, exhibiting, and defending all facts from all sources concerning God and His works.

For our knowledge of God to be accurate, the primary source must be the Bible, the special revelation of God, and the primary method must be the literal inductive method which is founded on a careful study of Scripture especially in the original languages in which it was written, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

A true and accurate systematic theology must also be an exegetical theology and a revealed or scriptural theology. This is primary. Too often the study of theology is man-centered, i.e., centered around what the so-called great theologians have said, historical theology, rather than centered in the Bible. This does not mean we ignore the writings of these men as they have sought to represent what the Scripture teaches, but our final conclusions need to be based on Scripture itself as much as is humanly possible.

Divisions of Theology

These are the categories which should form a part of any system of systematic theology:

Bibliology: From *biblos* + *logos*. This is the study of the Bible, i.e., revelation, inspiration, preservation, canonization and illumination.

Theology Proper: From *theos* + *logos*. This is the study of the essence, being, and trinity of God.

Angelology: From *angelos* + *logos*. This is the study of angels, fallen and unfallen.

Anthropology: From *anthropos* + *logos*. This is the study of man, his creation, make-up, innocence and fall.

Hamartiology: From *hamartia* + *logos*. This is the study of sin, its nature, derivation and classifications.

Soteriology: From *soterios* + *logos*. This is the study of God's plan and work of salvation for mankind.

Ecclesiology: From *ekklesia* + *logos*. This is the study of the church, universal and local.

Eschatology: From *eschatos* + *logos*. This is the study of prophecy and last things. Dispensations may also be included.

Christology: From *Christos* + *logos*. This involves the study of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man.

Pneumatology: From *pneuma* + *logos*. This involves the study of the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Systems of Perception Used in Theology

Rationalism:

In rationalism reason becomes the sole guide in discovering and learning about God whether in Scripture or in nature.

Here the supernatural is generally explained away by human reason and its bias against the supernatural, i.e., the supernatural is irrational to the human mind and must be rejected.

Empiricism:

This is the system of pursuing knowledge through observation and experiment. In the empirical system, everything must be checked out through the senses. One must be able to smell, see, touch, hear, or taste in order to know or come to a bonafide conclusion. The empirical method or the empiricist is one who depends on experience or observation alone, without regard to theory or faith.

Faith:

This is complete confidence in someone or something expressed in a non-meritorious way. Faith is the primary and Biblical means of perception (Heb. 11:3 "by faith we understand").

Faith is the means by which we understand spiritual phenomenon. Spiritual phenomenon is an infinite subject beyond the experience and reason of man. But faith is an infinite means of perception which alone is able to grasp the infinite. By the faith means of perception, a person reads the Bible, sees a fact of spiritual phenomenon and accepts it by faith. This becomes spiritual fact or truth by which an individual operates and has confidence. But is this rational? Does one have to put his brain in neutral with the faith means of perception?

(1) In Matthew 18:3 Christ said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (NIV). Children humbly accept a lot of things as true by faith, but always because they have confidence in a person, parent, or teacher. So with faith all biblical **facts** are accepted because of an underlying faith in God's person and then in God's Word. Faith begins with someone higher and greater than ourselves where rationalism and empiricism do not. They begin and end with man.

(2) Faith as a means of perception is not irrational, nor unreasonable, nor without evidence. So we read in Scripture that nature sings out the fact of God, giving constant evidence not only for the reality of God, but for something of the nature of God (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20). The Bible holds fantastic evidence that its source is in God and that God has given us this book without error. For evidence of this, see the book, *Evidence Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell, Campus Crusade.

(3) John came to the tomb in unbelief, saw the evidence within, reasoned, and went away in faith; but behind this were the previous words of Christ along with the evidence in the empty tomb (John 20:30-31). However, reason alone or rationalism, because of its bias, would say this cannot be true because it is supernatural, and this is unreasonable. Or empiricism alone would say—I have not observed it so it cannot be true, or unless I observe it, it cannot be true. Thomas, who doubted at first, may have been an empiricist (John 20:1-10, 26-31).

Illustration: The statement "the cow jumped over the moon" is irrational and cannot be believed because of what we have observed about cows and their limitations. But the statement "So the sun stood still and the moon stopped" (Josh. 10:13), though it defies our understanding, is not irrational because of what we know and believe about God. This is perception by faith.

False Views About God

The following are a few of the false views about God. These are either a product of rationalization or the failure of men to accept the Word of God by faith or both. They are the gropings of the human mind that operate on negative volition and as unaided by faith and God's revelation (cf. Rom. 1:18-20). These systems reveal the truth of 1 Corinthians 2:14.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Atheism:

Atheism is open and positive denial of the existence of God (Ps. 14:1). The word atheism comes from *a* + *theos* which

means no God. It does not refer to a mere ignorance of God, but applies to one who considers himself informed on the claims and evidence for the existence of God and who emphatically denies them.

There are three types of atheist, practically speaking:

(1) The Absolute Atheist. This is one who denies the absolute existence of God. Here is the person who argues and says “I have examined all the facts as to the existence of God and I deny them as proving His existence.”

(2) The Providential Atheist. This is the person who simply doubts the existence of God, but firmly denies His providential dealings and the care of God for the things of this world. However, this person in effect denies the being of God for he strips Him of His omnipotence, wisdom, mercy, justice and righteousness. Why? Because of their desire to be uncontrolled in their lust patterns. This kind of atheist is sometimes called a Deist. In every atheist there is a moral twist (see Ps. 14:1f). He denies God because he wants freedom from any responsibility for his sin. He is like the person who does not want to come to the light because his deeds are evil (John 3:19-20).

(3) The Practical Atheist. By this we refer to a secret or partial atheism which is present in the majority of the world. These do not actually deny the being of God, but by their actions and lifestyle, by their evil and neglect of God, or by the denial of certain aspects and rights of His divine and sovereign Being over them, they deny Him and act as though there were no God.

Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.

Agnosticism:

This word comes from *a* + *gnosis* which means “not knowing.” This school of thought does not deny the existence of God, only that there are no sufficient grounds (i.e., rational proof or empirical proof) that God exists—or that if God does exist He can be known. In reality it is an unwillingness to accept any of the sources of the knowledge of God (innate, tradition, nature, revelation), and an unwillingness to act in faith. Instead, it says I cannot know.

Materialism:

This is the system which tries to explain everything by physical causes which can be observed and understood. It denies and excludes any spiritual causes. Materialism is closely related to empiricism.

Polytheism:

Polytheism is a system of theology which believes in many gods. It has been claimed by unbelievers and by many evolutionists that all men were first polytheists and then evolved to monotheism. But the Bible shows that polytheism is a product not of evolution but devolution and degeneration. The idea found in evolution that monotheism, or the belief in one God, is a refinement of polytheism is contrary to the record of the Bible and even recent discoveries archaeologically. Scripture shows that polytheism is the product of man turning away from God and is specifically related to the deceptions of Satan as it is found in the false religions of the world. Polytheism is in no way similar to the biblical doctrine of the trinity which teaches that God is three in personality, but one in essence.

Pantheism:

This is the belief that God is in everything and that everything is God. This system confuses God with nature, matter with Spirit, and the creation with the Creator. Also, pantheism must not be confused with the omnipresence of God. The Bible teaches that God is everywhere, but not in everything. God as Creator is independent of, distinct, and separate from the creation.

Deism:

The term “deism” is from the Latin word *deus*, meaning God, and is closely allied to the Greek word *theos*. This system acknowledges that there is a God, that He is personal, infinite, holy, and the Creator of all things, but denies that He

sustains the universe. The Deist says that God just put things into motion. He is the Creator but not the Sustainer. Deism rejects the Scriptures, anything supernatural, and the idea that God is providentially working in this world.

Tritheism:

This is the doctrine that the Godhead consists of three independent Gods. This is a false view of the doctrine of the trinity, or better, triunity. Tritheism misses the oneness of the triunity of God.

There are many other false systems such as Positivism, Monism, Dualism, and Pluralism, but the plethora of these false systems simply show the futility of what the soulish mind can come up with when it tries to operate apart from the divine revelation of God. It is inconceivable, then, that God would leave man without a revelation of Himself.

Conclusion

The naturalistic arguments which debate the existence of God engender various philosophies. From these inconclusive and questionable theories the spiritual mind turns with relief to the complete, satisfying, and authoritative revelation of God set forth in the Bible.⁵

The Revelation of the Existence of God (Opposed to Atheism)

Can a person prove that God exists? No, not really, but if we believe in the existence of God, we should be able to give reasonable evidences for why we believe what we believe. This section is designed to help us do that as well as aid in thinking about some of the ramifications of believing in the existence of God.

The message of the Bible, or the gospel, is always equated with truth and it is presented as the opposite of error. Further, the Bible teaches us that man can know the truth and that God holds man responsible to know it. God plainly holds men responsible for not receiving and believing the truth (Rom. 1:18; 2:8; 2 Thess 2:10-12). Such verses would be meaningless unless there was some kind of clear and objective evidence by which men could come to a knowledge and conviction of the truth. If such were not the case, God would not hold man responsible for there would be no way to tell truth from error.

Many like to make the claim there is no absolute truth or that you cannot know the truth. They claim you really cannot know truth unless it can be verified by observable scientific testing and data. Morally, philosophically, and theologically, everything is simply relative. This is agnosticism, but the agnostic's position is really unsupported by the evidence.

Pilate's reaction to Jesus' statement when He was on trial may be an illustration of this not just because of what Pilate said, but because of what Christ first said to Pilate. Christ said, "everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate then replied, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38) Like all atheists, practical, intellectual, or philosophical, or like an agnostic, Pilate thought he could excuse himself from moral responsibility to God and humanity, or to truth itself by claiming truth cannot be known.

But in this statement, Christ shows us that knowing truth is ultimately a moral issue. Those who are of the truth, those who really want to know, can and will listen to the evidence that God has given us so that men may know the truth. The apostle Paul teaches us the exact same thing in Romans 1:18f. The fact is there is tremendous and bonafide evidence that there is a God out there, He exists. The problem is not one of evidence, but of rebellion and negative volition to God (Ps. 14:1; Rom. 1:21, 23, 25, 28; 3:9-18). It is a moral problem. The moral issue always overshadows the intellectual or evidential issues. As Paul Little writes,

It is not that man *cannot* believe—it is that he "*will* not believe." Jesus pointed the Pharisees to this as the root of the problem. "You refuse to come to me," he told them, "that you may have life" (John 5:40). He makes it abundantly clear that moral commitment leads to a solution of the intellectual problem. "If any man's will is to do his will, he shall *know* whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (John 7:17). Alleged intellectual problems are often a smoke screen covering moral rebellion.

A student once told me I had satisfactorily answered all his questions, "Are you going to become a Christian?" I asked.

“No,” he replied. Puzzled, I asked, “Why not?” He admitted, “Frankly, because it would mess up the way I’m living.” He realized that the real issue for him was not intellectual but moral.

The question is often asked, “If Christianity is rational and true, why is it that most educated people don’t believe it?” The answer is simple. They don’t believe it for the very same reason that most *uneducated* don’t believe it. They don’t *want* to believe it. It’s not a matter of brain power, for there are outstanding Christians in every field of the arts and sciences. It is primarily a matter of will.⁶

Then why do we bother with giving answers and evidence for the existence of God or any other area that is questioned? First, because the Bible tells us to be “ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet. 3:15). The reason for this is because people do have genuine doubts and questions and they deserve solid evidence.

John Stott struck a balance when he said, “We cannot pander to a man’s intellectual arrogance, but we must cater to his intellectual integrity.”⁷

Can we prove, then, that God exists? No! Not in the same way that you can prove something by scientific method in the laboratory by observable and repeatable experiments. However, observable data for the existence of God does exist. It exists in such degree and clarity that to deny it, one must deny his rational processes because of a bias against the supernatural and the issue of the moral twist spoken of earlier.

We must be clear from the outset that it is not possible to “prove” God in the scientific method sense of the word. But it can be said with equal emphasis that you can’t “prove” Napoleon by the scientific method. The reason lies in the nature of history itself and in the limitations of the scientific method, it must be repeatable ... But history in its very nature is non-repeatable. No one can “rerun” the beginning of the universe or bring Napoleon back or repeat the assassination of Lincoln or the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But the fact that these events can’t be “proved” by repetition does not disprove their reality as events.

There are many real things outside the scope of the scientific method as a means of verification ... To insist that God be “proved” by the scientific method is like insisting that a telephone be used to measure radioactivity. It simply wasn’t made for that.⁸

So what is the evidence for the existence of God? The evidence falls into two categories: (1) General or naturalistic evidence—reasonable evidence from the world around us, and (2) special or revealed evidence—the evidence from the Bible. Though the evidence for the supernatural character of the Bible is a subject that comes under the doctrine of bibliology (the study of the Bible), there is tremendous evidence that the Bible is truly unique and the inerrant and infallible Word of God. It is not a book that man would write if he could or could write if he would (Lewis Sperry Chafer). Ryrie writes:

General revelation includes all that God has revealed in the world around us, including man, while special revelation includes various means He used to communicate His message in what was codified in the Bible. General revelation is sometimes called natural theology and special revelation is called revealed theology. But, of course, what is revealed in nature is also revealed in theology. Some writers use the labels prelapsarian for general revelation and postlapsarian or soteric for special revelation. However, both general and special revelation are (a) from God and (b) about God.⁹

Characteristics of General (Naturalistic) Revelation

As Ryrie points out, General Revelation, as the title suggests, is simply general and broad in the following ways:¹⁰

(1) It is general in its **scope** in that it witnesses to all people as the following passages suggest:

Matthew 5:45 in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.

Acts 14:17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

It is general **geographically** in that it encompasses the entire globe.

Psalm 19:1-4 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 **Their line has gone out through all the earth**, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun. (Emphasis mine.)

(3) It is general in its **methodology** since it uses a universal means, the varied elements of God's creation like the heat of the sun and the human conscience, to declare the reality and glory of God (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 2:14-15).

Simply because it is a revelation that thus affects all people wherever they are and whenever they have lived it can bring light and truth to all, or, if rejected, brings condemnation.¹¹

General or Naturalistic Arguments

The following arguments are drawn from natural revelation, from the world around us, in contrast to the revealed or supernatural revelation of the Scripture. This is bonafide evidence for God-consciousness as the Apostle Paul shows in Romans 1:19-20. The basic idea of these arguments is that as we study the world in which we live one can reasonably conclude that there must be a God. In the final analysis, however, one only comes to this conclusion by the perception of faith. Why? Because in spite of the evidence, one does not see God; one sees only the evidence of God, but not God Himself.

Illustration: When a man walking through the woods finds the tracks of a deer that has passed there only hours before, he knows that a deer was there because of the evidence of the tracks even though he does not see the deer. So (as with the tracks of the deer) we may know that God exists by the tracks He has left everywhere in the world.

The Moral Argument

Man has an intellectual and moral nature which demands God as his Creator. Man's conscience, which is a law to man, necessitates a Law-Giver. Man's free will implies a Great Will. Without God as the basis for right and wrong, no government would be possible except on the principle, "might makes right."

Though it becomes defiled and seared by sin (1 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:15), to some degree all men have that faculty called conscience with its constant impulse to choose the right and leave the wrong. Society and government are based on this recognition of virtue and truth, but where does that come from? The only logical explanation is the existence of a God whose ways are holy, just, and good. A material universe without God as Supreme Governor would of necessity lack moral values and distinctions.

The Argument From Design (Teleological, telos, "end")

The universe is a cosmos not a chaos. "Adaptation of means to an end imply a Designer." Paley, the philosopher, used the illustration of a man finding a watch in the woods. If you found a watch and then found it also kept good time, you are forced to conclude that it had a designer (Isa. 45:18). How much more is this not true with the universe and its infinite complexity.

The earth itself is evidence of design. "If it were much smaller an atmosphere would be impossible (e.g. Mercury and the moon); if much larger the atmosphere would contain free hydrogen (e.g. Jupiter and Saturn). Its distance from the sun is correct—even a small change would make it too hot or too cold. Our moon, probably responsible for the continents and ocean basins, is unique in our solar system and seems to have originated in a way quite different from the other relatively much smaller moons. The tilt of the [earth's] axis insures the seasons, and so on."¹²

Another illustration is a stone wall. Rocks falling in a landslide never form a properly placed, neat, uniform stone wall. Rather, such a stone wall proves design and a designer. So the world, in all its perfection and design, must have had a Designer. Stated in the form of syllogism the argument is as follows:

- **Major Premise:** Design presupposes an intelligent architect.

- **Minor Premise:** The world shows evidence of design in every part.
- **Therefore:** The world has a designer or intelligent architect, who is God.

The Cosmological Argument

The Greek word *cosmos* means “an orderly arrangement.” Every effect must have its adequate cause. The universe is an adequate cause, and the only sufficient cause is God. Where did the universe come from if not from God the Creator? Reason and probability are on the side of creation, not chance or mere force (Rom. 1:20; Acts 17:28-29). Stated in the form of syllogism the argument is as follows:

- **Major Premise:** Every effect has an adequate **cause**.
- **Minor Premise:** The world is an **effect**.
- **Therefore:** The world has an adequate cause outside itself which produced it, namely God.

The Esthetic Argument

There is beauty in the universe and human beings have a unique ability to appreciate it. From whence comes this correspondence between the beauty in creation and the ability of man to appreciate it? This indicates design, intelligence, personality, and so, God.

The Ontological Argument (The idea of a supreme being)

Man not only has an idea of a God, but he pictures that God is a supreme being, one who is perfect, independent, and infinite. Where does this idea come from if there is no such being?

This argument is generally considered the most profound and Keyser in his book, *A System of Christian Evidences*, has an excellent statement:

We can not think of the relative without also thinking of an absolute. We can not think of the derived without also thinking of the underived. We can not think of the dependent without also thinking of the independent. We can not think of the imperfect without also thinking of the perfect. We can not think of the finite without also thinking of the infinite.

Now, if these concepts are not true, and there is no perfect, absolute, infinite Being, then man’s thinking, in its deepest constitution is null and void. If that were true, all our thinking would be insane and futile. Can we believe that?¹³

Sometimes this argument is called, The Religious or General Argument with the argument going something like this: Since the belief in God and supernatural beings is universal even among the most backward tribes, it must therefore come from within man, it is something innate. The question is, could it have come from civilization or even from education when people all over the world possess it whether they are civilized and educated or not? The logical answer is no.

Then, where could such an idea come from if there is no God? There is always something to satisfy the desires which are common to the whole human race. There is food for the hungry, water for the thirsty, and a God for the thirsty soul. Stated in the form of a syllogism the argument is as follows:

- **Major Premise:** An intuitive and universal belief among men must be true.
- **Minor Premise:** The belief that there is a God is universal and intuitive among men.
- **Therefore:** The belief that there is a God is true.

There are some very interesting facts regarding the universal belief in God.

(1) More than 90 percent of the religions of the world acknowledge the existence of one supreme being and some even anticipate God’s redeeming concern.

(2) In every case, this monotheistic belief predated other forms of worship or beliefs and heathenistic practices. This is true the world over on every continent.

(3) These other forms of heathenistic and polytheistic practices were invariably the result of failing to pursue the knowledge of God. Failure to pursue belief in the one Supreme Being created a vacuum into which false and demonic beliefs quickly rushed. As an illustration, ancient Chinese and Koreans had believed in a Supreme God who created all things. In China his name was Shang Ti and in Korea it was Hananim, The Great One. This belief predated Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. It goes back 2600 years before Christ and worshippers throughout China and Korea seem to have understood from the beginning that Shang Ti/Hananim must never be represented by idols.¹⁴

Little writes:

It is very significant that recent anthropological research has indicated that among the farthest and most remote primitive peoples, today, there is a universal belief in God. And in the earliest histories and legends of peoples all around the world the original concept was of one God, who was the Creator. An original high God seems once to have been in their consciousness even in those societies which are today polytheistic. This research, in the last fifty years, has challenged the evolutionary concept of the development of religion, which had suggested that monotheism—the concept of one God—was the apex of a gradual development that began with polytheistic concepts. It is increasingly clear that the oldest traditions everywhere were of one supreme God.¹⁵

Biblical Evidence for the Existence of God

The Existence of God Is Assumed by Scripture

Perhaps because it is so evident everywhere, no writer of Scripture, Old or New Testament, attempts to set down arguments for the existence of God. It is a fact taken for granted. The Bible simply begins with “In the beginning God” (Gen. 1:1), and nowhere is His existence argued. Why? Because of the abundant evidence in the universe for the existence of God (Psalm 19:1-4), and because they that come to God must believe that He is. God is perceived primarily by faith as a result of positive volition (see John 18:37; 7:17; Jer. 29:13).

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Biblical Theism

Biblical theism refers to what the Bible has to say about the reality, essence, and works of God, and it draws upon the marvelous revelation of God as it is found in the Holy Bible.

Biblical theism confirms the legitimate conclusions of naturalistic theism and also adds to it so much that is revealed only in the Bible. Though reason and revelation combine in any systematic theology, in approaching biblical theism certain assumptions are necessary.

Problems of interpretation of the Bible are recognized in systematic theology, but within orthodoxy there is no problem of the trustworthiness of Scripture ... The Bible clearly reveals the existence of God who has all the attributes properly recognized in Deity.¹⁶

Regarding biblical theism Robert Lightner writes:

Since God did not seek to prove and defend His existence in His own Word, perhaps that is not man's task either. We have been given the Bible which, while it does not seek to defend God's existence before the skeptic or the unbeliever, does assume God's existence and presents irrefutable evidence that He is, that He has worked in the past and is working today. In the Old Testament, for example, God's existence and presence in the world is established by appeal to historical evidence (i.e., Ex. 4:1ff; 14:30f; Num. 14:11; Josh. 2:8-11, etc.). Also, in the Word of God we are told of His Son who came to reveal God to men (John 1:18). Surely, no one can read God's Word with any degree of seriousness and go on denying the reality of God's existence. Either God is all that Scripture makes Him out to be or the Bible is the biggest and most deceptive hoax ever compiled ...

No doubt the strongest evidence for God's existence in the Bible comes from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Let it be

stated clearly again here by way of introduction, to deny the existence of the God of the Bible is to repudiate the Christ of Scripture.

The Son of God was the great Revealer of God. God also revealed Himself in the *words* of Scripture and in the miraculous *deeds* recorded there. Added to these evidences of His revelation it must also be said He reveals Himself to the believing heart through the personal *experience* of the Holy Spirit who “beareth witness with our spirits” (Rom. 8:16).

The revelation of God in the Bible reveals His infinite love and grace. But like His revelation in nature, apart from the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit the message will not be believed or understood.¹⁷

Conclusion

The big question is what does the fact of the existence of God means to us as human beings?

First, the knowledge of the existence of God means that man is put here by design. It means that while all God’s creatures have purpose, due to man’s particular uniqueness among the creatures of God, man has special purpose and meaning. We are not merely the product of time plus chance or some impersonal force. We are each the result of a personal God who created us for Himself with meaning and purpose. But the details of this purpose are found only in the Bible, God’s special revelation of Himself. Creation of course cannot and does not reveal this. Creation’s primary role is to give man the evidence and basis for God-consciousness (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-20).

Second, the knowledge of God means responsibility. The fact that there is a supreme and perfect being, a divine sovereign who created us for His purposes, means that we are each responsible to Him for the way we live and for what we do with the life He has given us.

Third, the knowledge of God’s existence means that we have the responsibility to search and seek to know God personally and intimately, to be thankful, and to worship Him accordingly (Rom. 1:18-23). The facts are, however, that man in his fallen state does not search for God, at least not on his own (Rom. 3:11). But in His grace, God constantly works to draw men to Himself (see John 1:9; 6:44; 7:17; 12:32; Acts 17:27-28; Rom. 2:4; Jer. 29:13; 2 Chron. 15:2, 4).

Sadly, most people, even with the conviction that God exists, live like practical atheists, as though God does not exist or as though He is indifferent to man. One of the reasons for this is the principle found in two passages: the principle of God’s patience and slowness to act against man’s sin.

Psalm 50:21 These things you have done, and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, and state *the case* in order before your eyes.

Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred *times* and may lengthen his *life*, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

People think they are getting by or that God is just an old man sitting in the heavens who smiles on the indiscretions of His children. This can be illustrated by the hymns we so often sing. We sing hymns indicating our faith, but then live so differently.

- We sing *Sweet Hour of Prayer*, but are content with 5 or 10 minutes a day.
- We sing *Onward Christian Soldiers*, but a lot of Christians are AWOL.
- We sing *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, but often use the one we have in complaining.
- We sing *There Shall Be Showers of Blessings*, but are ready to miss church when it rains.
- We sing *Blest Be the Tie that Binds*, and let the least little thing sever it.
- We sing *Serve the Lord with Gladness*, and gripe, gripe, gripe.
- We sing *I Love to Tell the Story*, but are often embarrassed to mention it.

May we live and serve the Lord knowing that He truly is and lives as the sovereign and loving God of the universe.

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- 3 Robert P. Lightner, *The God of the Bible, An Introduction to the Doctrine of God*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1973, p. 9.
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- 5 Lewis Sperry Chafer *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, Editor, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, Consulting Editors, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1988, p. 131.
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- 8 Ibid., p. 8.
- 9 Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1987, p. 28.
- 10 Ibid., p. 28
- 11 Ibid., p. 28.
- 12 Little, p. 11, quoting R.E.D. Clark, *Creation*, London: Tyndale Press, p. 10.
- 13 Keyser, *A System of Christian Evidences*, pp. 196-197.
- 14 Richardson, *Eternity In Their Hearts*, Regal Books, pp. 63f.
- 15 Little, p. 8, citing Samuel Zwemer, *The Origin of Religion*, New York, Loizeaux Brothers as the source of this information.
- 16 Chafer, p. 135.
- 17 Lightner, pp. 23-24.

[TOC](#) [Next Page](#)

[Printer Friendly Version](#)

[Top of Page](#)

[Send this page to a friend](#)

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[Previous Page](#) [TOC](#) [Next Page](#)

PART 2: WHAT GOD IS LIKE

*(The Essence and Nature of God)
Opposed to Agnosticism*

- [Introduction](#)
- [Definitions of God](#)
- [The Nature of God: How God Exists](#)
- [The Attributes \(Essence\) of God](#)
- [The Names of God \(Additional Revelation About God\)](#)

Introduction

Just who is God? What is God like? Can He be defined? Can He be described? If we are to know God personally as the Scriptures declare we can and must, and if we are to avoid the perversions about God that we find in a satanically-deceived world, we must learn **what God is like** and **who God is** from His God-breathed revelation to us in the Bible. This is essential and it is the foundation to an intimate walk with God by which we can learn to personally relate to the who and what of God.

But it is so important to remember that in our study of God there are two important things that we should seek to know. **First**, we need information, revealed facts about God. We need knowledge of who God is, how He exists, or about what God is like. But **second**, we desperately need to go beyond just the facts about God. We need to know God personally and intimately. The facts are the foundation, but the goal is fellowship with God as we learn about His person, plan, purposes, principles, and promises. It is this that builds faith, gives peace, comfort, courage, joy, and the energy to deal with life. I am reminded of the words of Daniel in Daniel 11:32b, "... but the people who know their God will display strength and take action." This is not just the knowledge about God, but the knowledge of God.

Definitions of God

Can we really define God? Yes and no! To adequately and completely define God who is infinite spirit is impossible. How can the finite define the infinite? There is no way man can set forth a statement which totally sets forth all that God is. "Such a statement, were it possible, would confine God; it would restrict Him and He would no longer be God. For that very reason we must say God cannot be completely defined."¹⁸

First, while this is true, it is possible and necessary to define something of the being and perfections of God even though God's essence or perfections are infinite and beyond the scope of total human understanding. Some things are clearly discernible through God's own revelation of Himself to man in the Bible. And while our definitions and descriptions of God must always be limited, they are also absolutely necessary for faith and for our spiritual well-being and hope, limited as they are.

Second, it is the perfections or qualities of God that we find in Scripture that reveal the essence or nature of God. "True

as that is, it must also be said that a listing of the perfections of God must never be viewed as a final or complete definition of God.¹⁹ Certainly, an infinite God is more than the sum total of the qualities we find assigned to Him in Scripture.

Third, the perfections of God have always been a part of His essence. He has never existed apart from them. Chafer wrote: "The whole of the divine essence is in each attribute, and the attribute belongs to the whole essence. The attributes belong eternally to the essence."²⁰

Fourth, people tend to focus on one of God's attributes to the exclusion of another or to exalt one above another. We particularly like to focus on God's attributes of love and grace rather than His holiness and divine justice, and it is true that in some biblical contexts, one attribute is often stressed more than another. For instance, the holiness of God is mentioned more than any other of God's perfections in the Bible including the love of God. Man's need to see how his sinfulness falls short of God's holiness is perhaps one of the reasons for this, but there is a danger here that we must avoid. Lightner warns:

Taking the total testimony of Scripture, however, there is a harmonious presentation of the characteristics of God. It must ever be kept in mind that God always deals with man on the basis of the totality of His Being and not simply on the basis of one or even a few of His perfections.²¹

God is love and grace and He longs for fellowship with man. His love and grace, however, cannot bypass or ignore His perfect holiness, righteousness, and justice. These perfections must condemn man in his sin. But then neither can God's holiness ignore His love. So in His sovereignty, omnipotence, and infinite wisdom, He provided a solution of grace through the person and work of Christ thereby satisfying the totality of His perfections.

Finally, before we look at the biblical explanations of what God is like, let's take a brief look at some samples of the typical, pathetic, and unbiblical definitions and ideas of what God is like.

Definitions Which Portray God in Impersonal Ways

Sometimes you hear God referred to as "the Ground of All Being," "the Force of Life," "the Principle of Love," "the Ultimate Reality," "Mother Nature," "the Cosmic Principle into which we must all get into contact," and so forth. Such descriptions do not even come close. They are the misguided attempts of men who are not only ignorant of the truth about God, but in many cases are suppressing the knowledge of God in their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Christian Science teaches that God is eternal, impersonal principle, law, truth, spirit, and idea. All that really is, is divine. God is spirit; there is no matter. God is good; there is no evil, sin, sickness, or death. How deeply this misses the revelation of God in the Bible!

Definitions Which Portray God as More Personal

We often hear God referred to as "the Man Upstairs," or as "the Grand Old Man." Many simply view God as a grandfatherly figure who sits in heaven in His rocking chair and views without too much concern the indiscretions of His children. I recently heard a man who had come through a life-threatening experience say, "I guess the Man Upstairs was looking out for me on this one." But God is not a man. He is infinitely more. He became man in the person of His Son by the incarnation, but though His deity was veiled and though the Son voluntarily gave up the prerogatives of His deity, He never ceased to be God of very God.

The Mormons claim God is a perfect exalted man with a literal flesh and bones body. As man is, God once was, and as God is, man can be. This is also at the heart of New Age thinking, but it's a far cry from the revelation of God in the Bible.²²

A Biblical Definition

Bearing in mind our human limitations, but recognizing our need to know what God is like that we might better know and depend on Him, Robert Lightner suggest the following:

God is Spirit. He is a living and active divine person who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and love. He can enjoy fellowship with persons He created in His own image

and redeemed by His grace, and He always acts in harmony with His perfect nature.²³

Far more important than being able to simply quote or memorize such a definition is our need to understand each aspect of the definition and to know and walk with God in accordance with its truth. The rest of this study will be devoted to this very issue.

The definition states that God is a living and active divine person. God is personal. He has personality, but what does this mean and what does it mean to us?

The Nature of God: How God Exists

As we have seen, if one looks at the evidence with an open mind, the evidence declares that God truly does exist. But how? What's the fundamental nature of God like? How exactly does He exist? Is He personal, or simply an impersonal force? Is He spirit, material, or a combination? In this section we are making a difference for clarity sake between the attributes or perfections of God like love, grace, sovereignty, and the fundamental nature in which God exists as personality, spirit, and triunity. Following this, we will look at the fundamental attributes or perfections of God.

The Personality of God

The Polemic of God's Personality—What It Protects Us Against

The truth of God's personality stands opposed to impersonal pantheism and all the impersonal ideas of God as found in many various cults and in the mysticism of today's world, especially as seen in the New Age Movement. New Age thinking says God is "the ground of all being," or God is "the force," or "the planetary consciousness" in human beings. Hunt describes New Age thinking as a "new 'openness' to one another, to ourselves, to nature, to a ***universal 'Force'*** (italics mine) pervading the whole cosmos—which produces an awakening of unimagined powers of the mind."²⁴

Today's world, because of the influence of Eastern mysticism, has become pantheistic. Pantheism teaches that matter or substance is God, and hence, everything is God, and God is everything. God is simply the sum total of the universe; God is all and all is God. Thus, God is an impersonal force to which we are all connected, but not the personal, independent, self-existent Creator who created us in His own image.

God is therefore identified with nature. He is not held to be independent of or separate from nature. God is simply an unconscious and impersonal force working in the world. So, New Agers teach that by some form of mysticism man must seek to get in touch with the force through TM, yoga, or biofeedback.

Closely associated with this is the error that "God is love and love is God." The first part is true, but not the second part which merely makes God an impersonal principle, a force, but not a personal and intelligent being who is personally guiding the affairs of the universe.

Important to all of this is the fact that God, according to the Bible, is both transcendent and immanent.

As Transcendent God is independent of, above, and distinct from this universe; He is outside, above, and before this time-space universe. This is seen from the name *Yahweh* by which God revealed Himself to Israel in the Old Testament. Most scholars suggest the basic meaning of this name is "I Am that I Am," which would stress God's transcendent independence and existence (Ex. 3:14). God's transcendence is also expressed in the following passages:

Isaiah 46:8-10 Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. 9 Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

Psalm 115:3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

As Immanent God pervades and sustains the universe, yet He is always distinct from it. He is everywhere, yet not in

everything. He is personally and intimately involved, yet distinct.

Proverbs 5:21 For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths.

Psalms 33:13-14 The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; 14 From His dwelling place He looks out On all the inhabitants of the earth.

Romans 11:34-36 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Though He is the only true God and the transcendent sovereign, He is involved as the King and Redeemer, and as our derivation—"from Him," our dynamic—"through Him," and our destination—"to Him are all things."

Definition and Explanation of Personality

What is meant when we speak of the personality of God? While the definitions of personality vary, at least four elements describe personality and distinguish God, as personal, from a mere force, or a thing, from a personal entity. These are:

- (1) **Self-Consciousness:** This is the ability to be aware of one's self and identity. It is more than mere consciousness, but involves an objective awareness of who one is.
- (2) **Intelligence or Thinking Mentality:** Animals have brains, but they lack the power to reason and plan and design as does man who was created in God's image. You can teach your dog to go get the paper, but not to read it. Animals act more by intuition while man is a reasoning creature because he was created in the image of a personal God.
- (3) **Self-Determination or Will:** This has to do with the ability to look to the future and to prepare an intelligent course of action; it means the inner power to act on one's own reason or free will in order to determine a course of action.
- (4) **Sensibility or Emotion:** This is the capacity to appreciate and respond with feeling or emotions like grief or joy.

Biblical Support for the Personality of God

All the elements of personality are applied to God in the Bible.

- (1) Self-consciousness—Ex. 3:14, "And God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'" This points to God's self-consciousness in the strongest possible way.
- (2) Mentality—Ps. 147:5, "Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite." Compare also Isaiah 40:12-14; Romans 11:33.
- (3) Self-determination or will—Ps. 115:3, "But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases;" Isaiah 46:10, "... My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure;"
- (4) Sensibility or emotion—Gen. 6:6, "The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain" (NIV); Prov. 6:16, "There are six things which the LORD hates ..."

Personal names and personal pronouns are applied to God which undeniably prove the personality of God.

(1) Names which show the actions of personality: *Yahweh Yireh*, "The Lord will provide," Gen. 22:13-14; *Yahweh Rapha*, "The Lord that heals," Ex. 15:26; *El Shaddai*, "God almighty who cares and nourishes," Gen. 17:1; *Father*, God is called Father over and over in the New Testament.

(2) Personal pronouns are regularly used of God like I, you, we, my.

Actions are regularly ascribed to God which reveal His personality. Scripture teaches us that God loves, guides, teaches, delivers, helps, comforts, cares, and becomes angry and grieved. There are other arguments that we could use, but these are sufficient to show that the Bible teaches us that God is a personal God and not just an influence or a force. The big issue is, "So what?" What does this mean to us?

The Significance of God's Personality

- (1) Without the personality of God we are left to accept some mechanistic theory for the existence of the universe and man, and the world has no purpose or real meaning. This life is all there is; it's eat, drink, and be merry (if you can) for tomorrow you die. That's all folks! We are left with the world's attitude of, "You have to get all the gusto you can because you only go around once."
- (2) Without God's personality, there would be no personal relationship or fellowship with God. Prayer would be an exercise in futility and nothing more than talking to a tree or a rock or an idol. At best, prayer would simply be an exercise in talking to oneself. Throughout Scripture, a sharp distinction is made between God and things which have no life and are impersonal as with the idols of the heathen (Jer. 10:10-16). As mere impersonal things, idols can't move on their own, speak, do good or evil, or help and comfort.
- (3) Without the fact of a personal God, there could be no reverence or fear of God. And this is precisely what we see in the world today. Unless there is a personal God by whom right and wrong can be reliably assessed, and with whom man becomes responsible, moral judgments can be no more than opinion, influenced by upbringing, training, and propaganda, but without any final responsibility beyond man himself. This is the perfect scenario for tyrants who have no respect for any opinion but their own and for the law of the jungle.
- (4) Because God is a person, He can care, love, and know our deepest needs, longings, and concerns. And the Bible reveals that as a person, He does love and care for us (John 3:16; 1 Pet. 5:7). Because He is a personal God, He is called "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:4f). To Isaiah the prophet, God said, "Comfort, O comfort My people, ... Speak kindly to Jerusalem;" (Isa. 40:1).

The Bible teaches us that God is a loving, sovereign, and personal God, but the important point is not only that God is a person, but that He is the kind of person He is. This is what makes the difference. Francis Schaeffer has an excellent word here:

The beginning is simply that God exists and that He is the personal-infinite God. Our generation longs for the reality of personality but it cannot find it. But Christianity says personality is valid because personality has not just appeared in the universe but rather is rooted in the personal God who has always been.

If we are unexcited Christians we should go back and see what is wrong. We are surrounded by a generation that can find "no one home" in the universe. If anything marks our generation it is this. In contrast to this, as a Christian I know who I am; and I know the personal God who is there. I speak and He hears. I am not surrounded by mere mass, nor only energy particles, but He is there. And if I have accepted Christ as my Savior, then though it will not be perfect in this life, yet moment by moment, on the basis of the finished work of Christ, this person to person relationship with the God who is there can have reality to me.²⁵

The lovingkindness of God as a personal God is everywhere evident in Scripture, but here is a passage that drives this truth home to our hearts.

Psalm 103:13-14 Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. 14 For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are *but* dust.

The Spirituality of God

The most important biblical statement about the spirituality of God is John 4:24, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

As Spirit, God is without a material body or substance (incorporeal), without physical parts or passions and therefore

free from all temporal limitations (Luke 24:39), invisible and incorruptible (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), and without earthly counterpart or resemblance (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 4:15-23; Isa. 40:25).

Questions Related to the Spirituality of God:

(1) Scripture declares that man is made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). Since God is Spirit, the image and likeness in no way implies a physical likeness. Rather, it is a reference to man's natural and moral likeness to God. When man sinned, he lost the moral likeness, but still retains the natural likeness by way of personality—self-consciousness, intellect, emotions, and will.

(2) Scripture also uses anthropomorphic expressions, physical terms of the human body, to give finite human beings a better understanding of the character of an invisible and infinite God. God is said to have hands, feet, arms, eyes, ears, and it is said that He hears, sees, feels, walks, holds us in His hand, etc. (Isa. 51:5; 59:1; Hos. 11:3; 1 Pet. 3:12; Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 145:16; John 10:28-29). Such terms in no way contradict the fact that God is Spirit. God is also said to shelter us under His pinions (feathers) and that we may seek refuge under His wings (Ps. 91:4). Does this mean God is a bird? Of course not. It simply expresses God's protecting love.

(3) Some passages of Scripture speak of visible manifestations of God (Ex. 24:10; 33:18-20), and some see this as a contradiction because other passages declare no man has ever seen God (John 1:18; 6:46; Deut. 4:12). This is really not a contradiction at all, only a misinterpretation of these passages. In some passages, God manifested Himself in what is called *theophanies*, appearances of God. As Spirit, God has manifested Himself in some kind of form. Sometimes there is no mention of a particular form (Gen. 12:7; 17:1, 22; 26:2; 35:9), sometimes there is the mention of a form such as a dove (John 1:32), as a bush on fire (Ex. 3:2), or of a cloud and a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21-22). But at other times the appearance was in the form of a man (Gen. 18:1-3, 33 [three men, Yahweh and two angels, cf. 18:1 with 19:1]; Ezek. 1:26-28), or in the form of "the Angel of the Lord" (Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-18; Judges 13:18-22). The answer to the apparent contradiction undoubtedly lies in the fact that in none of these appearances has man ever seen a full blown manifestation of the invisible and essential essence of God. God has been seen in various manifestation of His person, but never in His total essence.

Regarding this, Lightner makes a fitting application for us to consider if we are Christians.

The only physical body God has is the believer's in which He dwells (1 Cor. 6:19). The believer's body, therefore, is not to be used selfishly; it is to be presented back to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), and He is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).²⁶

In John 4:20, the woman at the well made an issue over the proper place to worship God. The implication of the question was, "Where is God to be found, at Gerizim or in Jerusalem?" Christ's answer to her in verses 21-24, based on the fact God is Spirit, showed that God is not to be confined to one place since as Spirit, no place can contain Him (Acts 7:48-49; 17:25; 1 Kings 18:27; Isa. 66:1). The worship of God is not limited to a mountain nor Jerusalem (vs. 21). Rather, because God is Spirit, He must be worshipped in two ways: (1) He must be worshipped "in spirit" as distinct from a place, or a particular form or other sensual and material limitations. Regardless of what one is doing externally, worship is a matter of the heart or the inner man (cf. Eph. 3:16). (2) He must be worshipped in "truth." Worship must be genuine, but also according to the truth of God's revelation as distinguished from man's false ideas about God stemming from his own human traditions (Mark 7:3-13; Col. 2:8). Man can know that God exists from the design of the creation around him, but he cannot accurately know God as to His nature, personality, and perfections apart from God's own revelation of Himself in the written Word and living Word, the person of Jesus Christ.

Scripture gives commands against graven images used to represent God's being (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 4:15-23; Isa. 40:25). But why? Because God is without earthly counterpart or resemblance. No one has ever gotten a full glimpse of God's being. No one has ever seen a picture of how He looks and nothing on earth even begins to resemble Him. Any image man could create, no matter how glorious it appeared to man, must distort the truth of God and reduce His infinite majesty and glory and bring grave dishonor to His perfections.

An Application of the Spirituality of God:

The fact that we are physical and limited to space and one place at a time, and resort to a particular place to worship God tends to make us susceptible to erroneous ideas and attitudes about God and our worship of Him.

Our Lord's point with the woman at the well in John 4 is that while man, being flesh, can only be present in one place at a time, God, being Spirit, is not at all limited by space and time. God is not localized to one place. God, as pure, infinite Spirit is everywhere at all times. Thus, the true condition of acceptable worship is not some particular place or time or some particular form, but that our hearts must be open, responsive, and honest to His presence and to His truth, the revelation of Himself found in the Bible.

Concerning mere religiosity versus biblical piety, Donald Bloesch warns:

Religiosity is not the same thing as biblical piety, nor is churchianity identical with Christianity. The mere practice of religion often promotes rather than alleviates guilt and anxiety. Scrupulous observance of the laws and codes of sacred tradition may grieve the Spirit. A beautiful liturgy may quench the Spirit. Scripture tells us that the only worship acceptable to God is worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3).

True religion is not simply keeping the law, but keeping the law in a spirit of love. It is not merely going to church, but going to church with a burning desire to adore the living God.²⁷

In an article for *Moody Monthly* regarding worship Erwin Lutzer wrote the following:

"To worship," William Temple said, "is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God."

Worship isn't listening to a sermon, appreciating choir music, or joining to sing hymns. In fact, it isn't even necessarily prayer, for prayer sometimes comes from an unbroken, unyielded heart. Worship is not an external activity precipitated by the right environment. To worship in spirit is to draw near to God with an undivided heart. We must come in full agreement without hiding anything or disregarding His will.²⁸

The Trinity (Triunity) of God

The Nature of This Revelation About God

Another revelation of the Bible that teaches us more about the nature of God or how He exists is the truth regarding the trinity or triunity of the Godhead. The Bible teaches us that God not only exists as a personal Spirit being, but that He does so in Holy Trinity. This is a doctrine beyond the scope of man's finite mind. If biblical evidence supports it, we can know it is true. Comprehending it is another matter. John Wesley said, "Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the triune God."²⁹ God's Word tells us that we should expect His revelation, the revelation of an infinite, omniscient, all-wise Creator, to contain an infinite depth that corresponds to His infinite mind. In the book of Isaiah, God tells us about this and says:

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Kenneth Boa has an excellent word here concerning the concept of God's thoughts being higher than ours:

It follows from all this that we cannot and should not expect to understand the Bible exhaustively. If we could, the Bible would not be divine but limited to human intelligence. A very important idea comes out of this, something over which many non-Christians and even Christians stumble: *Since the Bible is an infinite revelation, it often brings the reader beyond the limit of his intelligence.* (italics his)

As simple as the Bible is in its message of sin and of free salvation in Christ, an incredible subtlety and profundity underlies all its doctrines. Even a child can receive Christ as his Savior, thereby appropriating the free gift of eternal. Yet no philosopher has more than scratched the surface regarding the things that happened at the Cross. The Bible forces any reader to crash into the ceiling of his own comprehension, beyond which he cannot go until he sees the Lord face-to-face.

Until a person recognizes that his own wisdom and intelligence are not enough, he is not ready to listen to God's greater wisdom. Jesus alluded to this when He said to God, "you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Luke 10:21).³⁰

God has communicated to men truly though not exhaustively. Moses expressed this to us in Deuteronomy 29:29. He wrote, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." In the New Testament, the word *mystery*, the Greek *musterion*, refers to what was previously hidden, but is now revealed (1 Cor. 15:51; Eph. 3:3, 4, 9). Sometimes it is used simply of that which God makes known through His revelation to man and which man could not know on his own (1 Cor. 2:7). But there is a sense in which some of God's truth, though clearly revealed in the Bible, remains a mystery. Though it is a truth revealed in Scripture, like the doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God or the divine/human nature of Jesus Christ, the trinity is a kind of mystery in that it goes beyond the boundaries of human comprehension. God hasn't explained all the mysteries of His revelation to us undoubtedly because we simply cannot yet grasp it. The Apostle Paul wrote: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Because of this, some of the revelations of God given to us in the Bible *defy explanation and illustration*. When working and seeking to explain those truths that fall into this category, our explanations and especially our attempts to illustrate them must of necessity fall short of our ability to clarify and comprehend them. Does this mean it cannot be true simply because it defies our human imagination or ability to comprehend it? It would be nothing but human arrogance to say yes! The truth is we must recognize our need to simply trust in God's special revelation to us, the Bible, and submit our minds to that which is truly expressed in its pages. This does not mean we do not test the Scripture to make sure these things are truly taught, but once we are convinced that, "Yes, that's what the Bible says," we must lay hold of it by faith and wait on the eternal future for complete understanding (1 Cor. 13:12).

It would be the height of egotism for a person to say that because an idea in the Bible does not make sense (does not conform to his or her reasoning), it cannot be true and the Bible must be in error on this point.³¹

The doctrine of the trinity is part of God's revelation of one who is infinite to those who are finite. Doesn't it seem logical that in the study about God we are going to find things that are incomprehensible, mysterious, and super-rational to finite man's rational thinking capacity. "God in His existence as the Three-in-One is beyond the limits of human comprehension."³²

Definition of the Trinity (Triunity) of God

Trinity: Webster's dictionary gives the following definition: "The union of three divine persons (or hypostases), the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one divinity, so that all the three are one God as to substance, but three persons (or hypostases as to individuality)." Synonyms sometimes used are triunity, trine, triality. The term "trinity" is formed from "tri," three, and "nity," unity. Triunity is a better term than "trinity" because it better expresses the idea of three in one. God is three in one.

Person: In speaking of the Triunity, the term "person" is not used in just the same way it is in ordinary usage, in which it means an identity completely distinct from other persons. Actually the word *persons* tends to detract from the unity of the Trinity. According to the teaching of Scripture, the three Persons are inseparable, interdependent, and eternally united in one divine Being.

It is evident that the word "person" is not ideal for the purpose. Orthodox writers have struggled over this term. Some have opted for the term *subsistence*, hence, "God has three substances." Most have continued to use *persons* because we have not been able to find a better term.

Essence: In its theological usage, essence refers to "the intrinsic or indispensable, permanent, and inseparable qualities that characterize or identify the being of God."

The words triunity and trinity are used to refer to the fact that the Bible speaks of one God, but attributes the characteristics of God to three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the trinity states that there is one God who is one in essence or substance, but three in personality. This does not mean three independent Gods existing as one, but three persons who are co-equal, co-eternal, inseparable, interdependent, and eternally united in one

absolute divine essence and being.

The words triunity and trinity are not found in the Bible, but they are words that help us to express a doctrine that is scriptural, though replete with difficulties for the human mind. Further, it should be stated up front that this is a doctrine that is not explicitly stated either in the Old or New Testaments, but it is implicit in both. Speaking about this, Ryrie writes, "But explicit means 'characterized by full, clear expression,' an adjective hard to apply to this doctrine. Nevertheless, the doctrine grows out of the Scripture, so it is a biblical teaching."³³ Note the following points:

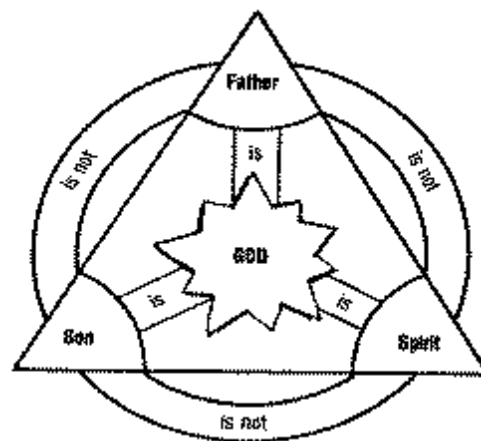
(1) Evangelical Christianity has believed in the doctrine of the Trinity or Triunity, or the Triune Godhead because of the teaching of the Bible as a whole (Old and New Testaments) and not because of one or two particular passages. As will be shown below, the whole of Scripture gives testimony to this doctrine.

(2) There are many specific passages which teach us that there are three distinct persons who possess deity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but the Bible also teaches us with equal emphasis that there is but one true God or one divine essence or substance and being.

(3) Taking the whole of Scripture, one can see that there is stress on (a) the unity of God, one divine being and essence, and (b) on the diversity of God in this unity, three persons identified as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It speaks of these persons in such a way that it ascribes absolute undiminished deity and personality to each while stressing that there is but one God in divine substance. Note: It is the doctrine of the trinity that harmonizes and explains these two thrusts of Scripture.

So, when we see that the Bible teaches these three things, (a) there is but one God, (b) that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each God, and (c) yet each are set forth as distinct persons, we have enunciated the doctrine of the Triunity of God. In a chart, it can be expressed as follows:

Ancient Diagram of the Holy Trinity



The three persons are the same in substance, i.e., in essence or in their essential nature, but distinct in subsistence which describes God's mode or quality of existence in three persons. By mode of existence we do not mean one God acting in three different ways, but one divine being existing in three distinct persons within one divine substance.

This is not exactly three individuals as we think of three personal individuals, but one divine being who acts and thinks as one within a three-old personality. This is incomprehensible to our finite and limited minds, but it is the teaching of the Scripture. "In the Being of God there are not three individuals, but only three personal self distinctions within the one divine essence."³⁴

Recognizable and Important Distinctions

The New Bible Dictionary has an excellent summary of this point:

In the relationship between the Persons there are recognizable distinctions.

a. Unity in diversity

In most formularies the doctrine is stated by saying that God is One in his essential being, but that in his being there are three Persons, yet so as not to form separate and distinct individuals. They are three modes or forms in which the divine essence exists. 'Person' is, however, an imperfect expression of the truth inasmuch as the term denotes to us a separate rational and moral individual. But in the being of God there are not three individuals, but three personal self-distinctions within the one divine essence. Then again, personality in man implies independence of will, actions and feelings leading to behaviour peculiar to the person. This cannot be thought of in connection with the Trinity. Each person is self-conscious and self-directing, yet never acting independently or in opposition. When we say that God is a Unity we mean that, though God is in himself a threefold centre of life, his life is not split into three. He is one in essence, in personality and in will. When we say that God is a Trinity in Unity, we mean that there is a unity in diversity, and that the diversity manifests itself in Persons, in characteristics and in operations.

b. Equality in dignity

There is perfect equality in nature, honour and dignity between the Persons. Fatherhood belongs to the very essence of the first Person and it was so from all eternity. It is a personal property of God 'from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named' (Eph. 3:15).

The Son is called the 'only begotten' perhaps to suggest uniqueness rather than derivation. Christ always claimed for himself a unique relationship to God as Father, and the Jews who listened to him apparently had no illusions about his claims. Indeed they sought to kill him because he 'called God his own Father, making himself equal with God' (Jn. 5:18).

The Spirit is revealed as the One who alone knows the depths of God's nature: 'For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God ... No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God' (1 Cor. 2:10f.). This is saying that the Spirit is 'just God himself in the innermost essence of his being.'

This puts the seal of NT teaching upon the doctrine of the equality of the three Persons.

c. Diversity in operation

In the functions ascribed to each of the Persons in the Godhead, especially in man's redemption, it is clear that a certain degree of subordination is involved (in relation, though not in nature); the Father first, the Son second, the Spirit third. The Father works through the Son by the Spirit. Thus Christ can say: 'My Father is greater than I.' As the Son is sent by the Father, so the Spirit is sent by the Son. As it was the Son's office to reveal the Father, so it is the Spirit's office to reveal the Son, as Christ testified: 'He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (Jn. 16:14).

It has to be recognized that the doctrine arose as the spontaneous expression of the Christian experience. The early Christians knew themselves to be reconciled to God the Father, and that the reconciliation was secured for them by the atoning work of the Son, and that it was mediated to them as an experience by the Holy Spirit. Thus the Trinity was to them a fact before it became a doctrine, but in order to preserve it in the credal faith of the church the doctrine had to be formulated.³⁵

Errors to Avoid Concerning the Trinity

Tri-theism. This is the teaching that there are three Gods who are sometimes related, but only in a loose association. Such an approach abandons the biblical oneness of God and the unity within the Trinity.

Sabellianism or Modalism. Sabellius (A.D. 200), the originator of this viewpoint, spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but he understood all three as no more than three manifestations of one God. This teaching came to be known as *modalism* because it views one God who variously manifests Himself in three modes of existence: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Arianism. This doctrine had its roots in Tertullian, who made the Son subordinate to the Father. Origen took this further

by teaching that the Son was subordinate to the Father “in respect to essence.” The result was ultimately Arianism which denied the deity of Christ. Arius taught that only God was the uncreated One; because Christ was begotten of the Father it meant Christ was created by the Father. Arius believed there was a time when Christ did not exist. Arius and his teaching was condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325.³⁶

Biblical Support for the Trinity

Scriptures on the Oneness of God:

(1) Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

Verse 4 is subject to various translations, though the statement is likely stressing the uniqueness of Yahweh and should be translated, “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” A secondary emphasis, His indivisibility, is apparent in most English translations ... This confession does not preclude the later revelation of the Trinity, for the word *God* (Elohim) is a plural word, and the word *one* is also used of the union of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:24) to describe two persons in one flesh.³⁷

The word for one is the Hebrew *echad* and means one in a collective sense, like one cluster of grapes rather than in an absolute sense.

The oneness of God is implied in those Old Testament passages that declare that there is no other God beside Yahweh, the God of Israel.

(2) Deuteronomy 4:35 To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.

(3) Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me,

(4) Isaiah 43:10 “You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, In order that you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me.”

The New Testament is even more explicit:

(5) 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.

(6) Ephesians 4:4-6 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

(7) James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

Scriptures Demonstrating That God, Who Is One, Is Also Three:

Old Testament Teaching:

While there is no explicit statement in the Old Testament affirming the Triunity, we can confidently say that the Old Testament not only allows for the Triunity, but also implies that God is a triune Being in a number of ways:

(1) The name *Elohim*, translated *God*, is the plural form of *El*. While this is what is called a plural of plenitude pointing to the power and majesty of God, it certainly allows for the New Testament revelation of the Triunity of God.

(2) There are many instances where God uses the plural pronoun to describe Himself (see Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa.

6:8).

(3) In the creation account, both God the Father and the Holy Spirit are seen in the work of creation. It is stated that God created heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1), but that it was the Holy Spirit who moved over the earth to infuse it with life in the sense of protecting and participating in the work of creation (Gen. 1:2).

(4) Writing about the Messiah, Isaiah reveals Him to be equal with God, calling Him the "Mighty God" and "Eternal Father" (Isa. 9:6).

(5) Several passages reveal a distinction of persons within the Godhead. (a) In Psalm 110:1, David demonstrates there is a distinction of persons between "LORD," the one speaking, and the one addressed called by David, "my Lord." David was indicating the Messiah was no ordinary king, but his own Lord, *Adoni* (my Lord), one who was God Himself. So God the first person addresses God the second person. This is precisely Peter's point when He quotes this Psalm to show the resurrection of the Messiah was anticipated in the Old Testament. (b) The Redeemer (who must be divine, Isa. 7:14; 9:6) is distinguished from the Lord (Isa. 59:20). (c) The Lord is distinguished from the Lord in Hosea 1:6-7. (d) The Spirit is distinguished from the Lord in a number of passages (Isa. 48:16; 59:21; 63:9-10).

(6) In the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, God made it clear that the one who would be born of the virgin would also be Immanuel, God with us.

(7) Two other passages which imply the Trinity are Isaiah 48:16 and 61:1. Here all three persons are mentioned and yet seen as distinct from each other. See also Gen. 22:15-16.

New Testament:

The case for the Triunity of God is even stronger in the New Testament. Here it can be unequivocally demonstrated the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Furthermore, the New Testament teaches us that these three names are not synonymous, but speak of three distinct and equal persons.

(1) *The Father is called God* (John 6:27; 1 Pet. 1:2).

(2) *Jesus Christ, the Son is declared to be God*. His deity is proven by the divine names given to Him, by His works that only God could do (upholding all things, Col. 1:17; creation, Col. 1:16; John 1:3; and future judgment, John 5:27), by His divine attributes (eternality, John 17:5; omnipresence, Matt. 28:20; omnipotence, Heb. 1:3; omniscience, Matt. 9:4), and by explicit statements declaring His deity (John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8).

(3) *The Holy Spirit is recognized as God*. He is called God in Acts 5:3-4, He has the attributes which only God can possess, like omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10) and omnipresence (1 Cor. 6:19), and He regenerates people to new life (John 3:5-6, 8; Tit. 3:5) which must of necessity be a work of God for only God has the power of life. Finally, His deity is evident by the divine names used for the Spirit as "the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

Ryrie writes: "Matthew 28:19 best states both the oneness and threeness by associating equally the three Persons and uniting them in one singular name. Other passages like Matthew 3:16-17 and 2 Corinthians 13:14 associate equally the three Persons but do not contain the strong emphasis on unity as does Matthew 28:19."³⁸

The *New Bible Dictionary* adds to this the following evidence:

The evidence of the NT writings, apart from the Gospels, is sufficient to show that Christ had instructed his disciples on this doctrine to a greater extent than is recorded by any of the four Evangelists. They whole-heartedly proclaim the doctrine of the Trinity as the threefold source of redemption. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost brought the personality of the Spirit into greater prominence and at the same time shed light anew from the Spirit upon the Son. Peter, in explaining the phenomenon of Pentecost, represents it as the activity of the Trinity: 'This Jesus ... being ... exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear' (Acts 2:32-33). So the church of Pentecost was founded on the doctrine of the Trinity.

In 1 Cor. there is mention of the gifts of the Spirit, the varieties of service for the same Lord and the inspiration of the

same God for the work (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

Peter traces salvation to the same triunal source: 'destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 1:2). The apostolic benediction: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all' (2 Cor. 13:14), not only sums up the apostolic teaching, but interprets the deeper meaning of the Trinity in Christian experience, the saving grace of the Son giving access to the love of the Father and to the communion of the Spirit.

What is amazing, however, is that this confession of God as One in Three took place without struggle and without controversy by a people indoctrinated for centuries in the faith of the one God, and that in entering the Christian church they were not conscious of any break with their ancient faith.³⁹

Thus, the Scripture teaches us that God is one and three.

Difficulties With the Trinity Considered and Answered

The Meaning of "Only-begotten"

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

In John 1:18, the King James Version has *huios*, "Son," in place of *theos*, "God," and reads,

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

Because to our mind the words "only begotten" suggest birth or beginning, some have tried to take the use of this designation of Jesus Christ to mean that Christ had a beginning, that He only *became* the Son of God. Such an understanding denies His eternity and also the concept of the trinity. So what does John mean by the term "only begotten?"

"Only begotten" is the Greek *monogenes*, a compound of *monos*, used as an adjective or adverb meaning "alone, only." Kittel writes: "In compounds with *genes*, adverbs describe the **nature** rather than the **source of derivation** (emphasis mine). Hence *monogenes* is used for the only child. More generally it means 'unique' or 'incomparable.'"⁴⁰ In the NT the term occurs only in Luke, John, and Hebrews, but an instructive use is found for us in Hebrews 11:17 where it is used of Isaac as the *monogenes* of Abraham. Isaac was not the only son of the Patriarch, but he was the unique son of the promise of God. The emphasis is not on derivation but on his uniqueness and special place in the heart of Abraham.

Vine has an excellent summary of the use of *monogenes* in John 1:14 and 18:

With reference to Christ, the phrase "the only begotten from the Father," John 1:14, R.V. (see also the marg.), indicates that as the Son of God He was the sole representative of the Being and character of the One who sent Him. In the original the definite article is omitted both before "only begotten" and before "Father," and its absence in each case serves to lay stress upon the characteristics referred to in the terms used. The Apostle's object is to demonstrate what sort of glory it was that he and his fellow-Apostles had seen. That he is not merely making a comparison with earthly relationships is indicated by *para*, "from." The glory was that of a unique relationship and the word "begotten" does not imply a beginning of His Sonship. It suggests relationship indeed, but must be distinguished from generation as applied to man.

We can only rightly understand the term "the only begotten" when used of the Son, in the sense of unoriginated relationship. "The begetting is not an event of time, however remote, but a fact irrespective of time. The Christ did not *become*, but necessarily and eternally *is* the Son. He, a Person, possesses every attribute of pure Godhood. This necessitates eternity, absolute being; in this respect He is not 'after' the Father" (Moule).

In John 1:18 the clause “The Only Begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father,” expresses both His eternal union with the Father in the Godhead and the ineffable intimacy and love between them, the Son sharing all the Father’s counsels and enjoying all His affections. Another reading is *monogenes Theos*, ‘God only–begotten.’ In John 3:16 the statement, “God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son,” must not be taken to mean that Christ became the Only Begotten Son by Incarnation. The value and the greatness of the gift lay in the Sonship of Him who was given. His Sonship was not the effect of His being given. In John 3:18 the phrase “the Name of the Only Begotten Son of God” lays stress upon the full revelation of God’s character and will, His love and grace, as conveyed in the Name of One who, being in a unique relationship to Him, was provided by Him as the Object of faith. In 1 John 4:9 the statement “God hath sent His Only Begotten Son into the world” does not mean that God sent out into the world one who at His birth in Bethlehem had become His Son. Cp. the parallel statement, “God sent forth the Spirit of His Son,” Gal. 4:6, R.V., which could not mean that God sent forth One who became His Spirit when He sent Him.⁴¹

The Meaning of “First-born”

Another term that has been misinterpreted by some as it is used of Christ is the term “firstborn.” It is used of Christ in Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5. Again, because of the thought of birth that this word denotes in our minds, this passage has been used to teach that Christ was not the eternal second person of the Trinity because He had a beginning as the firstborn of God. Firstborn is the Greek *prototokos* (from *protos*, first, and *tikto*, to beget), but this word may mean (a) first in time or (b) first in priority. The point and focus of the word must be taken from the context in which it is used.

In Colossians 1:15, as verse 16 makes clear, it refers to Christ’s sovereignty expressing His priority to and pre-eminence over creation, not in the sense of time, the first to be born, but in the sense of (a) being the sovereign creator, the one in Whom were the plans of creation as architect (“by Him all things were created” can also mean, “in Him ...”), (b) by Whom all things were created as the builder (“all things were created by Him”), and (c) for Whom all things were created as the owner (“and for Him”). Colossians 1:15 is declaring Christ’s sovereignty as the Creator. We can see this meaning of *prototokos* to express sovereignty or priority in the Septuagint’s use of this word in Psalm 89:27 where the clause that follows explains the meaning of “firstborn” or *prototokos*. Psalm 89:27 reads, “I also shall make him *My* first-born, The highest of the kings of the earth.” Who is the firstborn? He is “the highest of the kings of the earth,” the sovereign Lord.

In the words of Colossians 1:18, “and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead,” it means first in time, the first one to rise in an immortal and glorified body. But even here, He is the first-born of the dead so that He might come to be pre-eminent in all things as the head of the body, the church (vs. 18b).

The point is that *prototokos* can mean either first in time or first in priority and it is the context which determines the meaning. As the second person of the Trinity, Christ is God and sovereign, but as the God-Man who died for our sins and was raised from the dead, He is the pre-eminent head of the body of Christ, the church. In Colossians 2:9, the Apostle confirmed this meaning when he wrote, “For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

The word for “Deity” is *theotetos*, a strong word (used only here in the NT) for Christ’s essence as God. The full deity of Christ is nonetheless **in bodily form**—a full humanity (cf. Col. 1:22). Both Christ’s deity and humanity were challenged by this early Gnostic-like heresy. Those heretics diminished Christ to an angel whose “body” was only apparent, not real. Paul affirmed here that Christ is both fully God and truly man (cf. 1 John 4:1-6).⁴²

Some Practical Ramifications of the Doctrine of Triunity

All doctrine is practical and has specific ramifications to life. This is no less true of the Triunity of the Godhead which draws our attention to the concept of the tri-fold personality of God to communicate to us all the elements of personality—moral agency, intelligence, will, emotion, and communion that exists within the three persons of the Godhead. What are some of the ramifications of this doctrine not only for theology, but for Christian experience and life?

(1) It teaches us that God is a God of revelation and communion.

Scripture teaches us that God is light and one of the main functions of light is illumination. The act of revealing is as

natural to God as it is for the sun. Before the creation of any being, angel or human, there was revelation and communication taking place within the persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father, and so on with the Spirit. When, in the eternal decrees of God, He willed to create a universe with angelic and human beings, it was merely the expression of this very nature of God.

So if God is a fellowship within himself he can let that fellowship go out to his creatures and communicate himself to them according to their capacity to receive. This is what happened supremely when he came to redeem men: he let his fellowship bend down to reach outcast man and lift him up. And so because God is a Trinity he has something to share: it is his own life and communion.⁴³

(2) It means that the Trinity is the basis of all true fellowship in the world.

Since God is within himself a fellowship, it means that his moral creatures who are made in his image find fullness of life only within a fellowship. This is reflected in marriage, in the home, in society and above all in the church whose *koinonia* is built upon the fellowship of the three Persons. Christian fellowship is, therefore, the divinest thing on earth, the earthly counterpart of the divine life, as Christ indeed prayed for his followers: 'That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us' (Jn. 17:21).⁴⁴

(3) It gives variety to the life of the universe.

There is ... diversity in the life of God. God the Father designs, God the Son creates, God the Spirit quickens; a great diversity of life and operation and activity. For that reason we can realize that if the universe is a manifestation of God, we can expect a diversity of life within the whole of the created universe. We think that the so-called uniformity of nature is utterly untrue. All the wonders of creation, all the forms of life, all the movement in the universe, are a reflection, a mirroring, of the manifold life of God. There is no monotonous sameness, no large-scale uniformity of pattern, for nature reflects the many-sidedness of the nature and character of the living God.⁴⁵

For an expanded study on the Trinity (Triunity) of God, see the study entitled, The Trinity (Triunity) of God (trinity.doc) in the Theology section on the Biblical Studies Foundation web site at www.bible.org.

The Attributes (Essence) of God

Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote:

Though wholly inadequate, man's conception of God is measured by those characteristics which he attributes to God. The Bible represents a revelation which, though limited by the restrictions that language must ever impose, is of a Person, and this revelation attributes to Him those exalted qualities which are His. These qualities thus attributed are properly styled *attributes*. To declare His Person and the sum-total of His attributes, would constitute a final definition of God which man might never hope to form.⁴⁶

The attributes of God present a theme so vast and complex and so beyond the range of finite faculties that any attempt to classify them must be only approximate as to accuracy or completeness. So, also, the attributes are so interrelated and interdependent that the exact placing of some of them is difficult if not wholly impossible.⁴⁷

An attribute is "Something attributed as belonging; a quality, character, characteristic, or property."⁴⁸ The verb form is defined as "to consider as belonging."⁴⁹ In theology, however, God's attributes are His perfections. An attribute, then, is a quality, or property of a thing or person. Things as well as people have attributes. Attributes are what distinguishes one person or thing from other persons or things. The attributes of a person or thing are so essential to a person or thing that without them, they would not be what they are. But attributes are not like pins in a pin cushion that can simply be removed without altering the essence of the person or thing.

Definition:

(1) The works of God are manifestations of His attributes. Therefore, to truly understand God's works, it is important to have a greater understanding of His attributes. The study of the attributes or perfections of God allows the mind to contemplate the greatness of God and what this should mean to finite man who was created in the image of

God to both glorify and enjoy God.

(2) There is harmony among the attributes, or mutual dependence. Though there are characteristics in the attributes of God and very distinct at times, they are never isolated, nor dissociated. They always work in harmony with each other as a total expression of God's being. They are mutually dependent. Not one can be omitted. The possession of one implies necessarily the possession of all. God's love, though infinite, cannot ignore God's holy righteousness, nor can His holiness ignore His love, mercy, and grace, nor can God's omnipotence act independently of His wisdom and holiness.

(3) God's attributes were never acquired because they are essential to what He is. His attributes represent what He is, what He has always been, and what He will be forever. He is the source of all, and has never received them from any being. God is immutable and eternal and so is His essence.

(4) The Classification of God's Attributes. In their search for a way to properly classify the attributes of God, theologians have used a number of different approaches. Due to the infinite nature of the being of the almighty God, however, they are all insufficient in one way or another. Three such classifications are listed below but others are sometimes used.

- **Natural and Moral:** The natural belong to God's existence as infinite, rational Spirit. The moral belong to Him as infinite, righteous Spirit. **Natural:** Infinity, self-existence, eternity, unity, omnipresence, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience. **Moral:** Holiness, justice, righteousness, love, mercy, grace, truth, goodness, wisdom.
- **Positive and Negative:** The negatives are those which deny limitations to Him. In the positive something is affirmed, in the negative something is denied. **Positive:** Power, knowledge, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. **Negative:** Simplicity, infinity, eternity, immutability.
- **Communicable and Incommunicable:** The communicable (relative, personality) attributes represent those that are found in a limited degree in God's created beings. Incommunicable (absolute, or constitutional) are those which are found only in God. **Incommunicable:** Self-existence, eternity, unity, immutability, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence. **Communicable:** wisdom, holiness, righteousness, justice, goodness, love, truth. Some would place omniscience and omnipotence in this category since men can possess knowledge and power, but since they are omni (i.e. absolute), I have included them under the incommunicable or absolute category.

The Incommunicable Attributes

Self-Existence

This means that God exists independently of any cause. God exists from Himself, He has always existed, and will exist forever, and no one has caused His existence, nor can any one make it to cease. There is simply no cause of His existence outside of Himself. God's existence is necessary, not contingent on something else. He exists by His own being. The basis of His existence is not in His will (to exist), but in His divine nature. God does not exist because He wants to, but because His very nature demands that He exist.

His self-existence is seen in the special name by which He revealed Himself to Israel, Yahweh, which means, "I am that I am" (Ex. 6:3; 3:14). Though the following passages do not specifically declare the self-existence of God, it is implicit in all that is said about God as the only God and the incomparable creator of all that exists (cf. Isa. 40:12-17, 21-26; 44:24; 45:5-7).

The self-existence of God is incomprehensible and a profound mystery to the human mind, but its truth should bring comfort and stability to the human heart to know that our God exists independently of all things and is always there for His people.

Eternity

Scriptures: Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:1-2; Isaiah 40:28; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 1:8.

Eternity means much more than is commonly thought. It includes three ideas: (a) It means that the nature of God is without beginning or end, (b) that God is free from all succession of time, and (c) that God contains within Himself the

cause of time.

We should not consider time and space as antecedent to God. They are among the “all things” made by Him (Ps. 90:1-2; John 1:3; Heb. 1:3 [literally, “through whom He made the ages”]). Thus we see that eternity means far more than endless time. We may speak of eternity without end, and of an eternity past without beginning, but this is not yet the eternity of God. To Him there is no past, present, or future. He does not live in time, but beyond it in eternity and, as the eternal God, He is not subject to time (Deut. 33:27; Isa. 40:28; 57:15).

God sees all events from creation to the last judgment in one glimpse. God is the eternal “now”; He is the “I AM” (Ex. 3:14). This does not mean, however, that to God there is no objective reality of time. He recognizes that time exists and that we live in it. To Him, past, present, and future are one eternal now, not in the sense in which there is no distinction between them, but only in the sense that God sees that past and future as vividly as the present.

There are two ways to view a parade: one who stands at his door by the street as it passes, and sees first the those in the lead, then others, and finally the last. But one who is at the top of a high tower sees the whole parade with one glance. Nevertheless, that person sees that in the procession there is order and progress. Thus it is with God. This is evident from Isaiah 46:10 and Acts 15:18.

Isa. 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’;

Acts 15:18 Says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.

The eternity of God, as the Eternal / AM, is a part of His self-existence. He is uncaused and must therefore be without beginning. As such, He transcends the whole chain of causes and effects and, as He is without beginning, so He can never cease to be.

How does the eternity of God affect one’s life? For all of us as human beings, life is full of surprises. We never know exactly what lies around the corner, but while we do not know what the future holds, as believers in Christ, we do know Him who holds the future and for Whom nothing is a surprise. Since nothing ever surprises God, no problem I face slips up on the Lord who sees the future as clearly as the present.

Lamentations 5:19 Thou, O LORD, dost rule forever; Thy throne is from generation to generation.

Isaiah 26:3-4 The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee. 4 Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, *we have* an everlasting Rock.

Psalm 90 is a psalm in which Moses reflects on man’s temporality and sinfulness (vss. 3-11) in the light of God’s eternity (vss. 1-2). As the eternal one, regardless of the generation in which we may live with all its surprises, God is our dwelling place, our place of refuge and fortress (cf. 90:1 with 91:1-2). What then is our need? To know that regardless of the brevity of life (generally maybe seventy or even eighty years, vs. ten), we must know that God has a special purpose for each of us. As believers, we are a special part of the plan and purpose of God. In that regard, our need is to pray that we might number our days to bring in a full harvest of God’s wisdom (vs. 12) and seek God’s blessing on our lives to experience His joy and the confirmation of the work He has designed for us to do (vss. 13-16; Eph. 2:10).

Unity

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6:4; 4:35; Isaiah 44:6-8; 45:5-6, 18-22; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2:5; John 5:44.

The teaching of the Scripture on the unity of God directs our attention to two concepts: First, it teaches us that there is only one God numerically speaking. There is only one infinite and perfect divine Spirit. God is one and absolutely unique. But the unity of God also affirms that God’s nature is indivisible; He is not a composite and cannot be divided into parts.

The unity of God in no way contradicts the doctrine of the Trinity of God since the doctrine of the Trinity only asserts

that there are personal distinctions in the divine nature, but not a division of the very essence of God's Being; His essence is one.

Because God is the unique and only God, Scripture warns us against any and all forms of idolatry. There is only one source of salvation. All other so-called gods are helpless to save. But this also means that there is no escape: there is only one law, only one gospel, only one Savior, and only one Judge. The unity of God calls all men to come to God as He is revealed in Scripture in the person of Jesus Christ and be saved. To fail to do so is to face Him at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Isaiah 45:21-22 Declare and set forth *your case*; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. 22 Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.

Ephesians 4:4-6 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Infinity

Scriptures: 1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24-28; Deuteronomy 33:27.

The infinity of God means He is without limitations. He has no bounds or limits. He is not limited by the universe nor by time-space boundaries. Rather than *infinity* some theologians prefer to use the term, *immensity*. Immensity may be defined as "that perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being."⁵⁰ So God's infinity or immensity "does not mean that He is somehow spread throughout the universe, one part here and another there."⁵¹ Regarding immensity Ryrie writes:

It differs from omnipresence in that it emphasizes the transcendence of God (because He is not bound by space), while omnipresence focuses on the immanence of God (because he is everywhere present).⁵²

The infinity of God is related to all God's perfections. When related to time, He is called *eternal*. When related to His presence, theologians use the term *immensity*, though God's *omnipresence* is also related. When related to His power, He is called *omnipotent*, when related to His knowledge, He is called *omniscient*.

Immutability

Scriptures: Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 33:11; 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Isaiah 14:24.

Immutability means that God is not subject to change, that He is invariable. In His nature and character, God is absolutely without change. Immutability "is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises ... and is free from all accession or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfection."⁵³

All God's attributes or perfections are included in His immutability. There can be no increase nor decrease in their number, capacity, or power. God could not be more or less holy, righteous, omnipotent, etc. It would be an absurdity to suppose He could. Immutability, however, is not immobility. It does not mean that God cannot change His actions, or way of dealing with men in different situations and times. It simply means His character and attributes do not change. It means that His eternal purposes does not change, for He has even purposed all things that come to pass.

Reason teaches immutability. God must be immutable; there can be no change in Him, either for better or worse, since God is infinite and absolute perfection. If God could change for the better or the worse, it would indicate a weakness in His Being. There can be no cause for change in God who is perfect.

The immutability of God raises an important question. If God is immutable, what is meant by such statements found in the Bible that speak of God repenting or changing His mind?

Jonah 3:10 And God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them? (KJV)

Gen. 6:5-6 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. (KJV)

These passages are not suggesting there was a change in the character of God, only in His actions toward man based on the actions of men. It is man who changes and due to the changeless character of God, He must change His actions or dealings with man. God must deal with men in accord with His holy character. He must eventually deal with sin in judgment as He did in Genesis 6, or He acts in mercy when men repent as He did with Nineveh. But God's actions are always consistent with His character. For instance, the Genesis passage does not say that God changed His mind in the sense that He wished He had not made man, but only that He was grieved over man's behavior. The translation of the NIV makes the point clear.

Genesis 6:5-6 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (NIV)

Compare also the translation of the NIV for Jonah 3:10:

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. (NIV)

When used of God as in some translations, the term "repentance" is simply an *anthropopathism*, a term ascribing human feeling or emotion to God to show us God's attitude toward sin.

The immutability of God is a terror to the wicked because it means that God must always deal with men in accord with His holy character and plan. God make no deals and accepts no man's person apart from His plan of salvation in the person and work of Christ. On the other hand, God's immutability is a constant comfort to believers because it means God is faithful, always, to His promises and the principles of His Word. For this reason, God is called "the Rock" (Deut. 32:4) for when the entire world around us seems to fluctuate and shake (especially if one lives in California) God is the one safe and faithful place of anchorage.

Deuteronomy 32:4 The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.

Psalms 18:2 and 31 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 31 For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God,

People will often let each other down. Our friends as well as we ourselves often prove fickle, but the Lord who never changes, never lets us down. He is our Rock of blessing, support, and deliverance. This is why our trust should never be in man as Jeremiah 17:5 warns, "Cursed be man that trust in mankind and makes flesh his strength." This does not mean that God always answers our prayers and desires according to our wishes for He does not. It means, however, we can count on the fact that He is faithful to always act in accordance with His wisdom, love, and purposes. Let's note some of the ways that God is faithful:

- He is faithful to forgive sin when we confess it (1 John 1:9).
- He is faithful to discipline us in love when we need it (Heb. 12:5f; Ps. 11:75).
- He is faithful to support us in our suffering as the faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19).
- He is faithful to keep His promises according to the principles of His Word (Ps. 119:86, 138; Deut. 7:9; Isa. 49:7; 55:3; 1 Cor. 1:8-9).
- He is faithful to strengthen us in the midst of testing or temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).
- It is out of His faithful that He answers our prayers (Ps. 143:1).

We close this attribute with these verses:

Lamentations 3:21-23 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. 22 The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. 23 *They* are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness.

Psalm 36:5 Thy lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Thy faithfulness *reaches* to the skies.

Omnipresence

Scriptures: Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28.

The English word *omnipresence* comes from the Latin word *omnis*, meaning "all." Thus, omnipresence means God is everywhere present, but not in everything (pantheism). He is present everywhere at the same time. In the fullness of God's essence, He fills all parts of the universe. "God, in the totality of his essence, without diffusion or expansion, multiplication or division, penetrates and fills the universe in all its parts."⁵⁴ This means that God is everywhere present in the totality of His essence or divine Being.

This militates against the idea that God is in heaven and only His power is on earth. A distinction should be recognized between the immensity of God and the omnipresence of God. Immensity emphasizes the transcendence of God and stresses that He is not bound by space, whereas omnipresence emphasizes His immanence, filling all space, including earth.⁵⁵

We cannot think of one part of God being here and another there, because pure spirit cannot be divided. Material things have to possess extension to fill space, but this is not true of God, who is spirit.

The omnipresence of God may seem to be a form of pantheism, but it is vastly different. Pantheism says that God is in everything. He is in the tree, in the earth, in the book in your hand, in the desk in front of you, etc. Pantheism denies the personality of God and fails to show that God is distinct from the universe. The Bible teaches that God is in all parts of the universe, but He is not the universe. He existed before the universe because He created it. He is transcendent to it. He is present in all parts of His creation and yet apart from it. He may be in the wind or the storm as its source, but the storm is not God. It is a product of His creation (Ps. 104:3).

While God is everywhere present, He may manifest Himself locally when He wishes to do so, as with Moses on the Mount, or when Christ became incarnate and dwelt among men (John 1:14). The Bible may speak of God as localized for some point of emphasis, but this never denies His omnipresence. The Father is spoken of as in heaven (Matt. 6:9) to draw our attention to His sovereignty and ability to answer our prayers, but He is also present throughout the universe. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1), but He is also with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6). The Holy Spirit dwells (has taken up residence) in the church and in the believer (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19), but Psalm 139:7-10 shows the Spirit is everywhere present. See also John 16:8f. The New Testament teaches that all three Persons of the Godhead dwell in believers (Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:19).

The fullness of God's essence is in every place while His residence and the manifestation of His presence varies with the purposes of God.

There is a two-fold application to this doctrinal truth. First, the doctrine of God's omnipresence can become a comfort to the believer if he will recognize and rest in the fact that he can experience no adversity apart from the presence and care of God. Not only is God always present, but He has promised to be at our side in a special way as our rock and strength (Josh. 1:9; Heb. 13:5-6; Matt. 28:20). Secondly, it is also a warning against disobedience and a preventive against sin. We cannot commit a single sin without God being there. We have not a thought or intent of the heart without His knowing and feeling it. No wrong desire ever escapes His presence. No matter how we may fool others, we never fool our omnipresent, omniscient God. We can never run away or escape the presence of God.

Psalm 139:7-9 Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea.

Omniscience

- (1) God knows all things perfectly (Ps. 147:5; Job 37:16; 1 John 3:20).
- (2) God sees and hears everything (Ex. 3:7; 2 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 34:15; 102:19, 20; Prov. 5:21; 15:3; Jer. 16:16).
- (3) God has perfect knowledge of each individual person and of all human experiences: (a) Man's ways are known to the Lord (Ps. 33:13-15; 139:1-16; Pr. 5:21); (b) Man's words are known to the Lord (Ps. 139:4; Matt. 12:35-37); (c) Man's thoughts are known to the Lord (1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 94:11; 139:1-2; Matt. 9:4); (d) Man's sorrows and trials are known to the Lord (Gen. 21:17-19; 1 Cor. 10:13; Rev. 2:9-10, 13); (e) Man's future actions and final state are known to the Lord (Gen. 18:19; Ex. 3:19; Isa. 44:28-45:5; Matt. 25:31-34, 41; Acts 27:22-25).
- (4) God knows from all eternity what shall be in all eternity, the entire plan of the ages and the part of every man in that plan (Isa. 46:9-11; 48:3-7; Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:3-12).

The English word *omniscience* comes from the Latin word *omnis*, meaning "all," and *scientia*, meaning "knowledge." Thus, *omniscience* means "to know all, to have perfect knowledge." God's omniscience is His knowledge of all things including actual and possible, past, present, and future (foreknowledge). Paul Enns calls our attention to a number of things that should be noted about God's omniscience.

- (1) God knows all things that exist in actuality (Ps. 139:1-6; 147:4; Matt. 6:8; 10:28-30). The Psalmist recognized the omniscience of God in that God knew his actions, his thoughts, his words before he even spoke them, and his entire life (Ps. 139:1-4).
- (2) God knows all the variables concerning things that have not occurred. Jesus knew what Tyre and Sidon would have done had the gospel been preached to them (Matt. 11:21).
- (3) God knows all future events. Because God is eternal and knows all things in one eternal act, events that are future to man are an "eternal now" to God. He knew the nations that would dominate Israel (Dan. 2:36-43; 7:4-8), and He knows the events that will yet transpire upon the earth (Matt. 24-25; Rev. 6-19).
- (4) God's knowledge is intuitive. It is immediate, not coming through the senses; it is simultaneous, not acquired through observation or reason; it is actual, complete, and according to reality.⁵⁶

In addition to the statements of Scripture, God's omniscience can be seen in three lines of evidence: (a) His omnipresence, because if He is everywhere, He must have knowledge of all things. (b) His perfect knowledge of Himself, because He planned all things, He must therefore know them. No man completely knows himself and therefore cannot always be sure of what he will do in a given situation or how well he can do in that situation, but God does. Therefore, He is the perfect planner, creator, and governor because He knows His power, character, wisdom and He knows what is best and what He will do in all circumstances. Indeed, He ordained it. (c) Prophecy expresses His omniscience. Only omniscience can truly know the future with the perfect accuracy that we find in the hundreds of fulfilled prophecies of the Bible.

Because God alone is the perfect source of information and knowledge, I need to avail myself of the wisdom that God has revealed to me in His precious Word, the Bible (Isa. 55:8; 1 Cor. 2:9-11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Since God has perfect knowledge of His creatures (which includes me), there are a number of responses I need to make: (a) Worship, awe, adoration (Ps. 139:6). (b) Submission (Ps. 139:1-6, 23-24). God tests us not to know what we will do, but to show us the true condition of our inner lives, to point out our hidden sins and weaknesses and false areas of trust. (c) Personal comfort and rest comes in the knowledge that the Lord knows the way that I take with its temptation and trials. He also knows our frame and takes into account that we are dust (Ps. 103:14). Like Hagar said in confidence of God's love and care, "You are a God who sees me" (Gen. 16:13, NIV). (d) Confidence in prayer that my prayer will not be lost among the millions, that God knows the best answer and the real desires and needs of my heart, and that my often inability to know how to pray will not hinder God's loving and watchful care for He knows my need before I ask (Matt. 6:31-34; Isa. 65:24).

Isaiah 65:24 It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

For those who presume upon the Lord, God's omniscience should remind us that nothing anyone does escapes the

knowledge of God and that one day we will be called to give an account at the bar of God for God will deal with each according to the truth of his life (Rom. 2:2, 3, 6; 14:10-12). For more information on the various judgments, see *The Doctrine of the Judgments*.

Omnipotence

Scriptures: Psalm 68:14; 91:1-2; 115:3; 2 Corinthians 6:18.

- (1) The declaration of the fact of God's omnipotence (Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Numbers 11:23; Matt. 19:26; Revelation 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 19:6).
- (2) One of the names of God is "Power" (Mark 14:62).
- (3) God's power in creation: (a) An omnipotent Creator (Gen. 1:1-3; Ps. 33:6-9). (b) An omnipotent Commander (Ex. 9:3-6, 23-26, 33; Ps. 107:25-29; Jonah 1:17; 4:6-8; Dan. 3:22-28). (c) An omnipotent Sustainer (Col. 1:17b; Heb. 1:3).
- (4) God's power in relation to mankind (Gen. 45:4-8; Ex. 4:11; Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; Luke 12:20; Acts 12:21-24).
- (5) In relation to the heavenly hosts (Dan. 4:35; Heb. 1:14).
- (6) In relation to Satan and his hosts: Satan can only operate as God, in His infinite wisdom, permits him to do so (Job 1:12; 2:6; Luke 22:31-32). Later, Satan will be bound and will finally be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:2, 10).

Omnipotence means that God is all-powerful, that His power is unlimited, that God has the ability to do whatever He pleases with or without secondary means (directly or indirectly), but what He pleases is always in harmony with God's perfections, nature, and Person.

In God's power, there is both authority and ability to perform. In man, there may be authority but no ability to perform as when the rightful king of a nation is deposed, or there may be no authority but there may be power as in a rebel king who, because of the forces at his disposal, usurps the authority of the rightful king. In Matthew 28:18, Christ said "all authority (*exousia*, means "authority to act," and "power, ability to act") has been given to me in heaven and earth." Christ, as the glorified God-Man Savior, was claiming His omnipotence to enable the body of Christ to carry out its mission in the world throughout the ages.

God's omnipotence may be divided into two areas: *absolute power* and *ordained power*. *Absolute power* is God's power or ability to do what He will or may not do, but is possible for Him to do, "power to do all things" (Mark 10:27). *Ordained power* is the power exercised to do what He has decreed to do, that which His will and wisdom has directed and ordered. Matthew 26:53 and 54 give an illustration of each of these.

Absolute Power: "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53)

Ordained Power: "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen this way?" (Matt. 26:54)

God has the absolute power to perform any miracle in a person's life if He so chooses, but because of His wisdom, love, and purposes, He may choose not to do so. In the above illustration regarding the Savior, God could have easily destroyed Christ's enemies and delivered Him from the cross, but in the wisdom and mercy of God, it was His will for Christ, His Son, to die on the cross for the sin of the world to provide us with eternal life and fulfill the hope and promises of Scripture.

God's power is such that He can do whatever He pleases without difficulty and resistance. Though Satan and man may attempt to resist it, God's power cannot be checked, restrained, or frustrated. Having reminded stubborn Israel who had resisted God's will that Yahweh alone was God and there was none to compare with Him, the Lord made this declaration to the nation:

Isaiah 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying,

'My purpose will be established, *And I will accomplish all My good pleasure*'; (emphasis mine)

Just as He can do all things *possible* with regard to the object, so He can do all things *easily* as to the manner. He can do all things without the use of any means or instrument by the simple exercise of His will and without effort.

Isaiah 40:28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

Isaiah 45:12 It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands, And I ordained all their host.

Whereas man needs matter or material to work with, God needs nothing. He can create out of nothing by the exercise of His will as He did in Genesis one, or He can create out of something as He did when He created man from the dust of the earth (cf. Heb. 11:3; 1:3). God needs no blueprint to work from, no time to work in, and no instruments to work with. However, in connection with this, it is important to remember that God has chosen to use secondary causes or means. As Hebrews 11:3 asserts, creation was accomplished without means other than the voice of God, but our salvation was accomplished through the instrumentation of the God-Man Savior's death on the cross. Indeed, even the crucifixion was accomplished by human means.

Acts 2:23 this *Man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

Omnipotence does not imply the exercise of all His power. He has power over His power. Though His power is limitless, it is always under the control of His holy and wise will. Or to put this another way, God's power is subordinate to His wisdom, will, and holy character. God can do all He wishes to do, but He will not do all He could do. All things with God are possible; God can do anything, but He will only do what His infinite wisdom, holiness, and love dictate.

God cannot do that which would contradict His own holy character or essence.

(1) He cannot annihilate Himself because He is eternal, immutable, and all wise. He cannot lie because He is absolute truth (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

(2) He cannot go back on His Word because He is faithful (2 Tim. 2:13).

(3) He cannot be tempted because He is absolute holiness, He is self-sufficient and needs nothing (Jam. 1:13).

(4) Sin is imperfection and it would be contradictory to say that the perfect One could be imperfect. To say that the perfect One cannot be imperfect, is not really putting a limitation of God.

The power of God gives activity and efficacy to all His other perfections. As God's holiness is the beauty and purity of His attributes, so His power gives life, action, and validity to all His essence. For instance, His eternal counsels would be vain if His omnipotence were not there to execute them. His promises would be empty if He could not fulfill them. Without His power, the assurance of His presence would be meaningless. And His warnings of judgment would be but empty words, a mere scarecrow.

Psalm 62:11 speaks of the lovingkindness of God who recompenses men for their work, but it is the power of God that he has heard of the most, mentioned in verse 11, that gives the Psalmist the assurance of the action of God's mercy and reward.

Once God has spoken; Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God; And lovingkindness is Thine, O Lord, For Thou dost recompense a man according to his work.

This Psalm brings us another point concerning God's omnipotence. God's power, as with all His perfections, stems from the nature of God and is totally independent within Him as the eternal *I Am*. A king may have authority in his person to command his kingdom, but he does not contain sufficient power within himself to rule without the aid of others to enforce his will. But God's power is not derived from anything outside of Himself. As Psalm 62:11 declares,

“power belongs to God (i.e., alone).”

After the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream had been revealed to Daniel, Daniel clearly acknowledged this important fact about God as the source of all power in his praise to the God of heaven. First, he said, “... for wisdom and power belong to Him (i.e., God),” but later in his praise, he said this, “... for Thou hast given me wisdom and power; Even now Thou hast made known to me what we requested of Thee” (Dan. 2:20 and 23). All other power in the universe regardless of its nature is derived power, power derived from God who is the source of all power. Therefore, God is sovereign and I can depend on Him regardless of what powers in the world I may face. A wonderful illustration of this is found in the action of Daniel’s friends when faced with the fiery furnace when they refused to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar. Their response to the power of the king to throw them into the fiery furnace was:

Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

The king’s power was a derived power and these godly Jews knew that God’s power could overrule if that was His will and purpose. They rested in God’s power according to His wisdom and purposes. Note how they did not presume upon God’s power, but rested in the wisdom of God.

The omnipotence of God is a wonderful ground of trust and confidence for the believer in the reliability of the Scriptures and its many promises, in the truth of the resurrection, in the miracles of the Bible, and in God’s provision and care for believers in every realm of life. So it was that the Apostle, knowing and experiencing the greatness of God’s power, prayed that we might know what is the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe.

Ephesians 1:18-23 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (NIV)

Still, with God’s powerful Word in our hands and with the experience of His power in our lives, God’s power is so great that, according to Ephesians 3:20, God is able to do beyond all we can ask or think according to the power at work in us, of course, all to the glory of God.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,

Sovereignty

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 2:2-8; Job 42:2; Psalm 103:19; 115:3; 135:6; Daniel 4:31-32, 35; Isaiah 46:9-10; 14:24, 27; 40:25; 43:13; Ephesians 1:11.

Sovereignty means highest, chief, supreme. God’s sovereignty means that He is the absolute and sole ruler who is independent of all other rule. When we say that God is sovereign, we are saying that He is the number one ruler in the universe with authority and power over all. Sovereignty “speaks first of position (God is the chief Being in the universe), then of power (God is supreme in power in the universe) ... Ultimately God is in complete control of all things, though He may choose to let certain events happen according to natural laws which He has ordained.”⁵⁷ Psalm 103:19 says it best, “The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And His sovereignty rules over all.”

As the small sampling of the verses above shows, the Bible is full of evidence for the absolute sovereignty of God both in direct statements like Psalm 103:19, and by the necessary implications of His divine perfections as omnipresence, omniscience, and His work in creation and providence.

(1) God’s complete control, His sovereignty over the universe, is based on His divine attributes (i.e., on His

omnipotence—the power to do as He pleases, on His omniscience—His wise understanding of all things actual and possible; and on His love, goodness, and holiness. All His actions and sovereign plans are always completely consistent with His own character. God cannot act inconsistently with His character.

(2) This means that in God's sovereignty, He always does what He deems best. There is no injustice with God and he does not act arbitrarily with man. God's rule over man and the universe is in complete harmony with His wisdom, love, and holiness.

(3) God's sovereignty means that nothing escapes His notice. Nothing occurs outside of His sovereign jurisdiction and control and nothing occurs by blind chance or fate. Even the laws of mathematical probability fall within the sovereign control of God and His sovereign plan. As the Bible reminds us, "the lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD" (Proverbs 16:33).

(4) God uses various instruments and means to accomplish His purposes, but He is always in control of the means He uses either through natural causes or by divine intervention. This is true of nations, individuals, Satan and the demons, and of natural forces (see Isa. 10:5-16; Job. 1-2).

The Sovereignty of God and the Volition of Man

There is no aspect of the Person and Being of God that is unimportant. As mentioned before, all the perfections of God are essential to the very Being of God and work in harmony with each other. And while they all contribute to the comfort and security of believers, some are easier for our minds to grasp than others, but they are all important and we need to know what the Scripture teaches about each aspect of the attributes of God. As we find some aspects of the attributes of God difficult to grasp, we need to remember, in humility, that we are finite and God is infinite, that we are dealing with mystery and with that which is incomprehensible, at least to us. We must accept the fact that we are creatures who fall infinitely short of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Consequently, we need to guard against trying to subject the Bible and its revelation of God to the supposed demands of our human logic. God's attributes, as with His sovereignty, are not a matter of human reason, but divine revelation and we should not be surprised that the revelation of an infinite God will sometimes reveal those things that go beyond the boundary of human understanding. Kenneth Boa writes:

Mysteries (as used by Boa he means that which goes past the boundary of human understanding) are forced upon us by the facts of God's Word; we are not inventing them ourselves. Since His written revelation teaches concepts that appear to be mutually exclusive, we must realize that with God both truths are friends, not enemies. In God's higher rationality, things that we think must be either-or can in reality be both-and.

Thus, *when the biblical facts warrant them*, we can embrace incomprehensibles in the Bible and relate them to the omniscience and omnipotence of God ... [58](#)

We must remember that what is quite incomprehensible to man may be totally comprehensible to God. It is a matter of revelation. If a truth is clearly taught in Scripture, then I must embrace it even if it seems beyond my comprehension or seems to contradict another element of doctrine. Three such truths that fall into this category are the Trinity of God (one God, yet three persons), the divine/human nature of Jesus Christ (undiminished deity and true humanity united in one person), and divine sovereignty versus human responsibility. As we face such mysteries of God's Word, at least three dangers must be avoided:

(1) The danger of imposing human reason over divine revelation. If an idea in the Bible (assuming it is clearly taught) does not conform to our human reason, our reason must be subordinated to the clear revelation of God.

(2) The danger of one extreme or the other. In seeking to make difficult doctrines reasonable, our tendency is to emphasize one truth, like God's sovereignty, and ignore or even deny another, like man's responsibility, or vice versa. Men seek to remove the tension between the two, but in doing so, they invariably emphasize one doctrine to the exclusion of the other.

(3) The danger of a wrong attitude. Such mysteries, sometimes called antinomies, are not enemies. They are our friends, God's truth to direct us and keep us in balance with the total revelation of God.

The way men have typically approached God's sovereignty and human responsibility has caused no little debate and

perplexity among students of the Bible. But these are parallel truths taught in Scripture, both of which must be accepted without trying to divorce one from the other or force one over the other.

The sovereignty of God is one of the somewhat inscrutable mysteries of Scripture. It is also one of the most comforting doctrines as well when properly understood and embraced alongside of the truth of man's responsibility. Ryrie writes:

The sovereignty of God seems to contradict the freedom or actual responsibility of man. But even though it may seem to do so, the perfection of sovereignty is clearly taught in the Scriptures so must not be denied because of our inability to reconcile it with freedom or responsibility. Also, if God is sovereign, how can the creation be so filled with evil?

Man was created with genuine freedom, but the exercise of that freedom in rebellion against God introduced sin into the human race. Though God was the Designer of the plan, He was in no way involved in the commission of evil either on the part of Satan originally or of Adam subsequently. Even though God hates sin, for reasons not revealed to us, sin is present by His permission. Sin must be within God's eternal plan (or God would not be sovereign) in some way in which He is not the author of it (or God could not be holy).

Sovereignty/freedom forms an antinomy ("a contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles"). Antinomies in the Bible, however, consist only of apparent contradictions, not ultimate ones. One can accept the truths of an antinomy and live with them, accepting by faith what cannot be reconciled; or one can try to harmonize the apparent contradictions in an antinomy which inevitably leads to overemphasizing one truth to the neglect or even denial of the other. Sovereignty must not obliterate free will, and free will must never dilute sovereignty.⁵⁹

The Communicable Attributes

Holiness

Scriptures: Psalm 99:5, 8, 9; Isaiah 6:3; 57:15; 1 Peter 1:15-16; Exodus 15:11; 19:10-11; Revelation 15:4.

Holiness occupies a place second to none among the attributes of God. Scripture places a chief emphasis on God's holiness. In fact, He is described by the word "Holy" more than any other. It is the most central, epitomizing attribute of God's being. As an epithet to God's Name, "Holy" is what you find most, not "His mighty name," or "wise name." Occasionally you read "His great name," but most of all, it is either "My holy name," or "His Holy Name." It is this perfection of God's being and none other that is celebrated by the Seraphim in Isaiah 6. Undoubtedly, because holiness gives a fuller expression of the central feature of God's being than any other, God Himself said, "once have I sworn by my holiness" (Ps. 89:35). He could have sworn by any of His perfections, but He swore by His holiness because it is this attribute which gives the greatest meaning to all the rest. So we are exhorted to sing and give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness (Ps. 30:4, KJV).

To be adequately grasped, the holiness of God must be described negatively and positively.

Negatively: Holiness is that perfection in God that totally separates Him from all that is evil and defiling and common. As we call gold pure when it is free from any dross or impurities, or a garment clean when free from any spot, so the nature and actions of God are free from any impurity or evil of any kind whatsoever.

Positively: Holiness refers to the absolute integrity and purity of the nature of God. It means He is always absolutely pure and so distinct from all others. God is pure light (1 John 1:5).

Holiness is an essential and necessary perfection of God. It is not maintained by an act of His will. He does not choose to be holy because He wants to be. Holiness is an essential and inherent part of His Being. Only God is absolutely holy because only God is God. "There is no one holy like the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:2). The words "there is no" represents a Hebrew word that properly means, "nothing, nought." It may deny existence absolutely which certainly is the meaning here. Who can be holy like God? Absolutely no one. So God only is absolute holiness. Men and angels only have derived holiness from Him. Revelation 15:4 says, "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; For all the nations will come and worship before Thee, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed."

(1) God's holiness means He can never approve of any evil, but perfectly, necessarily, universally, and perpetually abhors all evil. God cannot hate one sinner and indulge another. He can have no respect of persons (Rom. 2:2-8).

(2) God's holiness means He desires holiness in all His creatures (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

(3) God's holiness is the glory and beauty of all of God's perfections (see Ps. 29:2 and 96:9 in the NIV or KJV). **As** God's power (arm) gives strength and validity to each of His attributes, as immutability guarantees the continuance of each unchanged, **so** His holiness gives moral beauty and purity to each: His power is a holy power (Ps. 98:1), His word or promise is a holy promise (Ps. 105:42), His name which stands for all His attributes is a holy name (Ps. 103:1), and His throne, is a holy throne (Ps. 47:8). And so it is with each of God's attributes, His wisdom, knowledge, mercy, grace, love, goodness, etc., all operate in concert with God's perfect holiness.

In the outworking and manifestation of God's holiness there are two other attributes that, though distinct, still seem to function as branches of God's holiness. There is the legislative or executive branch—God's righteousness, and the judicial branch—God's justice. Holiness has to do more with the pure character of God Himself while righteous and justice express that character in God's dealings and government in the affairs of His creatures, angels, and mankind. So think of the next two perfections of God as the outworking of God's holiness in God's government in the universe.

Righteousness and Justice

Righteousness is that attribute of God which leads Him to always think and do what is right or act in perfect goodness in relation to men and angels.

Justice refers to that attribute of God which vindicates the righteousness of God, not vindictively or in vengeance, but in holy justice. Justice refers to the judgment which God, as a righteous God, must exercise against anything which falls short of His holy standards. Righteous laws and principles proceed from God's holiness to legislate and govern the affairs of men. This is God's righteousness at work, the legislative branch of His holiness (cf. Deut. 4:8). But from God's holiness also comes the penalties and judgments attached to these laws. This is the judicial branch which we call justice.

In righteousness we have the manifestation of God's love of holiness, of what is right and good. In justice, we have the manifestation of God's hatred of sin. Habakkuk 1:13 expresses both.

The Manifestation of God's Holiness in His Righteousness and Justice:

The following gives just a few of the ways God's holiness is manifested in His righteous actions in His governmental dealings with man.

(1) It is manifested in His works. All that He made was good (Gen. 1:31), He created man upright and in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). Even Satan was created perfect and without sin until he turned in arrogant rebellion against God (Ezek. 28:15).

(2) It is manifested in the Law (Rom. 7:12) which is holy, pure, and good.

(3) It is manifested by God's clear statements of His hatred of sin and His love of righteousness (Gen. 6:5-6; Prov. 6:16; 15:9, 26; Zech. 8:16-17; Jer. 44:4).

(4) It is manifested in His judgments against Israel and the nations for their rebellion against God (Deut. 28-30; Isa. 1-12).

(5) It is seen in the gift of God's own Son to die on the cross for the sin of the world (Ps. 22:1-3; Eph. 5:25-27; Col. 1:20-22; 1 John 3:5, 7-8).

(6) It is seen in the separation of God Himself from the sinner (Hab. 1:13; Isa. 59:1-3).

(7) It is seen by the continual presence and work of Christ before God on behalf of the believer (Rom. 8:34; 1 John 1:7;

2:1-2).

(8) It is seen in the eternal punishment of the unbelieving sinner (Rev. 20:12-15; Matt. 25:41-46).

(9) It is seen in God who, as a holy Father, disciplines sin in His children to train them in holiness (Heb. 12:5-10).

God's righteousness and justice pose a dire warning for all who have never put their trust in the person and work of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for their sin. All have sinned and come short of the glory or the perfect holiness of God (Rom. 3:23). Because God is perfect righteousness, He can have no fellowship with sinful man (Hab. 1:13). Sin separates man from God, and the wages of sin is eternal death, eternal separation from God (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 6:23). In this we see God's justice in action. But God's love of righteousness and love for the world provided the solution in the gift of His Son (John 3:16). Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth, no man comes to the Father but by me" because He alone met the holy demands of God through His sinless life and substitutionary death (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). If one rejects Christ and fails to receive Him by faith, that person remains under the wrath of God's holy justice (John 3:36).

For those who have trusted in the Savior for eternal life, God's holiness is a call to walk by faith, in fellowship with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the light of the Word, that he might experience His holiness—Christlike character. Why? Because God has called us to be a holy people, a people separated to Him (1 Pet. 1:16-17; Gal. 5:16-26).

Goodness (Includes Benevolence, Mercy, and Grace)

Scriptures: Exodus 34:6; Psalm 25:7-8; 33:5; 68:10; 145:7; Nehemiah 9:25; Romans 2:4; 1 Timothy 4:4.

The goodness of God is the expression of both His love and righteousness to His creatures in general. It is that aspect of God's character that promotes the happiness of His creatures. Goodness includes God's kindness as seen in mercy and grace. God's goodness includes His benevolence, mercy, and grace.

Benevolence: This is the desire to do good for others, the disposition to promote kindness. God's benevolent interest in His creatures and His care for them is manifested in different ways according to the nature and circumstances of the creature. All creatures are objects of His benevolence. Even animals are recipients of His benevolence. They have what may be called "animal joy," which is manifested in the song of the birds and the frolicking of the animals, etc. (Ps. 104:21, 26-28; 36:6c; 145:15-16; Matt. 6:26). Hodge says, "There are no devices in nature for the promotion of pain for its own sake; whereas the manifestations of design for the production of happiness are beyond computation."⁶⁰

Since man is rational, he has more capacity to enjoy the goodness of God. God manifests His benevolence to all men (Acts 14:17) even to unbelievers (Matt. 5:44-45; Luke 6:35). The sinner, by his own sin and the absence of fellowship with God, is deprived of the full manifestation of God's benevolence. His benevolence is infinite being limited only by the capacity and characteristics of the creature.

Mercy or Lovingkindness: Mercy or lovingkindness is God's benevolent compassion toward man as a sinner, especially in his misery as a sinner (Ex. 34:6-7; Ps. 103:8; 136:1-26). It is great (1 Kings 3:6), abundant (Ps. 86:5; 1 Pet. 1:3), tender (Luke 1:78), enduring for ever (Ps. 136:1), and sovereignly given (Ex. 33:19).

Grace: Grace is close to mercy, but differs in that it has reference to man as sinful and without the ability to gain any merit with God. Mercy, on the other hand, sees man as miserable and weak without any capacity to help himself. Grace refers especially to the gifts of God which man can never deserve; mercy to man's miserable and wretched state. With grace the emphasis is more on God's person as being gracious, while in mercy man's wretchedness and need are highlighted. Both terms, however, draw attention to both God's character and man's helplessness.

The grace of God to men in general is seen in His delay in letting judgment fall on them (2 Pet. 3:7-9). It is manifested especially to the believer (Eph. 1:4-6; 2:8-9; Tit. 2:11-14; 3:5). In the New Testament grace is seen in contrast with works done meritoriously (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9), in contrast with debt (Rom. 4:4-5), and in contrast with sin (Rom. 5:20-21).

Love

There are three things Scripture specifically states about God: God is Spirit (John 4:24), God is light (1 John 1:5), and God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). This does not simply state that God loves, but that He is love itself. This means that He is the epitome of what love is, that He is the sole source of real love, and that love is at the heart of the essence of God.

The absence of the article before “love” (the verse does not say, God is the love) indicates that this is the very nature of God. The presence of the article before “God” (literally, the God is love) shows that the statement is not reversible; it cannot read, “Love is God” (as Christian Science asserts).⁶¹

Love is ascribed to all three Persons of the Godhead: (a) to the Father (John 16:27), (b) to the Son (John 13:34), and (c) to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:30).

Love is that attribute of God which always seeks the absolute and perfect well-being of the object loved, regardless of the cost to the one loving (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16). Since the well-being of man is found only in the will of God and is related to God’s holiness and moral good, God’s love always seeks to bring man into conformity with His good and perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2). Love is a great part of the energy and motivation in God’s character for His benevolence, mercy, and grace, but it cannot act against God’s holiness. In His holiness, God could not ignore man’s sin and accept sinners into His presence. This is why in God’s love, He sent His Son to die for man’s sin that the sinner might be justified, declared righteous, and become acceptable to God through Christ.

Obviously, God’s goodness, mercy, lovingkindness, long-suffering, and grace are all closely related to God’s love, and while distinctions are made, such distinctions are not exact. See the above on these elements of God’s goodness.

God’s love is commonly regarded as a kind of amiable weakness, as a sort of good-natured indulgence that overlooks and winks at the indiscretions of man. Love is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment patterned after human emotion and sentimentality. The real essence of God’s love and all that it means is too often missed because man’s ideas about love stem from man’s own thinking. Our concept of God’s love must, as in everything else, be regulated by the Word of God.

(1) God’s love is contagious, it produces love in others, but in the following ways: (a) through regeneration (1 John 4:7), (b) through the knowledge of God’s Word (1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 2:3-5; 3:16), and (c) through the control of the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22).

(2) God’s love is eternal and constant because it is an inherent part of His eternal essence (1 John 4:8, 16). God’s love, therefore, is without beginning or ending (Jer. 31:3; Eph. 1:4-5).

(3) This means that God’s love is also immutable; there is no variableness to His love. His love knows neither change or diminishing because it depends on who He is and not on us (John 13:1; Rom. 8:35-39).

(4) Though motivated by His mercy and grace, God’s love is uninfluenced and unconditional (1 John 4:10). By this we mean that there is nothing whatever in the objects of His love that caused or influenced His love—nothing in man to attract it. His love is given and operates on the basis of grace and on the basis of God’s person and eternal purposes (Deut. 7:7-8). We love Him because He first loved us even while we were enemies and alien from Him (1 John 4:10, 19; Rom. 5:8-10).

(5) God’s love, being eternal, is also infinite, without limits as in all other aspects of His divine essence. The words of Ephesians 2:4, “because of His great love,” express the idea. So also the words of Ephesians 3:19, “and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.”

(6) God’s love is holy. His love is not regulated by caprice, passion, or sentiment, but by moral and righteous principle. It is important to remember that the Apostle John said “God is light” (1 John 1:5), a reference to God’s holiness, before he said “God is love” (1 John 4:8). God acted in love by sending His Son to die on the cross for our sin and He is free to receive the sinner because His holiness is propitiated, satisfied, by Christ’s death. In His holiness, however, He must reject and condemn all those who fail to receive by faith His plan of love in Christ (Rom. 3:21-26).

Objects of God’s Love:

- (1) God's Son is the special object of the Father's love (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 17:24).
- (2) Believers in Christ are also the special objects of God's love (John 16:27; 14:21-21; 17:23).
- (3) Sinners of the world are the objects of God's love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 Tim. 2:4).

The Manifestations of God's Love:

- (1) The great sacrifice of God's unique Son (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10). In the cross we see the most awesome display of the love of God.
- (2) The complete forgiveness of sin with all the attendant blessings of salvation and spiritual life (Eph. 1:7-8; 2:4-5).
- (3) God's loving care over His children in the circumstances of life, regardless of their nature (Rom. 8:35-39; Isa. 63:9; 49:15-16).
- (4) God's chastening of His children in Christ (Heb. 12:5-11). Love is not sentimental nor lax. It always seeks the true good, not just the pleasures or wants of the one loved.

Those who have never put their trust in Christ should consider the immense love manifested at Calvary in their behalf, and accept by faith God's offer of salvation (John 1:12; 3:16). The Christian should be motivated to abide in Christ and His love (John 15:1-9), to love the brethren (John 15:12; 1 John 4:8-11), and to be constrained by Christ's love in us to reach the lost (2 Cor. 5:14).

Truth, Veracity

Scriptures: Exodus 34:6; Numbers 23:19; Psalm 19:9; 91:4; 100:5; 146:6; Isaiah 25:1; 65:16 (ASV margin, "Amen"); Daniel 4:37; Micah 7:20; John 17:17; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Revelation 16:7.

That God is truth means He is absolutely dependable, without falseness of any kind. God's plan, principles, and promises are completely reliable, accurate, real, and factual.

Truth is (a) that which is real, as opposed to that which is fictitious or imaginary. The God of the Bible is the true God, while the gods of the heathen are vanity and nothing, mere imaginary beings, having neither existence nor attributes. (b) The truth is that which completely comes up to its idea, or to what it purports to be. A true man is a man in whom the idea of manhood is fully realized. The true God is He in whom is found all that deity implies. (c) The truth is that in which the reality exactly corresponds to the manifestation. God is true, because He really is what He declares Himself to be; because He is what He commands us to believe Him to be; and because all His declarations correspond to what really is. (d) "The truth is that which can be depended upon, which does not fail, or change, or disappoint. In this sense also God is true as He is immutable and faithful. His promise cannot fail; His Word never disappoints."⁶² This attribute is the ground of all our assurance. (e) Some theologians adopts the term veracity, which Strong calls transitive truth. It is the truth of God in relationship to His creatures in general, and to His people in particular (Psa 138:2; John 3:33; Rom. 3:4). Veracity is that perfection of God which makes all His actions and words conform to the truth (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). All He does and all His statements are in perfect accord with His being.

In Matthew 6:16 the Lord warned, "Be not as the hypocrites," because hypocrisy is so foreign to the very character of God that God's people are to emulate. The external expression of God always corresponds with the internal reality of His holy character.

God's faithfulness, then, is included in the attribute of truth (See Deut. 7:9; 32:4; 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:24). God's faithfulness as an aspect of God's truthfulness is great (Lam. 3:23), high as the heavens (Psa. 36:5; 89:2), and throughout the generations (Psa. 119:90). It is manifested in keeping His promises and covenants (Deut. 7:8-10; Psa. 89:1-8, 20-24, 33-37; Heb. 10:23; 11:11), in the defense and keeping of His children (Lam. 3:22-26; 1 Peter 4:19), in the calling, confirming, and final perfecting of His children (1 Cor. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Thess. 3:3), in guarding His children from temptations that would be too severe, and in always providing a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13), in

answering prayer (Psa. 143:1), in forgiving the confessed sins of believers (1 John 1:9), and in chastening His disobedient children (Ps. 119:75).

God's truthfulness is a rock of assurance for the people of God. His faithfulness in fulfilling His promises is a fountain of joy (Heb. 10:23; 6:17; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:20; Josh. 23:14; 2 Tim. 2:13). Regardless how things seem in this life, because God is truth, we can count on the Lord, always. This also means that God wants His people real and true. Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:9, "Let love be without hypocrisy."

The veracity of God also makes certain the fulfillment of His warnings, so that no sinner should presume upon God, thinking that he can "get by" with anything. The consequences of sin will follow (Job 32:22; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Heb. 3:11; Psa. 9:17).

The Names of God (Additional Revelation About God)

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). The great purpose of man, especially the believer in Christ, is to glorify God. Essential to our ability to glorify God is the knowledge of God and knowing Him personally in view of that knowledge. The word "glory" in the Greek New Testament is *doxa* which means an opinion, an estimation, or reputation in which one is held. It refers to that which should accrue to God as praise, thanksgiving, obedience, reverence, and service because of who God is and what God does (past, present, and future). In other words, giving glory to God is tied in with the knowledge of God (revelation of God), and knowing God personally (response to God).

The Lord Jesus said in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." The many names in Scripture constitute additional revelation of God's character, His works, and His relationship to us based on His character and works. The names which God chose for Himself and which are ascribed to Him in the Word of God are additional revelations of the who and what of God that we may know and relate to God.

Note David's declarations about God's name and word in Psalm 138:1-2. God's name declares much about His person, but it is God's Word that reveals God and His name.

We know what God is like, not only by His perfections and works, but also by His names. They tell us many things about God's care and concern for his own. This is one of the fascinating studies of Scripture. The various circumstances which bring forth each of the names of God are important.⁶³

The Significance of the Names of God in Scripture

In our twentieth century Western culture, personal names are little more than labels that distinguish one person from another. Sometimes nicknames are chosen which tell something about a person, but even this is a poor reflection of the significance of names in the Bible. Unfortunately, to many the name God or Lord conveys little more than a designation of a supreme being. It says little to them about God's character, His ways, and what God means to each of us as human beings. But in Scripture, the names of God are like miniature portraits and promises found everywhere in the Bible. In Scripture, a person's name identified them and stood for something specific. This is especially true of God. Naming also carried special significance. It was a sign of authority and power. This is evident in the fact that God revealed His names to His people rather than allowing them to choose their names for God. This is also seen in the fact that God often changed the names of His people: Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel. Note also how this concept of authority and power is seen when Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of Daniel and his three friends.

The Name of God in General

There are a number of instances where no name of God is employed, but where simply the term "name" in reference to God is used as the point of focus:

- (1) Abraham called on the *name* of the Lord (Gen. 12:8; 13:4).
- (2) The Lord proclaimed His own *name* before Moses (Ex. 33:19; 34:5).

(3) Israel was warned against profaning the *name* of the Lord (Lev. 13:21; 22:2, 32).

(4) The *name* of the Lord was not to be taken in vain (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11).

(5) The priests of Israel were to minister in the *name* of the Lord (Deut. 18:5; 21:5).

(6) The *name* of God is called “wonderful” in Judges 13:18.

(7) To call on the *name* of the Lord was to worship Him as God (Gen. 21:33; 26:25).

Consequently, from this we can conclude that such phrases as “the name of the LORD” or “the name of God” refer to God’s whole character. It was a summary statement embodying the entire person of God.⁶⁴

When we turn to the New Testament we find the same. The name Jesus is used in a similar way to the name of God in the Old Testament:

(1) Salvation is through His *name* (John 1:12).

(2) Believers are to gather in His *name* (Matt. 18:20).

(3) Prayer is to be made in His *name* (John 14:13-14).

(4) The servant of the Lord who bears the *name* of Christ will be hated (Matt. 10:22).

(5) The book of Acts makes frequent mention of worship, service, and suffering in the *name* of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18; 5:28, 41; 10:43; 19:17).

(6) It is at the *name* of Jesus that every knee will one day bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

So, just as the name of God in the Old Testament spoke of the holy character of God the Father, so the name of Jesus in the New Testament speaks of the holy character of God the Son.⁶⁵

Overview of the Names of God in Scripture

(1) **Elohim:** The plural form of *EL*, meaning “strong one.” Is used of false gods, but when used of the true God, it is a plural of majesty and intimates the trinity. Is especially used of God’s sovereignty, creative work, mighty work for Israel and in relation to His sovereignty (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 32:27; Gen. 1:1; Isa. 45:18; Deut. 5:23; 8:15; Ps. 68:7).

Compounds of *EI*:

- **El Shaddai:** “God Almighty.” Derivation is uncertain: From possible derivations, some think it stresses God’s loving supply and comfort; others His power as the Almighty one standing on a mountain and who corrects and chastens (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; Ex. 6:31; Ps. 91:1, 2).
- **El Elyon:** “The Most High God.” Stresses God’s strength, sovereignty, and supremacy (Gen. 14:19; Ps. 9:2; Dan. 7:18, 22, 25).
- **El Olam:** “The Everlasting God.” Emphasizes God’s unchangeableness and is connected with His inexhaustibleness (Gen. 16:13).

(2) **Yahweh (YHWH):** Comes from a verb which means “to exist, be.” This plus its usage shows that this name stresses God as the independent and self-existent God of revelation and redemption (Gen. 4:3; Ex. 6:3 (cf. 3:14); 3:12).

Compounds of *Yahweh*: Strictly speaking, these compounds are designations or titles which reveal additional facts of God’s character.

- **Yahweh Jireh (Yireh):** “The Lord will provide.” Stresses God’s provision for His people (Gen. 22:14).
- **Yahweh Nissi:** “The Lord is my Banner.” Stresses that God is our rallying point and our means of victory, the one who fights for His people (Ex. 17:15).
- **Yahweh Shalom:** “The Lord is Peace.” Points to the Lord as the means of our peace and rest (Jud. 6:24).
- **Yahweh Sabaoth:** “The Lord of Hosts.” A military figure portraying the Lord as the commander of the armies of heaven (1 Sam. 1:3; 17:45).
- **Yahweh Maccaddeshcem:** “The Lord your Sanctifier.” Portrays the Lord as our means of sanctification or as the one who sets believers apart for His purposes (Ex. 31:13).
- **Yahweh Ro’i:** “The Lord my Shepherd.” Portrays the Lord as the Shepherd who cares for His people as a shepherd the sheep of his pasture (Ps. 23:1).
- **Yahweh Tsidkenu:** “The Lord our Righteousness.” Portrays the Lord as the means of our righteousness (Jer. 23:6).
- **Yahweh Shammah:** “The Lord is there.” Portrays the Lord’s personal presence in the millennial kingdom (Ezek. 48:35).
- **Yahweh Elohim Israel:** “The Lord, the God of Israel.” Identifies Yahweh as the God of Israel in contrast to the false gods of the nations (Jud. 5:3.; Isa. 17:6).

(3) **Adonai:** Like *Elohim*, this too is a plural of majesty. The singular form means “master, owner.” Stresses man’s relationship to God as his master, authority, and provider (Gen. 18:2; 40:1; 1 Sam. 1:15; Ex. 21:1-6; Josh. 5:14).

(4) **Theos:** Greek word translated “God.” Primary name for God used in the New Testament. Its use teaches: (1) *He is the only true God* (Matt. 23:9; Rom. 3:30); (2) *He is unique* (1 Tim. 1:17; John 17:3; Rev. 15:4; 16:27); (3) *He is transcendent* (Acts 17:24; Heb. 3:4; Rev. 10:6); (4) *He is the Savior* (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10). This name is used of Christ as God in John 1:1, 18; 20:28; 1 John 5:20; Tit. 2:13; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1.

(5) **Kurios:** Greek word translated “Lord.” Stresses authority and supremacy. While it can mean sir (John 4:11), owner (Luke 19:33), master (Col. 3:22), or even refer to idols (1 Cor. 8:5) or husbands (1 Pet. 3:6), it is used mostly as the equivalent of *Yahweh* of the Old Testament. It too is used of Jesus Christ meaning (1) Rabbi or Sir (Matt. 8:6); (2) God or Deity (John 20:28; Acts 2:36; Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11).

(6) **Despotes:** Greek word translated “Master.” Carries the idea of ownership while *kurios* stressed supreme authority (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; Rev. 6:10; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 4).

(7) **Father:** A distinctive New Testament revelation is that through faith in Christ, God becomes our personal Father. Father is used of God in the Old Testament only 15 times while it is used of God 245 times in the New Testament. As a name of God, it stresses God’s loving care, provision, discipline, and the way we are to address God in prayer (Matt. 7:11; Jam. 1:17; Heb. 12:5-11; John 15:16; 16:23; Eph. 2:18; 3:15; 1 Thess. 3:11).

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19 Ibid., p. 89.

20 Lewis Sperry Chafer *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, Editor, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, Consulting Editors, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1988, p. 191.

21 Lightner, p. 89.

22 For some of the other inadequate ideas people have about what God is like, see the chapter, “Unreal Gods,” in J. B. Phillips’ book, *Your God is Too Small*, Macmillan Publishing, New York, 1961, pp. 15-59.

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- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 187.
- 47 Ibid., p. 189.
- 48 *American College Dictionary*.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Banner of Truth, London, 1968, p. 60.

51 Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 38.

52 Ibid., p. 38.

53 Berkhof, p. 58.

54 A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Judson, p. 279.

55 Enns, p. 194.

56 Ibid., pp. 194-195.

57 Ryie, *Basic Theology*, p. 43.

58 Boa, p. 56.

59 Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 43-44.

60 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, London, James Clark & Co, p. 427.

61 Ryrie, p. 39.

62 Hodge, pp. 436-437.

63 Lightner, page 107.

64 Ibid., p. 108.

65 Ibid., p. 109.

[Previous Page](#) [TOC](#) [Next Page](#)

[Printer Friendly Version](#)

[Top of Page](#)

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[Previous Page](#) [TOC](#)

PART 3: WHAT GOD IS DOING

(The Sovereign Decree(s) of God)

- [Introduction](#)
- [The Nature and Characteristics of God's Sovereign Plan](#)
- [The Scope of God's Sovereign Plan](#)
- [The Purpose of God's Sovereign Plan](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

Introduction

As the sovereign, all-wise, omnipotent, and omniscient God, Scripture teaches us that God, as also immanently involved in His creation, has a sovereign plan He is accomplishing in the universe. The truth of God's sovereign plan has many practical ramifications for us, but before we can properly relate to God's plan, we need a right understanding of that plan generally speaking, or we may try to relate to the plan of God improperly. We need a grasp of the fundamental principles regarding His plan from the Word to form the grid needed for our thinking so we can relate responsibly to both God's sovereignty and to His plan. So, what exactly is God's plan? What is God's plan like, and how does it impact our lives?

The Nature and Characteristics of God's Sovereign Plan

God's Plan Is One

Theologians and Bible teachers often speak of the decrees of God in relation to God's decisions to do certain things in history. But these are only various aspects of the one great plan of God often referred to as the decree of God. In God's plan there are many steps and phases, yet there is only one master plan which intricately and harmoniously includes all things (Acts 2:23 ["plan" is singular]; Isa. 46:10 ["purpose" or "counsel" is singular]). The plan or decree of God is a single plan that encompasses all things. Nothing is outside the scope of this sovereign plan of God.

Ephesians 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works ***all things after the counsel of His will***, (emphasis mine)

Let us remember that while there is one great master plan, each one of us has a part in the master plan of God. This is infinitesimally small which should be humbling, but our part is very important to God, important enough to consider us individually even as to the number of the hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30). Such should not only comfort, but it should remind us we are here for a purpose (cf. 1 Pet. 5:6-7 and Eph. 2:10).

Definition

The decree or plan of God is “God’s eternal purpose, according to the wise council of his own will, whereby, for His own glory, he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass” (“Shorter Catechism,” Question 7, *Westminster Confession of Faith*). The great purpose of this plan is the manifestation of the glory of God in all His divine perfections.

Various Designations of the Plan of God

The Scriptures refer to God’s plan by various designations. Some of these may look at some specific aspect of God’s plan, but it is still a part of the decree of God. Some of these are: “the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11), “predetermined plan” (Acts 2:23), “foreknowledge” (1 Pet. 1:2; cf. vs. 20), “purpose” (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:28), “kind intention” (Eph. 1:9), “predestined” (Rom. 8:30), “elect” (1 Thess. 1:4), and “will of God” (Eph. 1:1).

The Time of the Institution of the Plan of God

When did God form His plan? Second Timothy 1:9 declares it is “from all eternity.” First Peter 2:20 says it was from “before the foundation of the world.” God’s plan is an eternal plan that has existed from all eternity. While it is an eternal plan, it is unfolded and manifested in time or human history. However, the entire plan was formed from all eternity and it is not subject to change. God is not scrambling about trying to work out His plan or make last minute corrections. When we fumble the ball, or when things go wrong, or when tragedy strikes, according to Scripture, God’s plan has not slipped a gear. He is still on the throne and in control. The tragedy was (or is) a part of God’s plan. God includes our fumbles and allows the tragedies of life in His sovereign purpose (Isa. 43:10-13; 44:6-9, 24-28; 45:6-13, 20-22).

He has foreordained all that comes to pass and this includes the evil and the good and the permission of the evil will ultimately demonstrate His glory and bring praise to Him (Ps. 76:10).

It Is an All-Wise Plan, the Very Best Possible Plan

Since God’s plan is the plan of an omniscient and all-wise God, it must be the wisest plan possible. God’s plan accomplishes the purposes of God in the most complete and perfect way. His plan is best because He is omniscient, knows all things possible, and was eternally aware of all other possible plans. Since God is perfect in His perfections—holiness, love, grace, mercy, justice, goodness, truth, power, etc., our faith in God must rest in the fact it is the wisest possible plan and, as His finite creatures, we need to submit to God’s plan regardless of how things appear to us. We need to learn to see life from the standpoint of its overall purpose, the glory of God. Unfortunately, we tend to look at life from the finite standpoint of our very temporal and limited existence. Looking at God’s plan from an eternal perspective with its eternal weight of glory, enables us to rest in today and to accept life and use the things that happen to serve God and His eternal plan. Paul demonstrates this attitude and perspective toward the trials of life. He wrote:

2 Corinthians 4:8-18 *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death works in us, but life in you. 13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed, therefore I spoke,” we also believe, therefore also we speak; 14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.*

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us in Isaiah 55:8-9 that God’s thoughts and ways are very different from ours, as much so as the heavens are higher than the earth. This means we may often be perplexed about the way God runs the universe and about the things that He allows to go on in terms of misery, pain, and evil. Since we now see in a mirror dimly, we must simply wait for God’s illumination in the future when we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:12). Enns writes:

God’s wisdom and knowledge cannot be comprehended, and His decisions cannot be tracked as footprints in the sand. God has consulted no one and no one has advised Him. But because God knows all things He controls and guides all

events *for His glory and for our good* (cf. Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19).⁶⁶

Having discussed the sovereignty of God and His plan and purposes for the nation of Israel in Romans 9-11, the Apostle concludes with this praise to the infinite wisdom of God:

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be the glory forever*. Amen.

It Depends on God Alone

Though God often uses human instruments to accomplish His plan, it ultimately depends solely upon God both for its source and for its accomplishment.

As to Its Source:

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? 14 With whom did He consult and *who* gave Him understanding? And *who* taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?

As to Its Accomplishment:

Isaiah 40:21-26 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. 23 He *it is* who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. 24 Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. 25 "To whom then will you liken Me That I should be *his* equal?" says the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these *stars*, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of *His* power Not one *of them* is missing.

Ephesians 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Things Excluded From God's Plan

Excluded from the decree of God are all things relating to His own existence, His attributes, His subsistence in three Persons, His intimate relationships, or His responsibilities. All these proceed from the nature of God rather than from His will or decree. The decree of God relates to His acts that are not immanent and intrinsic and that are outside His own being.⁶⁷

The Scope of God's Sovereign Plan

The Totality of God's Plan

Every year, we are bombarded with news of horrible things that occur all around the globe: serial murders, mass killings, plane crashes, devastating floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and on the list goes. There seems to be no end to it. Could all this be in God's plan? God's Word, though perplexing to us, gives us the answer. The Bible tells us that God is the One "... who works ***all things*** after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11) (emphasis mine). Not some things, but ***all*** things. Note how the Psalmist put it:

Psalm 103:19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And His sovereignty rules over all.

Even the evil and the good are included together in the sovereign plan of God. There are no areas, or happenings over

which God is not the Supreme Ruler. Everything in creation is subject to His rule and only occurs as a part of His sovereign plan (see Isa. 46:10-11; 45:6-7, 9).

Illustrations of the Areas Included in God's Plan

- (1) The material universe (Ps. 33:6-11; 89:5-18; Deut. 32:8; Job. 14:5; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3a).
- (2) Nations and their rulers (Isa. 10:5f; 30:1ff; 31:1f; 41:2-4; Acts 17:26; Rom. 13:1f).
- (3) Man's length of life (Deut 32:39; Ps. 68:20; 91:3f; Job 14:5, 14; 21:21).
- (4) The works God has planned for one's life (Eph. 2:10; Prov. 16:1-4, 9; Ps. 37:23).
- (5) The sinful acts of men (Pr. 16:4; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Isa. 10:5-14).
- (6) The death of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:19-20; Acts 2:23).
- (7) The kingdom of God (Matt. 25:34).
- (8) The salvation of men (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13).
- (9) The giving of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11).
- (10) The gifts of specific individual believers to specific ministries (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 5:3).
- (11) Even the calamities of life fall within the permissive aspect of the sovereign will of God (Isa. 45:7).

Since God is infinitely holy, how do we account for the evil and the pain and allowance of sin? Not an easy question and there are no easy answers, but Scripture does give us an answer.

The fact of sin is the major problem in the doctrine of God's decree. If sin had not entered the universe, there probably would have been no possibility of challenging the sovereignty of God. Within our limited comprehension as human beings it is perhaps difficult to see how God would sovereignly adopt a plan in which terrible acts of sin take place. Yet that is the universe in which we find ourselves and the universe to which Scripture addresses the truth of God's sovereignty ...

It is not sufficient to assume that God was unable to prevent sin from eventuating or that He could not cause it to cease at any moment if this were His will. God, however, permitted evil to appear, and the Bible provides the only basic solution to the problem of evil in the universe which exists in all forms of human thought.

The essential nature of sin is one area that needs to be explored. Though evil is a part of God's original plan, it is not attributed to God as an act of His will in the sense that He determined that evil would be accomplished. Scripture is clear that the presence of sin in the world cost God the death of His Son as a sacrificial Lamb on the altar when He was killed at Calvary. Permitting evil cost God the most of any possible plan.

Under the circumstances the question may be raised as to why sin is allowed in the universe. This is best explained by pointing to the ultimate purpose of God to bring men into likeness to Himself. To realize this end they must know to some degree what God knows. They must recognize the evil character of sin ...

In examining the fact of sin consideration must be given to the fact of God's grace toward the fallen and the sinful. No demonstration of grace is possible unless there are objects that need grace, objects that know the experience of sin. Sin must be brought into final judgment.

In conclusion, it must be said that God's primary divine purpose was not to avoid the presence of sin. He could have prevented it if He had willed to do so. To achieve His purposes, which were holy, just, and good, God had to permit sin in order to demonstrate His glory—especially His righteousness, love, and grace.⁶⁸

The Means God Uses to Accomplish His All-Encompassing Plan

In the outworking of God's plan in human history, God's decrees are often viewed in three aspects: The efficacious or overruling will of God, the permissive will of God, and directive will of God.

The Efficacious or Overruling Will of God

The efficacious will of God is carried out by various means (directly by physical causes, Job 28:25-26; Gen. 1, and by spiritual forces, Eph. 2:8, 10; 4:24; Phil. 2:13) for which God is personally or directly responsible and for which He acknowledges responsibility as in the preceding verses.

The Permissive Will of God

Other parts of God's plan He permits. The permissive will of God embraces only the moral features that are evil or contrary to His desired will. Though God does not actively promote this aspect of His sovereign will, He uses them to accomplish His purposes, since He knows before hand just how every person will respond to every possible situation, and decreed to allow it or not. Regardless, God always places the responsibility for these acts and their results with men or angels, as in the case of the fall of Satan and then of man (Acts 14:16; Ps. 78:29; Isa. 10:5-14; Acts 2:23; Rom. 1:18-32). A classic example of this is perhaps the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the book of Exodus.

Ten times it is said that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34; 13:15), and 10 times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). Paul uses this as an example of the inscrutable will of God and of His mercy toward men (Rom. 9:14-18). Seven times Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God first hardened it, though the prediction that God would do it preceded all.⁶⁹

The fact that God permits these things does not make them less certain, nor remove them from the sovereign plan of God, but it does remove the responsibility for the sinful acts of men and fallen angels from God. Another illustration of this is the way God sovereignly uses kings, who often commit evil acts and who, though they operate by their own volition and have no intention of serving God (see Isa. 45:4-6), are accomplishing God's sovereign purposes. Isaiah calls Cyrus, the Persian monarch, God's anointed because he was carrying out God's purposes in protecting the Nation of Israel. In this passage, we have this well-known verse that is directly related to this subject:

Isaiah 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

Regarding this verse, Ryrie writes: "Included in God's plan are all things (Eph. 1:11), though the responsibility for committing sin rests on the creature, not the creator."⁷⁰

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 76:10, "Surely your wrath against men brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained." (NIV)

"Wrath" refers to the evil acts of men done in rebellion against God, or His people, or against the world. God may use such rebellion or wrath in His sovereign plan to carry out His purposes, or He may restrain it. "The entrance of sin into the universe was made certain by God's plan. God did not create sin, but in His infinite wisdom He allowed its entrance into the universe."⁷¹

Sin is always the product of the creatures own negative volition to God. God may permit it, use it, or hinder it, but it is the creature who chooses to sin in rebellion against God. God did not create man to be a robot but a creature created in God's image with the moral responsibility to know God, love God, and choose for God. A robot that could do only what it was programmed for would bring little glory to God; it certainly would not have the capacity for love and true fellowship.

The Directive Will of God and Human Responsibility

By the directive will of God we mean the will of God as it may be discerned and defined by God's specific instructions or

directions as they are found in the Word and by His specific workings within a person's individual life. God's sovereignty not only includes the end, but the means He has chosen to attain that end. The primary means He has chosen is found in the directive will of God. This is where human responsibility comes into play. This truth moves man onto the stage with God, not as a puppet, but as a volitional and moral agent responsible for a relationship with God wherein man studies, prays, serves, and witnesses for God and the Savior.

God could act and accomplish His plan without man, but He has chosen to use human beings as earthen vessels to bring His plan to fulfillment. This means that there is a two-fold operation and responsibility.

(1) Man's responsibility includes the various means of faith, prayer, learning and applying Scripture, giving, serving, and moral uprightness, etc.

(2) God's responsibility includes calling, convicting, illuminating, regenerating, leading, and working in men to enable them to accomplish His directive will.

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

All the imperatives and principles laid out in the Bible point us to man's responsibility while all the promises of Scripture point us to God's. So our human response and responsibility to God is a part of God's plan, that which He has decreed that we might carry out His purposes. It's like the farmer who acts on the laws of the harvest that the Creator has established. God does not clear the land, plow, disc, fertilize, and plant the crop. The farmer must do those things in cooperation with God's creative processes. Likewise, God does not read the Word for us, haul us to Bible class or church, or spend quality time with our families, witness for us, and so on. These are things He has directed us to do in faith which He prospers and uses to His glory and for our edification and fruitfulness in the world (1 Cor. 3:5-9).

The Purpose of God's Sovereign Plan

The ultimate purpose of God's plan is the praise and manifestation of the glory of God (Eph. 1:6, 11, 12, 14; 3:21; Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Rev. 4:11; 5:13). It is essential to the very Being of God and by the very nature of God that His glory be manifested and appreciated because of what God's glory is and does within the universe. This is not the action of some pompous person who wants to be seen to feel good about himself. Not for a moment. Rather, this is more like the blessing, the joy, and the awe we may experience when we see some highly-skilled acrobat, athlete, actor, musician, or some majestic part of creation. Because of the beauty, grace and skill, it needs to be seen and appreciated by others. When we view a glorious mountain in its beautiful setting or see an athlete perform in an outstanding way, we often think, how awful it would be if such talent or beauty were never seen and appreciated, not for the ego of the person, but for the joy and thrill it gives to the viewers.

So God's plan is designed to manifest the various facets of His glory or perfections. How? By allowing sin through the creature, God's plan brought out all aspects of God's glory much like sparkling diamonds against the backdrop of black velvet. The presence of sin and rebellion manifests God's love, patience, holiness, mercy, and grace to a magnificent degree.

Conclusion

Amidst all the confusion and uncertainty of the world in which we live, how assuring to know that God orders our steps! Our faith need not be in blind chance nor in circumstances, but should be in an infinitely wise God who does all things well, who knows the end from the beginning and whose every desire for us is for ultimate good and His glory.

These great truths will make the child of God humble and remove any confidence in the flesh ... These are family truths and are not understood by those outside the family and in fact should not be taught to them.

God's truth concerning Himself and His plan strengthens our faith and give us assurance, hope, and confidence in Him. But these sublime truths should also help us to see our duties within God's plan and to see them as a part of that plan.⁷²

The concept of God's sovereignty and sovereign plan as seen in the Scripture is a declaration of God's majestic rule and control over this earth and all the affairs of life. It is also an invitation to each of us to worship the Lord, to submit to His authority over every aspect of life, to rest and relax in His control over all our affairs, and to obey His Word which He has given us to direct us into His perfect will and plan. But by His mercy and grace, even in our disobedience, as with Jonah who found himself in the belly of the great fish, God is still in control either for our blessing or for our discipline, itself a form of blessing because of its design to make us like His Son.

It is a marvelous revelation of the Bible to learn (a) that God watches over all that happens, indeed, He has known it from all eternity, and (b) that He is in complete control over all situations, no matter how dark or hopeless. Amazingly, this knowledge, if rested in by faith, can free us to serve the Lord and love others unconditionally, for ultimately, nothing can stand in the way of God's plan for our lives.

66 Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1989, p. 204.

67 *Lewis Sperry Chafer Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, Editor, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, Consulting Editors, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1988, p. 155.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 157-158.

69 Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 96.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 1114.

71 Robert P. Lightner, *The God of the Bible, An Introduction to the Doctrine of God*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1973, p. 83.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[Previous Page](#)

[TOC](#)

[Printer Friendly Version](#)

[Top of Page](#)

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