

The Existence/Knowledge of God and Attributes of God

Theology Proper- The Doctrine of God

**Today we continue our study in systematic theology, addressing what may properly be labeled *the doctrine of God*.**

The word "Theo-logy" is a combination of Greek word Theos meaning "God" and Greek word Logos meaning "word", "reason", "account" or "knowledge". Therefore, theology properly means the study of God; and over the next 5 weeks we are engaging in the study of God in a more direct and concentrated way.

Today we continue our study ***focusing upon the attributes of God, working through what the Bible says about God's nature and God's character- attempting to answer the question "What is God like?"***

In a future class we anticipate Pastor Lopes delivering two lectures on the doctrine of the Trinity specifically. Lord willing, Pastor Stu will take up the Doctrine of Creation. Following that, we plan to dedicate a class to the doctrine of God's Providence. These studies will comprise our whirlwind tour of the doctrine of God.

The reality is that we could spend 3 months wrestling through the attributes of God as a stand-alone Sunday School class, and it would be a profitable three months. However, time constraints mean that we must cover this sacred ground in under two hours. Therefore, this is a high-level overview, that hopefully isn't too imbalanced or negligent- because we cannot cover everything. However, if you gain greater familiarity or re-familiarize yourself with the essential aspects of God's attributes and are better equipped and motivated in your personal study, I will consider that a success.

Spurgeon quote- from a sermon on the Immutability of God-

*"It has been said by some one that 'the proper study of mankind is man.' I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead.*

*The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.*

*There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.*

*Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, 'Behold I am wise.'*

*But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, 'I am but of yesterday, and know nothing.' No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.*

Jeremiah 9:23–24 (ESV): Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

-A proper knowledge of God doesn't exalt and glorify man, but promotes humility and brings us to glory in the Triune God

-A proper knowledge of God is not mysticism devoid of truth, but is very much bound up with knowing the propositional, verbal truths that God clearly reveals about himself through His Word

- A proper knowledge of God is not merely knowing and the facts, it is intensely relational (we know the Lord **who practices such things- implied is a personal and corporate experience of such things**; we know the Lord **who delights in such things- implied is a personal-relational knowledge of God**)

-God cites a knowledge of his some of his attributes- (namely his love, justice, righteousness) as bound up with knowing him- thereby encouraging us to think about God by means of His revealed attributes

In view of these things- let's pray. Prayer themes- John 17.3/John 5.39

John 17.3: "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

John 5:39 "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

Some of the best Christian thinkers who have made contributions to the discipline of systematic theology, and more specifically the doctrine of God, often start off **(and we began) by dedicating considerable time, effort, and space toward working through essentially two things- number one, the existence of God- and number two, the knowledge of God.**

How do we know that God is there- how do we know that God exists- and how do we come to know the God that truly is there? Two foundational, introductory matters that we must at least touch on as we begin to think through the attributes of God.

### ***The Existence of God***

***The Scripture, by and large, presupposes the existence of God. God's existence is assumed. No complex arguments, no extensive debates, no impassioned defense when it comes to God's existence.***

That doesn't mean that Scripture doesn't address God's existence. This doesn't mean that the Scriptures fail to address our sinful, foolish and wicked misgivings regarding his existence.

But on the whole, Scripture's stance on the matter is that God is there, end of debate. In this sense, the Bible does not feel compelled to prove the existence of God to us. The Bible's fundamental purpose **isn't** to answer man's objections to the reality of God. Rather it plainly insists that God is and then proceeds to tell us who God is.

It placards, ***it flies His existence like a banner from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation.*** In it's opening statement- Genesis 1:1, we read these words- "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Bible presupposes, assumes, and insists that God exists.

*Where does that leave us? What are we to make of this?*

***The Scripture teaches that we, in our finite, fallen humanity must lay hold of God's existence by faith.*** To some this is unsatisfactory. Some men, in their suppression of God's existence and truth, give the impression that nothing less than a direct, empirical, sense-driven encounter with God will dispel their doubts, their agnosticism, their professed atheism.

But because of our status as finite, limited creatures and because of God's exalted, supreme and transcendent nature as invisible spirit, without physical form- we unable to see God in His absolute essence directly, we unable to touch God in His absolute essence directly. He cannot be relegated to the physical and the empirical in that kind of way. We can't merely think or reason our way to God.

Consider these texts-

*Hebrews 11.1- "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*

***Hebrews 11.6- "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."***

*John 1:18 "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."*

*Exodus 33.20- "But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."*

***There is, therefore, an inherent faith dynamic at play*** as we unashamedly declare God's existence, because we are declaring our conviction and confidence about a reality that is ultimately invisible and unseen in His absolute essence. And we must accept that. It is in this sense that we presuppose God's existence and embrace God's existence by faith.

As an aside- we must be on our guard against anyone who presents an explanation for the origins of the universe and humanity, while downplaying inherent presuppositions-inherent faith as it were- in their explanation/perspective.

***We as orthodox Christians believe that God exists and has created everything that exists- that humans are created by God in his image with intrinsic worth and dignity (Gen 1:28). All matter, space, time, motion, and energy are tools created and used by God to organize and rule over his creation to accomplish his purposes. This is our faith premise. This means that reality is not limited to the physical but expands into the metaphysical, the spiritual. We do not live in a closed system but an open system.***

***This presupposition is at the heart of our "religion" so to speak.***

Many believe that humans are ultimately just impersonal matter that has come into being through a mysterious and random convergence of mass and energy over billions of years for no apparent reason and for no purpose with no cause that exists outside of our physical realities- and this is presented not as religious, but as accepted fact.

***But even the most atheistic scientists have at the core of their strongest beliefs about the origins of the universe—a faith premise.*** And it's a very religious faith premise at its heart, no matter how "non-religious" they may consider their premises to be.

***This is because it takes faith/a fundamental presupposition to believe that the origins of the universe and humanity somehow mysteriously came into being through a "big bang" followed by even more mysterious processes over billions of years.***

***It may be argued that it takes more religious faith to believe that everything that exists is only material or energy that has existed forever in some form and has been mysteriously shaped into all of its present complex forms, including humanity, only by pure chance—rather than to hold to the historic Judeo-Christian worldview that everything is the work of a personal, infinite, creator God.***

Therefore, it is dishonest to present a view of the origins of the universe and humanity and to claim that this view does not have a deeply rooted presuppositional faith premise at its very core. And it's even more

dishonest to somehow try to position one view of origins as being scientific and not faith-based and others as being faith-based and religious.

So faith and presupposition is always an essential part of our worldview, our outlook, our grid through which we interpret the things around us.

The bible is simply honest about this, no surprises there. Faith is essential when laying hold of God's existence.

***Although faith is essential, we must insist that this faith is not what some describe as "blind faith."***

Louis Berkof writes this:

"The Christian accepts the truth of the existence of God by faith. But this faith is not a blind faith, but a faith that is *based on evidence*, and the evidence is found primarily in Scripture as the inspired Word of God, and secondarily in God's revelation in nature."

Therefore- ***there is an evidence component to all of this. And not just any kind of evidence. It is evidence that is compelling, undeniable, indisputable, overwhelming and renders all men accountable before God. It is evidence rooted in things that God has revealed to us***, and we will touch on that in due course.

That brings us to our next point.

Although there is an undeniable faith component, ***the Scriptures also make it clear that all people already possess knowledge that God exists. So there is a tension here.***

***How is it that men already know that the unseen God exists? Where does God reveal himself so that we may know that he is there and come to understand and know him?***

***There are many ways to present the biblical answer to this question- for our purposes, it is reasonable to say that God reveals himself in essentially 3 primary ways.***

***Through nature (and providence), through the inward conscience, and through a supernatural breaking-through into our existence where God manifests himself in words and deeds, in acts- something many theologians refer to as supernatural or special revelation.***

***Oftentimes we simplify this even further by speaking of two broad categories of God revealing himself- general and special revelation.***

***Consider first nature, the outward creation. The created order outside of us testifies to the existence of God.***

***Consider Psalm 19:1-6 (can reduce to first two verses in presentation)-***

***1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.***

***2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.***

3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.

4 Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun,

5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The idea of the natural order revealing something about God is plain in this text of Scripture.

The heavens "declare".

The skies "proclaim".

"They pour out speech".

"They reveal knowledge".

***When we gaze at the night sky or observe a mountain vista we see "masterful and majestic" design that proclaims the glory of a masterful and majestic Creator.***

***Do they use literal words to this? No, "There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard." But these verses do acknowledge that observing the created order, contemplating the glories and complexity and wonder of the natural world can give us a real apprehension of God's power (the work of his hands) and glory, and implied in all of this is a knowledge of his existence.***

At this point it is helpful to know that this type of revelation is nonverbal in form and function. Although the Bible talks plainly about this type of revelation and even addresses the content of this revelation in a general way, this type of revelation does not intersect with the mind and reason of man via scripture and verse. So in that sense it is nonverbal revelation.

Notice how extensive this revelation is- its scope- how far reaching it is.

1. It takes place at all times (2), all places (4, 6)- I think implied is that it reaches all people- therefore it is general revelation.

It is called general in the sense that it comes to all people generally, it is called natural because it comes through observing how God has ordered nature.

Consider another verse that touches on this notion of general revelation-

***Acts 14:17- Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."***

***In this verse real notions of God's loving-goodness, kindness, and providential care and mercy can be surmised from how He orders the seasons in order to provide good things to mankind through His creation. And we can see that he is lavish in his provision. "He provides you with plenty of food". We can surmise that He is not disinterested in our emotional well-being. He "fills your hearts with joy" by way of his kind provision.***

God has good intentions in how he arranges the cosmos for the good of humanity- we learn that it is true that general revelation leaves every man and woman without excuse before God for their rebellion. However, we can fall victim to the idea that God's sole, primary intention is to give humans good things, in an effort to heap up their condemnation. Consider Paul's words to the people of Athens-

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of

their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'

Speaking of Paul, ***the Apostle Paul himself speaks in a more direct fashion about how God reveals himself in and through the creation explaining-***

***Romans 1:19-20: For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.***

So here Paul teaches that creation ("the things that have been made") always have been a means by which men perceive God's existence. Through the created order men are exposed to truth about God and perceive truth about God- it "is plain to them" Paul says.

God's invisible attributes- somehow- and we do not have time to open this up and qualify it- God's invisible attributes "have been clearly perceived". Implied is that men know that God exists and explicit is that men know something of God's divine nature and eternal power.

Let's talk briefly about the conscience and humanity's inner sense of God.

***Scripture also affirms that there is a knowledge of God that comes through the inner sense and right and wrong that informs every person's reason and heart.*** All people, apart from the Bible, even people who do not have a written record of the ordinary righteousness that God requires, can still have some understanding, in their consciences, of God's moral demands apart from the Bible.

***Toward the very end of Romans chapter 1 Paul airs out a laundry list of unrighteous acts that unbelievers willing to engage in. Verse 29- "They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.***

***Then he says this-***

***Romans 1:32- Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.***

***Implicit is that all men know that God exists. More than that, they understand that certain patterns of thought and certain actions are actually wrong and that these things invite God's disapproval.***

What is going on here? Well, Paul explains just a few verses later.

Romans 2:15 -They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.

Even though some men and women do not have God's written revelation in the form of his righteous laws and commands, they do have the work of the law written on the heart by virtue of their capacities as image bearers of God. The work of the law written on the heart comes with the package that is your humanity.

This is a crude example but maybe it will be useful. Nowadays, when you go buy a car, they all have certain built-in features. For instance, if there is engine trouble, you may get a message displaying the word "check engine". Or if you start the car and fail to put on your seatbelt, *a warning bell will ding incessantly* until you comply. Well- the conscience is part of the package you get when you get a human. It is the warning-bell, it is the "check engine" light. Its presence will be felt and experienced without much conscious effort on our part.

At this point you may ask yourself the question- if God has given us a “built-in” conscience, and God’s just and right commands- “the work of the law” as it were- impressed upon our inner being- why do we then go to great lengths to discern what it is that God requires of us? Why do we learn the 10 Commandments? Why do we meditate on the greatest commandment, to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself? Why the painstaking efforts on the part of God and His inspired messengers to articulate what God requires and expects of us?

The short answer is that humanity has been tainted, severely affected by sin. Humanity is fallen. Scripture recognizes that people suppress, the idea is that people “push down” this inner sense of God, this inner sense of right and wrong, and the testimony of the outward creation that surrounds us. Therefore-the work of the law written on the heart, as a result of sins' influence and our suppression, can become distorted and suppressed.

Some even adamantly deny that God exists.

(Romans 1:18)- For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (all men in general apart from being made a new creation in Christ), who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Wayne Grudem, in his volume “Systematic Theology” writes the following-

“The consciences of unbelievers will be suppressed or hardened in various areas of morality, depending on cultural influences and personal circumstances. A cannibalistic society, for example, will have many members whose consciences are hardened and insensitive with regard to the evil of murder, while modern American society, for example, exhibits very little sensitivity of conscience with regard to the evil of falsehood in speech, or disrespect for parental authority, or sexual immorality. Moreover, individuals who repeatedly commit a certain sin will often find the pangs of conscience diminishing after time; a thief may feel guilty after his first or second robbery but feel little guilt after his twentieth. The witness of conscience is still there in each case, but it is suppressed through repeated wickedness.”

Revisiting the car analogy, if we never put on our seatbelt, the incessant beeping may fade overtime, as we become used to it- it becomes background noise, or the mechanism begins to wear out and the sound becomes softer and softer. That “check engine” light is something that is there, but we convince ourselves that the problem must be insignificant or trivial or inconsequential. The car is still somehow getting us from point A to point B.

Or if you live in a culture that doesn’t value the benefit of working tail-lights or headlights, they will not go to great lengths to tell you when one of them has burned out unless it infringes on their safety and wellbeing. The suppression, therefore, certainly arises internally, within us, and the suppression of God’s righteous standards *can be reinforced by the culture that surrounds us.*

To summarize- the Scriptures teach us that all people do possess an inward sense that God exists, that God is there, that we are his creatures, and he is our Creator, and that we are thereby obligated to him.

[Romans 1:21 (speaking of Gentile unbelievers) here- *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Paul says that these unbelievers in some way possessed a knowledge of God and his existence- ***“for although they knew God”***.

Romans 1:25- For they exchanged the truth of God for falsehood and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Here Paul says that wicked unbelievers have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie- for falsehood”, implying that they really do possess truth concerning God’s existence and character, even if they actively and willfully reject those truths.

The testimony of Paul is that all men have a conscience, and that they know from their own conscience that God exists, and that they are accountable to him and guilty before him. The evidence for God's existence that has been marshaled in the creation and within the conscience is so compelling, undeniable, overwhelming, and man's perception of it is sufficiently clear- that it renders all men accountable before God. Therefore, Paul says- "*they are without excuse.*" -Romans 1.20]

*What do we make of atheists and agnostics?* Someone has written a book, I think Ray Comfort, entitled "God Doesn't Believe in Atheists." Now is not the time to wrangle about these issues. The Bible candidly acknowledges that people profess atheism and deny his existence- and speaks very pointedly into such patterns of thought. Let's look at 2 texts that confront the matter of heart atheism.

Psalm 14.1-The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." *They are corrupt*, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.

Psalm 10.3-4: For *the wicked* boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. In the pride of his face *the wicked* does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

There is a lot that can be said in view of these passages. But what I want us to appreciate is that the posture of Scripture *is not* that self-professing atheists and agnostics fundamentally need savvy arguments about God's existence in order to shore up some deficit in their understanding.

Fundamentally Scripture is quick to identify sin and wickedness as the problem that has affected their reasoning. In each instance, these Scriptures make it abundantly clear that moral corruption attends the profession. That is because the moral corruption is the bitter root giving rise to the heart atheism.

Their fundamental need is for God to deal with the sin problem, the bitter root, so that they can once again approach some semblance of rational thought concerning the evidence that is within and all around them. God is always faithful to identify the main problem, which takes place primarily within the moral sphere. Only when we correctly identify the root cause, can we see our way clear to the true solution.

This is not to say that there is no place for traditional "proofs" for the existence of God (for instance the cosmological, teleological, ontological, moral- the classical arguments for the existence of God)- we cannot delve into that right now.

Suffice to say, some of the most compelling, valid arguments for God's existence lean heavily on what we just talked about- dynamics involving the inward conscience and created order. These arguments evaluate the evidence, exercise sound reasoning, ultimately drawing true, accurate conclusions about God existence. Lord-willing we will cover some of this in a forthcoming class on apologetics.

But these arguments, although helpful in overcoming intellectual objections to God's existence, cannot overcome our sin. They are not the substance of saving faith. Although these arguments are often convincing, people are not naturally disposed to believe them unless convinced and convicted by the Holy Spirit. That is why the Scripture is quick to affirm that God must remove spiritual blindness from the unbeliever.

2 Corinthians 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

*And since sin is the ultimate problem that needs to be remedied, the indispensable priority is saving faith, that comes through clear articulations of the truth of Scripture, as they naturally drive to Jesus Christ and the gospel.* It is God alone who can deal with our sin and dispel any darkness that clouds our reasoning. And until he does that, in and to some degree men will continue to suppress the truth in unrighteousness.



It bears mentioning that after conversion, the Christian enjoys a growing sense of God's presence, and doubts concerning God's existence are swallowed up in a fundamental and increasing appreciation for God as our Father.

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

***We must acknowledge the universal apprehension of the existence of God. We have looked at the testimony of nature and the inward conscience. But God has done much more than reveal himself in the beauty and wonder of his creation while pressing his divine nature and eternal power and righteous requirements upon the inner man.***

***The eternal God also makes his invisible presence visible by sometimes breaking through into our temporal world.***

***Theologians use the Latin phrase "Magnalia Dei" to refer to these magnificent acts of God, the wonderful works of God breaking through into history. Moments where God breaks through into human history with word and deed.***

***Think the cataclysmic global flood and God's words to Noah. Think God acts of judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptian captors, think the parting of the Red Sea and God's communication with Moses.***

***The inspired author of Hebrews captures this idea- magnificent acts of word and deed by telling us that God spoke to his ancient people "Long ago, at many times and in many ways... (Heb1:1a)."***

***We learn from Scripture that God sometimes reveals himself directly and personally to individuals. Other times, He reveals himself by dreams, visions, and miracles. One of the primary ways God revealed himself to his people in Old Testament times was through the prophets of Israel. Hebrews 1:1 goes on to tell us "...God spoke to our fathers by the prophets (Heb 1:1b)."***

***At this point it must be said that the ultimate act in history, through which God reveals himself most fully, is in first century Palestine, when God reveals himself through the person, work, and words of his one and only Son, Jesus Christ.***

***The writer of Hebrews goes on to explain in Hebrews 1:2, "...in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." In the person and work of Jesus Christ, God reveals himself like at no other time in history.***

In Hebrews 1:3 we read, "***He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...***"

This means that ***when we see the power, wisdom, and goodness of Jesus Christ, we are seeing the power, wisdom, and goodness of God.***

Jesus said, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him (John 14:7)."

***Since we could not be there to experience first-hand all these magnificent works of God in history, God, by his Spirit, has graciously recorded his acts and words for us in the ancient Scriptures.*** We have already devoted considerable time to the doctrine of the Word of God, the Scriptures in our first 3 classes. The reason for this is that special revelation, embodied in the Word of God- the Scriptures- is absolutely indispensable.

Let's talk about the essential place of the Scriptures in God's revelation of himself to mankind.

General revelation has its benefits- it is essential for a functioning society.

The knowledge of God gleaned from the created order and understood within the conscience promotes a real sense of right and wrong giving rise to societal restraint on evil. Because of this, Christians find a tremendous amount of common ground with unbelievers, especially when it comes to civil law, community standards, professional and business ethics, and patterns of acceptable of conduct in our everyday lives.

General revelation, when rightly considered, really does form a receptacle in the heart for the gospel if God is so pleased to use it that way.

*But we must understand that general revelation has its limits.*

Scripture nowhere indicates that people can come to know the gospel- God's plan of salvation- through general revelation. General revelation cannot give us saving knowledge. The lost sinner cannot deduce from general revelation anything about the gospel.

By way of general revelation, people may know that God exists, that he is their Creator, that they owe him obedience and allegiance, and that they have sinned against him and are thereby accountable and guilty- but that is just about the extent of it.

General revelation cannot give us the good news about Christ, God sending His Son, the God-man to be our representative, bearing the penalty for our sins, where the love and mercy of God and the justice of God meet in one astoundingly gracious act.

This can only come through special revelation, epitomized and embodied in Jesus Christ whose person and work, whose words and deeds are made known to us and mediated to us in the Word of God, the Scriptures. Therefore, we correctly identify special revelation with the Scriptures, the word of God.

It is important to note that special revelation, namely ***the Scriptures- exercise a tremendous bearing on our understanding of natural revelation, including the inner conscience. Before God worked in us to receive the Scriptures for what it really is, the Word of God- we were those who "by their wickedness suppress the truth"- those who "became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened... who exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (Romans 1:18, 21, 25).***

As sinners ***we were prone to misconstrue and distort the revelation about God found in nature.***

But now that special revelation has been entrusted to us, we are equipped to interpret natural revelation rightly.

Berkof provides one of the most complete and clear statements of the Reformed position on this matter-

As a result of the entrance of sin into the world, the handwriting of God in nature is greatly obscured, and is in some of the most important matters rather dim and illegible. Moreover, man is stricken with spiritual blindness, and is thus deprived of the ability to read aright what God had originally plainly written in the works of creation. In order to remedy the matter and to prevent the frustration of His purpose, God did two things. ***In His supernatural revelation He republished the truths of natural revelation, cleared them of misconception, interpreted them with a view to the present needs of man, and thus incorporated them in His supernatural revelation of redemption. And in addition to that [through supernatural revelation] He provided a cure for the spiritual blindness of man in the work of regeneration and sanctification, including spiritual illumination, and thus enabled man once more to obtain true knowledge of God, the knowledge that carries with it the assurance of eternal life.***

***So as far as revelation is concerned- the Scriptures are the touchstone of all of our knowledge about God. The Scriptures, the word of God in written form, is the final authority in all matters concerning faith and godliness/practice, with all other authorities being subservient to Scripture. Therefore, in our discussion of God we do not veer from the Scriptures as our authoritative, clear, trustworthy, inerrant, and sufficient guide in this matter.***

More briefly, I want to touch specifically on the knowability of God.

It is not uncommon to find people who readily profess belief in God's existence, but when it comes to professing knowledge of God in some definitive and personal way, objections and doubts are bound to surface.

If we look at things from one angle, objections to the knowability of God are reasonable.

For instance, we are about to discuss at length how the God of the Bible is totally unlike us. The distance between God and man is as great as the distance between Creator and creature, eternity and time. *God is infinite in being, knowledge, and perfection; humans are limited in every way.*

Moreover, ***we are not only finite and limited, we are also fallen; we go our own way and follow our own thoughts and imaginations.***

***How then is the knowledge of a holy and transcendent God even possible? And how do we attain this knowledge?***

*Here it is helpful to talk about (at this point we addressed) the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility and knowability.*

"Incomprehensibility" is a theological term that seeks to capture the biblical presentation of the triune God in all of his uniqueness, transcendence, and glory. God is infinite, absolute, and beyond our full comprehension. The keyword for understand this doctrine rightly is the word "full".

***The doctrine of God's Incomprehensibility simply means that we can never fully understand God.*** In this sense God is said to be incomprehensible, where the term "incomprehensible" is in line with an older usage of the word, meaning "unable to be *fully* understood."

This understanding of incomprehensibility must be distinguished from the more common usage of the term of incomprehensibility so that we do not fall into the error of thinking that we cannot understand God at all. It would be untrue to say that God is unable to be understood. But it is true to say that he cannot be understood fully or exhaustively.

Consider these Scriptures that speak of God's incomprehensibility.

***In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says: For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts***

Psalms 145:3 says, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."

God's greatness is beyond searching out or discovering; *it is too great ever to be fully known.*

Psalms 147:5 says, "Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure."

As it pertains to God's understanding, we will never be able to measure or fully know the understanding of God: it is far too great for us to fully understand.

As David contemplates God's omniscience and sovereign rule that entails God's knowledge of all things that have yet will come to pass, David says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it" (Ps. 139:6; cf. v. 17).

Paul implies this incomprehensibility of God when he says that "the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God," and then goes on to say that "no one comprehends the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:10–12).

At the end of a long discussion on the history of God's great plan of redemption, Paul breaks forth into praise: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom. 11:33).

***We can never fully comprehend the depths of God in all his splendid glory. We cannot know God exhaustively and completely. Only God knows himself at that level.***

Moreover-the Apostle Paul describes his knowledge now in comparison what his knowledge will be like in the age to come, by writing: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Cor 13:12)."

These verses also press us to take our understanding of the incomprehensibility of God one step further.

It is not only true that we can never fully understand God; ***it is also true that we can never fully understand any particular attribute of God.*** These Scriptures that we just reviewed make that clear- His greatness (Ps. 145:3), his understanding (Ps. 147:5), his knowledge (Ps. 139:6), his riches, wisdom, judgments, and ways (Rom. 11:33) all outstrip our ability to fully comprehend.

Thus, ***we may know something about God's love, power, wisdom, and so forth. But we can never know, for example, how God's love relates to every other attribute of God, and to every individual thing in the universe. We can never know any of God's attributes completely or exhaustively.***

***This doctrine of God's incomprehensibility means that we can never plumb the depths of God's greatness- we will never run out of things to learn about him, and we will thus never tire in delighting in the discovery of more and more of his excellence and of the greatness of his works.***

In fact, even in eternity, in our glorified condition, we remain finite creatures and as such. Therefore- we will never fully exhaust the depths of God's knowledge and being. As Reformed theology has rightly taught, along with the entire history of the church, "The finite cannot contain the infinite."

***Therefore, Christian's throughout the ages gladly profess that God is the Incomprehensible One. But at the same time- the Scriptures and the Church also insists that God can be truly known.***

***How is it that the infinite can be known by the finite?***

***The answer is both simple and profound-God must reveal Himself to us. It is necessary that God reveal himself to us.***

Think about it this way. In the study of all other sciences, in a sense, man places himself above that which he is studying. Picture if you will a person, looking through a microscope, standing above, let's say, a virus or bacteria, studying its varied parts. Observing its unique protein spikes, its outer casing. How it reacts to the environment around it. The scientist, the man or woman, places himself or herself above the object of his or her study, actively observing it, and drawing from their observations a body of knowledge and understanding, using whatever means and methods he or she deems appropriate.

But when it comes to knowing God, acquiring a body of knowledge about who God is and what God is like, we cannot stand above Him, manipulating, testing, stimulating, and carefully controlling the object of study. Rather we find ourselves in a position of utter dependence in relation to that which we are seeking to understand. He must reveal himself to us.

Consider this Scripture-

John 4:24 tells us that "God is spirit". As divine spirit he doesn't know the constraint of anything outside of himself. As divine spirit He is infinite and eternal.

***The Westminster Shorter Catechism states that- “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable”. And 1 John 4:12 states that “No one has ever seen God”.***

***So how are finite and constrained and limited persons like us supposed to know someone who is Spirit, infinite and eternal, someone who transcends our limited physical senses, someone we cannot see? The greater must somehow reveal Himself to the lesser.***

To use the words of Berkoff- “man can only know God only in so far as [God] actively makes himself known”.

***Therefore, for us to know God, we need God to take the initiative and reveal himself- we need revelation.*** The Creator must disclose to His creation who He is and what He is like. ***And this is precisely what God has done.***

Our infinite creator ***God has graciously adapted his revelation of himself to our finite created capabilities, by using finite human language and analogies and making comparisons with things he has created. Through God's condescension in divine revelation, we are able truly to know God.***

However, our knowledge of God is necessarily imperfect, incomplete, and derivative knowledge. We know God as he shares his perfect knowledge of himself with us. Calvin describes this as a nurse talking in baby-talk to a child she's caring for, stooping to the child's level to be understood.

But at the same time we must affirm that precisely because it is God that has revealed Himself to us- ***especially so in the Scriptures- therefore we can confidently say that we may truly know God.***

***And there are numerous passages that speak about knowing God.***

Toward the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, he lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed to God the Father on behalf of all his followers, saying, ***“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).”***

The knowledge of God Jesus refers to here is the very essence of eternal life. This knowledge is not merely knowing about God, or about godly behaviors. It is knowing God like you would know another person. This is a personal knowledge of God that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

***Consider again the John 4 encounter between Jesus and Samaritan woman- where Jesus affirms unequivocally that God is spirit, he equally affirms that God can be known. Over and against the Samaritans, who had distorted and rejected the Scriptures- Jesus says “we worship what we do know”- because both He and the Jews had a firm attachment to the Scriptures. Jesus also affirms that true worshipers worship in the Spirit and in truth.***

And even though we cannot know God exhaustively, what we do know about God is entirely true, it is truth- because it is God's gracious self-revelation to us. He took the initiative. He ensures its veracity. It is his revelation- no prophecy of Scripture finds its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Theologian Herman Bavinck writes,

“While our knowledge of him is accommodated and limited, it is no less real, true, and trustworthy. As God reveals himself, so he truly is. His revealed attributes truly reveal his nature.”[1]

So it is with our knowledge of God: we have true knowledge of God from Scripture, even though we do not have exhaustive knowledge.

It is true to say that God is love (1 John 4:8), that God is light (1 John 1:5), that God is spirit (John 4:24), that God is righteous (Rom. 3:26), and so forth. To say this does not imply exhaustive knowledge about God or about his love or his righteousness or any other attribute.

**Even more significantly, it is God himself that we know, not simply facts about him or actions that he does**, a point that we have already touched on at the beginning of today's lesson. **We can also know God personally, relationally. Jeremiah indicates that a person's boast should be that a man "understand and knows me." (Jeremiah 9:24).** This is not mere knowing facts or Scriptures but knowing him as a person. John 17:3- And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Epitomizing text that shows God's knowability and incomprehensibility.

Ephesians 3. 18-19: Paul prays that we "may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

God cannot be fully known. However, he can be truly known. But not being able to know God as fully as he knows himself does not mean we can't know him at all, or that all our knowledge of God is false. Instead, we must understand that, although our knowledge of God is limited, it's still true, trustworthy, adequate, and good knowledge.

***Having wrestled through the knowability and incomprehensibility of God- we can now approach the attributes with a disposition of humility- with a holy tension. Our theology is simultaneously a confident expression of faith and trust in what God has given us in the Scripture, and at the same there is humble admission of ignorance, because of God's incomprehensibility.***

**In the Scripture God has revealed to us his personal qualities. Theologians often use the word attributes to describe God's personal qualities.**

**We need some way to decide which aspect of God's personal qualities-** his character **to discuss first**, which aspect to discuss second, and so forth. In other words, we need some way to categorize the attributes of God. This question is not as unimportant as it may seem. There is the possibility that we would adopt a misleading order of attributes or that we would emphasize some attributes so much that others would not be presented properly.

Several different methods of classifying God's attributes have been used. In this class we have adopted the most commonly used classification: **the incommunicable attributes of God (that is, those attributes that God does not share or "communicate" to others), and the communicable attributes of God (those that God shares or "communicates" with us).**

Some have referred to this division under the headings of essential attributes (for they belong to his incommunicable essence) and relational attributes (they express something of his relationship with human beings).

**The primary purpose of these two categories in Church History has been to distinguish between the bible's teaching on God's transcendence, as his distinction from and elevation above the world, and God's immanence, as his distinction with and presence in the world.**

Although the bible does not present these two categories of God's attributes as standing rigidly against each other in total separation, it is important to affirm "that God possesses all of his incommunicable attributes in an absolute way and to an infinite and therefore incommunicable degree."

**One of the most notable expressions of this division is found in the historic Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) as it answers the ancient question, "What is God?". The answer contains a list of God's personal attributes found in the Bible: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."**

**After defining God as "a Spirit," i.e., not having a physical body like humans, God's being is described as infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. These represent the kinds of attributes of God that are**

***incommunicable- that only God can possess. God's infinity means his being is not confined by any limits. God's eternity means he has no beginning and no end, no before or after. God has existed for all eternity, but we have not. And God's immutability means it is not possible for God to change- that God does not change but we do.***

***Then, there are the attributes of God that we share more fully, these are called God's communicable attributes; the Westminster Shorter Catechism goes on to mention his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Other examples of communicable attributes are love (God is love and we are able to love as well), knowledge (God has knowledge and we are able to have knowledge as well), mercy (God is merciful and we are able to be merciful, too), or justice (God is just and we, too, are able to be just).***

***This classification of God's attributes into two major categories is largely intuitive, and most people have an initial sense of which specific attributes should be called incommunicable and which should be called communicable. It makes sense to say that God's love is communicable, but his omnipresence is not. It can be helpful to think of God's incommunicable attributes in a separate category from God's communicable attributes. But we must make this division with great care and wisdom, or we'll may start thinking of God in an unbiblical way. We must be careful in how we describe God's attributes and how we describe the way in which we share any of God's attributes.***

***This is because there is a sense in which we, as limited, created beings, don't have the capacity to understand or share fully any of the attributes (including the communicable attributes) of an unlimited, uncreated, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God.***

***Take for instance, holiness, righteousness, and goodness. God is holy, righteous, and good in an absolute sense, whereas we can be holy, righteous, and good only within the limits of our finite nature. However much we may manifest these qualities, we can never hope to possess them in the way that God does. Compared with him, "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment," as the prophet Isaiah said, and no human achievement in this area can take the place of God's gracious gift of his righteousness to us (Isa. 64:6).***

***Also- when we come to speak about the character of God, we realize that we cannot say everything the Bible teaches us about God's character all at once. We cannot comprehend all of his attributes and their interrelatedness all at once. We don't have the capacity. Therefore, studying God's character by means of individual attributes is in some ways unavoidable and the product of our inherent limitations.***

***Thankfully, God in the Scriptures leads the way in this pattern.***

***One example of this is God's use of individual names in conveying truth regarding what he is like. If we had time we could engage in a study of the various names of God. They are given, piecemeal, by God Himself- with the assurance that they contain true revelation concerning His nature and character.***

***Or consider that God employs finite descriptions drawn from the created order to convey truth regarding who he is. Again, they are given, piecemeal, by God Himself with the assurance that they contain true revelation concerning His nature and character.***

***In disclosing to us some real aspect of his character the Bible likens God to:***

***A lion (Isaiah 31:4)***

***An eagle (Deuteronomy 32:11)***

***A lamb (Isaiah 53:7)***

A hen (Matthew 23:37)

The sun (Psalm 84:11)

The morning star (Revelation 22:15)

A light (Psalm 27:1)

A consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29)

A rock (Deuteronomy 32:4)

A tower (Proverbs 18:10)

A hiding place (Psalm 119:114)

A bridegroom (Isaiah 61:10)

A father (Deuteronomy 32:6)

A shepherd (Psalm 23:1)

A physician (Exodus 15:26)

***God is not any one of these physical things or people, rather he acknowledges a limited, qualified similarity to each of these things. This is known as anthropomorphic language or “language that speaks of God in terms relatable to human experience.” He uses such descriptions as God accommodates himself to our finite human existence that we might know him. It is good for us to understand God’s being in all these ways. So we can and should draw strong and true similarities from these comparisons and analogies God has revealed to us- in as far as the Bible permits.***

***But, in doing so, we must realize that all biblical analogies, descriptions, and words ultimately fall short, because it’s not possible to use analogies and words drawn from God’s finite creation to fully reveal the infinite, uncreated God.***

***For example, it is good for you to see God as a father, but not exactly the way you think of your earthly father. God is infinitely greater than that. He is the Father who is the standard for all fatherhood (Eph. 3:14-15). Likewise, it is good for you to see God as a judge, but God is more than that.***

***When you see in Scripture that God is joyful, you should know that God’s joy is beyond the realm of human joy. And when you read in the Bible that God is angry, you should not think of God’s anger being exactly the same as human anger because it’s not. And when we read in Scripture that God repents or changes his mind, we should not think of God changing his mind like we would change our mind .***

It is worth mentioning, that these names and descriptions and human languages used to convey truth are not the product of God simply making use of what he has on hand in the created order, without prior thought or intention.

These realities, the names, these likenesses, human language is something that is foreordained, and brought into being, in part, as vehicles to showcase something of God’s glory, especially as he yokes these natural phenomena to the Scripture, God’s special revelation concerning himself.



***Moving toward a more traditional conception of God's attributes, we are justified in using categories like invisible and incorporeal (without a body). Take for instance the Ten Commandments, which makes it clear that visible things are not to be worshiped, because they are not—and cannot be—God (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 5:8). The substance of the doctrine of divine invisibility and incorporeality is there, even though there is no word used to describe it.***

***In the New Testament, a key text is 1 Timothy 1:17, where God is described as “immortal” and “invisible.” Of the two terms, the second is more frequent, occurring as it does in Romans 1:20, Colossians 1:15–16, and Hebrews 11:27 also.***

***God's immutable unchanging nature is expressed more indirectly, but it is present nonetheless, in the words of Hebrews 6:17-18***

***When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.***

***God's omnipotence is also a biblical theme that recurs from one end of the Bible to the other. There are at least six occurrences of the word “Almighty” in Genesis and nine in the book of Revelation, but it is most frequently found in Job, where it appears no fewer than thirty-one times.***

***Not to mention all the places we God is called holy, righteous, good, love, light, merciful etc.***

***Therefore- it is evident that the Bible leads the way in our approach to a knowledge of God through attributes.***

***Moreover- the whole work of theologizing, thinking through the attributes of God, will make us better thinkers, more circumspect and careful Bible readers. As these large categories can get fleshed in our thinking, as we continue to come to the Scripture, we find that our Bible reading is more robust. Words used to describe God are suddenly seen in their proper proportion. Knowing the attributes can serve as a shorthand of sorts, allowing us to capture large sweeping truths about God in an economy of words.***

***As we begin to direct our focus on individual attributes of God, there is an important caveat- although we will focus on one attribute at a time, they should not be seen as completely separate, compartmental aspects of God's being, but as integrated and complementary views of the one perfectly unified God.***

***Therefore- communicable attributes such as God holiness, justice, goodness should be seen in light of God's incommunicable attributes- like God's infinity, eternity, immutability.***

***That's the idea behind the wording of the Westminster Shorter Catechism- “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”***

***Moreover, communicable attribute should not be separated from other communicable attributes as is they have no bearing on one another. The communicable attributes qualify and inform each other. God love for instance, is a holy and good and just and wise love. It is a love that doesn't compromise God's truth, and so on. God's attributes of love, mercy, justice, wisdom, and power, etc. are not parts of him that can somehow be separated from each other. It's not possible to separate God's mercy from his justice or any other of his attributes.***

***It is here that we must wrestle with the doctrine of God's simplicity- which is considered an incommunicable attribute of God in its own right. To understand this doctrine is essential to understanding all the other attributes.***

## ***The Simplicity of God***

*At first glance, this description almost has a derogatory connotation to it.*

*How is God simple?*

*God is “simple” in the sense in which the word is used in chemistry—his nature is not compounded or composed of different elements.*

*Wayne Grudem defines it this way: “God is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times.”*

*An analogy with water may help us to understand what this means and why it matters. Water is a compound substance made up of hydrogen and oxygen, and it can be separated into those elements. God, however, is not a compound. If he were, he could not be the ultimate being. His parts would all be logically prior to him.*

Human beings, on the other hand, are made of parts and dependent on those parts. Humans are part material (body), and part non-material (soul). In our physical make-up we are primarily composed of oxygen, hydrogen, carbon, and nitrogen with a healthy dose of other element thrown in. We are composed of parts that fundamentally precede us. We are composite.

But God’s nature is not composite. It is unitary.

As we have just mentioned, divine simplicity also means that God’s attributes are interrelated. Because of our limitations, it is helpful for us to concentrate on different aspects of his being, one attribute at a time, and fail to appreciate their interrelatedness.

The take home point is that **all of God’s attributes are in harmony with each other- never to be pitted against one another,**

Some refer to God’s simplicity as the unity of God- and therefore a cohesive attribute that helps bring all of God’s attributes together.

*This doctrine also teaches us that that no one attribute should be singled out as more important than another.* For instance, it is true that “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and it is also true that “God is love.” (1 John 4:8). But we should never say that God is partly light and partly love. Nor should we suggest that God is more love than light, or more light than love.

Instead, God’s whole being includes all of his attributes. That means God is entirely loving, entirely merciful, entirely just, and so on. Every attribute of God is completely true and every attribute is understood in tension with every other attribute of God. So when the Bible tells us that “God is love” (1 John 4:8)- we must view his love in the context of his other attributes. Therefore we can affirm that God’s love is a merciful love, a just love, a wise love, and a powerful love, etc. Likewise, God’s justice is a loving justice, a merciful justice, a wise justice, and a powerful justice, etc.

The doctrine of simplicity teaches us that each divine attribute is integral and essential to God’s nature.

And because God reveals himself as one being (Deuteronomy 6:4- “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one), his attributes **must not** be understood as being parts of his nature. Instead, God’s attributes should be seen as inseparable from his nature.

And if it were possible to separate any attribute of God from him, **and it’s not**, he would no longer be the God of the Bible.

The doctrine of Divine Simplicity also teaches us that- although there is much that we do not know about God- we can be certain that whatever is hidden from our eyes **is consistent** with what has been revealed to us. There isn't some secret essence that is somehow entirely different from His revealed attributes. His attributes are what he, the Supreme Spirit, really is. They are not a façade.

It is a doctrine largely implied in the Scripture; however- it inevitably flows from a careful exegesis of certain texts. Take for instance the truth found in 1 John 4.8 - "God is love". The text does not tell us that God is part love, rather that he is love.

However, God is not only love. The same epistle affirms 1 John 1.5- "God is light"- "light" being God's moral purity. His character is permeated by it, his moral purity characterizing every attribute.

And there are many other attributes contained in God's uncompounded nature. Therefore, it would be wrong, to assert- based on these passages- that somehow God is only love or only light.

Moreover, it would be very wrong to say that *love is God* or *light is God*.

We will likely see this doctrine surface again as we deal with the Trinity and the person of Christ.

Since God's **divine nature is not compounded** but simple, and cannot be compounded with anything outside of Himself, it drives to see Christ as one divine person with two distinct, separate, uncompounded natures, a fully divine nature and a fully human nature, neither of which compromises the fullness and integrity of the other.

And although God is Trinity, three distinct persons, the doctrine of simplicity drives us to affirm that the Father, Son and Spirit, are the one and only Supreme Being- God is One- each distinct person is fully God, fully divine- each person having the same divine authority, possessing the same divine attributes, having the one and the same divine nature or essence, exercising one will.

Some words of caution may be in order here- and on this point I prefer to let Charles Hodge speak-

"In attempting to explain the relation in which the attributes of God stand to his essence and to each other, there are two extremes to be avoided. First, we must not represent God as a composite being, composed of different elements; and secondly, we must not confound the attributes, making them mean all the same thing, which is equivalent to denying them all together."

Evidently, some have had the tendency to imply that what we call God's "attributes" are really just different names for the same thing- to this Greg Nichols asserts that although "God's nature is unitary, he is not unvarying. Love is not omniscience. Eternity is not faithfulness. They are not distinct in name only. Each concept defines something essential about God, yet they are not "parts" of God that may be disassembled. Yet, each defines a distinct quality or characteristic of God."

Consider the text- Jacob I have loved, but Esau I hated." In his response to sin in this text, God is revealing something of what He is essentially. In this situation, can we assert that love and hate are simply different names for the same reality?

Although we affirm the simplicity of God- this doesn't minimize that Scripture frequently emphasizes the vast multiplicity of God's thoughts, his works, his judgments and ways (Rom. 11:36). When we consider God's revelation in creation, we cannot help being amazed at the vast number of objects and relationships (indeed, the "all things" of Rom. 8:28) that God has coordinated to work together under his direction. That all these work as one reflects God's simplicity; but that simplicity coordinates a vast complexity.

All of this leads us back to the doctrine of incomprehensibility- we simply cannot fathom the depths of God's nature. The doctrine of simplicity is a fence around the mystery, a fence that we can see but that we cannot peer over.

### ***God's Self-Existence or Independence***

This attribute may be defined as follows: God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, rather, we are entirely dependent upon God.

Or stated another way- God is determined by nothing, and everything else is determined by him. He needs nothing outside of himself.

This attribute of God is sometimes called his aseity (from the Latin words *a se*, which mean "from himself").

Scripture in several places teaches that God does not need any part of creation in order to exist. God is absolutely independent and self-sufficient.

Paul proclaims to the men of Athens, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24–25).

The implication is that God does not need anything from mankind.

"Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine." (Job 41:11)

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

Psalms 50:10-12: For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.

People sometimes hold to this mistaken notion that God created human beings because he was lonely and needed fellowship with other persons or that he needed worshipers. If this were true, it would undermine God's utter independence and self-existence. It would mean that God would need to create people in order to experience completeness, satisfaction and fulfillment in his personal existence.

However, we should not forget that God has existed as Trinity from all eternity. In God's intra-trinitarian life there is and always has been, and always will be a reciprocation of glory, love, and divine fellowship.

We get hints of this in Christ's high-priestly prayer.

In John 17:5, Jesus prays, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made." Here is an indication that there was a sharing of glory between the Father and the Son before creation. Then in John 17:24, Jesus speaks to the Father of "my glory which you have given me in your love for me before the foundation of the world."

With regard to God's existence, this doctrine also reminds us that only God was never created and never came into being. He always was. He is uncreated.

This is seen from the fact that all things that exist were made by him ("For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" [Rev. 4:11]).

Moses tells us that God existed before there was any creation: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2).

How should this make us feel? It should breed humility. Again, this doctrine rips us from the center of the universe, humbles us, teaches us that we are non-essential. Sometimes, we try to justify our existence before God based on something within us, some good thing, some attribute, some gift- God must needs me on some level. Well, that is not biblical.

Don't misunderstand me. We are important. We glorify him, he rejoices over us, he works in and through us for His kingdom purposes. But none of his purposes rest upon any one individual save one. We are dispensable-

Matthew 3.9- And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. God can raise up rocks to accomplish his purposes.

Good men have been taken from this world in their prime, and evil men have been shown extreme long-suffering and this is perplexing. The mystery lies with God. But one thing is clear, his kingdom purposes do not ride on any one man or woman, save one- the God-man Jesus Christ.

Understanding aseity multiplies our appreciation of God's grace and goodness toward us. He needs nothing, he is not obliged to any. But he is lavish in his dealings with mankind, and especially his church.

All that flows from himself toward his creatures is a gift of grace. We are not owed anything. He is not obligated to the created thing. Romans 11.36-For from him and through him and to him are all things.

This doctrine teaches us that God's being is also something totally unique. It is not just that God does not need the creation for anything; God cannot need the creation for anything. The difference between the creature and the Creator is a vast and qualitative- for God exists in a fundamentally different way than his creation.

The difference between God's being and ours is more than the difference between the sun and a candle, more than the difference between the ocean and a raindrop, more that the difference between the glacier and a snowflake. God's being is qualitatively different from ours. No limitations or imperfections in creation should be projected on to our thought of God. He is the Creator; all else is creaturely. All else can pass away in a moment; God ***necessarily*** exists forever.

We have derived life. God has life-in-himself. John 5.26- For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

The self-existence of God is implied in the name Yahweh- "I am" Exodus 3.14.

The balancing consideration with respect to this doctrine is the fact that we and the rest of creation do in fact glorify God and we do bring him joy. This must be stated in order to guard against any idea that God's independence makes us *meaningless*. That simply is not the case.

We are in fact very meaningful because God has created us and he has sovereignly determined that we would be meaningful to him. To be significant to God is to be significant in the most ultimate sense. There is no greater personal significance to be imagined.

God speaks of his sons and daughters from the ends of the earth as "every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (Isa. 43:7). Although God did not have to create us, he chose to do so in a totally free choice. He decided that he would create us to glorify him.

It is also true that we are able to bring real joy and delight to God. It is one of the most amazing facts in Scripture that God actually delights in his people and rejoices over them. Zephaniah prophesies that the Lord "will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival" (Zeph. 3:17-18; cf. Is. 62:3-5).

### ***The Immutability of God- God's Unchanging Being***

God's 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. He remains the same eternally- Human beings, on the other hand, as well as the creation around us, are realities subject to flux- undergoing constant change- from forces within them and outside them. Think of our ever-varying moods, think of the seasons. Think of North Carolina weather.

By virtue of this attribute- God is exalted above all becoming, he does not rise or fall in rank, he does not undergo growth or decay in His being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same.

Reason teaches us that change is not possible in God, since a change is either for better or for worse. But God is absolute Perfection, improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible.

Psalms 102:25-27: Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end

Malachi 3:6-“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

James 1:17- “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

Therefore- God does not change. There is no change in His Being, His attributes, His purpose, His motives of action, or His promises.

But there is some necessary nuance involved in this attribute.

How do we understand passages where the Bible speaks of God changing?

There are several examples when God seemingly changes in Scripture. In one instance, he was sorry about making man (Genesis 6:6). In another passage, he changed his mind about destroying Israel (Exodus 32:9-14). In a famous passage, he did not to destroy Nineveh after saying he would judge the city (Jonah 3:4-10).

When we have questions about a text, it is probably best to address each Scripture on a case-by-case basis, rather than making sweeping pronouncements. But we cannot do that this morning.

But I will offer up some general and necessary principles and a little wisdom to bear in mind regarding this doctrine.

Always be sensitive to the fact that God often employs anthropomorphic (human action) and anthropopathic (human emotion) types of language, where God accommodates himself to our human experience, and does so by using language that conveys human action or emotion. He may be speaking in a way that we can best process and understand.

I think we must listen carefully to the Scriptures. We must all affirm that divine immutability is taught in several passages. We must maintain that God is unchanging in his essence, knowledge, and will; in other words that God's essence and attributes do not change. His understanding cannot grow or diminish. His eternal purposes will always stand and can never be thwarted.

At the same time, we must allow that God participates in life with his creatures. Greg Nichols writes- “God is immutable. Nevertheless, he lives, acts, interacts, reacts, responds, and feels. He judges conditionally. He answers prayer. His covenants show progression”.

The practical applications of this doctrine are many, but perhaps the most precious center on his *Immutability as our redeemer*.

It assures us that he will never turn against us. It encourages us confidently to expect eternal blessings. It certifies that he will always do us good and preserve us.

*God has promised- "Never will I leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13.5*

### ***The Impassibility of God***

The 1689, in its opening paragraph of chapter 2, Of God and the Holy Trinity, affirms that God is without body, parts, or *passions*.

Here, the confession tells us that God is without passions- hence God is *impassible*. But what does this mean?

Thomas Weinandy defines impassibility this way, God "does not undergo successive and fluctuating emotional states; nor can the created order alter him in such a way so as to cause him to suffer any modification or loss."

As you can see, this doctrine is a naturally corollary to God's immutability.

A little background may be in order to help us better grasp this doctrine. Up until the nineteenth century, the word "passions" was a word only to be applied to the creature, not the Creator. It was a word that had negative connotations, referring to someone or something that was vulnerable to change, subject to the emotional power of others.

*In this one word- "passions"- we then see the difference between the Christian God and say, the gods of Greek mythology, gods susceptible to emotional fluctuation, overcome by a variation in mood, gods changed or manipulated by the will of another. One minute they are given to lust and the next fly off the handle in a fit of rage.*

More recently, there was resurgence in liberal theology that sought to present God as passible- it began as a reaction to the harsh conditions surrounding the Industrial Revolution and the suffering and death that characterized the First World War, and really gained traction following the devastation that surrounded the Second World War.

The idea put forward by some of these liberal theologians was that a God who cannot suffer like humans do is of little value to a humanity that is suffering.

Therefore- these theologians opted to present God, *in his divine nature*, as one who **shares our pain** rather than **the God who compassionately meets us in our suffering** and delivers us from it in Christ. Therefore, the traditional, reformed doctrine of God's impassibility- that God *in His divine nature* is unable to suffer- came under scrutiny.

The liberal theologians concern regarding impassibility was that it portrays God as robotic and remote in his relationship with us. But the intent of the doctrine is not to present God as emotionally cold, distant, or indifferent to the human predicament. Impassibility does not and should not cast doubt on whether God, in His essence, cares about humanity, and his people- or whether or not he understands their concerns.

The doctrine seeks to affirm something about who God is in his divine nature- who God is ontologically- who he is in his essence and nature. In His divine nature, God has made everything and retains control over everything, including his rebellious creatures. None of them can act in a way that goes against His sovereign will- **he cannot be harmed or diminished by them in His divine nature**. He is impassible. He cannot be weakened by a supposed enemy attack, somehow being compromised or made to veer from his resolute purposes.

God in his divine essence is Spirit, without body, how can anyone or anything get a hold of Him? He is not vulnerable to bodily suffering in that way. Being without body, he is not subject to bodily appetites- we, however, are greatly driven and affected by our instinctive and necessary drives to preserve life. God, being without passions and without a human body in his essence does not have human emotions or carnal affections- emotions and affections tainted by sin. God is impeccable and utterly divine in his affections and emotions.

What the doctrine teaches us is that God is not vulnerable- or the victim of outward circumstances. That is what it means for God to be impassible. The doctrine is seeking to affirm that God, by means of his divine nature, which can suffer no loss whatsoever, and is therefore peculiarly suited to help us in our suffering.

Perhaps a well-known analogy can be of some assistance. If you are ill and in bed and your doctor comes to visit, what do you want him to do? Do you want him to lie in a bed next to yours and tell you that he is suffering alongside you? Are you interested in hearing about all his aches and pains so that you will know that he understands how you feel? Or do you want a doctor that who is healthy, and because of that fully capable of treating you with the expectation that you will get better. That latter is precisely what God has done for us, not to “share” our pain in his divine nature, but to set us free from it, which he can only do if he is not subject to it himself.

Anytime we try to negate the idea that God suffers or say that God cannot suffer- we are forced to deal squarely with perhaps the most precious reality that intersects with our lives. That is the reality that Christ, the God-man, suffered and died for us.

1 Peter 3:18- For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh.

Moreover, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses (sufferings included), but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”- Hebrews 4:15-16

The Son of God, Jesus Christ- we resolutely affirm- knows what it is like to suffer. And because of what he endured, he is able to help us when we find ourselves in dire straits of all kinds. Impassibility does not negate this reality. Christians believe that in Jesus Christ, the impassible and immortal somehow suffered and died. ***The challenge is explaining this how such a this is possible.***

Perhaps the best answer is an one, one that is traditional, one that is Reformed. The Son of God, desirous of doing His Father’s will, chose to become a man so that in his humanity he could suffer and die for us.

In becoming a man, the second person of the Trinity suffered and died in his human nature. In other words, the Son of God was able to experience and undergo suffering and death by assuming a second nature that was capable and constituted in such a way that he could suffer and die in obedience to God and for our salvation. The incarnation was necessary precisely because the Son could not suffer and die as God. Again, this belies the essential doctrine of maintaining the two distinct natures of Jesus Christ- fully human and fully divine. This is essential for understanding this doctrine.

Since this attribute is closely bound to God’s Immutability, some of the same proof texts apply.

### ***The Infinity of God***

I like the way Berkof defines this attribute- “The infinity of God is that perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations. In ascribing infinity to God, we deny that there are or can be any limitations to the divine Being or attributes. It implies that He is in no way limited by the universe, by this time-space world, or confined to the universe.”



It is an attribute that is often applied to attributes of God's absolute perfection, eternity, and his immensity. We will address God's eternity and immensity separately.

As far as God's absolute perfection is concerned, perhaps the best way to conceive of it is by thinking about God's attributes. God's attributes, especially when we conceive of His communicable ones- have no defect or limitations- therefore, in this way, the infinity of God is also synonymous with the perfection of His divine being.

God's infinity is closely bound up with what we have termed God's incorporeality- that God has no body in his divine nature. If he had a body, he would be limited spatially, and therefore not infinite.

And as odd as it may sound- the traditional mathematic conception of infinity is somewhat different than the sense in which orthodox theology conceives of it- Denise may disagree, but our mathematical conception of infinity speaks of a succession of numbers stretching to infinity (1, 2, 3, 4 and so on)- or perhaps affirms that there is an infinite number of fractions between 2 distinct values, such as the number 1 and numbers 2. And although mathematical infinity affirms that something has no end, ***it brings with it connotations of having a beginning***. It is a one directional infinity. God's infinity as it were, as we shall see when we address the concept of eternity, has no starting point- no beginning and no end.

Job 11:7-9: "Can you fathom the deep things of God or discover the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea."

### ***God's Eternity***

Another incommunicable attribute of God is eternity. It could be conceived of as the Infinity of God in relation to time.

Here I really like Wayne Grudem's treatment of the attribute. God's eternity means "God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God see events in time and acts in time."

In this doctrine we affirm that God both transcends time and yet penetrates every moment of time.

It may be said that human beings gain some transcendence over time through their God-given memory, and through their ability to accept God's revelation of the future. But unlike God they are time-bound, and always will be. But time does not limit God. He is not time-bound. He is timeless in his own being, has no beginning, and will have no end.

God's own name, as revealed to Moses, conveys God's eternal nature when he declared "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:14).

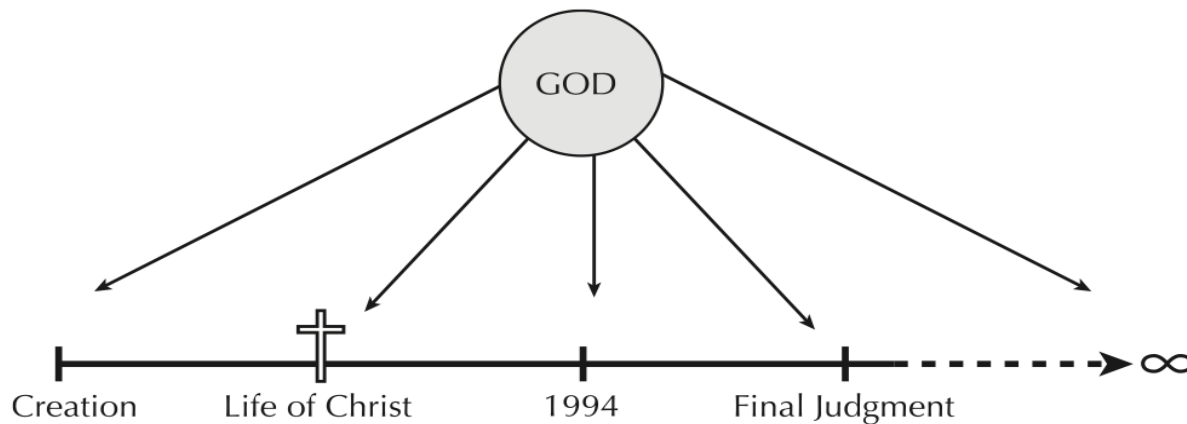
Jesus even ties his nature to the same name and thus declares himself to be eternal when he assumed the title of 'I am' in the midst of his opponents (John 8:58). "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Other verses also teach the eternity of God. Jones spoke at length about God's eternality last week in his treatment of Psalm 90. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Psalm 90:2)

"Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable." (Job 36:26)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

Although it's difficult to conceptualize, God sees all time equally vividly. God sees one day as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, God experiences time in a completely different way than humans. A snippet of time can last forever while a long period of time can be very short from God's perspective. *The reason is God stands outside of time.*



### THE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD TO TIME

*Figure 11.1*

***And yet, God sees events in time and acts in time. The Apostle Paul said, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.” (Galatians 4:4).***

Another example that implies God's eternal nature is the pattern of the prophets receiving God's promises at one point in history, and then God fulfilled those promises at a later moment in time.

This attribute is “incommunicable”: We will never experience timelessness. Even after many millennia in the new heavens and earth, we will still experience time's passage.

This is one of those attributes that accentuates our brevity and frailty- God is eternal. Humans are transitory. Our time on earth is short, our days are few and numbered. When compared with God's eternal being, human life is like a blade of grass that lasts for day. Our brevity, especially in view God's eternity, should cause us to number our days, so that we may present to him a heart of wisdom.

### ***God's Omnipresence and Immensity***

Grudem defines the attribute of omnipresence in this way: “God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.”

This attribute could be characterized by the Infinity of God with reference to space. Just as God is outside of time and not limited by it, God is also not limited in respect to space. He is omnipresent. God is everywhere present. He is not just in heaven or even just on earth – his presence fills creation while also being outside of creation. He is everywhere at once in the fullness of his being, in every square inch of the entire cosmos, and for every second of the temporal sequence of life.

Moreover, when we think of God's omnipresence, it should not be confused with “boundless extension”, ***as if God were spread out through the entire universe, one part being here and another there***, for God has no body and therefore no extension.

Several verses express God's omnipresence:

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." (Psalm 139:7-10)

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27)

"For 'In him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said.'" (Acts 17:28)

In Jeremiah, God rebukes the prophets who think their words or thoughts are hidden from God. He is everywhere and fills heaven and earth: "'Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?' says the Lord. 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:23-24).

The list goes on and on.

Although God is present everywhere, it is important to realize that he is not doing the same thing in every place.

In some places he is currently present in order to punish sin. Simultaneously, he is present in other places in order to bless and comfort encourage and instruct— therefore, he does not always act in the same way in every place.

When we speak of God's omnipresence, we often speak of God's "immensity" and as applied to God, they denote the same general idea, and can therefore be regarded as synonymous. Yet there is a point of difference that should be carefully noted.

"Immensity" points to the fact that God transcends all space and is not subject to its limitations, while "omnipresence" denotes that He nevertheless fills every part of space with His entire Being. ***Immensity therefore emphasizes the transcendence, and God's omnipresence draws attention to the immanence of God.***

In connection with God's immanence, his presence and nearness in reference to the created order, we must avoid the error of Pantheism- that the Being of God is somehow the sum of the created world- thereby identifying God with His creation. God's transcendence guards us against this gross error.

Moreover, this doctrine does not mean that we should fail to appreciate nuance within the Scriptures as we conceive of God's presence and God's special presence. He does not dwell on earth in the same way inhabits heaven, nor does His Spirit dwell with the unbelieving like it does within those who have Christ, nor is His presence in the gathered church the same as his presence in the workplace. These nuances can be multiplied and are best addressed on a case-by-case basis in order to bring us into a fuller and more proportionate understanding of the doctrine.

### ***The Omnipotence of God-***

I prefer to define this attribute by putting forth two Scriptural ideas. 1. God can do anything that he pleases. And nothing is too hard for God.

Psalm 115.3 "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases."

Genesis 18.14- "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

Job 42.2 “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

Daniel 4.35- “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”

Psalms 33.9- “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”

Mark 10.27- “Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

It is important to note God’s infinite power is being constantly exerted over every area of the universe, holding everything together, from the smallest atom to the largest planet and bringing about every event. God can do anything and everything he wills to do, merely by willing it, since nothing can restrain him, and nothing is too hard for him.

As we intersect with this truth in the Scripture, it is often presented in a rather straightforward fashion. It is not presented as doctrine embroiled in theological controversy or attended by pestering questions. It is an extremely encouraging doctrine.

But anytime we assert God can do all things, it is bound to be met by clever objections within the human mind, which may sometimes distract us from what the Bible is actually trying to tell us in the passage.

Most of these pestering objections center wrestling through things God cannot do. *While affirming* “Our God is in the heavens; *he does all that he pleases*”- we can venture to say that there are things **God cannot do** simply because they are things **that God will not do**.

I borrow these categories from John Frame and will just mention them without much elaboration.

1. God cannot perform logically contradictory actions, such as both ultimately saving and condemning the same individual, or making a round square, and the like. Being logical is his nature and his pleasure.

And here we must be careful. God does do things that defy normal conventions and patterns. For instance, he raises the dead to life, he supplies miraculous strength in our utter weakness, as well as other varied and extraordinary miracles. But such appear defy logic or seem like mutually exclusive realities only when seen from our finite human perspective. But from God’s ultimate and true perspective, they are not at all inconsistent or illogical. Let Scripture be your guide as to what actions are consistent with God’s power and purpose.

2. God cannot perform immoral actions, like lying or stealing, or coveting or breaking His promises. Number 23:19- God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? In speaking of his inability here, we are really talking about something wholly admirable and not some sort of perceived deficit. Not every inability is a lack of power. Imagine a basketball player that never misses a shot. To say that he possesses the to miss a shot may sound like a deficit of sorts, until you examine what is actually being affirmed.

3. God cannot perform actions denying his own nature as God, such as making another God equal to himself, or abandoning anyone of His divine attributes.

4. God cannot change his eternal plan or decree.

5. God cannot perform actions appropriate only to finite creatures. For instance- taking medicine for a cough or rash. Again- a careful qualifier is that such limitation pertains only to God in his divine nature, not to Christ’s incarnate nature.

6. Finally, he cannot make a stone so large that he cannot lift it. His power is an infinite power; therefore, it cannot be outstripped. He cannot relinquish any of his attributes, including his infinite power, or else he would cease to be God. To make such an object would involve God somehow doing this very thing, which is impossible. Therefore, as it pertains to God, this is illogical proposition.

Another area that causes us to have hang ups as we deal with this attribute is the ever-present issue of affirming both God's preceptive will (a state of affairs and course of conduct that God deems as desirable) and decretive will (His eternal purpose, by which he foreordains everything that comes to pass).

We cannot explore this in detail right now. I can only define the problem and tell you the answer- without showing any of the work.

Consider the clear Scriptural affirmation that the Lord is not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance" – 2 Peter 3:9. Here we have the affirmation that God is not willing for any to perish. This is his preceptive will. But clearly not all men reach repentance. Does this represent a denigration or limit to his power? The answer is no.

It is here that we must be supremely Scriptural, affirming what the Bible affirms about God's will in each peculiar instance, with each particular Scripture that is in question, while not losing sight of God's ultimate will of decree. There is mystery involved as well. But as far the doctrine of omnipotence is concerned, it remains intact and true.

***Again, the controversies that can sometimes crop up during a discussion of this attribute may actually serve to distract us from the actual purposes of God in revealing his power to his people. God does not give us the doctrine as fodder for engaging in endless philosophical speculation on what he cannot do. Rather God wants to edify his people with clear affirmations of His omnipotence.***

The instruction, encouragement, exhortation and application of this truth are many. One thing I would mention is that it gives us strong incentive to pray, not with pessimism, not coldly or apathetically, but with optimism and boldness. Our requests cannot outstrip the power and potential of our omnipotent God. He can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

### ***The Omniscience of God***

This can be defined as God's supreme capacity to comprehend and perceive, by which He knows all things divine, possible, actual, and historical; and by which He has supreme capability to use what he knows to devise and accomplish his plans. His unlimited knowledge includes knowing everything about everything, past, present, and future, and it includes not just knowing all facts and ideas but knowing them from every possible perspective.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Psalms 139: 4-6: "Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."

Psalms 147:5- "Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure."

Romans 16:27- "to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."

Isaiah 40:28- "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable."

John 21:17- "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

Hebrews 4:13- "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

This is just scratching the surface in terms of the biblical data.

The omniscience of God provides great comfort in the realization that God ever watches over us, never forgets us, always keeps his sworn promises to us, The Holy Spirit prays for us even when we do not know what to pray. The Omniscience of God compels us to seek God for guidance and counsel-

### ***God's Communicable Attributes***

As God's image bearers, we do have the capacity to share, in a limited way, God's communicable attributes. In fact, some of the attributes we have covered already, categorized as incommunicable, are not entirely unrelated to our limited human experience.

For instance, we may not be omniscient, but we do have some knowledge, and that knowledge can be true. We are not omnipotent, but we do have some power, especially as we seek to do God's will through Christ who strengthens us. As divine image-bearers, we can reflect these communicable attributes of God. But we must always remember there is a sense in which even these attributes are uniquely peculiar to God in an absolute way that cannot be shared by us.

Moreover, as humans, we can lose our attributes of wisdom, power, and holiness and still be human. But this is not possible for God.

[because the bible describes every attribute of God as also a description of God's personal essence and being. This is why God's attributes must not be understood as mere characteristics added to God or impersonal independent forces added together to make God, but as reflections of his solitary, unified being and person. We can think of these communicable realities as fundamentally distinct from God, but the reality is that they find their origin in God's fundamental essence, that God epitomizes them, and part of our human existence by virtue of God's reality breaking in on us.

Therefore-God is not only wise, He is wisdom. God's power is not only a force but the power of a real person exerting his will. God is not only holy, He is holiness. In the Bible, Holy is an idea that is almost synonymous with God himself. God is not only just, He is justice. God is not only good, He is goodness. And God is not only truthful, He is truth.

So, when you obey Jesus' command to seek first God's righteousness this means you are to seek first *God himself in Christ who is righteousness.*

Remember also that the communicable attributes cannot be entirely separated from other communicable attributes- but rather expand and enlarge upon their true nature. *We can summarize this complex integration of God's attributes by saying that all of God's divine attributes have divine attributes.*

If we are to borrow from the Westminster Shorter Catechism list of communicable attributes, practically speaking this means:

God's wisdom is a powerful wisdom, a holy wisdom, a just wisdom, a good wisdom, and a truthful wisdom.

God's power is a wise power, a holy power, a just power, a good power, and a truthful power.

God's holiness is a wise holiness, a powerful holiness, a just holiness, a good holiness, and truthful holiness.

God's justice is a wise justice, a powerful justice, a holy justice, a good justice, and a truthful justice.

God's goodness is a wise goodness, a powerful goodness, a holy goodness, a just goodness, and a truthful goodness.

And this is not an exhaustive summary of the communicable attributes. In the following treatment of the communicable attributes, I lean heavily on Grudem, especially in his organization of the material.

### ***Spirituality***

*God isn't made of matter, has no parts or dimensions, cannot be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence. He doesn't have a physical body, nor is he merely energy, thought, or some other element of creation. God is spirit. John 4.24*

This attribute is implied in the second commandment (Ex. 20:4) which forbids us to worship or serve "any graven image" or "any likeness of anything" in heaven or earth. This is a reminder that God's being is different from everything that he has created. To think of God in terms of anything else in the created universe is to misrepresent him, to limit him, to think of him as less than he really is.

While we must say that God has made all creation so that each part of it reflects something of his own character, we must not picture God as if he were of the same substance as the created thing- this is error and dishonors who he is.

It might appear that God's spirituality would be better classified as an "incommunicable" attribute since God's being is so different from ours. But there are good reason to categorize it as communicable. God has given us spirits in which we worship him (John 4:24), in which we are united with the Lord's spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), with which the Holy Spirit joins to bear witness to our adoption in God's family (Rom. 8:16), and in which we pass into the Lord's presence when we die (Heb. 12:23).

Therefore, there is clearly some communication from God to us of a spiritual nature that is something like his own nature, though certainly not in all respects. For this reason, it also seems appropriate to think of God's spirituality as a communicable attribute.

### ***Invisibility***

*This attribute affirms that God's total essence, all of his spiritual being, will never be seen by us, yet God still shows himself to us through visible, created things.*

Many passages speak of God's invisibility:

"No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18).

"Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God" (John 6:46).

"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17).

"-who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16).

These passages were all written after events where people saw some outward manifestation of God. For example, in Exodus we read, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

Yet there is a tension, careful qualifier in the same chapter, as God tells Moses, “You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20).

Moreover, God caused his glory to pass by Moses while he hid Moses in a cleft of the rock, and then God let Moses see his back after he had passed by, but said, “my face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:21–23).

This passage and others like it in the Old Testament indicate that there was a sense in which God could not be seen at all, but that there was also some outward form or manifestation of God which at least in part was able to be seen by man.

The Old Testament also records a number of theophanies. A theophany is “an appearance of God.” In these theophanies God took on various visible forms to show himself to people. God appeared to Abraham (Gen. 18:1–33), Jacob (Gen. 32:28–30), the people of Israel (as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night: Ex. 13:21–22), the elders of Israel (Ex. 24:9–11), Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:21–22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1), and others.

A much greater visible manifestation of God than these Old Testament theophanies was found in the person of Jesus Christ himself. He could say, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). And John contrasts the fact that no one has ever seen God with the fact that God’s only Son has made him known to us: “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18 NIV). Thus, in the person of Jesus we have a unique visible manifestation of God in the New Testament that was not available to believers who saw theophanies in the Old Testament.

It is right, therefore, to say that although God’s total essence will never be able to be seen by us, nevertheless, God still shows something of himself to us through visible, created things, and especially in the person of Christ.

But how will we see God in heaven? We will never be able to see or know all of God, for “his greatness is unsearchable” (Ps. 145:3; cf. John 6:46; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 1 John 4:12). And we will not be able to see—at least with our physical eyes—the entire spiritual being of God.

Nevertheless, Scripture says that we will see God himself. Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). Perhaps the nature of this “seeing” will not be known to us until we reach heaven.

Although what we see will not be an exhaustive vision of God, it will be a completely true, clear, and real vision of God. We shall see “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12) and “we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

In the heavenly city “his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face” (Rev. 22:3–4).

“We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

This vision of God, the beatific vision, whatever it is, will give us full delight and joy for all eternity.

## **Wisdom**

God’s wisdom means that God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals. This definition goes beyond the idea of God knowing all things and specifies that God’s decisions about what he will do are always wise decisions—that is, they always will bring about the best results (from God’s ultimate perspective), and they will bring about those results through the best possible means.

Scripture affirms God’s wisdom in general in several places.

He is called “the only wise God” (Rom. 16:27).



Job says that God “is wise in heart” (Job 9:4), and “with him are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding” (Job 12:13).

God’s wisdom is seen specifically in creation. The psalmist exclaims, “O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures” (Ps. 104:24).

As God created the universe, it was perfectly suited to bring him glory, both in its day-by-day processes and in the goals for which he created it. Even now, while we still see the effects of sin and the curse on the natural world, we should be amazed at how harmonious and intricate God’s creation is.

God’s wisdom is also shown in our individual lives. “We know that in everything God works for good for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Here Paul affirms that God does work wisely in all the things that come into our lives, and that through all these things he advances us toward the goal of conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

Every day of our lives, we may quiet our discouragement with the comfort that comes from the knowledge of God’s infinite wisdom. If we are his children, we can know that he is working wisely in our lives to bring us into greater conformity to the image of Christ.

God’s wisdom is, of course, in part communicable to us.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him” (James 1:5).

This wisdom, or skill in living a life pleasing to God, comes primarily from reading and obeying his Word: “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7; cf. Deut. 4:6–8).

Yet we must also remember that God’s wisdom is not entirely communicable; we can never fully share God’s wisdom (Rom. 11:33). In practical terms, this means that there will frequently be times in this life when we will not be able to understand why God allowed something to happen. Then we have simply to trust him and go on obeying his wise commands for our lives: “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19; cf. Deut. 29:29; Prov. 3:5–6).

God is infinitely wise and we are not, and it pleases him when we have faith to trust his wisdom even when we do not understand what he is doing.

### ***Truthfulness (and Faithfulness)***

*God’s truthfulness means that the God of the Bible is the true God, and that all his knowledge and words are both true and the final standard of truth.*

*Moreover, God is reliable and faithful in his words. He always does what he promises to do and will never prove unfaithful to his promises. Thus, he is “a God of faithfulness” (Deuteronomy 32:4).*

Hebrews 6:17-18: So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

The truthfulness of God is also communicable in that we can in part imitate it by striving to have true knowledge about God and about his world. Growth in knowledge is part of the process of becoming more like

God. Paul tells us that we have put on the “new nature,” which, he says, “is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10).

In a society that is exceedingly careless with the truthfulness of spoken words, we as God’s children are to imitate our Creator and take great care to be sure that our words are always truthful. “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature” (Col. 3:9–10).

Like God, we should love truth and hate falsehood. The commandment not to bear false witness against our neighbor (Ex. 20:16), like the other commandments, requires not merely outward conformity but also conformity in heart attitude.

### **Goodness**

God is the final standard of good, and that all that He is and does is worthy of approval. Here are a few passages that speak of God’s goodness:

“No one is good but God alone” (Luke 18:19).

The Psalms frequently affirm that “the Lord is good” (Psalm 100:5).

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good” (Psalm 106:1).

“O taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Psalm 34:8).

Scripture also tells us that God is the source of all good in the world. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17).

Once we realize that God is the definition and source of all good, we realize that God himself is the ultimate good that we seek.

### **Love**

John tells us that “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

We see evidence that this attribute of God was active even before creation- among the members of the Trinity. Jesus speaks to his Father of “my glory which you have given me in your love for me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24), indicating that there was love from the Father to the Son from all eternity. It continues at the present time, for we read, “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand” (John 3:35).

We imitate this communicable attribute of God, first by loving God, and second by loving others in imitation of the way God loves them.

All our obligations to God can be summarized in this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself ” (Matthew 22:37–38). If we love God, we will obey his commandments (1 John 5:3) and thus do what is pleasing to him.

### **Mercy, Grace, Patience**

God’s mercy, patience, and grace may be seen as three separate attributes, or as specific aspects of God’s goodness.

These three characteristics of God's nature are often mentioned together, especially in the Old Testament. When God declared his name to Moses, he proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).

David says in Psalm 103:8, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Mercy is often emphasized where people are in misery or distress. David says, for example, "I am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercy is great . . ." (2 Samuel 24:14). When Paul speaks of the fact that God comforts us in affliction, he calls God the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). We are to imitate God's mercy in our conduct toward others: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

God's grace is his favor toward those who deserve no favor but only punishment, and therefore something freely given.

God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19).

In the New Testament, and especially in Paul's letters, the entire Christian life can be seen as a result of God's continuous offering of grace.

As with most of the God's attributes that we are to imitate, patience requires a moment-by-moment trust in God to fulfill his promises and purposes in our lives at his chosen time. Our confidence that the Lord will soon fulfill his purposes for our good and his glory will enable us to be patient. James makes this connection when he says, "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8).

### ***Holiness***

God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.

God himself is the Most Holy One. He's called the "Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 71:22, 78:41, 89:18; Isaiah 1:4, 5:19, 24).

The seraphim around God's throne cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

"The Lord our God is holy!" exclaims the psalmist (Psalm 99:9).

God's holiness provides the pattern for his people to imitate. He commands them, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). When God called his people out of Egypt and brought them to himself and commanded them to obey his voice, then he said, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4–6).

### ***Righteousness (or Justice)***

God always does what is right, and He is the final standard of what is right. Scripture attests to God's righteousness and justice:

"All his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4).  
 "Shall not the Judge of re right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:8).

"I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right" (Isaiah 45:19).

Paul says that when God sent Christ as a sacrifice to bear the punishment for sin, it “was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25–26).

When Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins it showed that God was both righteous and just, because he paid the wages of sin (Romans 6:23) in order to forgive his people.

### **Wrath**

God loves all that is right and good, for rightness and goodness conforms to his moral character. Therefore, it shouldn’t be surprising that God intensely hates sin. Scripture’s narrative frequently references God’s wrath, so it is an undeniable reality that all men must reckon with.

“I have seen this people . . . now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.” (Exodus 32:9–10)

“Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. . . . Even at Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, and the Lord was so angry with you that he was ready to destroy you.” (Deuteronomy 9:7–8)

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.” (John 3:36)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men.” (Romans 1:18)

Christians shouldn’t fear God’s wrath. For although “we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:3), we now trust in Jesus, “who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Jesus Christ bore the wrath of God that was due to our sin, in order that we might be saved (Romans 3:25–26).

I place God’s wrath on the heels of God’s justice, simply because some fold wrath into the attribute of God’s justice. Some argue that if wrath were a divine attribute as such, that God would be angry with everybody all the time, since it would comprise somethings of his unified essence. Somehow wrath would then characterize and qualify every other attribute. Therefore, God’s mercy and grace would be a wrathful mercy and grace and God’s wrath is a merciful and gracious wrath- for instance. Perhaps a better way to look at wrath is through the lens of God’s justice. We can affirm that God is always just, and that justice qualifies and characterizes every other attribute. Wrath would then be the way that disobedient, unrepentant people experience the attribute of God’s justice.

### **Glory**

Scripture presents God’s glory in two major ways. In one sense, God’s glory isn’t an attribute, but the superlative honor that everything in the universe should give to God (Isaiah 43:7, Romans 3:23, John 17:5).

But God’s “glory” also describes the bright light that surrounds his presence. It belongs to him alone and it’s the outward expression of his excellence. We see this glory in several places in Scripture. For example:

When the angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds (Luke 2:9)

The transfiguration (Matthew 17:2)

The heavenly city in Revelation (Revelation 21:23)

God made us to reflect his glory. Paul tells us that even now in our Christian lives we all are being “changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). There isn’t a visible light that

surrounds us, but there is a brightness, splendor, or beauty about the life of a person who deeply loves God, and it's often evident to those around them.

God reveals himself to us in Scripture so we might glorify and enjoy him forever. The word glory, from the Latin *Gloria*, "fame, renown," is used to describe the beautiful, radiant display of God's attributes as the most glorious being in existence.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *kabod*, translated glory, originally means "weight" or "heaviness." The New Testament word for glory, *doxa*, continues to express this meaning of importance, honor, and majesty.

God's attributes reveal to us that he alone is in a category of greatest importance, honor, and majesty. As God's image-bearers, we are designed by God to bring him glory by reflecting the beauty of who he is and what he does in all his magnificent works of creation and redemption. We are called to magnify the radiance of his perfections that reveal his infinite, eternal, and unchangeable being in the fullness of his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, etc.

In his treatise, "Concerning the End for which God Created the World," Jonathan Edwards concludes, "It appears that all that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, "the glory of God." The Apostle Paul confirms Edward's conclusion when he writes, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Rom 11:36)."